District Councillor Report
Haseley Brook ward
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Local Matters and what I've been doing

The recent announcements on LGR (again) and Devolution have been priority topics for councils and councillors in the past week, however I'll write more about this further down in the "Council Matters" part of this report.

In recent weeks I've been asked regularly about **planning decision notices no longer being issued** to interested parties, including parish councils. I asked the relevant Cabinet member to look into the situation with a request to revert to the original notification process. The response I received was that the move to MasterGov changed the way the council does certain things, including how information relating to decisions is shared. Decision notices are always published on the case file, and it's now possible for residents and parishes to set up alerts for various things - including decisions - so they can receive a notification when a decision has been made. So effectively, although individual decisions aren't issued automatically from the council's end, interested parties can set up a notification alert from their end instead. Please have a look at this and let me know if you have any problems setting this up.

Currently, SODC no longer publishes a list of decisions. This is something the council is looking at bringing back because of feedback about its usefulness, and also to ensure we are meeting the recording and auditing requirements of the National Scheme of Delegation which came into force at the end of October

In the meantime, if people would like to keep track of decisions, they can use the advanced search function on the planning register or set up a suitable alert in their Council account.

I've also been asked by a couple of parish councils about the possibility of widening the **scope of residents notified of new planning applications**. Having looked into this with the Cabinet member, the Development Management Procedure Order sets out minimum statutory requirements which is a site notice or letters:

*In a case to which paragraphs (1A), (2), (4) and (4A) do not apply the application must**]** be publicised in accordance with the requirements in paragraph (7) and by giving requisite notice—*

(a) by site display in at least one place on or near the land to which the application relates for not less than 21 days; ***or***

(b) by serving the notice on any adjoining owner or occupier.

SODC does both of the above, and the council doesn't have any plans currently to change this approach, which complies with the adopted Statement of Community Involvement:

Joint Statement of Community Involvement May-2024.pdf

In other planning concerns, now that the National Scheme of Delegation and the new NPPF have come into effect, I'll once again mention that **local planning policies** – Parish and District – are our main line of defence. It was fantastic to see Great Haseley's new Neighbourhood Plan consultation information around the village hall when I attended their parish meeting last month. I never underestimate the work that goes into a Neighbourhood Plan and I commend all those involved in Great Haseley's project.

If you'd like to view the status of any neighbourhood plans across the district, you can visit SODC's Neighbourhood Planning map, which shows all active groups and is updated regularly.

Full Council was on 22nd October, in which I seconded Thame Cllr Kate Gregory's motion on violence against women and girls. Supporting victims and survivors, promoting prevention and creating safer communities are priorities for SODC. We know that some women face additional barriers when seeking help and it's important that support services are accessible, inclusive and well-resourced. Through the motion, we are also calling on national government and partners to take further action to drive meaningful change and improve outcomes for victims and survivors. Victims and survivors must have confidence that crimes will be investigated thoroughly and that action is taken to make communities safer for everyone.

I was also very pleased to support Chinnor Cllr Ed Sadler's motion on litter prevention. Recognising that enforcement and clean-up efforts alone cannot solve the problem of littering, the motion commits the council to reviewing its current anti-litter measures, including signage, awareness campaigns and enforcement activity, to identify where further improvements can be made.

The council will explore new opportunities to work with partners including Oxfordshire County Council, town and parish councils, schools, businesses, environmental organisations and community groups to prevent littering before it happens. The council will also write to the government and local MPs to urge for renewed national action on litter prevention and public responsibility. Keeping public spaces clean is everyone's responsibility.

The link to the meeting details, including motions, is here: Agenda for Council on Thursday, 22 October 2026, 6.00 pm

I would also like to share a link on the **Herbert Protocol**, which TVP introduced Community Safety Partnership members to at the recent meeting. The Herbert Protocol is a national safeguarding scheme to help police and emergency services find vulnerable people (most commonly those living with dementia) who go missing. The cruel effects of Dementia sadly touch almost every family, and I feel passionately about the benefits of this scheme. Please share this link far and wide and encourage affected friends and families to look into it and sign up:

People with dementia at risk of going missing (Herbert Protocol) | Thames Valley Police

Another part of my portfolio work is **Licensing**, and I was really disappointed that the owner of a local private hire company M40 Cars had been allowing one of their drivers to work without having a valid licence (and therefore insurance). They pleaded guilty at Reading Magistrates Court and were both fined. Customer trust and safety are paramount, and SODC has a zero-tolerance approach towards operators who allow their employees to drive without a licence, and for drivers who continue to drive when they are not licensed or insured to do so.

Council Matters

Following Government's "pause" on **Local Government Reorganisation**, it has now announced that its minded-to decision is still to replace the seven existing councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire with three new unitary councils. As before, the three new councils will be:

- **Greater Oxford Council** – covering Oxford and its immediate surroundings.
- **North Oxfordshire Council** – covering most of the existing Cherwell and West Oxfordshire districts.
- **Ridgeway Council** – covering most of the existing South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts, combined with West Berkshire.

The one difference is that the number of parishes included in Great Oxford has been reduced to 17, meaning that in our ward **Great Milton** is now with Ridgeway rather than Greater Oxford.

Elections for the new unitaries will take place in May 2028, after which shadow authorities will be created to plan the new councils, but will not deliver services. The new councils are due to go live on 1 April 2029. Serving councillors' terms of office will continue until the existing councils come to an end on vesting day.

Our Leader Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers issued the following statement:

"I remain disappointed that the Government has decided to proceed with a model that carves up South Oxfordshire, drawing rural villages into Greater Oxford despite their much

stronger economic, social and geographical ties to our rural district. It is difficult to understand the rationale for boundaries that appear to be driven more by the City Council's ambitions for expansion than by genuine understanding of place, local identity and the needs of communities affected.

"However, I welcome the fact that we finally have some clarity on the timetable for local government reform. The prolonged uncertainty has helped nobody. My priority remains securing the best possible future for all our residents and businesses, both those who will form part of the new Ridgeway council and those who are currently proposed to move into Greater Oxford. We will work constructively, while continuing to ensure the delivery of local services and infrastructure which reflects the priorities of our communities.

"Importantly, I welcome government's decision to include fewer South Oxfordshire villages in the greater Oxfordshire unitary council - Nuneham Courtenay, Culham, Clifton Hampden, Marsh Baldon, Great Milton, Wheatley, Waterstock and Holton will now be in the Ridgeway Council area instead of Greater Oxford. I also welcome that the government has indicated that there will be an opportunity to make representations and refine the proposals. We will carefully consider how best to use this opportunity, taking an evidence-based approach to ensure that adjustments better reflect the needs and identities of our towns and villages"

Government has also announced its **Devolution** plans for the Thames Valley, to be led by an elected mayor. The Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) will take responsibility for decisions on transport, infrastructure, skills, housing, economic growth and investment, which the government says will give local areas greater control over issues that affect their communities.

As part of this process, Government asked councils across the Thames Valley to consider proposals for a new Mayoral Strategic Authority covering Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Swindon. Disappointingly, councils were given only a couple of days to come together, discuss, and give their response. For SODC, our Leader's letter sets out support for the principle of devolution and that decisions affecting local communities should be taken as close to those communities as possible; and how greater local control over investment and public services has the potential to deliver significant benefits for residents and businesses.

However, the council has expressed concern that local authority leaders were effectively presented with a binary choice between accepting the government's proposed geography or having no strategic authority at all with very limited time to consider the long-term implications of either option.

The council's preferred geography remains a Thames Valley area comprising Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, reflecting the strong economic, public service and institutional links that already exist across the region. Cllr Filipova-Rivers raised concerns about the impact of excluding Buckinghamshire from the arrangement. This could require changes to the boundaries used by a range of public services and strategic partnerships, including healthcare and policing, with the costs and wider implications currently unclear.

Despite these concerns, South Oxfordshire District Council has agreed to continue to the next stage of discussions and development work. This will allow councils across the area to build a fuller evidence base, better understand the potential benefits and risks of the proposals, and ensure residents and stakeholders have opportunities to engage in the discussion before any final decisions are made.

Cllr Filipova-Rivers' letter can be found here.

Finally, some good news in that South and Vale District Councils have secured £100,000 each as part of our major new national programme designed to **strengthen community connections and help build resilient communities**.

The funding forms part of Common Ground, a £14 million initiative delivered by Belong and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales.

The councils are among a select group of local authorities across England and Wales taking part in the three-year programme, which will help local areas develop practical, evidence-based approaches to community cohesion and belonging.

The funding will build on work already underway across South Oxfordshire and the Vale through the councils' Be Together programme and the development of a new Community Cohesion Strategy, which aims to strengthen connections between people, encourage participation in local life and foster a sense of belonging for everyone who lives in the districts.

The £100,000 investment in each district will be used to support and deliver the councils' community cohesion strategy action plan over the next 5 years – supporting local voluntary and community sector organisations and projects that help bring people together, strengthen relationships and build community resilience.

The councils are already working with Belong to gather insights from residents, community groups and local organisations to help shape a future Community Cohesion Strategy for the two districts.

This project sits in my own portfolio and it's something I'm very excited about. We know that strong communities don't happen by chance. They are built through connection, understanding and people feeling that they belong. There's still time to complete the online survey and I'd be very grateful if everyone reading this report would consider following this link and getting involved:

A place for everyone. One place. One community. - South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council