Focus on Parish Councils – Monthly Update
November 2026
Cllr Ben Higgins



County Council – ben.higgins@oxfordshire.gov.uk
District Council – benjamin.higgins@southoxon.gov.uk

Dear parish councillors and residents,

This month has seen a flurry of announcements on the future shape of local government. Having withdrawn its previous decision on implementing 3 unitary authorities, government re-confirmed this intention in late October as a "new" decision. My view is that this is the worst of the three options available. It involves creating two new sub-scale councils and splitting up services. The county council was in the process of legally challenging the previous decision and now must consider whether to do the same with this new one.

OCC News

1. Local Government Reorganisation

The government has announced the outcome of its review into local government reorganisation (LGR) in our area. It has made a new minded-to decision to replace the seven existing councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire with three new unitary councils.

Government has said it is minded-to proceed with decisions in five areas, including ours, but this will be open to further representation and views from council leaders and interested parties for approximately three weeks. Following this, an update will be made to parliament on these decisions before Christmas.

The five areas are East-Sussex and Brighton and Hove, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

In our area, the three new councils will be:
Greater Oxford Council – covering Oxford and its immediate surroundings
North Oxfordshire Council – covering most of the existing Cherwell and West Oxfordshire districts.
Ridgeway Council – covering most of the existing South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts, combined with West Berkshire.

The new councils are due to go live on 1 April 2029, with elections to the new shadow authorities taking place in May 2028.

2. Devolution

Following discussions on devolution with Jim McMahon, Minister for Local Government, Devolution and Regional Growth last week, the leaders of Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Swindon wrote to him on Monday 26th October confirming their wish to progress the development of a new mayoral strategic authority (MSA) for the Thames Valley.

OCC Leader, Councillor Bearder, and Windsor and Maidenhead's Leader, Councillor Simon Werner, have written jointly to the minister about concerns that remain unresolved. These include how police, fire, NHS and other public service boundaries would work without Buckinghamshire in the initial MSA. The letter also highlighted the link between local government reorganisation (LGR) and the risk that the combined arrangements could create more leaders, boundaries and complexity rather than less. However, both councillors support progressing the current offer so we are at the table to shape the detail and ensure we have coherent public service boundaries and accountable governance. I share these concerns, but on balance think we are taking the right approach engaging with this process, especially given the promises made in the budget around fiscal devolution and great local control of spending power for mayoral areas.

Subject to approval of the final proposal by councils across the region in December and consideration of the consultation, a formal proposal could be submitted to government in spring next year. This would be ahead of the statutory decision-making process on establishing the new MSA, in shadow form, later in 2027. This could then be followed by mayoral elections in 2028.

The new authority would be led by an elected mayor and would bring new powers and funding to the region.

Decisions on important areas in the Thames Valley, such as strategic transport, affordable housing and skills and employment support would be made at a regional level.

Local councils will continue to be responsible for delivering day to day services such as waste collections, social care, schools and local planning.

3. Traffic Filters

Please do register for passes for the filters if you have not already. More details and guidance can be found here - https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/traffic-filter-trial-starts-in-oxford-on-monday-28-september

4. Council backs stronger action to tackle violence against women and girls

Oxfordshire county councillors have backed a motion to strengthen efforts to prevent and tackle violence against women and girls.
At full council on 3 November, councillors reaffirmed their commitment to tackling violence against women and girls, backing calls for stronger national action to prevent abuse and challenge misogyny, and sought assurances that investigations into serious offences are improving.

The motion responds to concerns about the scale and impact of violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse, sexual violence and online abuse, and calls for stronger action nationally and locally to prevent harm, support victims and survivors, and improve confidence in the investigation of serious offences.

Councillor Kate Gregory, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities, put forward the motion, she said**:** "Everyone has the right to live free from fear, abuse and violence. Violence against women and girls has a devastating impact on individuals, families and communities, and preventing it is everyone's responsibility. "This motion reaffirms our commitment

to supporting victims and survivors, promoting healthy relationships and challenging the attitudes and behaviours that can lead to abuse. We also want to see confidence that all victims will receive the support they need and that serious offences are investigated thoroughly and professionally. By working together locally and calling for stronger national action, we can help create safer communities for everyone."

Under the motion, the council agreed to continue to work on prevention, safeguarding, education and support for victims and survivors.The council's leader will write to the Home Secretary and Oxfordshire MPs calling for stronger national action, including a long-term behaviour-change campaign to challenge misogyny and promote healthy relationships.

The leader will also write to the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner seeking assurances that concerns about investigations, specialist resources and officer accreditation are being addressed.

The council will also take forward actions within its own responsibilities, while the letters ask national government and policing partners to take action in areas outside the council's direct control.

5. Oxfordshire unveils ambitions nature recovery initiatives

Plans to bring Britain's rarest tree species back to Oxfordshire, restore a chalk grassland habitat in the Cotswolds, and a wildflower meadow restoration project in Eynsham are among six significant nature recovery projects identified for further work in the county.
After the successful partnership working that led to the publication of the local nature recovery strategy (LNRS), we are now continuing our work with the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP).
The OLNP is launching the first of Oxfordshire's strategic nature projects – a growing portfolio of the county's most ambitious nature recovery initiatives, now live on the OLNP's website. It will include 15 projects, with these six already promoted and more to come:

- Black poplar project to recover Britain's rarest tree species back to floodplains in Oxfordshire.
- Cotswolds Savannah project: a large-scale chalk grassland and mosaic habitat restoration project on 2,000 hectares.
- Evenlode landscape recovery project restoring habitats, soil health, and waterways. Led by farmers without sacrificing food production.
- Thames Valley wildflower meadow restoration project in Eynsham, including the acquisition of a new piece of land.
- Ock and Thame landscape recovery project, including benefits for people, food, farming, and nature.
- Reconnecting Bernwood Otmoor and the Ray project.

6. Tackling Noisy Vehicles and Antisocial Driving

Following SODC's recent motion on excessive vehicle noise and antisocial driving, SODC's Leader Maggie Filipova-Rivers has continued to press Matthew Barber, Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner, for stronger enforcement and a more coordinated response to a problem affecting many of our communities.

She has now written to the Commissioner twice, asking particularly about identifying recurring hotspots, using police data to target enforcement and making it easier for residents to report incidents. In his latest response, the Commissioner confirmed that neighbourhood policing teams can use hotspot mapping and that residents' reports help inform enforcement priorities.

She has also written to the Department for Transport. Its response confirmed that police powers have recently been strengthened, allowing vehicles used antisocially to be seized without a prior warning in certain circumstances. The Department also acknowledged the potential of noise cameras, although technical and cost limitations mean they are not yet widely used for enforcement.

A meeting with Matthew Barber is now being arranged later this month, and we will continue to press for practical action, particularly better reporting, identification of persistent hotspots and targeted enforcement.

In the meantime, I encourage residents and parish councils to report recurring incidents to Thames Valley Police on 101 or through its online antisocial behaviour reporting service. This information helps the police build a clearer picture of where enforcement is needed.

7. Housing Delivery and Homelessness Prevention

Housing delivery and homelessness prevention remain major priorities for South Oxfordshire District Council. With demand for affordable housing continuing to grow, we are taking a more active role in providing homes ourselves, alongside established housing associations such as Soha.

Since adopting our Housing Delivery Strategy in 2022, we have expanded our role as a Registered Provider of social housing, building a portfolio of council-owned homes. We now own 57 properties, with approximately 17 further purchases planned by spring 2027, supported by government funding and our own capital investment.

We are also progressing the redevelopment of the Broadway site in Didcot, which will provide nine new homes, supported by Homes England funding. These are expected to be completed by the end of 2027 and allocated to households on the housing register.

Our focus is particularly on increasing the supply of suitable temporary accommodation, reducing reliance on expensive bed and breakfast accommodation and hotels, and helping households move into more secure housing.

Homelessness prevention is another area where our teams continue to achieve excellent results. In September, homelessness was successfully prevented in 83% of cases in South Oxfordshire, compared with a national average of just over 50%. The team also helped three people sleeping rough secure accommodation during the month.

We have additionally secured £122,859 in government funding to provide targeted accommodation and support for people experiencing entrenched rough sleeping. Officers are developing the programme with the aim of having support available from December.

There is much to be proud of in the work of our housing teams, but significant challenges remain. At the end of September, 1,858 households were on South Oxfordshire's housing register, illustrating the scale of local housing need.

Our ambition is that, by the time local government reorganisation takes effect in 2029, we will have established a strong foundation for the successor authority to scale up its own housing provision, giving it greater control over housing delivery, reducing the costs of homelessness and providing more secure homes for residents who need them

8. Consultations

There are a range of consultations open on https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/, including:

A consultation on the County councils 15 year plan for bus services - https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxbus-2040-plan-for-bus

An opportunity to feed back on the traffic filters trial - https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxford_filters_etro2026

9. Funding

The SODC councillor grant scheme is now open for the year, applicable to the Watlington Ward where I am a district councillor. Please contact me if you would like to discuss an application – the deadline is fast approaching!

Parish Round-Up

I hope to attend Parish Councils in person as regularly as I can. Below are some notes on issues raised at recent meetings:

- Watlington – relief road continued planning delays, CIL funding, Church St/Chapel St/New Road.
- Britwell Salome – expansion of the 20mph area raised in parish meeting, road conditions.
- Checkendon – review of application for extension of 20mph limit; flooding issue by pub
- Stoke Row – road conditions, lotting.
- Pishhill with Stonor – mobile phone coverage with retirement of analogue phonelines, road condition.
- Cuxham – Chalgrove New Town and removal of bypass proposal, HGV traffic (including construction traffic), condition of roads.
- Nuffield – Speeding enforcement, speed limits on the A4130, condition of Ewelme junction next to May's farm cottages, Fred's field.
- Shirburn – 20mph limit request, chicane (alternatives after recent trial).
- Swyncombe – issue with unpermitted development on lotted land.
- Nettlebed – community sports facilities, cycle path from Nettlebed to Bix.
- Rotherfield Peppard – draining on Gravel hill, junction of Stoke Row Road/Gallowstree Road.
- Highmoor – flooding issue on Holly close