

SODC Councillor's Monthly Report October 2026

Councils reluctantly approve constitution changes for new planning process

Published Monday 28 September 2026

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councillors last week discussed significant changes coming to the world of planning from the end of October, including a new standard national system that will see more applications determined by council officers.

Government reforms to planning committees are set to come into force from 31 October 2026, with big changes in the way the planning process works locally.

Key changes include:

A mandatory national scheme of delegation. Where previously, every local council created its own rules, the new system creates one standard rulebook for the whole country – with the aim of speeding up and streamlining the planning approval process.

Most everyday planning applications will automatically be handed to professional planning officers to decide. Only very large, complex, or highly controversial projects are allowed to be decided by a planning committee.

A smaller project can only be pushed up to the committee if it passes a strict “gateway test” to demonstrate that the proposal has significant impacts affecting the wider community, and that request will need to be agreed by a nominated officer.

Parish council and district councillor call-ins are not permissible under the new legislation.

An ambitious undertaking with the aim of strengthening community connections gets underway this month across southern Oxfordshire.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council have launched a project to help build stronger communities, develop connections and foster neighbourhood togetherness across the districts.

Earlier this year the Councils launched a series of community-led initiatives, under the theme of ‘Be Together’, ranging from yoga, ‘have a go’ days and community arts events to bike repairs and food skills courses.

Its core aim is to foster integration by encouraging social participation, cultural understanding, and mutual support. It also aims to build long-term independence and resilience among the communities it supports.

Residents are being encouraged to play their part in keeping parks, streets and countryside looking their best during the final week of the Waste Less. Clean Spaces. Better Places. Campaign previously announced.

Throughout Clean Spaces Week, the councils will celebrate the many people who already help care for their local area while encouraging everyone to take one small action that keeps shared spaces clean. Whether it's taking litter home when a bin is full, picking up one piece of litter while out walking or joining a local litter pick, every action helps. Taking your litter home, when possible, also helps to ensure more items, such as cans and bottles, can be recycled.

New £100,000 grant to help communities tackle climate change and support nature recovery

Communities across South Oxfordshire will benefit from a new £100,000 council grant scheme to help tackle climate change and support nature recovery. The new Nature and Climate Action Fund is the latest community grant scheme from South Oxfordshire District Council and will be open to voluntary and community organisations. Grants of between £250 and £10,000 will be available to support climate and nature focused projects of all sizes. Projects could include making a village hall more energy efficient, restoring natural habitats such as floodplain meadows, planting trees for shade and to reduce flooding, organising a community learning event on home renewable energy options or installing bike racks at a community venue to encourage cycling.

**Report details lessons learnt from Land Charges system delay
Published Wednesday 9 September 2026**

Following the delays in delivering South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' new Land Charges system this year, a report has been published setting out the causes of the project delays and identifying lessons learnt. The report went before the councils' Joint Scrutiny Committee on Monday 7 September. Members of the committee reviewed the report and concluded that lessons from the Land Charges project should lead to improvements in project governance, risk management, transparency of communications, access to specialist expertise and collaborative working on future systems. The committee also formally acknowledged the considerable effort of officers, contractors and partners put in towards stabilising and operating the service.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council statement on local government reorganisation (LGR) announcement
Published on Monday 7 September 2026

The government has announced it will review its local government reorganisation (LGR) decisions across England. This has implications about the future of councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. In a joint statement, the leaders of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council expressed their disbelief and disappointment at the latest government announcement:

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

“We’re deeply disappointed to have received this information at such short notice. All along, our councils have all done what government had asked of us in the preparation for local government reorganisation. Every pound and every officer hour spent responding to a process that is subsequently paused, is a resource that could have been spent on housing, social care, roads, planning and other frontline services. The uncertainty this has caused is a further erosion of our trust in government.

“We will now do our utmost to understand the way forward for our districts.”

REMINDER Cash for community groups with councillor grant scheme
I have £7500 available to support community projects with this year’s round of the Councillor Community Grant Scheme from South Oxfordshire District Council. The grant scheme launched on Monday 17 August and is open to non-profit organisations including community and voluntary groups and town and parish councils. **Please get your applications in early. The deadline for applications is midday Friday 4 December.**

David Turner
7th October 2026

