

SODC ward councillors' report

Shiplake – 13th January 2025

New Standard Method

Under the previous Standard Method algorithm to set “housing need”, SODC were required to deliver 573 homes per annum.

In the new Government’s consultation it was suggested that this might increase to 1,173 – an increase of 600. In the final decision, the Secretary of State for MHCLG has revised the algorithm further such that the requirement for SODC becomes: 1,242 – so an increase of 663 or 115%.

Joint Local Plan

The Joint Local Plan for SODC and Vale of White Horse has now been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

The two district councils have been working together to produce a Joint Local Plan (JLP), which aims to help meet their local communities’ need for affordable housing, jobs and infrastructure while tackling the climate emergency.

Following a series of successful public consultations, which produced strong and positive feedback, the plan has now been submitted to the ministry and Planning Inspectorate for the examination stage.

The Planning Inspectorate will examine the JLP and assess whether it has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements.

At the end of the public examination, the Inspector will conclude whether or not the plan is sound. In most cases the Inspector’s report will recommend some changes that would allow the plan to be adopted.

If successfully adopted, the plan would replace the existing Local Plans for both councils.

In the new draft Joint Local Plan, the councils have shown that there are enough new homes in the pipeline already based on the (then) Standard Method. This indicated that there is no need to build on any extra new greenfield sites over the next 15 years, beyond what has already been allocated. Only one area of expansion has been earmarked, which is on the brownfield land in Vale owned by the Ministry of Defence at Dalton Barracks near Abingdon.

More information on the examination process can be found on SODC’s Joint Local Plan webpage: [*the our Joint Local Plan webpage*](#).

(Note: as the JLP was submitted prior to the new Std Method and NPPF came into force, then the then-ruling Std Method applies. This means that initially after adoption the housing need will be set by what is in the JLP.)

Local Government re-organisation - update

In a recent address to the Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet, Cllr David Rouane explained that it’s clear the government intends to push through plans for changes to how local councils work and so the best way to influence that here is to work positively and quickly with the government.

The government published a white paper in December outlining plans for comprehensive reform of local government across England that would see the creation of large regional Strategic Authorities

(of about 1.5 million population) with Mayors - along with the creation of new unitary councils in areas like Oxfordshire that currently have a two-tier council system. The Government has indicated a guideline size for the new unitaries to be of a population of 500 thousand plus.

At the 2021 Census SODC had 149k and Vale of White Horse 139k, although there has been growth since and by 2031 these are forecast to be 166k and 163k respectively. By 2031, Oxfordshire is expected to have a population of 810k and neighbouring West Berkshire 164k.

In neighbouring Berkshire there are currently 6 small unitary councils (West Berks, Reading, Wokingham, Bracknell Forest, Slough and Maidenhead & Windsor). At the 2021 Census Reading BC had a population of 174k. To reach 500k there will need to be mergers there.

The county council's Cabinet met to discuss writing to the government requesting Oxfordshire be included in the fast track for Local Government Re-organisation. Cllr Rouane has now welcomed the Cabinet's decision to send a letter to the government this week.

Speaking in his capacity as Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, Cllr Rouane said: "It is important that we focus on those areas of the proposals that we can influence rather than waste energy and resources on those that we cannot.

"What we can influence are the shape of these new authorities and the timing of their introduction.

"The most important thing for us to focus on is that we continue to deliver excellent services for our residents, both during this transition process and afterwards. That is why I would urge that, given that this transition is going to happen then it should happen quickly. The only way in which we can deliver high quality services is by recruiting and retaining high quality staff and to sustain that, certainty is essential".

It is widely agreed that unitaries offer more clarity since all services are provided together. However the concern is about size. Larger councils can offer some spreadsheet efficiencies. However it is important to retain the "local" dimension. A remote council without local knowledge is likely to be inefficient and disconnected from local realities.

£60,000 available in grants for performing arts

A new £60,000 Performing Arts grant scheme, run by South Oxfordshire District Council, will open for applications on 3 February 2025.

The scheme is open to voluntary and community organisations in South Oxfordshire, who will be able to apply for a minimum of £500 and up to a maximum of £5,000 in funding for projects that improve community wellbeing across the district.

The grant aims to enhance the cultural landscape of South Oxfordshire by providing a financial boost to projects that help improve the quality of life of people living in the district, through projects that have a significant impact on the community.

South Oxfordshire District Council are holding a funding advice event at Watlington Town Hall at 4pm on Thursday 23 January 2025. Places at this event are limited and must be booked in advance – [please register here](#).

There will be further advice sessions for those who cannot make this event – If any organisations have a project they'd like to discuss, have any questions about eligibility or the application process for this scheme, they can book a phone call, arrange a Teams chat or a face-to-face meeting. Email performingartsgrants@southandvale.gov.uk.

Applicants must show how their projects meet the following community values and priorities, fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable performing arts scene in South Oxfordshire:

- Increase the range of arts opportunities available to local communities.

- Support inclusive practice and celebrate diversity
- Develop local artistic talent
- Promote innovation and excellence
- Develop new audiences and participants in performing arts initiatives

Organisations eligible to apply are:

- Non-for-profit groups, arts, or community groups
- Town and parish councils
- Schools (for non-core curriculum activities)

The grant scheme closes at midday on 3 March 2025. More information about the grant scheme along with information about the launch event and drop-in events can be found on the council's website southoxon.gov.uk/grants and organisations can contact the Community Arts team by email performingartsgrants@southandvale.gov.uk.

Bathtub dumpers ordered to soak up hefty fine

Two Nottinghamshire residents must pay more than £4,000 after admitting illegally dumping a bathtub, tyres and a large amount of renovation waste near Didcot.

Pamela Whata, 47, and Willard Kurisa, 47, of Dryden Dale, Worksop, Nottinghamshire, appeared at Oxford Magistrates 'Court on Friday 13 December where they both pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawfully depositing waste, commonly known as fly-tipping.

The incident was reported to South Oxfordshire District Council on 14 August 2024 after a large fly-tip was discovered on an unnamed road, off the A417, at Aston Tirrold.

Taking early pleas into account, Mr Kurisa was fined £1,143 and ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £457 and £614 towards prosecution costs. Ms Whata was fined £961 and ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £384 and £614 towards prosecution costs, total of £4,173.

If you come across fly-tipping or notice anything suspicious, please visit southoxon.gov.uk/fly-tipping.

Happy New Year!

Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins

District Councillors