

SODC ward councillors' report

Shiplake – 13th October 2025

Joint Local Plan Update- The councils' response to the Inspectors

Inspectors for the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' Joint Local Plan ("JLP") have recommended the withdrawal of the Joint Local Plan following Stage 1 of its Examination and threatened that they will fail it if it is not withdrawn.

They allege that the full detail of "Duty to Cooperate" with Oxford City Council was not met. In fact the councils had had a great number of engagement meetings with the City Council. The City Council had previously had their plan fail and had to withdraw it for trying to impose housing numbers on other councils with due evidence or engagement. Moreover the City Inspector had spelt out that they should now be applying the Standard Method and not making up numbers to their liking.

Contrary to all previous Inspections these JLP inspectors have suggested that engagement is not enough and that the JLP should have compromised and accepted some of City's made up numbers! Previously it has always been said that there is a duty to cooperate and engage – but not one to agree. The JLP relied on the findings of the PINS Inspector of the City LP. Of course there has been a change of Government and Oxford City are dominated by the Labour Party. However inspectors are expected to be independent and to apply some consistency. The argument only relates to the City housing needs after 2040 and only a part of that say 50% – if any existed – would relate to SODC/VoWH – so the numbers aren't even large for such a huge decision. This seems highly disproportionate. Indeed in the hearings SODC/VoWH Planning Policy officers pointed out that there was in fact capacity to increase density on the existing strategic sites to meet any numbers that might potentially emerge as needed once City had done a proper review of their scope to meet their Standard Method housing obligations – if any did.

The councils argue that the Inspectors' conclusions were unwarranted and lacked coherent explanation, and that any decision to withdraw the plan will need to be taken at full Council meetings, expected in December 2025.

Key points raised by the councils:

- The Inspectors' letter contained factual errors, including outdated references to "housing market areas," which are no longer part of government housing need calculations.
- The Inspectors did not identify specific impacts on Oxford or neighbouring districts that would trigger a legal duty to cooperate.
- They relied on Oxford's withdrawn Local Plan 2040, which incorrectly suggested a housing shortfall.
- Evidence shows the Joint Local Plan already meets Oxford's unmet housing need up to 2040.

Despite their concerns, both councils have reaffirmed their commitment to sustainable, well-planned development for local communities and will consider all options carefully, with residents and local priorities at the heart of next steps.

Read the Letter in full: <https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/joint-local-plan-2041-examination/>

Plot Twist:

In a rather unusual move and likely following news that about 50% of local plans examined under the transitional arrangements (i.e. current framework) Matthew Pennycook MP Minister of State for Housing and Planning has now written to the Planning Inspectorate's Chief urging the following:

- Inspectors to adopt a **pragmatic and flexible approach** to examining plans under the existing framework.
- Evidence requirements, including for the **Duty to Cooperate**, should be **proportionate** and reflect the transitional context, so as not to delay adoption unnecessarily
- Inspectors should look for ways to **enable adoption** where plans are broadly sound

Read the Government's letter here (October 2025):

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68e7d53a187483de54d766f0/Local_Plan_examinations_-_letter_to_the_Chief_Executive_of_the_Planning_Inspectorate.pdf

This is currently being reviewed by the Council's planners to understand if it could open the door for salvaging the plan.

In the meantime planning decisions will be determined under the existing adopted local plan, and there are no immediate changes to 5 year housing land supply (HLS) in the medium term.

Given that the 5 year HLS and "tilted" balance has been re-introduced the adopted Local Plan (LP2035) has some limitations in application. However due to Paragraph 14 of the NPPF the Neighbourhood Plan stand in full strength and are not subject in their policies to the "tilted" balance for 5 years after they are made (provided that the LPA has a least 3 years of HLS).

It is therefore appropriate to ensure that NPs are kept up to date on a 5 year cycle.

Council Chief to Step Down After 8 Years of Service

Mark Stone, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils, stood down from his role on the 30 September 2025. Mark has held the role since July 2017, working with several administrations and leading the current senior management team.

During his tenure, the councils managed have been able to not only stabilise their financial position but were able to increase investment in the key priorities. The councils met the challenges of the pandemic, delivered good service delivery, and introduced new improved council plans.

Full announcement:

https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/council-chief-stands-down/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Accordingly, on 8 September, the Joint Staffing Committee agreed the terms of the Chief Executive role going forwards and launched an internal recruitment process. This approach was chosen because external recruitment can be lengthy and the current market for senior officers is highly competitive. With Local Government Reorganisation ahead, the councils need someone in post quickly who understands their operations and communities. Interviews will take place shortly, and if a suitable candidate is identified, an appointment is expected by December. In the meantime, Deputy Chief Executives and statutory officers are sharing responsibilities, with Adrianna Partridge acting as Head of Paid Service.

New Contact Number for Waste Services

Residents should now use **01235 422 123** for all waste-related enquiries, including: household waste, recycling, food and garden waste (collections only), bulky items, clinical waste, fly-tipping, and abandoned vehicles. The old 03000 number will soon be switched off.

Please note:

- For "brown bin" **garden waste permits**, call **01235 422 422**
- For **Household Waste & Recycling Centres (HWRCs)**, contact the county council on **0345 310 1111**

Extra Garden Waste Collections: 27th October to 7th November

Residents with a brown bin garden waste permit can leave out up to four extra sacks of garden waste per subscription on their normal collection day between 27th October and 7th November.

Guidance for residents:

- Only put out natural garden waste (grass, plants, small branches).
- Use standard 60L sacks or containers – no oversized or builders' bags.
- Leave bags open so crews can check contents and empty them easily.

All garden waste is composted near Wallingford and reused by local farmers as a soil conditioner. More details, including how to buy a permit, are available on the SODC website. (

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/garden-waste/>)

South Oxfordshire Food and Warmth Grant Scheme: Now Open!

The South Oxfordshire Food and Warmth Grant (formerly the Household Support Fund) is now open for applications to help residents facing cost-of-living pressures this winter. Voluntary and community groups, as well as town and parish councils, can apply for funding to support local people in need.

- Up to £2,000 for unconstituted groups
- £2,000-£5,000 for constituted organisations
- Up to £10,000 for collaborations between three or more not-for-profit organisations (led by a constituted group)

The application deadline is midday on 6 November 2025.

Full details on eligibility and how to apply are available on the South Oxfordshire District Council

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/food-and-warmth-grant-scheme-2025-2026-now-open/> .

Licensing Consultation – Have Your Say

The council is reviewing its **Licensing Act Policy**, which guides how licensing decisions are made and how premises operate. Small businesses, such as pubs, can also input any concerns they have around onerous licensing requirements.

Share your views:

<https://theconversation.southandvale.gov.uk/legal-and-democratic/licensing-act-policy-consultation/>

Flood Action Week

As we approach the winter months, we are encouraging everyone to prepare in advance of adverse weather.

Flood Action Week is (13 to 19 October), so look out for our tips and advice, including information from The Environment Agency, that we'll be sharing on social media channels. Please help us share their messaging.

Know how to prepare

Preparing for flooding includes simple things that people can do to help keep themselves, their home, family and business safe and save thousands of pounds in damages and disruption.

What to prepare:

- Get flood warnings - phone, text or email <https://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings>
- check for flooding in the next 5 days: <https://www.gov.uk/check-flooding>

- check for LT flood risk: <https://www.gov.uk/check-long-term-flood-risk>
- make a flood plan: <https://thefloodhub.co.uk/community/>

There's also more information available on <https://www.oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com/>

Update to Universal Credit

There are changes coming to Universal Credit in April 2026. Citizens Advice [has published a report](#) on how reductions to the health element of the benefit are likely to affect disabled people and their families.

(https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/policy/publications/not-so-universal-the-two-tiered-health-element-how-the-universal-credit-bill/?mc_cid=275caa4655&mc_eid=cb30ecbcca).

For residents with health conditions, the advice is to check now what benefits they are eligible for. The cuts will only apply to people who become newly eligible for the Universal Credit health element from 6 April 2026.

- Residents can check their benefits entitlement on Citizens Advice Benefits Entitlement pages (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/benefits-introduction/what-benefits-can-i-get/>) to verify they getting the right support
- If a resident needs help with completing a benefits check, they can contact Citizens Advice locally for help

SODC also have information available for residents who are struggling financially or just finding life difficult via the Community Hub:

- Tel: 01235 422600 if you need support (our office hours are 8.30am-5pm Monday to Thursday, 8.30am-4.30pm on Fridays)
- Email: communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk

Common Grant Award: Up To £10,000 per Organisation

The “Common Ground” Award is a capital grant programme from MHCLG, designed to support voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations that are helping build social cohesion across England.

Funding available: Up to £10,000 per organisation.

Purpose: To identify and reward good practice in building social capital. To invest in facilities, equipment, or spaces that bring people together and strengthen community bonds.

Who can apply: VCSE organisations operating in England with charitable, benevolent, or philanthropic aims.

Application window: Opens 13 October 2025, closes 21 November 2025.

Awarded: January 2026.

SODC Councillor Community Grants

This grant scheme has now opened for this year. Each councillor will get a fund of £7,500, for projects within their ward. This is an increase of 50% on the past.

Since Sonning Common is a 2-member ward the funds will total £15,000. I would estimate that pro-rata Shiplake may represent £3.6k between Mike and me.

Please contact us to discuss projects and there is more info at :-

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/community-support/grants/councillor-community-grants/>

The closing deadline is noon on Friday 5th December 2025.

New Road application for 25 new homes – P25-s1950

This application was heard at the SODC Planning Committee on Wednesday 8th October.

It was refused by 8 votes to 1 with 1 abstention,

Councillors supported the importance of Para 14 of the NPPF and Neighbourhood Plans – in addition to the many flaws and harms from the proposal.

Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins

District Councillors