

SODC ward councillors' report

Shiplake – 12th January 2026

December 2025

New Chief Executive

South Oxfordshire District Council has confirmed **Adrianna Partridge** as the preferred candidate for its new shared **Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service**.

Currently Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate and Communities), Adrianna has been recognised for her leadership during the pandemic, support for emergency housing for refugees, and work on local government re-organisation.

Her appointment was confirmed at a full Council meeting on 11 December, and if approved, she will formally take up the post on 1 January 2026.

New Leader

After successful 4 years Councillor David Rouane has stepped down from being Leader of SODC. In his place Maggie Filipova-Rivers was confirmed as the new Leader at full Council on 11 December. (Maggie has been Deputy Leader since May 2019.)

Revised Cabinet

Along with the change of Leader there have been some cabinet changes. Amongst these Leigh has taken on the Economic Development brief whilst Mike has joined cabinet and taken on the Corporate Services and Climate Change brief.

Disabled Facilities Grant – Continued Support for Residents

South Oxfordshire District Council continues to offer the **Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)**, providing up to **£50,000** to help disabled and vulnerable residents adapt their homes. The means-tested grant can fund essential modifications such as ramps, stairlifts, level-access showers, and heating or insulation improvements. The scheme aims to support independent living, reduce hospital admissions, and reduce the need for residential care, including for residents with dementia.

To begin the process, residents should contact an **Occupational Therapist** to check eligibility. More details are available on the council's [grants and loans webpage \(South\)](#). Recent cases highlight the positive impact of the DFG and the Home Improvement Agency's ability to step in with wider essential repairs where needed.

Bathing Water Quality at Wallingford Improves

Water quality at **Wallingford Beach** has improved to a “**sufficient**” rating in the Government's latest classification—an upgrade from last year's “poor” rating. This means the site has met minimum Bathing Water Regulations standards and is now performing better for swimmers, kayakers, and others who enjoy the River Thames.

The Environment Agency continues to test the site regularly during the bathing season (15 May–30 September). Results are published on the [Wallingford Bathing Water website](#) for residents to check conditions before visiting.

Household Bin Collections – Reminder on Closed Lids

Residents are reminded that household waste bins must have **fully closed lids** to be collected. Overfilled bins can fail to attach properly to collection vehicle lifting equipment, posing safety risks to crews, road users, and pedestrians.

Closed lids also prevent spills during transport and help deter vermin such as foxes and gulls, keeping local streets cleaner.

Thames Valley Leaders to Pursue Devolution Deal

Leaders across the Thames Valley are progressing plans for a new **mayoral strategic authority (MSA)** covering multiple council areas and led by a directly elected mayor. [An expression of interest](#) will outline shared ambitions for new powers and funding to support improved transport, infrastructure, and housing delivery—including social housing. Oxfordshire has agreed to join with Berkshire. However the position of Buckinghamshire remains uncertain and Swindon are still trying to break out of Wiltshire and into the Thames Valley.

The proposed MSA aims to devolve powers from Central Government but will also take some strategic powers from the local councils – who will become unitaries. Economic development and Industrial Strategy lies at the heart of this. The unitary councils will continue to provide essential public services.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy Launched

Oxfordshire's **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)** has now been formally launched following extensive collaboration with partner organisations across the county. The strategy sets shared priorities for restoring landscapes, protecting habitats, and strengthening nature recovery work across Oxfordshire.

The next phase focuses on implementation, and more details are available on the [LNRS website](#).

Joint Local Plan Update

A recent [ministerial statement](#) signalled the Government's intention to remove the **duty to co-operate** through new planning regulations expected early next year and asked PINS (The Planning Inspectorate) to consider this. PINS has asked councils with plans under examination—such as the **Joint Local Plan (JLP)**—for their views on how they wish to proceed.

The Inspectors' [letter can be read here](#), and the council's formal response will be published on the **JLP examination webpage** once submitted.

Leisure and Playing Pitch Strategies – Request for Updates

Town and parish councils have been asked to provide any updated information on **leisure and playing pitch provision** ahead of the annual review scheduled for early 2026.

The deadline for submissions is **11:59pm on Tuesday 23 December**. Any council that did not receive the request should contact jointheconversation@southandvale.gov.uk

Eye & Dunsden Planning Update

The **Eye and Dunsden Neighbourhood Plan** has been submitted and validated, with the statutory publicity period running from **27 November 2025 to 15 January 2026**.

Plan documents have been published on the [Neighbourhood Plan webpage](#).

Festive Season at Cornerstone Arts Centre

Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot is preparing for the festive season, featuring the pantomime [Beauty and the Beast](#) from **18–31 December**. Tickets are available now via the **Cornerstone website**.

January 2026

Joint Local Plan Examination Moves Forward

South Oxfordshire District Council will meet with government Planning Inspectors to discuss how the Joint Local Plan examination can continue, following a change in government direction on the “Duty to Co-operate”. Inspectors had previously indicated the plan could not proceed, but a ministerial statement has opened the door for plans already in examination to move forward.

A public procedural meeting will now be held to agree the practical steps for resuming the examination. While the meeting will not consider the plan’s soundness, it represents an important opportunity to keep South Oxfordshire’s long-term planning framework on track.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/meeting-with-inspectors-will-discuss-ways-forward-for-joint-local-plan/>

Council Leader Seeks Clarity on Emergency Discharge from Proposed Reservoir

SODC’s Leader has written to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs raising serious concerns about emergency discharge arrangements linked to Thames Water’s proposed South East Strategic Reservoir near Abingdon.

The council is calling for firm guarantees that resources and plans will be in place before any further consent is given. Emergency discharge could release vast quantities of water into the Thames over several weeks, potentially putting homes, businesses, wildlife and lives at risk. Residents and councillors have highlighted the absence of a requirement for a discharge plan before construction begins, and the consultation on the proposals remains open until mid-January.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sesro/council-leader-calls-for-answers-on-emergency-discharge-from-the-proposed-abingdon-reservoir/>

Fair Treatment and Community Cohesion Statement

SODC has issued a clear statement condemning intimidation, harassment and violence toward minority communities. The statement follows the passing of a council motion reaffirming the district’s commitment to fairness, inclusion and cohesion.

The council emphasises that fair treatment underpins its services — from housing and financial support to disability access, community safety and inclusion. Working with partners across community safety and migration support, the council has pledged to challenge misinformation and stand up to intolerance wherever it appears.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/community-support/fair-treatment-and-cohesion-motion/>

Securing the Future of Leisure Facilities

SODC has secured a three-year extension to its leisure services contract, ensuring continued access to high-quality, affordable facilities until at least August 2029. The short-term extension provides flexibility during upcoming local government reorganisation while protecting the services residents rely on.

The agreement delivers savings without reducing service quality and supports continued investment in facilities, including major decarbonisation projects such as solar panels and heat pumps. The aim is to reduce carbon emissions while supporting healthier, more active communities across the district.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/leisure/councils-secure-a-high-quality-and-sustainable-future-for-leisure-facilities-in-uncertain-times/>

Recruitment Begins for Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate and Communities)

Following the appointment of a new Chief Executive, SODC is pursuing the recruitment of a Deputy Chief Executive for Corporate and Communities. The role is seen as critical to maintaining operational stability during a period of devolution and structural change.

The council will advertise the post internally and externally to ensure a strong and diverse candidate pool. Moving quickly but carefully is viewed as essential to securing the leadership capacity needed for the challenges ahead.

Thames Water Funding for Community Flood Prevention

Community organisations in South Oxfordshire are being encouraged to apply for Thames Water funding to deliver small-scale flood prevention projects, such as rain gardens, planting schemes and water butts. The funding targets known flood hotspots and supports sustainable drainage solutions.

Applications are open until 31 March, with a webinar planned to support applicants. Local groups are encouraged to get involved and help reduce flood risk while improving local environments.

Interested parties should get in touch with swmp.applications@thameswater.co.uk

Community Infrastructure Levy Grant Fund – 2026

A new year round of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) district funding will open soon for 2026, offering £750,000 to support new or improved community facilities across South Oxfordshire.

Grants of between £75,000 and £250,000 will be available to town and parish councils and not-for-profit groups for projects linked to growth and development, such as community centres, play areas, sports facilities and open spaces.

Planning System Reform Update for Town and Parish Councils

SODC's Planning team has written to town and parish councils outlining the government's proposed reforms to the planning system and clarifying what these changes could mean locally.

The letters aim to ensure councils are informed and prepared as national policy evolves, particularly in the context of plan-making and development management.

<https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/app/uploads/sites/2/2025/12/South-Town-and-Parish-letter.pdf>

Laptops Donated to Support Digital Inclusion

The council has donated hundreds of older but working devices to local organisations supporting people to get online. The donation includes laptops, desktops and tablets that are no longer suitable for council use but remain valuable for residents.

Local people are also encouraged to donate unused devices to help expand access to digital services and opportunities across the district.

<https://gettingoxfordshireonline.org/put-your-old-laptops-to-good-use/>

Diversity and Social Campaign Calendar for 2026

SODC's 2026 Diversity and Social Campaign calendar is now live, highlighting key dates and themes that reflect council priorities around inclusion and equality.

Residents, councillors and partners are encouraged to share and promote the calendar throughout the year to support consistent messaging.

<https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/app/uploads/sites/2/2025/12/2026-South-Diversity-and-Social-Campaign-Calendar.pdf>

River Charity Seeks Volunteers

Thames21 is recruiting volunteers to help monitor river pollution along the Thames, with training provided in January. Volunteers are asked to commit a small amount of time each month to support long-term river health.

The programme supports community-led environmental protection and improved understanding of local water quality issues.

Details on the [Thames21 website](#) or email claire.robertson@thames21.org.uk

Leader's Christmas and New Year Message

The Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council has shared a message reflecting on the year's challenges and achievements, thanking communities, volunteers and council teams for their support.

The message highlights ongoing work on climate action, homelessness prevention, leisure investment and community support, while looking ahead with optimism to the year to come.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/south-leader-christmas-message-2025/>

Happy New Year!

[Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins](#)

District Councillors