

Title	District Councillors' Report
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Parish	Warborough Parish Council
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Climate Action Scorecard – SODC in top ten nationally!

In June Climate Emergency UK (CEUK) published its latest league table for local authorities and we were delighted to see that SODC is ranked 5th for district councils taking action to mitigate the impact of Climate Change and to restore Biodiversity. SODC achieved the highest ranking (90%) for Planning and Land Use, reflecting the strong policies proposed as part of the new Joint Local Plan, but also past performance.

Oxfordshire County Council achieved first place in the rankings for County Councils.

The full set of Scorecards can be found at <https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/>

Major council IT system migration completed

The work to migrate Council IT systems from Capita to an in-house managed Cloud platform has now been completed. This involved a large number of business-critical systems, including those supporting teams in planning, environmental services, private sector housing, community safety and land charges.

This essential work was required due to the termination of the costly and outdated Capita contract and to provide future-proofing for Council systems irrespective of the future structure of local government. The disruption during this transition period lasted longer than anticipated, and the Councils are grateful to all service users for their forbearance while the work was completed!

Grants

A reminder that the Capital Grant scheme closes to applications on 25th July. There is a total budget available of £320,000 to award for capital projects that take place in the district or within a three-mile radius of the district boundary. You can request a minimum of £5,000 and a maximum of £75,000 but no more than 50 per cent of your total project cost. Your total project cost must be at least £10,000 but no set maximum cost.

The Councillor Grant scheme opens on 18th August (£15k between us), the Performing Arts Grant Fund (£60k) on 28th July and the CIL Grant fund (£750k) in January 2026.

Local Government Reorganisation – Time to Have Your Say!

Although there is no legal requirement for public consultation, SODC has decided to carry out a six-week exercise to get the views of as many local residents and Parish Councils as possible and in order to help shape the final proposal. This is being done in partnership with councils in Vale of White Horse, Cherwell, West Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, since these bodies also support the Two Council model for Oxfordshire. As a reminder, the County Council is championing a “One Oxfordshire” approach while Oxford City has proposed a “Greater Oxford” alongside smaller Unitaries for the rest of the county.

The Two Council model proposes two new authorities – Oxford & Shires and Ridgeway – and we here in Benson and surrounding villages would be part of Ridgeway. This new Council would combine the current geographies of SODC, Vale and West Berks; these three areas have much in common including a mix of market towns and rural communities, similar demographics and employment types and a shared interest in the protection of our natural assets.

If you would like to give your views on this new proposed structure, the online survey will be open until 16th July. Paper versions of the form are also available on request or at Benson

Library. More information about the proposed Ridgeway Council can also be found at <https://ridgewaycouncil.org/home>. The Council is also planning special online sessions for Parish Councils over the next few weeks, so keep an eye out for further information.

The drop-in exhibition in Wallingford on Thursday 19th June was well attended; the next ones in the local area are at Henley Town Hall on **Tuesday 1st July** from 2.30pm to 5.30pm and at Thame Town Hall on **Friday 4th July** from 10.30am to 1.30pm.

To add your views to the survey go to:

<https://theconversation.southandvale.gov.uk/corporate-services/two-councils/>

Joint Local Plan Examination

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](#).

Didcot Gateway Office – Planning Application Update

SODC is pressing ahead with obtaining planning permission for the new office building at the Didcot Gateway regeneration site opposite Didcot Parkway station, although any new building is unlikely to be built before the completion of the Local Government Reorganisation programme currently underway. The application is coming before the Planning Committee on Wednesday 2nd July and will be streamed live on our YouTube channel for anyone interested.

Incidentally, another planning application has been submitted by the Councils for a new refuse vehicle depot near Great Haseley - <https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/haseley-trading-estate/>.

Food and Safety Achievements

The Council has published its Food and Workplace Safety achievements during 2024-25; 97.7 per cent of the 1,179 premises they inspected broadly complied with hygiene standards with 658 achieving a 5 rating. A total of 54 premises were identified as non-broadly compliant and were therefore supported to make improvements. Furthermore, the Environmental Health team dealt with more than 2,400 requests from the public on food safety and hygiene related issues.

Government Planning Reforms

The Government is currently running a number of online consultations on various aspects of the planning system, and the Planning and Infrastructure Bill is currently working its way through Parliament. Local Councils, environmental charities and many MPs have raised serious concerns about the risk to the delivery of truly affordable homes, the rolling-back of many environmental protections and the lack of measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The Bill as it stands fails to enable councils to purchase land for social housing development without paying substantial premiums, so although more money has been announced for social housing it could end up simply boosting the profits of landowners.

One recent announcement in the Spending Review was the withdrawal of funding to support the development of new Neighbourhood Plans, which risks undermining local engagement in the planning process. NALC has published a statement on this matter:

[NALC is disappointed at the government's decision to axe funding for neighbourhood planning.](#)

There is much information available online about the proposed Amendments to the Bill and Parish Councils are encouraged to submit comments to the various consultations and to write to MPs to voice concerns.