

District Councillor Report

Haseley Brook ward

5th January 2026

Cllr Georgina Heritage



What I've been doing - Meetings and Council Activity

I hope everyone had a lovely Christmas break and enjoyed the coming together of community in our beautiful villages. Thank you to those who were involved in arranging festive activities, services and carol singing for us all. I wish everyone a very happy, successful and peaceful 2026.

- At full council on 11 December, Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers was voted as the new Leader of SODC after Cllr David Rouane chose to retire from leadership, having led the council for four years and having served as the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment for two and a half years prior to that (he will remain in his role as a councillor). Cllr Filipova-Rivers was elected unopposed and unanimously.

Cllr Filipova-Rivers' new role as Leader means there are some changes in the Council's cabinet. They are as follows:

- [Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers](#) – Leader, plus Legal and Democratic Services.
- [Councillor Tony Worgan](#) – Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning Development Management.
- [Councillor Pieter-Paul Barker](#) – Cabinet Member for Finance and Property Assets.
- [Councillor Mike Giles](#): Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Policy and Climate Action.
- [Councillor Georgina Heritage](#) – Cabinet Member for Communities (Including Community Hub).
- [Cllr Sue Cooper](#) – Cabinet Member for Environment.
- [Councillor Leigh Rawlins](#) – Cabinet Member for Economic Development.
- [Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson](#) – Cabinet Member for Planning Policy (Including Garden Communities).

There is more information about Cllr Filipova-Rivers further on in this report.

At the same meeting, and at Vale of White Horse Council meeting on Wednesday 10 December, Adrianna Partridge was confirmed as the councils' new, shared Chief Executive.

- After chairing the Health Improvement Board on 27th November, I gave a report on that meeting at the statutory Health and Wellbeing Board at County Hall in December. The Health and Wellbeing Board will be instrumental in coordinating the government's 10 year NHS Plan, so I'm particularly pleased to have a place at that table from a District perspective.
- Following a planning policy update for SODC councillors in December which we found very useful, I'm really pleased that a planning policy event intended for town and parish councils has been proposed for 28th January in Didcot. Please save the date! There will be lots of information and support targeted to parish councils, and when District councillors attended our meeting we used the opportunity to ask officers a wide variety of questions from land supply to planning enforcement. Parish councils should have received direct communication about this, and I also forwarded an email about it to parish clerks just before Christmas. Due to the changing scene including (of course) our JLP, District councillors also expect further briefings in the next month.

Planning Policy Updates

It's been a busy period for planning policy and development management, with several important Government announcements made recently. Here are some key headlines:

Joint Local Plan (JLP) Examination

On 3 December 2025, we confirmed to the Inspectors that we want to resume the local plan hearings and are awaiting their response. The Government intends to remove the Duty to Cooperate early in the new year. For plans like the JLP already at examination, this means the legal "pass/fail" test will go, but we'll still need to show effective cooperation as part of the soundness test. This can be addressed during examination if needed. See the latest information here [Joint Local Plan 2041 Examination - South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council](#)

Oxford Growth Commission Interim report

[Neale Coleman's Interim Report](#) was published on 15 December. It identifies barriers to growth and sets out 47 recommendations to improve infrastructure and speed up development. The Commission will continue its work through 2026, with a final report expected later, within a year.

Planning Reforms

Government has released a raft of [new guidance](#), including details on the forthcoming 30-month process for preparing new-style local plans.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

A [draft revised NPPF](#) was published on 16 December 2025 for consultation until 10 March 2026. It aims to create a more rules-based system and accelerate delivery of 1.5 million homes this Parliament.

What this means for South and Vale

Although Government policy and the local plan system are changing, please be reassured that there is no direct effect on the Joint Local Plan. The JLP qualifies as a transitional plan, so it is being examined against the 2023 NPPF. For the JLP, we do not need to immediately meet new national policies, adopt the new housing numbers, or switch to the new plan-making system. Those changes will apply to a subsequent local plan. Where these changes impact on development management decision making, officers will set out the relevant weight to be applied in their reports.

There will be further briefings for both District and Parish/Town councillors over the next few weeks.

Thame Market House toilets get a makeover

Thanks to SODC, Thame Market House has had a makeover... The building's toilets have been refurbished and reconfigured to include a new Changing Places facility.

Changing Places facilities provide extra equipment and space for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities or with physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis to allow them to use the toilets safely and comfortably. It means anyone, regardless of their disability, can go to the shops, attend hospital appointments, enjoy community life, socialise and travel without worry about accessing toilet facilities.

The council also carried out exterior decoration, roof repairs and facia cleaning and refurbishment of the rainwater goods, to the Grade II listed building. As part of the nine-month project, essential structural repairs were carried out to the supporting steel columns in the basement of Market House.

The repairs were partly funded by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and capital budget.

Fair Treatment and Cohesion Motion

A Statement by South Oxfordshire District Council:

We condemn all intimidation, violence or harassment of minority groups in South Oxfordshire. We continue to stand in solidarity with everyone who has made South Oxfordshire their home.

Misinformation and the fear, suspicion, and intolerance that it generates must be challenged. We are a cohesive and welcoming district, and we will use all our influence and power to challenge any attempts to intimidate any minority group in our district.

Building healthy, safe, and resilient communities are key priorities for our area. We will stand up to intolerant attitudes and behaviours - to stop their deeply harmful impact.

Fair treatment is embedded in the design and delivery of our services. This is reflected in how we allocate social housing, support residents facing financial difficulties, include and

enable people with disabilities, work to ensure the safety of everyone, value and support our LGBTQ+ community, and ensure that people of migrant background are treated equitably and with respect. We do this not only because we have a legal duty, but because we recognise our moral responsibility to treat all residents fairly.

Working closely with our partners, from our work as part of the Community Safety Partnership to address crime and protect vulnerable people, to our proactive role in the Oxfordshire Migration Partnership, we continue to mitigate the impact of increasing hostility toward individuals and families who are simply trying to live their lives.

The statement follows the passing of the '[Fair treatment and cohesion' motion](#) at Council on Thursday 23 October.

Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council said:

“These are difficult times for many. When the cost of living is rising, access to basic services feels harder, and politics seems broken, it becomes easy to look for someone to blame. But punching down at vulnerable communities will not fix any of this.

“Let us recognise that we’re actually on the same team. It will take all of us to ensure we have services and a district that works for everyone. One that supports opportunity, dignity and fairness for every person who calls this place home. This is the South Oxfordshire I believe in, the Britain that I love.

“As this council’s first leader of migrant background, I know firsthand the damaging impact that misinformation and intolerance have on individuals and communities, and it must stop. Each and every one of us who has made South Oxfordshire our home is welcome here and valued. We cannot, and must not, allow bad-faith actors to divide us.”

SODC’s New Leader, Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers

Cllr Filipova-Rivers (ward member for Goring) has served on SODC since 2019. She was Deputy Leader at SODC and, since May 2025 she has also served as a county councillor in Oxfordshire. Her work spans affordable housing, homelessness prevention, public health, and community resilience, including playing a key role in the Covid response. She also served as Vice Chair of the Oxfordshire Health Improvement Board.

Maggie is a public policy and economic development professional with extensive experience in green growth, refugee integration, and multi-sector partnership work. She holds an MSc in the Political Economy of Development and a BA in Financial and Business Economics. Her professional experience includes work with the World Bank’s Finance, Competitiveness and Innovation Global Practice, where she contributed to major investment programmes decarbonisation and economic inclusion. Alongside this, she advises more than 180 councils across the UK on refugee integration strategy through City of Sanctuary UK, helping local authorities strengthen access to a broad range of services and develop more inclusive communities.

Cllr Filipova-Rivers paid tribute to Cllr Rouane and said: “David has served South Oxfordshire with dedication and vision - first as Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment, and then as Leader for the past four years. His leadership has guided us through significant challenges and achievements, always with a focus on improving the lives of our residents and protecting our environment – most recently in his support of the innovative Joint Local Plan and the Two Unitary Councils proposal for local government reorganisation.

“David has always prioritised tackling homelessness and improving the availability of genuinely affordable housing. Amongst many achievements as leader, he has notably overseen the return of the council as a Registered Provider of social housing for the first time since the housing stock was sold off in 1997.

“On behalf of the council and our community, thank you, David, for your commitment and hard work. We wish you all the very best for the future.”

Cllr Filipova-Rivers continued: “I look forward to embracing my new role. We all know times are tough. Many people are facing the sharp end of the cost-of-living crisis, unaffordable housing, long waits for services, and a growing sense of hopelessness. The challenge of showing our communities that we are firmly in their corner, at a time when trust in institutions is at an all-time low, does not escape me.

“As Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, my commitment is simple: to provide the strategic clarity our Council needs to navigate this period of profound change, while holding firm to our vision of a proactive council that does not let structural reform become a reason for inaction, a council that looks for ways to help, not reasons to say no. We cannot promise that the world will become easier overnight, but we can promise to meet the challenges ahead with competence and compassion.

“This includes protecting essential services and ensuring that reorganisation does not come at the expense of residents who rely on us most, delivering on our Council Plan Priorities, safeguarding the district’s voice in Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution, progressing our innovative Joint Local Plan and leaving a strong, positive legacy – so ultimately the successor authority inherits services, policies, and a culture we all can be proud of.

“My door will always be open to any councillor, officer, or resident who wants to work together. We have an important few months ahead of us, and we can make them count.”