

SODC ward councillors' report

Shiplake – 9th February 2026

Government launches Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) consultation

The Government has launched a **public consultation** on options for the future structure of councils across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. The consultation runs for **seven weeks, from Thursday 5 February to Thursday 26 March 2026**, and will help inform decisions that could shape how council services are delivered for decades to come. South Oxfordshire District Council supports the proposal for **two unitary councils**, which it considers the most effective option for improving services, maintaining financial sustainability, responding to local communities and supporting economic growth.

Parish councils and residents are strongly encouraged to take part in the consultation, as the outcome will affect all council services. The consultation is open to individuals, organisations and community groups, and responses can be submitted online via the Government's consultation page:

<https://consult.communities.gov.uk/local-government-reorganisation/oxfordshire>

Council response to Thames Water reservoir consultation

South Oxfordshire District Council submitted its response to Thames Water's consultation on the proposed **South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO)** on **13 January 2026**. The consultation forms part of Thames Water's preparations for a Development Consent Order application later in 2026.

The council raised concerns around environmental impact, safety and long-term risk management, and has called for greater transparency and stronger safeguards. More information is available at:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/south-oxfordshire-district-council-submits-response-to-thames-water-reservoir-consultation/>

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Grant Fund

The second round of the District **Community Infrastructure Levy Grant Fund** opened on **Friday 30 January 2026**, with **£750,000 available** to support local projects across South Oxfordshire. Grants of **£75,000 to £250,000** are available to town and parish councils and not-for-profit community organisations.

Funding is intended for projects that address infrastructure needs arising from development, such as community buildings, sports and cultural facilities, play areas and open spaces. Applications close at **5pm on 30 March 2026**, with further details available here:-

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/community-support/grants/community-infrastructure-levy-cil-grant-fund-further-information/>

Capital grants of £320,000 awarded

In **February 2026**, South Oxfordshire District Council awarded **£320,000 in capital grants** to local organisations to support projects that improve quality of life in communities. Funded projects include improvements to play areas, community buildings, accessibility upgrades and environmental initiatives such as solar panels and e-bike charging points.

These grants support local priorities and help parish councils and community groups deliver tangible benefits for residents. Further details are available at:-

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants-and-community-funding/320k-capital-grants-awarded-to-improve-quality-of-life-in-south-oxfordshire/>

Town and Parish planning training sessions

Town and Parish councils have been invited to attend **two planning training sessions** delivered by the council's Planning team. The sessions will provide updates on changes to the planning system and guidance on how parish councils can engage effectively in planning matters.

The sessions will take place on **Thursday 26 February at The Beacon** and **Tuesday 3 March at Cornerstone**. Further information, including the invitation letter, is available via the link shared with parish councils.

A lot of change is underway in national policy. The Planning and Infrastructure Act is already now law. It provides for faster approval of "Nationally Significant Infrastructure" Projects (NSIP), mandatory 5-year reviews of National Policy Statements, new strategic "spatial development strategies" for regional planning at MSA or strategic authority level, and reformed local planning authority powers to set fees and delegate decisions. The latter could at the will of the Secretary of State for MHCLG to change the "scheme of delegation" and reduce scope for the Planning Committees of LPAs to have applications referred to them.

Also there is "LURA" or the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act which is not yet law. It provides for major changes to English planning, housing, and local regeneration, including a 10-year uniform enforcement rule, the Infrastructure Levy, and new "local design codes". Previously enforcement could only go back 6 year or 10 years for change of use. Also "unreasonably slow" builders and applicants will face sanctions. Also there is provision to reduce developer "hope value" in compulsory purchases. It will support LPAs in effecting CPOs for necessary purposes including land assembly for developments.

Finally a new NPPF for consultation was released just before Christmas. After consultation it is expected to go live in late 2026. It sharply separates "plan-making" and "decision-taking". It will also enable national "Development Management" policies and disallow Plans from varying these. (Concerns that there are different places and for example Urban and Rural character and form is different!) It will strengthen the presumption in favour of sustainable development, subject to strategic plan and location-based needs. Settlement boundaries to become the norm to contain wild speculative development. More of a rules-based approach to planning approvals. High density development near stations and transport hubs. A more permissive approach to use of "Grey" and Green Belt land. Lots of other small changes. The NPPF consultation is open and closes at **11:45pm on 10 March 2026**. **Training is recommended!**

Eye and Dunsden NP

The **publicity period** for the Eye and Dunsden Neighbourhood Plan concluded on **Tuesday 27 January 2026**. The plan will now proceed to an **independent examination**, which will assess whether it meets legal requirements and national planning policy.

Plan documents have been published on the [Neighbourhood Plan webpage](#).

Further updates will be published once the examination process is complete. Information on neighbourhood planning can be found on the council's website.

Joint leisure contract secured

South Oxfordshire District Council has secured the **future of local leisure services** by extending its contract with leisure operator **GLL (Better)** for a further three years. The extension delivers financial savings while also securing continued investment in leisure facilities across the district

until **31 August 2029**, helping to maintain access to sport, fitness and wellbeing services for residents.

Alongside the contract extension, the council announced a **£2 million capital investment package** in January 2026 to improve leisure facilities. Planned works include upgrades to sports halls, refurbished changing areas and energy-efficiency improvements at key sites, ensuring facilities remain modern, accessible and sustainable. More information is available at:-

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/leisure/2m-boost-for-south-leisure-facilities/>

Councils recognised for disability inclusion

In **January 2026**, South Oxfordshire District Council achieved **Disability Confident Leader (Level 3)** status — the highest level of accreditation under the Government's Disability Confident scheme. This recognises the council's commitment to inclusive employment practices, accessibility and support for disabled people.

The accreditation followed an independent assessment by the Department for Work and Pensions and reflects ongoing work to promote equality, inclusion and fair access to employment and services. More information is available at:-

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/uncategorised/councils-lead-the-way-in-disability-representation/>

New garden waste permits

Existing garden waste permits for brown bins will **expire on 31 March 2026**.

Residents who wish to continue receiving **fortnightly garden waste collections from 1 April** will need to purchase a new permit. Sales will open in **mid-February**, and most residents will be able to buy their permit online via 'MyAccount' or at: <https://southandvale.gov.uk/gardenwastepermit>

Residents who need assistance can contact Customer Services on **01235 422422**. When the new permit arrives, residents should keep their current sticker on the bin until the final March collection, then replace it with the new 2026/27 permit. Buying early ensures residents receive the full year of collections up to **31 March 2027**.

Residents to continue using one recycling bin

Residents in South Oxfordshire will continue using a **single green wheelie bin for dry recycling**, following Government-required assessments under DEFRA's *Simpler Recycling* policy. The council concluded that introducing additional bins for paper and card would not be environmentally, technically or economically beneficial.

The existing recycling system therefore remains unchanged, providing continuity for residents while still meeting national recycling requirements. More information is available at:-

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/south-and-vale-residents-to-keep-using-just-one-recycling-bin/>

Consultation on the Joint Taxi Licensing Policy

Residents, businesses and members of the taxi and private hire trade are invited to comment on proposed changes to the **Joint Taxi Licensing Policy**. The proposed updates include requirements around **card payments, enhanced passenger safety measures**, and **revised vehicle emission standards**.

The consultation closes on **10 March 2026**. Parish councils are encouraged to share the consultation with local drivers and residents. Full details and the online survey can be found on the council's taxi licensing consultation page.

Car park fee changes

Following a Cabinet decision on **18 December 2025**, South Oxfordshire District Council agreed modest changes to car park fees to ensure parking services remain **self-funding** in the face of rising costs. Increases are generally small (around 10p–30p), and **one hour of free parking** will continue to be offered.

The council will also introduce discounts for certain permits, including incentives for low-emission vehicles, and move towards a **ticketless parking system** to reduce paper use. The impact of these changes will be monitored to ensure town centres and local businesses remain supported. Further details are available at:-

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/parking/car-park-fees-changes-strike-balance-amid-financial-pressures/>

Air quality improvements in South Oxfordshire

Air quality monitoring in **Henley and Watlington** has shown significant long-term improvements. Over the past five years, nitrogen dioxide levels have reduced by approximately **51% in Watlington** and **31% in Henley**, largely due to reduced emissions from more up-to-date combustion-engine vehicles.

Both locations have remained below national nitrogen dioxide targets and are therefore under the national rules no longer designated as **Air Quality Management Areas**. Monitoring will continue, and results are published online at: <https://www.oxonair.uk>

Council leaves X social media platform

In January 2026, South Oxfordshire District Council announced it would remove its official presence from the social media platform **X (formerly Twitter)** due to concerns about harmful and unsafe content associated with the platform's Grok AI functionality.

The council will continue to communicate with residents through other channels, including its website, email newsletters, Facebook, Instagram, Nextdoor, WhatsApp and local media, ensuring information remains accessible and appropriate. Further details can be found at:-

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/community-safety/councils-remove-themselves-from-unacceptable-x-social-media-platform/>

Council Tax e-bills made easier

Residents can now choose to receive their **Council Tax bill by email** instead of by post, without needing to create or manage a full online account. This change forms part of the council's wider digital improvements programme and aims to make services more convenient while also reducing paper use, postage costs and environmental impact.

Residents who wish to switch to e-bills can complete a simple form on the council's website. Those who prefer to manage multiple services online can still create an account if they wish.

Budget 2026-27

From leisure centres to flood protection, public toilets, community grants, affordable housing and much more, South Oxfordshire District Council's draft budget proposes investment in local communities and public facilities for 2026/27 and beyond.

The £19.4 million draft budget will be put before full Council on 12 February.

If approved, the budget would allow the council to continue investing in leisure and community facilities that play an important role in everyday life and improve wellbeing. Proposals include measures to reduce carbon emissions.

New ongoing funding is proposed to support community cohesion, backing local projects that bring people together, reduce isolation and strengthen community connections, particularly for residents who are vulnerable or at risk of being left behind. This is in addition to funding for the council's Community Hub which will continue to help residents with housing issues, cost-of-living pressures and access to advice and support when they need it most.

Towns and villages across South Oxfordshire could benefit from £590,000 in community grants, supporting locally led improvements such as community buildings, energy efficiency, local events and play equipment. In addition, the highly successful Community Infrastructure grants scheme would continue for another year with a budget of £750,000. The proposals also include funding to help deliver affordable housing and community space at Broadway in Didcot.

The draft budget continues the council's approach to climate action that focuses on practical local outcomes. A new Climate Action Fund is proposed for grants to community-based projects that cut energy use and emissions, alongside further investment to improve the efficiency of council owned buildings and facilities, helping to reduce running costs over time.

The draft budget includes plans to modernise public conveniences in Goring and Dorchester, with proposed improvements focused on accessibility, security, resilience to vandalism and bringing facilities up to modern standards.

Additional funding is also proposed to support the major Wheatley flood alleviation scheme, as well as other schemes that reduce flood risk for local homes and improve long-term resilience.

The budget also aims to continue the council's work supporting the local economy, helping businesses to start up, adapt and grow, and providing support for town centres, rural employers and the wider economy during a period of uncertainty.

Under the draft proposals, the district council's share of council tax would increase by £5 a year for a typical Band D household, bringing the average annual charge to £156.24, just £3 per week.

Councillor Pieter-Paul Barker, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property Assets, said: "This budget is fundamentally about investing in the places where people live their everyday lives. From leisure centres and affordable housing to community spaces and play areas, we're putting funding directly into projects that strengthen local connections and improve wellbeing across South Oxfordshire.

More details next month!

[Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins](#)

District Councillors