

Title	District Councillors' Report
Councillors	Cllr Anne-Marie Simpson & Cllr Crispin Topping
Parish	Moulsford Parish Council
Date	8 July 2025

[Booking link](#) for planning surgeries for town and parish councils

Joint Local Plan examination hearings update

The first stage of our Joint Local Plan 2041 examination hearings took place in Milton Park at the beginning of the month. Over three days of public hearings, the inspectors looked at topics such as legal requirements, duty to cooperate, housing requirement, and employment land requirement.

You can review all the sessions via our [YouTube channel](#), including watching Head of Policy and Programmes Tim Oruye's [opening statement](#) on behalf of the councils.

For an overview of the topics discussed, as well as next steps, please read this [summary document](#).

Local Government Reorganisation

Two councils Proposal

Our public engagement exercise on Local Government Reorganisation launched on Wednesday 4 June and will run for six weeks **until 16 July**. You can **find out more** and [take part in the online survey here](#).

This will inform our proposal for a new model for local government in our area that we are seeking to submit to the government in the autumn.

We are working closely with our counterparts in West Berkshire Council, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire District Councils on both the proposal and the engagement, providing a unified and robust solution to the government's plans to end Oxfordshire's two-tier council structure in a way that best serves our communities.

Our proposal seeks to create two brand new unitary councils that cover the following areas:

- **Oxford City, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire Council** (created from the existing district councils of Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire)
- **Ridgeway Council** (created from the existing district councils of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse and the unitary council of West Berkshire).

Our public engagement exercise on Local Government Reorganisation is progressing well with our last public event having taken place on 4 July. Further information about our two unitary councils' proposal is available at <https://twocouncils.org>. Our survey runs until 16 July (see above for link).

Three Councils proposal

Oxford City Council launched its public engagement this week for its alternative proposal, which is to create a [Greater Oxford Council](#). The city's online survey can be found on [Oxford City Council's engagement portal](#).

The city council is going to be holding public drop-in events in our area:

- The Merry Bells in Wheatley between 10am and 1pm on 11 July
- The Berin Centre in Berinsfield between 10am and 1pm on 16 July
- Berro Lounge in Didcot between 4pm and 7pm on 29 July

One Council proposal

Oxfordshire County Council has also launched a public engagement survey for its proposal for a single unitary council that covers the whole of Oxfordshire. You can [read more about it and take part on the county's Let's Talk website](#).

Changes to government neighbourhood planning support

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has recently announced that it will no longer fund national neighbourhood planning support services beyond 2025. This includes both the grant funding and technical advice that community groups previously accessed through Locality.

Despite this change, the Government has reaffirmed its view that neighbourhood plans remain an important part of the planning system, and that communities can continue to prepare them where they see value in doing so.

We recognise this change may raise questions, and we want to reassure communities in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse about what it means in practice and how we will continue to support them through the neighbourhood planning process.

We have also provided general information on the councils' websites: [South](#) / [Vale](#) and please do reach out to if you have any questions regarding these changes.

Environment fund helps nature recovery work in Thame

Last week saw the [official opening of the Rycote Meadow footpath](#) in Thame.

It is part of the nature recovery work at the meadow and nature reserve, which has been part funded by South's environment fund managed by environmental charity, the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment. [More information on the fund available here](#)

South and Vale in top ten district councils in UK for action on climate and nature

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils are in the top ten performing district councils in the country for taking action on climate and nature recovery, according to research by an environmental organisation.

Both councils, which have just published their new joint nature and climate action plan, were rated in the top ten of the Climate Emergency UK's (CEUK) 2025 [climate action scorecard](#), a league table of the country's councils published earlier this month.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse scored highly for 'planning and land use'. In this section CEUK's research focussed on how councils are using their planning powers, primarily through their local plans, (the emerging [Joint Local Plan](#) is currently at examination stage), to ensure low emission new buildings, homes and developments are built to minimise their impact on the environment.

The councils also did well in the scoring for the 'biodiversity' section which examines actions by local authorities to protect and increase biodiversity in the area through their management of its green spaces and biodiversity net gain requirements for developers.

Biodiversity Net Gain requires developers to include wildlife enhancements as part of their plans.

Councillor Sam James-Lawrie, South Oxfordshire District Council cabinet member for environment, said: "This is very positive news for the council, its staff and its residents. The councils have developed forward-looking planning policies on climate change in the emerging joint local plan to help minimise the climate impact of the built environment in our districts. This includes a policy that will require truly net zero carbon buildings to be delivered in the districts."

Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne, Vale of White Horse District Council cabinet member for climate action and nature recovery, said: "We welcome this news which highlights the work being done by staff, particularly on the management of our green spaces. For the past three years the grounds maintenance team has been encouraging biodiversity on council land and now has dozens of meadow areas in the districts which are left unmown. This is in addition to wildflower meadow area sites which are actively sown with wildflower seeds to encourage pollinators such as bees."

Both councils are committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, significantly ahead of the national 2050 target.

Performing Arts grant scheme opening soon

A new round of the £60,000 Performing Arts grant scheme will open for applications on 28 July. The scheme supports voluntary and community performing arts organisations in South Oxfordshire, who will be able to apply for up to £5,000 in funding for projects that improve community wellbeing across the district.

We are holding a funding advice event at Cornerstone Arts Centre from **4pm – 6pm on Wednesday 9 July**. There are limited spaces available, and places must be booked in advance – [please register here](#).

More information can be found on our website southoxon.gov.uk/grants - please help us spread the word!

Bring the family together at Cornerstone

This coming autumn season, Cornerstone Arts Centre invites families to enjoy a wonderful line-up of heartwarming shows, with tickets on sale from Friday 4 July.

Family shows start with [Spot's Birthday Party](#). An interactive adventure based on the beloved Eric Hill classic, where little ones can meet Spot himself!

Fans of picture books won't want to miss [Nick Sharratt's Picture Book Drawalong](#), a lively, hands-on session led by the much-loved illustrator.

And for a touch of festive magic, [Let's All Dance's The Nutcracker](#) brings the classic ballet to life in a beautiful production made especially for young audiences.

There's even more to come! Keep an eye out for cosy half-term activities and the return of a sparkling seasonal favourite... this year's panto promises plenty of magic and mayhem.

Explore the full line-up on the [Cornerstone website](#).

Culture and Heritage Network Event brings local groups together

A brand new event has been launched to help local arts, culture and heritage to thrive, linking the groups and organisations who need support with those that have the ability to provide it.

The inaugural Heritage Network event successfully took place on 25 June at the Abbey Buildings in Abingdon. Around 30 representatives from local museums, cultural organisations, and heritage sites across South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse attended. The ambition is for this to become a regular event.

This event organised by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils brings together people and organisations involved in local heritage and culture. The event offered a chance to hear from key organisations like The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Oxfordshire County Council, Museums Development Trust and Arts Council England about funding and future plans across the districts.

To further support culture and heritage, the pathway to a new Culture, Heritage and Creative Industries (CHCI) Strategy has recently been approved by both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and is set to be launched in Summer 2026. This strategy will serve as a long-term plan to strengthen and grow arts, culture and heritage across both districts.

an opportunity for the sector and council representatives to make new connections helping the heritage community find access to the support they need in both districts. Attendees at the first event have already found out about funding that's available to them that they wouldn't have previously known about.

Demolition work starts for Broadway project

Demolition of an old building in preparation for a new housing scheme in Didcot has begun. The old building between 116 and 120 Broadway is being demolished and replaced by nine new one and two-bedroom apartments and a new ground floor space that will be subject to a council decision to award the main contract later this year.

The properties will provide much-needed affordable homes that the council will own and manage and offer at affordable rent, as part of the council's commitment to providing homes and infrastructure that meet local needs.

At the heart of Didcot's community, the new building will revitalise the area while being built to high environmental standards, including sustainable construction and zero-carbon houses fit for the future.

Given its proximity to the town centre, the apartments will be car-free with spaces for bicycles to encourage active travel which is good for both physical and mental wellbeing.

Planning permission was granted for the Broadway scheme on Monday 12 May 2025. The demolition work started on Monday 23 June 2025 with the programme taking around eight weeks to complete.

Contractors will look to keep noise, dust, and disruption to a minimum during the demolition.