Title	District Councillors' Report
Councillors	Cllr Anne-Marie Simpson & Cllr Crispin Topping
Parish	Moulsford Parish Council
Date	13 November 2025

Booking link for planning surgeries for town and parish councils

Five councils launch ambitious plan for local government reform

Change is coming to local government across England, and five councils have worked together to create a proposal for two new, innovative and locally accountable unitary authorities for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire that will tackle existing inefficiencies, improve services, and support local communities in response to the government's call for reform of council structures.

The proposal is one of three being put forward for the area and has the potential to save the most money of all the options – with possible savings reaching £59.8m a year. It would create authorities that are big enough to be efficient, stable and reliable, but local enough to care and be responsive to communities.

The proposal would create two councils covering the following geographical areas:

- **Oxford and Shires Council** would comprise all of the existing district areas of Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire.

- **Ridgeway Council** would be made up of the whole of West Berkshire Council's area and all of the existing district areas of South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

The proposal has been designed to meet the criteria set out by the government earlier this year. The criteria called for all proposals to be for councils that serve populations of around 500,000, are financially stable, deliver high-quality services, are responsive to the needs of communities, and support positive growth across the region.

The key benefits of the proposal would be:

- Significant cost savings and financial stability – helping to protect key services. Financial modelling indicates this proposal has the potential to generate the highest level of ongoing financial savings and provides the best combined financial resilience among the three proposals being submitted for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.
- Reimagined service delivery, addressing concerns raised by residents during widespread public engagement earlier this year.
- Sustainable growth for Oxford, market towns and rural areas, balancing the needs of different communities and delivering more jobs, better transport and the right homes in the right places.
- A high standard of democratic representation with councils that are the right size to respond to the needs of individual communities.

Financial modelling shows the new councils have the potential to save around £59.8m per year after paying off initial transition costs, which looks like the highest saving of the three models proposed in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. These savings would come from reducing the number of councils and adopting a new, innovative approach to service

delivery. It would also help to minimise the disaggregation risks associated with splitting upper-tier services, as the proposal involves two existing upper-tier councils.

The proposal sets out plans to make services more cost-effective while improving outcomes. Oxfordshire County Council is currently responsible for around 85 per cent of the council spending in its area, with a significant proportion of that going on Adults' Social Care and Children's Services. Research shows that these services can often be less efficient across a large area like Oxfordshire, where the average spend per person is above the national average, while demand is low. The proposal includes a new, local approach to these services that would reduce costs while delivering a much more local, responsive, and improved service.

In line with national guidance, each council will have just under 100 councillors providing good democratic representation at a level local enough to allow councillors to understand their communities.

The proposed councils would turbocharge economic growth by focusing on the unique nature of each area. Oxford & Shires would focus on growth linked to Oxford's world-class innovation and knowledge economy and the wider area's world-class engineering sector and booming rural economy. Ridgeway would focus on making the most of advanced research, rural enterprise, and connectivity across the M4 and A34 corridors.

The councils would support sustainable housing growth, combined with much better transport planning, to manage the growth of Oxford and the wider area in a practical way. This would allow Oxford to flourish as a global brand, not just as an island within the county, but as part of the wider region. It will also reduce the requirement to build on the green belt, which itself could place more pressure on Oxford's strained services, increase congestion, and damage the character of the city.

The proposal are currently being considered by councils across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, before it is submitted to the government by the deadline of 28 November. While the local councils will formally decide which proposal to endorse at their meetings, the ultimate decision on which is taken forward will sit with the government.

It is anticipated that the government will then consult with residents and stakeholders on all proposals for the area in 2026 before deciding which model is put in place in early summer. The new council or councils are expected in 2028.

Residents can read the full proposal or an abridged version on the website http://twocouncils.org. The proposal covers all key aspects, including how services will be run, financial modelling, implementation plans and vision for the future.

Cllr David Hingley, Leader of Cherwell District Council, said: "Our proposal for two new unitary councils will create authorities that are designed around what our communities truly need. They will be locally accountable to their residents and underpinned by sound finances, positioning them to serve and empower future generations.

"By drawing from the strengths of all parts of Oxfordshire, Oxford and West Berkshire, these councils will be the right size to deliver for our residents and businesses – enterprising, connected and ready to meet local priorities."

Cllr David Rouane, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, said: "Residents have been clear; they want councils to be efficient while delivering better services. They also need to represent their communities and deliver on their behalf. This is the opportunity to address current problems, and this proposal creates councils that will deliver better services, save

money, and positively tackle big topics such as infrastructure and housing growth in a way that works for local communities.

Cllr Bethia Thomas, Leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council, said: "This is a once in a generation opportunity – and we need to think about what will truly deliver for our communities both now and in the future.

"We believe that means basing the councils on existing communities and a shared history and sense of identity while also being forward-thinking and innovative. It is an opportunity to be bold and to redesign councils, so they are fit for the future and fit to serve the places we hold dear."

Cllr Jeff Brooks, Leader of West Berkshire Council, said: "It's important that through LGR we deliver the best option for our residents. This proposal is about creating councils that are big enough to cope, but small enough to care. It could save the most money of all the proposals and take a modern and innovative approach to service delivery, learning from our good work locally but also from other areas.

"It will help us proactively tackle the financial challenges facing West Berkshire as a small unitary authority whilst preserving the character and communities we hold dear."

Cllr Andy Graham, Leader for West Oxfordshire District Council, said: "We were clear that residents needed to come first in any discussions around future options for local government. The feedback we have received over the last several months has shaped this proposal, so it truly reflects our communities, both now and in the future.

"We wanted to build on the obvious benefits of a two-unitary option while creating something that is new, forward-thinking and makes the most of this change in approach to deliver more for local people while protecting the services they currently value."

More information on the proposal is available at https://twocouncils.org

Councils to take positive steps to represent communities despite concerns with Inspectors' Local Plan decision

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have written two letters to the Inspectors in response to the Planning Inspectors' letter published last month, which recommended the councils withdraw their Joint Local Plan from the examination process based on a single issue – the 'duty to co-operate' with Oxford city.

Their most recent letter was written in light of the Ministerial letter of 9 October 2025. Inspectors acknowledged receipt of this and confirmed that a more substantive response will be provided in due course.

In their first response to the Planning Inspectors the councils have defended the processes carried out to develop the plan. They go on to explain to the Inspectors that any decision on whether to withdraw the plan from examination would need to be taken at full Council meetings.

Despite the significant concerns with the Inspectors' conclusions, the councils' leaders have both committed to take all reasonable steps to ensure that future development in the areas remains sustainable, appropriate and well-planned.

Joint Local Plan background information

Over the past four years, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils have worked tirelessly together to prepare new planning policies in an innovative, forward-looking Joint Local Plan to guide sustainable development across both districts.

The Joint Local Plan was developed through extensive consultation and deep engagement with our residents, community groups, neighbouring authorities, developers, infrastructure providers and government agencies. It gained unanimous cross-party support at both councils before submission for examination in December 2024, a rare level of political alignment that demonstrated shared commitment to a plan-led future for South and Vale's communities.

Despite this, the Inspectors examining the Joint Local Plan wrote to South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils on 26 September 2025 following Stage 1 of the Joint Local Plan Examination Hearing Sessions. This letter advised the councils withdraw the plan from examination, citing a single technical matter, the Duty to Cooperate, specifically with Oxford City Council. Their letter is available in the Examination Library (**ID10**). On 1 October the Councils issued a joint Press Release, available here: **South Oxfordshire** and **Vale of White Horse**.

On 6 October the Councils wrote to the Planning Inspectors about their letter - the letter is available to view on the Councils' website.

On 20 October the Councils wrote a second letter to the Inspectors in light of the Ministerial letter of 9 October 2025 – letter is available to view on the Councils' website.

The Inspectors have written to the Councils to acknowledge receipt of their letter of 20 October 2025 and confirm that a more substantive response will be provided in due course - letter is available to view on the Councils' website.

Community grant scheme: one month to go

The Councillor Community Grant Scheme closes for applications at midday **Friday 5 December**.

There's still funding available for organisations to apply for, and for organisations to submit their applications, so please help us spread the word.

And if you know of any organisations that have previously applied that you weren't able to support, why not reach out to them and see if they still need funding?

If you wish to discuss your grant allocation with our Community Enablement team, or have questions about eligible projects, please email grants@southandvale.gov.uk

Magic awaits in Didcot as Beauty and the Beast opens in six weeks

With just six weeks to go until opening night, excitement is building as Polka Dot Pantomimes brings the much-loved classic Beauty and the Beast to Cornerstone Arts Centre this Christmas.

Running from **Thursday 18 December to Wednesday 31 December**, this spectacular family production promises a festive experience filled with laughter, music and magic. Audiences can look forward to dazzling costumes, impressive special effects, toe-tapping musical numbers and even a few real panto pooches.

Featuring a talented professional cast alongside local young performers, Beauty and the Beast is set to be a true community celebration and the perfect festive treat for audiences of all ages.

Tickets are on sale now on their website.

Council launches 'Winter Campaign' to help residents stay warm, well and connected

As the colder months roll in, South Oxfordshire District Council is launching its 'Winter in South Oxfordshire' campaign - a seasonal initiative packed with practical advice, local events, and support to help residents stay warm, well and connected this winter.
The campaign brings together a wide range of services and resources from the council and partner organisations, including community activities, health advice, and support services to help residents through the winter months.

Highlights of the campaign include signposting to information on:

- **Winter activities and events:** From group walks to performances and workshops, there's something for everyone. Visit the Active Communities page or check out what's on at Cornerstone Arts Centre.

- **Energy-saving support:** Guidance is available on how to make simple home improvements, such as insulation, draught-proofing, and efficient heating, to help residents stay warm and reduce energy costs.

- **Community Hub support:** If people are struggling financially or need advice, the council's Community Hub is here to help — from food and housing support to mental health guidance.

- **Emergency preparedness:** Get ready for winter weather with tips on flooding, power cuts, and emergency kits.

- **Preventing damp and mould:** Tips on how to stop condensation building up in our homes and prevent mould growing.

- **Support for rough sleepers:** The council activates emergency accommodation during severe weather and works year-round to support people at risk of homelessness.

- **Warm spaces**: Local libraries, leisure centres and other venues are offering warm, welcoming places to relax, recharge and connect.

- **Health advice:** The NHS winter health guide offers tips for staying well.

Residents can find all the information and resources on the council's Winter in South Oxfordshire page.

Breaking the cycle of homelessness

Our proactive work to break the cycle of homelessness and improve people's lives is at the heart of our new Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

We support many families and individuals who face multiple challenges in their lives to find sustainable, secure accommodation.

The joint strategy is now live on our webpages South / Vale and sets how we prevent homelessness wherever possible and help people access affordable housing which meets their needs. See our media release South / Vale for more on this. Please do share our social media posts and signpost people to our website for help with homelessness.

Social housing allocation policy changes now in place

Following a public consultation we've now put in place an updated joint Housing Allocation Policy for both councils. The refreshed policy sets out the criteria on who can join the councils' housing register and the rules for how social housing is allocated. See the policy on our website South / Vale

South East Strategic Option (SESRO) consultation

A reminder, following on from our email on 28 October regarding the launch of Thames Water's statutory consultation for the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO).

As well as an online survey available until 13 January 2026, Thames Water is also hosting community drop-in events.

Thames Water is also offering councillors dedicated sessions at the following location (Didcot session was 10 November):

- **The Beacon, Wantage: 26 November 1pm to 2pm**

If you have any questions about the consultation materials or process, please contact Thames Water at info.SESRO@thameswater.co.uk

New Active Communities leaflet

Active Communities has released a new leaflet packed with their free and low-cost sport and wellbeing activities.

The leaflet includes information about:

- Community Walks led by trained volunteers at multiple locations across the district.
- Move Together programme providing tailored support for individuals with health, mobility, or social isolation challenges.
- Family-friendly holiday sessions through the YouMove scheme, along with inclusive sports activities for all ages.
- Nature trails, running groups, Nordic walking, and more.

Download a copy from (South)the Active Communities page / (Vale)the Active Communities page or pick one up from the reception at Abbey House or our venues around the district.

Over £900,000 boost for local infrastructure in South Oxfordshire

Over the last six months, the council has transferred over £900,000 to invest in vital infrastructure delivered by the council, town and parish councils and other community organisations.

As the local planning authority, South Oxfordshire collects financial contributions in the form of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 (S106) – this is the funding from housing developers to support the growth of the district when new developments are created.

Follow this link for a breakdown of S106 funds have been approved and paid out and CIL monies transferred for South (the document should download automatically).

Find out more about CIL here and S106 here. If you'd like further information, please contact the Infrastructure and Development Team