

Neighbourhood Plans

Of the ten parishes in the Woodcote and Rotherfield Ward, only one has a Neighbourhood Plan (Woodcote), and one other (Stoke Row) has just embarked on one. Last month, Cllr James Norman wrote to parishes to ask them to look again at the possibility of embarking on a NP.

Most of our parishes are small and have limited resources. All are protected from unwanted development by being in the National Landscape (formerly AONB) and most have no housing allocation under the Local Plan.

However, we believe that the balance is now shifting and that there are strong reasons why NPs should again be seriously considered by every parish in our ward. The District's lack of five years of housing land supply, combined with the government's determination to "build, build, build" has meant that more and more speculative planning applications are being recommended for approval by officers. In some recent cases (Chalgrove notwithstanding), the existence of a NP has been the deciding factor for Planning Committees in refusing a planning application.

There are numerous other potential benefits for parishes, especially the ability to plan the future direction of your villages and parishes, protecting what you value and directing the development you would like to see to areas you have chosen. In addition, it increases your CIL portion from 15% to 25%.

There is a great deal of help and support in considering and making a Neighbourhood Plan. SODC has an entire team dedicated to NP support, and there is an excellent independent body, Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance (ONPA).

Neighbourhood Plans can be made jointly by two or more parishes, and that this might appeal to smaller parishes so that the workload could potentially be shared.

Do please speak to one of us if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further.

Planning Appeals

P25/SO867/O Land off the B480, Chalgrove

The successful appeal on this application has implications far beyond Chalgrove. Cllr James Norman was on the committee which originally turned it down. The Committee's reasons for refusal were very clear: the site is not in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, not in the Chalgrove Neighbourhood Plan. It was an unsuitable site, in an unsustainable location and would harm the local landscape.

However at appeal, the inspector decided that the benefit of more houses outweighed the multitude of other harms. This decision is especially egregious in light of recent clear

statements by the Secretary of State that, despite the intended changes to planning law, development should remain plan led. This appeal decision flies in the face of the plan-led system.

Green councillors are asking what measures the council is taking to challenge this decision, which could have profound consequences for planning and the integrity of the planning system in our district.

SODC Budget Update

Now that the SODC Budget for FY 26/27 has been approved by full council here are some of the highlights:

- **£1,500,000** approved for [community grants](#) including:
 - Councillor Grants
 - Capital Grants
 - Community Infrastructure Grants
 - Performing Arts Grant
 - Climate Action Grants
- Approved capital programme of **over £100 million**, including investment in community infrastructure.
- There is a significant commitment to investment in emergency social housing, which now totals **£25 million** (including previous years)
- A new **£100,000 a year Climate Action Fund** will accept bids for nature recovery and climate adaptation including **flood alleviation**

Residents will pay an average £156.24 for services provided by the district council for 2026/27, **just £3 per week**, with its share of the council tax increasing by £5 a year for a typical Band D household. This small increase helps to protect frontline services and fund investment in local facilities, while ensuring the district's council tax remains **one of the lowest in the country**.

Council tax was raised by the maximum allowable, with surplus funds being returned to reserves. Green councillors successfully proposed some "small but powerful" amendments to the budget to put some of this surplus back into our communities. It marked the first time in many years (!) that an opposition group at SODC has put budget amendments. The amendments that were approved were: A new £60,000 start-up fund to support community led housing and a new £60,000 Community Nature Fund to support natural flood management and community access to nature.

£750,000 CIL grant scheme now open-deadline 30th March

The Council has opened applications for the second round of its Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Grant Fund, with £750,000 available to support new or improved community facilities across the district.

Town and parish councils, along with not-for-profit community groups, can now apply for grants of between £75,000 and £250,000 to help bring forward projects that benefit local residents.

This funding is designed to support facilities needed as our communities grow, including community centres, sports and cultural spaces, open areas, play facilities and other important local amenities, ensuring that new development is matched by the infrastructure and services residents need. The new round of the grant funding will close for applications **at 17:00 on 30th March.**

To apply: [Community Infrastructure Levy \(CIL\) Grant Fund - open - South Oxfordshire District Council](#)

Councillor Grant beneficiaries

We have signed off grant applications and are pleased that we have spent our entire allowance. Across the district, the grants were many times oversubscribed. Successful applicants included Nettlebed Parish Council for the regeneration of their allotments, the Peppard War Memorial Hall for works to their carpark and outdoor space, Shedquarters for some improvements to their building and Wallingford Rowing Club for the purchase of a new boat (residents in our ward use Wallingford Rowing Club).

Thank you to all who applied. As ever, if your organisation needs funding for a community project, please just let us know. We can put you in touch with the right people.

Local Government reorganisation

The UK Government has launched a formal public consultation on major changes to local government in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, the biggest restructuring in over 50 years. Residents now have a chance to shape how local services will be delivered in the future.

There are 3 models (see below);

To complete the consultation please visit: <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/local-government-reorganisation/oxfordshire>

What is changing?

The current two-tier system (district + county councils) is set to be replaced by unitary councils, which deliver all local services under one authority (e.g. planning, roads, education, social care). This will significantly affect how local services are managed and delivered for decades.

The three proposed models.

- **Single unitary council** (Oxfordshire-wide) One council covering all of Oxfordshire
Supported by Oxfordshire County Council:
<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oneoxfordshire>
- **Two unitary councils (Oxfordshire + West Berkshire)**

- Council 1: Cherwell, Oxford City, West Oxfordshire
- Council 2: South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Berkshire

Supported by South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, Cherwell, West Berkshire and West Oxfordshire. Strong political backing: 142 of 158 councillors across parties supported submitting this option <https://www.twocouncils.org>

- **Three unitary councils**

- Council 1: Cherwell + West Oxfordshire unitary
- Council 2: South Oxfordshire + Vale of White Horse + West Berkshire unitary
- Council 3: Expanded Oxford City unitary

Supported by Oxford City Council: <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/three-councils>

Consultation

The Government's public consultation is now open until the 26th March, allowing residents and stakeholders to review the proposals and give their views before a final decision is made. You can explore each proposal and respond via the model websites above.

Consultation On Arts, Culture and Heritage

SODC has launched a survey to help plan more arts, culture, and creative activities (such as music, dance, theatre, painting, or visiting museums) and support funding to bring these opportunities to communities. The survey takes about 10 minutes, and participants have a chance to win 1 of 2 £50 shopping vouchers.

The deadline for comments is Sunday 29 March. More information is available via this survey link <https://www.surveyhero.com/c/9pjwrdch>

Letter to the Secretary of State on planning reforms- energy efficiency

South Oxfordshire has joined a host of other local authorities, businesses and non-government organisations in signing an open letter from the Town and County Planning Association (TCPA). The letter has been sent to The Rt Hon Steve Reed MP Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The letter supports the climate ambitions in the emerging Joint Local Plan, as well as the strategic priorities of both councils, as **it urges government to reconsider proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that would prevent local authorities from requiring higher energy efficiency standards for new buildings**, as we have included within the emerging Joint Local Plan. The letter warns that by restricting local authorities in this way, the draft NPPF would halt progress on the delivery of net zero carbon buildings in England, and undermine the ability of councils, to address climate change locally and meet their climate obligations.

Electronic Council Tax Bills

Residents can now get their council tax bill by email instead of a paper bill in the post without needing to sign up for an online account with SODC. As part of the council's work to encourage people to use digital services, the easy e-bill sign up will reduce paper waste and reliance on postal services, saving the councils money too.

Residents can fill in a form on our website to switch to e-bills. If they do want to set up an account to handle everything online, they can do that on our website too.

For more information: [View your council tax details online - South Oxfordshire District Council](#)

No changes to our recycling bins for South Oxon residents

We are pleased to clarify that residents in South Oxfordshire will continue using a single recycling wheelie bin for most dry recyclables. Following the government's new "Simpler Recycling" requirements from March 2026, the council reviewed the need for changes and confirmed that our current mixed recycling system can remain in place.

After completing the required technical, environmental and financial assessments, the council found that introducing separate bins for paper and card would increase costs and complexity without improving recycling performance. This means no additional bins will be introduced, and there are no plans to issue fines for incorrect recycling, though residents are encouraged to recycle carefully.

Our current single-bin system already delivers strong recycling rates and low contamination, and keeping it in place remains the simplest and most effective approach for households.

Useful South Links

- [Calendar of South committee meetings](#)
- [Recent planning applications lodged](#)
- [Planning appeals lodged](#)
- [Planning appeals decided](#)
- [Tree works](#)