

District Councillor Update – November 2025

Cllr Jo Robb, Cllr James Norman

### **Matt Gulliford – Tree Officer**

We were very sad to hear of the sudden death of Matt Gulliford, SODC's tree officer, last month.

Matt was a tremendous officer: he was responsive, friendly and professional. There are many trees in our ward that are flourishing because of Matt's hard work to protect them. He was always at the end of the phone, and many of our parishes will remember him fondly as a true champion for trees in our district.

We extend our deepest sympathies to his family and loved ones.

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

The government's plan to replace the current two-tier system in Oxfordshire (and across the country) with one or more new unitary councils, is gathering pace.

Councils submitted initial proposals in March 2025 and are required to submit final proposals by **November 28, 2025**. The government is expected to make a final decision in 2026 for new councils to be formed in 2028. The main options being considered are a single unitary council for the entire county (One Oxfordshire), two unitary councils (Two Councils), or three unitary councils including an enlarged Oxford City. This approach is being proposed by Oxford City and would involve much of Oxford's Green Belt being subsumed into a larger Oxford City with the northern part of the county and the southern part forming two separate unitaries.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee for South and Vale will consider the Ridgeway Council proposal, outlined over 457 pages, at its meeting on Monday 10 November. The Committee will make recommendations to cabinet.

At Full Council meetings last week (w/c 3 November), Green councillors in the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire proposed that **strong action on climate change and the promotion of nature recovery** be added to the vision statement for the Ridgeway Council proposal. Greens in West Berkshire will propose the same amendment.

### **Joint Local Plan update**

You will recall that two planning inspectors recommended South and Vale withdraw their Joint Local Plan from inspection because, they say, there was a failure in the duty to co-operate.

The council has written a second letter to the Inspectors in response to their advice to withdraw the draft Plan. You can read the letter here:

<https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/app/uploads/2025/10/LPA40-South-and-Vale-letter-to-our-Inspectors-20-October-2025.pdf>

The letter points out the most recent correspondence from the Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning, to Paul Morrison, Chief Executive of the Planning

Inspectorate. The Minister outlines his expectation that local plans submitted in the current plan-making system should be treated with an appropriate degree of flexibility. He specifically refers to the Duty to Cooperate (DtC), asking Inspectors to be proportionate in what is expected as the DtC evidence, and to consider the context.

Furthermore, Oxford City Council has re considered its housing need and published a draft option with lower housing numbers than previously outlined. The letter from SODC shows this revised housing requirement in a table:

Oxford's housing need	21,740
Oxford's capacity	9,851
Unmet need for Oxford already agreed in South, Vale, West and Cherwell	14,300
Balance (surplus)	+ 2,411

Over 20 planning authorities have had their draft local plans rejected by the planning inspectorate in recent months – the government is clearly in damage control.

### **Homeless Prevention**

The council has approved a new Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy, aimed at taking a proactive approach to preventing homelessness, and reducing the use of temporary housing such as BnB accommodation.

While demand for homeless services has increased locally and nationally, the councils manage to keep homelessness levels low through working closely with people at risk of homelessness to help them find sustainable accommodation. Homeless prevention rates are currently at 79 per cent in South Oxfordshire and 70 per cent in the Vale compared to 52 per cent across the South East.

As we approach the colder months, please could you make residents aware of the support that is available through the district council. Rural parishes may be aware of people rough sleeping in their cars: our housing officers can help.

Details of the homelessness strategy and information on how people can get support can be found at: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/housing/are-you-homeless/>

If you, or someone you know, is homeless or at risk of homelessness, please contact SODC's Housing Team, who will help: 01235 422 452 or email: [housing@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:housing@southandvale.gov.uk)

### **Housing Allocations – How to Get on the Social Housing Register**

Following a public consultation, the council has now put in place an updated joint Housing Allocation Policy. This sets out the criteria on who can join the housing register and the rules for how social housing is allocated. You can view the policy online:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/housing/social-housing-and-join-the-housing-register/>

You can apply to join the social housing register at HomeChoice:

<https://www.southoxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk/#> Let us know if you need any help or have any questions.

### **Winter in South Oxfordshire**

The council has produced a comprehensive and rather useful one-stop guide on all things relating to winter. It includes advice on keeping your house warm, the work of the community hub, weather and waste services, flooding, what to do if your social house has damp or mould, and steps to take during extreme weather. Take a look – it may be worth bookmarking:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/winter-in-south-oxfordshire/>

You can subscribe to South News, the council's email newsletter which contains information on waste services, events that are happening and other useful information.

<https://mailchi.mp/79d399ef631e/south-news-subscribe>

### **Progress towards Net Zero**

At its meeting on 16th October, Cabinet reviewed a progress report on the Council's progress towards achieving its Net Zero targets (2030 for the Council's own operations). The report detailed that the council has reduced its carbon emissions by 14 per cent since 2019/20 and by 49 per cent since 2009/10 (when Greenhouse Gas reporting began). This summer solar panels were installed on the roof of Thame Leisure Centre which have been producing renewable clean energy for the site ever since. In addition, decarbonisation projects (including solar panels, air source heat pumps and insulation) are in progress for Didcot Wave, Park Sports Centre, Abbey Sports Centre, Henley Leisure Centre and Cornerstone Arts Centre.

Nearly 90 per cent of the council's carbon emissions are from waste collection vehicles and leisure centres (waste 57 per cent, leisure 32 per cent). While the council has moved forward with its plans to reduce its carbon emissions at some, but not all, of its leisure sites, major factors beyond the council's remit are likely to prevent the council meeting its 2030 net zero target. Where the council has been able to make positive changes, it has invested in low carbon electric vehicles such as the smaller food waste truck and vans for some of its teams. It is estimated that one of the smaller vans (EVs) used by the parks team, which replaced a petrol vehicle, saved 475.25kg of carbon dioxide equivalent in the first two months of use.

The report concludes that it is "We continue to progress in certain areas where we have already secured funding to decarbonise some of our buildings. However, the forthcoming LGR and the issues surrounding the electrification of the waste fleet mean there are limited opportunities to increase the pace of the decarbonisation works required to meet our 2030 targets."

South Oxfordshire as whole has seen a reduction in carbon emissions year on year for two years in a row. In 2023, greenhouse gas emissions in South Oxfordshire fell by 5.1 per cent compared to the previous year, which itself had seen a 4.2 per cent drop compared with the year before that.

### **Missed Bin Collections: Please Report!**

If your bin collection is missed, please do report it by 5pm the day after collection day. You can email: [admin.southoxford@biffa.co.uk](mailto:admin.southoxford@biffa.co.uk) and [waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk) or phone 01235 422 123

If you have trouble getting Biffa to return to collect your missed bin, please do let us know.

### **Fly Tipping: Please Report!**

Sadly, we continue to see fly tipping on our beautiful country lanes and verges. If you see it, please report it! The investigation team (the brilliantly named “Envirocrime”) will investigate. We have a good record of successful prosecutions against fly tippers – it is definitely worth reporting.

You can report online (just google “Fly Tipping South Oxfordshire”) or by phoning **01235 422 123**

### **Equalities Roadshow**

Ensuring that all residents can access to council services is essential. The council’s equalities team will be in Henley on Thursday 13 November to listen to residents and hear about your priorities when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

Pop down to the Market Place on **Thursday 13 November** and let the team know what you’d like to see in terms of ensuring everyone can access council services.

### **Grants**

We are delighted by the number and variety of applications we’ve received under the Councillor Community Grant scheme – please do reach out if you are interested in applying.

It may be that your project is better suited to a different pot of funding – we can put you in touch with the grants team, who can provide clear advice.

The deadline for applications under the Councillor Community Grant scheme is **midday, 5 December 2025**.

### **Active Communities**

The Active Communities team at the council has published a new leaflet full of information on free and low-cost sports and wellbeing activities.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/sports-and-activities/active-communities/>

There is information about Community Walks led by trained volunteers, the Move Together programme which provides help for people with health or mobility challenges or social isolation and family friendly holiday sessions to keep children active.

Do take a look and sign up to the Active Communities Newsletter if you'd like regular updates on what's going on: <https://ebtk.co.uk/sub/12267/103>