

EAST HAGBOURNE PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING DULY CONVENED AND HELD ON THURSDAY 13TH MARCH 2025

1. ATTENDANCE, APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST:

Present were Chairman I. Duff, Vice Chairman P. Dixon, Councillors D. Rickeard and C. Shaikh, and District Councillors A-M. Simpson and C. Topping.

Apologies were received from Cllrs C. Gover, R. Jaboor and N. Milner.

In attendance was L. Lloyd (Clerk).

I. Duff indicated there is 1 vacancy for a parish councillor.

2. PUBLIC FORUM AND QUESTIONS: None

3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 13TH FEBRUARY 2025:

The minutes of the Parish Council Meeting on 13th February 2025 were approved by Council and signed by I. Duff.

4. REPORTS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS: I. Duff confirmed receipt of the District Councillor's Report. A-M Simpson highlighted the grant funding advice session on 20th March, noting that the change to Unitary councils may well change the funding opportunities moving forward. The Social housing allocation policy changes consultation is open until 18th March. Papers have now been submitted for initial Unitary council proposals ahead of the meeting on 19th March. The preferred option for South and Vale would be to join with West Berkshire to form a Unitary council (just under 500,000 population) and Cherwell, West Oxfordshire & Oxford City Councils to join and form a second Unitary covering the rest of Oxfordshire, both of which would be considered smaller unitary councils. However, proposals for Oxfordshire as a whole, or Oxford City Council expanding outwards are also anticipated. Please see attachment 2 for full details.

C. Topping reported on two recent meetings concerning flooding:

- R. Ainger (Fieldside resident and flood group member) wishes to share his knowledge of flooding in the village. It was suggested that producing a written document to share with the flood group would be the best way forward.
- L. Travers confirmed that East Hagbourne is being actively reviewed along with West Hagbourne, which is good news as flood management in West Hagbourne will have an impact on East Hagbourne. Active engagement between C. Shaikh, the clerk and the flood group help maintain focus on parish issues.

C. Topping also noted that he is also investigating Biodiversity Net Gain in private gardens following comments made by the Ecology team in response to a recent planning application. He hopes to discuss this with Phil Chapman, a new contact in the SODC Ecology team. C. Topping left the meeting at 19.55pm

5. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION:

- a) **Annual Parish Meeting preparation:** Councillors discussed topics for the upcoming Annual Parish Meeting, including the updated CIL Projects list – it was noted that there are a good number of newer residents in the parish so continuing this discussion and engaging with the new residents is important. Creating some visuals to highlight achievements and areas under consideration was discussed. It was agreed that displays should be prepared and printed for presentation at the APM. The Public Art Project was also noted as a possible topic, although it may not be at the stage for detailed discussion in time for the APM. It was agreed that this would be clarified with Abigail Brown (SODC) at the steering committee next Monday.

b) **East Hagbourne Pavilion**

- i) **User survey feedback:** D. Rickeard confirmed that feedback from regular users has been very useful and the priorities for various groups provides a good foundation to consider improvements as noted below.
- ii) **Consideration of potential upgrades and improvements:** Internal decorating: it was agreed that EHSRC should initially consider the essentials that it may be able to fund, with additional items noted which would need to be funded by EHPC. Ventilation: It was agreed that this is not a priority at this time. Lighting: It was agreed that this should be pursued, with D. Rickeard and P. Dixon to write a specification for replacement lighting to include dimmable LEDs to allow flexibility for users. It would be useful to have recommendations for companies who could provide quotes. Acoustics: Initial research into the solution installed at Didcot Baptist Church indicates that wall and or ceiling panelling would likely be the best way forward. D. Rickeard has received 3 initial quotes with the preferred option suggesting ceiling panel installation of 20m². It was agreed that acoustics should be investigated further.

- c) **Parking and Traffic Management on Main Road:** N. Milner circulated a document ahead of the meeting, proposing that a survey of residents within the problem zone and a traffic survey to further analyse the issues should be carried out. It was agreed that surveys would be useful, but they need to be focused appropriately. D. Rickeard noted that an offline discussion to agree how to proceed would be beneficial to allow councillors

to share views on the matter ahead of agreeing the survey details and next steps. The suggestion in the email from N. Milner that accompanied the document for leafletting cars parked on Main Road was not supported.

- d) **Great British Spring Clean:** The Great British Spring Clean is taking place between 21st March – 6th April this year. A litter pick has not been completed in the past 2 years due to dwindling participation and a general lack of litter in accessible areas of the parish. D. Rickeard noted that there are a number of regular pickers in the village who do a good job of keeping the litter in check, which is very much appreciated. Past litter picks have been successful with the involvement of the school and local children. It was agreed not to partake in The Great British Spring Clean this year, but to flag the efforts of those who keep this in check throughout the year, possibly with anonymous mentions at the APM to hopefully encourage other volunteers for community-minded activities.

6. ITEMS FOR DECISION:

- a) **To approve Insurance renewal with Clear Councils for 2025-26 at a maximum cost of £1642.76:** L. Lloyd noted that due to a change of insurance partner, Clear Councils sent through higher premiums as the 3-year term is no longer valid. The renewal cost for 1 year has been quoted as £1642.76, and without the opportunity to request comparative quotes it is not appropriate to commit to a new 3-year deal at this time. L. Lloyd is awaiting confirmation as to whether the 1 year premium can be reduced. Councillors approved the expenditure.
- b) **To approve the Clerk's SLCC membership renewal for 2025-26 at a cost of £150.00:** Councillors approved the expenditure.
- c) **To approve the Clerk's OALC membership renewal for 2025-26 at a cost of £250.99:** Councillors approved the expenditure.
- d) **To approve CFO Membership renewal for 2025-26 at a cost of £70.00:** Councillors approved the expenditure.
- e) **To confirm the ICO Registration renewal fee of £52.00 (or £47.00 if paid by DD):** Councillors confirmed the expenditure and agreed to set up a DD agreement to benefit from the lower fee.
- f) **To confirm purchase of a replacement battery at £199.00 and set of pads at £54.99 for the Village Hall defibrillator:** Councillors confirmed the expenditure.
- g) **Grass Cutting Contract: To confirm the continuation of the existing contract with BGG for 2025-26:** Councillors agreed to the continuation of BGG's grass cutting contract for the coming year. It was agreed that the schedule will be updated to reflect the removal of cutting in Rymans Crescent and the addition of cutting maintenance on FP18.
- h) **Dog Waste Bins – to consider and agree potential adjustments to existing bins and additions to the current collection schedule:** Councillors discussed the possible options to improve the service provision for dog waste collection, including an additional collection for bins that are consistently full/overspilling, increasing the capacity of the existing bin at Manor Farm Lane, and adding a new bin at the embankment access from Deanfield. It was agreed that an additional collection for bins 1, 2 and 5 should be added and the situation monitored ahead of any decisions concerning new or larger bins.

7. ITEMS FOR REPORT:

- a) **Planning Applications:**
P25/S0541/FUL 89 New Road: A new application for a single storey bungalow has been submitted after the withdrawal of the application for a 3-bedroom house to the front of the plot. I. Duff noted that some neighbours are not available to speak to until next week ahead of submitting the council's response.
P25/S0321/LDP 132 New Road: The Parish Council has been notified of an application for a Lawful Development Certificate to replace the existing conservatory with a single storey extension within permitted planning limits. Although not invited to comment on LDP applications, the Parish Council will respond with a No Objection to the application.
- b) **East Hagbourne Sport and Recreation Committee:** D. Rickeard reported on the following: The concrete pothole repairs have been completed in the car park and the job has been done to the expected standard. The cycle area has been completed but three slabs have cracked (it is not known why as they were intact when the contractor completed the work) and these are to be replaced. The EHSRC budget is being reviewed and this will clarify what amount is potentially available for redecoration and upgrades to the pavilion. I. Duff reported on progress concerning the pavilion lease and management, following a meeting between himself and D. Rickeard. The preferred option would be to continue with a lease to EHSRC as this model has worked for the past decade, with the existing lease and constitution to be reviewed and amended if required to tailor it for the next lease period.
- c) **Cemetery Committee:** R. Jaboor circulated a brief report confirming that the Cemetery Committee met on 3rd March and agreed to instruct CDS to continue with the enabling design works for the drainage. The presence of trees will be taken into account and checks will be made as to any permissions required to drain into the ditch adjacent to Main Road. The Topographical survey has been scheduled for 24th March. L. Lloyd received a report of three tents in the PCC owned cemetery on Main Road today and has informed the Churn Benefice and PCC.
- d) **Employment Committee:** Nothing to report.

- e) **Butts Piece Allotments:** P. Dixon confirmed that the SODC grant was received earlier this month, and a note has been sent to all allotment holders for views on future allotment waste management. The allotment renewals will be sent out next week.
- f) **Flood Management:** C. Shaikh confirmed that the redistribution of silt and bridge removal has been completed along FP19, but there will have to be a separate return visit to remove the soil that was knocked back into the channel by the digger as it left.
- g) **Community Speedwatch:** WHPC has shared their information on VAR signage, and C. Shaikh confirmed she would be happy to review this with R. Jaboor for consideration in East Hagbourne. R. Jaboor has confirmed that he does not have the time to dedicate to speedwatch activities and noted that someone else will be required to continue with this initiative. It was noted that this would also be a good item to flag at the APM.
- h) **Housing development adjacent to the village hall:** I. Duff noted that the playground is still out of bounds, with areas needing to be turfed ahead of opening. The area to the left of the Crescent is also still awaiting the planting of trees and grass.
- i) **Hagbourne Village Hall:** D. Rickeard noted that he is currently the nominated trustee for the Parish Council on the VH Committee, and it would be advisable to consider who could take this on – it does not have to be a Parish Councillor.
- j) **Public Art Project:** The next meeting has been scheduled for 17th March.
- k) **Rymans Crescent Wildflower Area:** P. Dixon circulated a report on the meeting held at Rymans Crescent on 28th February to councillors, summarised below:
 - It was agreed that SOHA's contractor, John O'Conner would cut the grass verge and ditch moving forward to avoid potential confusion.
 - BGG have agreed to work with SOHA to reinstate or duplicate any lost biodiversity, following a period of monitoring over the summer to gauge what level of variety has been lost. BGG has offered to supply materials and potentially labour to make this happen.
 - The area adjacent to the Pavilion Car Park is being trialled as an area for biodiversity – this will be left to grow between May and October this year.
 - A request has been made for a goodwill gesture of £450 to be paid to HUGS in light of the incident. Councillors felt that the agreement between BGG and SOHA to reinstate the wildflower meadow is the appropriate restitution for the Rymans Crescent issue. The Parish Council is always open to grant requests for any projects supporting the Climate and Biodiversity strategy.
- l) **Footpath Management:** – C. Shaikh reported on a meeting with SBS Oxon who have quoted to resurface the full length of FP8 to the same spec as FP12 and FP15. It was discussed whether the resurfacing is justified for the full length of the path, with the possibility of leaving the narrower section next to the bowls club and focusing on the eastern end – although opinions differed on how future mulch build up from fallen leaves would affect the path surface along this stretch. D. Rickeard confirmed that SBS Oxon have also provided guidance on possible resolution of the flooding on FP18, which would include clearance of vegetation and installing pipes to connect into the existing drainage. L. Lloyd, C. Shaikh and C. Gover are meeting with the Parish Path Warden Coordinator on 25th March.
- m) **Matters raised at the Chairman's Surgery and OALC Councillor's Forum:** I. Duff reported that his February surgery was very quiet. Issues raised: Potholes on New Road and Coscote Road, and comments in favour of continuation of the new FP12 path surface as far as Church Close.

8. Correspondence:

I. Duff reported that he attended the West Hagbourne Parish Council meeting earlier this month; 7 members of the public were in attendance, 5 of whom are actively involved in parish issues. In particular the WHPC flood group and community speedwatch are very active. WHPC noted concerns with their website and L. Lloyd has shared details of EHPC's website administration for information.

I. Duff noted that the current window for TOE grants closes on 7th April.

9. Finance:

a) Expenditure and receipts since the last meeting and account balances

a) Payments since last meeting: **NB: Payments pending are shown in yellow and are not included in the account balance shown in c)**

Payee	Item	Auth:	Amount	VAT	Total	Date
Dark White Digital	INV 001764 February web hosting	C Shaikh / C Gover	£30.00	£0.00	£30.00	17/02/2025
Shield Maintenance Ltd	INV 8452 Dog Bin and Waste bin emptying January 2025	C Shaikh / C Gover	£125.66	£25.13	£150.79	17/02/2025
EHSRC	INV004-25 Meeting room hire 09/01/2025	C Shaikh / C Gover	£25.00	£0.00	£25.00	17/02/2025

David Rikeard	Expenses - Hagbourne Oaks Project (canes)	C Shaikh / C Gover	£9.75	£1.95	£11.70	17/02/2025
Laura Lloyd	Expenses - Domain name renewal (4 yrs) and Google One storage	C Shaikh / C Gover	£93.29	£18.66	£111.95	17/02/2025
Grundon Waste Management	PSI-1215513 Cemetery bin collections January 2025	DD	£62.27	£12.45	£74.72	20/02/2025
Castle Water	INV10005507581 - Allotment Water - Bill date 07022025	DD	£5.56	£1.11	£6.67	21/02/2025
Laura Lloyd	February Salary	C Shaikh / C Gover	£857.81	£0.00	£857.81	28/02/2025
Unity Trust Bank	T2 Account Service Charge	Automatic Payment	£7.50	£0.00	£7.50	28/02/2025
Scribe Accounts	INV 9474 March monthly fee	DD	£35.00	£7.00	£42.00	03/03/2025
Dark White Digital	INV001794 March web hosting		£30.00	£0.00	£30.00	
Shield Maintenance Ltd	INV8573 February Dog Bin and General bin Emptying		£125.66	£25.13	£150.79	
BGG Garden and Tree Care	INV1479/25 FP18 bramble clearance and Allotment Hedge cutting		£1,000.00	£200.00	£1,200.00	
EHSRC	INV012-25 Community Hall hire 13th February		£25.00	£0.00	£25.00	
Hagbourne Village Hall	INV1778 Hall hire 2nd Q (Dec-Feb) 2024-25		£42.00	£0.00	£42.00	
Laura Lloyd	March Salary		£857.81	£0.00	£857.81	

b) Receipts since last meeting:

From	Item	Amount	Date
Redwood Bank	35 day notice account interest February	£199.32	28/02/2025
Nationwide	Instant Access Savings account interest February	£121.96	28/02/2025
SODC	Councillor Community Grant Scheme (Allotment clearance)	£1,000.00	07/03/2025
	Total	£1,321.28	

c) Accumulated Account Balances (reconciled online 12/03/2025)

Unity Trust Bank - T1 current account	£23,435.50
Unity Trust Bank - Instant access account	£58,276.22
Redwood Bank - 35 Day Notice Savings Account	£85,000.00
Nationwide - Instant Access Business Savings Account	£81,657.26
Natwest - Liquidity Manager 95 Day Notice Account***	£85,333.02
Total	£333,702.00

***NB Postal statement for February not yet rec'd

d) The Special Project Balances (as of 12/03/2025) are:

Community Infrastructure Levy Fund	Received 28/04/23 so requires spending by 27/04/28	£43,620.62
	Received 27/10/23 so requires spending by 26/10/28	£106,843.63
	Received 26/04/24 so requires spending by 25/04/29	£4,165.09
	Received 24/10/24 so requires spending by 25/10/29	£115,173.81
	Total CIL money	£269,803.15
Community Projects Reserve Fund		£4,712.91
Planned Development Support Fund		£5,303.15
Cemetery		£14,646.95
	Total	£294,466.16

e) General Reserve (as of 12/03/2025)

£39,235.84

b) **Review and approval of pending payments:** The Council reviewed the pending payments and approved those without minuted/regular payment approval.

10. Items for report and inclusion on the April agenda:

Annual Parish Meeting feedback

The meeting closed at 10.00pm.

Items for consideration for the April agenda must be received by the clerk no later than Monday 14th April.

The next meeting will be held on 24th April 2025 at Hagbourne Village Hall, East Hagbourne.

Signed.....Dated.....

ATTACHMENT 1: ACTION LIST (FOR INFORMATION ONLY: ITEMS WILL NOT BE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING UNLESS FEATURED ON THE MAIN AGENDA)

Action No	What	Who	Status
2023-03-01	Deanfield Homes Car Park Land Transfer	LL	Transfer documentation signed at meeting on 26 th March 2024. 29/01/2025 Correspondence between Deanfield and OCC legal teams means the transfer documentation is nearly complete; there is still a restriction that needs removing with agreement from the original landowners before the transfer can be finalised.
2023-06-02	Parking and Traffic Management on Main Road	NM/ALL	Councillors to discuss approach to surveys
2023-06-03	Footway repairs in the parish	ID/PD/RJ	Prioritise potential repairs for OCC to review. C. Stallwood has added East Hagbourne to the list for slurry sealing Main Road footways in the future. Meeting with Highways Engagement Officer on 3 rd October being followed up. 28/11/2024 Progress update requested Jan 2025 Follow up meeting with Highways Engagement has been postponed but email discussion continues.
2023-10-01	Disabled Parking spaces in the village car park	LL	24/01/2025 Request for improved access to disabled bays from a blue badge holder, council obtaining quotes for line markings (check national guidelines) Clerk obtaining advice and comparative quotes for the works.
2023-10-03	Weed management on Main Road	LL/ID	14/10 Deep Cleanse team have cleared the outer edge of the raised footway approaching Lower Cross. The footway and verge in front of Lawson's Orchard have also been improved. 28/02/2025 – The sweeper has been through the village and the road channel along the edge of the raised path has been partially cleared. Next steps are clearance of the remaining debris and applying a weed treatment to keep regrowth under control.

VARIOUS	<p>Footpath accessibility:</p> <p>2023-12-02 FP10 MFL to West Hagbourne</p> <p>2023-12-03 FP12 Church Close to Fieldside</p> <p>2023-12-04 FP13 Parsonage Lane</p> <p>2024-01-01 FP1 West Hagbourne to Didcot</p> <p>2024-03-02 FP15 Grange Footpath</p> <p>2024-03-03 FP8 Bakers Lane to The Croft</p> <p>2024-04-01 FP30 Village Hall</p> <p>2025-03-01 FP18 Flooding issues</p>	LL/CS/PD/ ID	<p>Volunteer labour is available for FP8 aggregate laying subject to OCC approval.</p> <p>03/10/2024 FP13 was discussed with the Highways Engagement Team and recorded as Cat 3</p> <p>03/10/2024 FP30 – Initial review of possible surface improvements undertaken by Chloe from the Highways Engagement team</p> <p>05/12/2024 FP12 – Farmer to review field drainage before any continuation of the path to Church Close is considered.</p> <p>05/12/2024 FP15 new surface between Fieldside and the bridge would be better finished in tarmac to withstand instances of flooding. This is under consideration.</p> <p>11/12/2024 Email sent to A McEwan-James to reconnect on remaining footpath priorities in the New Year.</p> <p>09/01/2025 Noted that there may be a need to improve the point where FP12 joins the path at Parsonage Lane</p> <p>13/02/2025 Meeting arranged with the Local Coordinator for Parish Path Wardens on 25th March</p> <p>13/03/2025 Contractor quote received for consideration for FP8</p> <p>13/03/2025 FP18 Investigation into flooding and drainage at northern end of path</p>
2023-12-09	Community Speedwatch	RJ/CS	<p>20mph Traffic Order came into force on 27/01/2025</p> <p>13/03/2025 VAR options to be reviewed. Seeking new Speedwatch Coordinator to take over from R Jaboor</p>
2024-01-02	Emergency Plan / Flooding documentation Review	RJ/LL	Emergency Plan Approved and now online. Resident feedback and volunteers for emergency contact list now ongoing.
2024-02-01	Pavilion Lease Renewal	DR/LL	<p>Feedback from CFO received and being reviewed</p> <p>Feb 2025 - Advice received from SLCC Legal advisor Wellers Solicitors</p> <p>13/03/2025 Existing lease to be reviewed and updated to meet future needs</p>
2024-02-04	Flood Management in the Parish	CS/DR/PD	<p>The OCC funded channel clearance and bridge removal works along FP19 (Tadley) were completed in mid-November. Silt levelling has now been completed.</p> <p>26/02/2025 Leigh Travers and Carl Stallwood completed a walkabout to assess the rest of the watercourses in the parish with input from the flood group. Awaiting written feedback.</p>
2024-03-04	Main Road 20mph limit	OCC	<p>20mph Traffic Order came into force on 27/01/2025</p> <p>07/01/2025 Chased again for a response to the concerns over lack of repeater roundels on Blewbury Road and visibility of the 20mph limit sign on New Road.</p> <p>13/02/2025 A second roundel has been installed on the far side of the road when entering the 20mph limit from New Road.</p>

2024-03-05	From APM: Step reinstatement on Main Road/Bakers Lane footpath	OCC/LL	This is an OCC Highways matter and has also been raised with the Highways Engagement Team on 03/10/2024. 11/11/2024 The clerk chased SGN, OCC officers and Highways Engagement when SGN contractors were working on Main Road. No communication has been received from the local depot. 28/11/2024 Further support has been requested from Chloe in Highways Engagement to resolve this. 18/02/2025 Clerk contacted SGN and OCC again for an update
2024-03-06	From APM: Main Road to Coscote road surface	OCC	An OCC matter as no agreement was made with the developer during the planning process and the S278 agreement to maintain and repair the main agreed access route to the site. The Parish Council has full support from our County Councillor, Jane Murphy, to lobby for repairs and reinstatement. 28/11/2024 Further discussion with Chloe from Highways Engagement on the necessary works to make good the road and verges. The follow up site meeting scheduled for late January has been postponed but email communication continues.
2024-04-01	CIL Projects Shortlist	ALL	Councillors reviewing and updating project proposals ahead of the APM on 3 rd April
2024-10-01	Blewbury Road Drainage	CS/LL	Initial communications being followed up
2024-12-01	Zebra Crossing Visibility	LL	OCC Streetlighting team investigating visibility concerns

ATTACHMENT 2:

Title	District Councillors' Report
Councillors	Cllr Anne-Marie Simpson & Cllr Crispin Topping
Parish	East Hagbourne Parish Council
Date	13 March 2025

[Booking link](#) for planning surgeries for town and parish councils

South and Vale Leaders write to West Berkshire Council on unitary council proposals

UPDATE: Papers have been published for the Cabinet meeting on Local Government Reorganisation next week (19 March) which can be viewed [here](#).

The Leaders of South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Council have written to the Leader of West Berkshire Council to support the creation of a joint forum of senior council members from each authority to support the three authorities to work up a proposal for a possible unitary council across the three neighbouring areas. You can [read the letter on the councils' websites here](#).

The proposal for a unitary council that partners South and Vale with West Berkshire was a topic of conversation when both Councils held public meetings last week, with many members commenting positively about this potential option. The councils both issued press releases on this last week:

- Vale of White Horse - [A new council for the Vale, South Oxfordshire and West Berkshire?](#)
- South Oxfordshire - [South Oxfordshire considers options for a new unitary authority](#)

Representatives of the two district councils are also continuing discussions with other authorities in Oxfordshire to explore the feasibility of a single unitary council for the whole county.

The Leaders of the South Oxfordshire and Vale councils both believe those are the only two options currently being discussed that would meet the government's criteria for the creation of new unitary councils and would represent the best options to meet the needs of the districts' residents and businesses.

Grant funding advice session

We are holding a grant funding advice session at Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot on **Thursday 20 March, appointments available from 12.30pm to 4pm**. Voluntary and community organisations will have the opportunity to discuss projects, ask questions about the application process including eligibility for any of the upcoming grant schemes. Places are limited, so please encourage organisations to book a time slot by emailing grants@southandvale.gov.uk or phone 01235 422405. Alternatively, if they are unable to attend, the team are happy to book a phone call or Teams meeting at a more convenient time. Please help us to spread the word! [For more information visit our website.](#)

Social housing allocation policy changes

Our public consultation on proposed changes to the Joint Housing Allocations Policy opened on 18 February. The policy underpins our work on providing homes to those who need them most, setting out the criteria to join the housing register and the rules for how social housing is allocated.

Last updated in 2019, the policy needs refreshing to reflect current housing priorities in the districts. There are four main proposed changes to the policy – all designed to help ensure no one is disadvantaged when it comes to allocating social housing.

[Details on how to take part are on Join The Conversation](#), our Community Engagement website and the consultation runs until 11.59pm on Tuesday 18 March 2025. Please do help encourage people to share their views.

Bringing empty houses back into use

We're offering help to empty property owners so they can bring underused homes back into use for those who need them most. Measures include rent in advance, financial assistance towards refurbishment in some circumstances, and help with finding a tenant.

We're encouraging empty property owners to get in touch with us so we can discuss the benefits and options available, and tying in with National Empty Homes Week beginning on 3 March, we'll also be encouraging residents to report empty homes to us via our website.

Please help support our campaign by directing people to our webpages - see [South](#) / [Vale](#) and share our social media messages.

New garden waste permit payment system rolls out

Residents in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse can now sign up for a new garden waste permit as part of changes to the councils' subscribed collection service.

The updated scheme, launching on 1 April 2025, introduces an annual permit sticker system. Residents need to pay for their permit to ensure their garden waste collections continue without interruption.

The new payment system is now available online at www.southoxon.gov.uk/gardenwaste and www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/gardenwaste

Once they have purchased a permit, customers will receive a sticker through the post displaying their address which needs to be stuck to their garden waste bin lid to identify it as fully paid for and eligible for collection.

Customers now need to make an annual payment for a permit – this replaces the existing direct debit scheme. Everyone's payment year will run from 1 April to 31 March each year. Every bin needs its own permit and customers will receive a new sticker annually each time they renew. This kind of scheme is successfully offered by many other local authorities, including in neighbouring West Oxfordshire.

The permits will help the waste collection crews identify which bins are eligible to be emptied. This will ensure that only households that have paid for the service have their garden waste bins emptied. The changes are part of the councils' ongoing work to improve the value of public services by streamlining payments and improving service efficiency.

Benefits to customers include a new online system so they can manage their account, renew their permit and change their details much more easily. This will also mean the councils can contact people quickly if there are any major disruptions to the service, such as during adverse weather. When customers pay for a permit, there will be a link to sign up for an account and the account sign-up is also available on the councils' websites.

Full information is also available on the council websites and each existing customer will shortly receive a bin hanger flagging the changes. Support is available for any customer unable to pay online by contacting the council.

An FAQ page covering all the changes is available on the garden waste section: [South FAQ](#) / [Vale FAQ](#). The councils' customer services team will also be on hand to assist with any queries customers have. Garden waste sack customers can find out more information on how the new permits will work for them within the FAQ page.

Housing investment and community support a key focus of South Oxfordshire's 2025-26 Budget

Diligent financial management has ensured that South Oxfordshire District Council can deliver a balanced budget for 2025-26 and marks the first time in nine years that the council hasn't needed to dip into its reserves.

Last Thursday 13 February, district councillors approved a 2025-26 budget that ensures continued investment in public services, including crucial housing and infrastructure projects and guaranteeing support for vulnerable residents, despite the ongoing challenges of an unstable national economy.

By protecting rather than using its reserves, the council is securing long-term financial stability, ensuring resilience against future challenges and maintaining the ability to invest in key services for residents.

Major funding is to be made available to support the purchase of more affordable housing across South Oxfordshire. Having already committed £10 million to provide more safe, secure and compliant housing, purchased under the Local Authority Housing Funding (LAHF) schemes, the district council has now committed to make a further £10 million available to support the council's long-term ambitions to meet local housing need. South Oxfordshire District Council has so far purchased 27 properties under the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) scheme, the majority of which will provide genuinely affordable and energy efficient houses and apartments available for rent.

Councillors also approved funding to secure the future of the council's Community Hub on an ongoing basis. This valued service provides practical support and advice for those with cost-of-living concerns or who are finding life difficult. Since launching in 2020, the Community Hub has supported thousands of residents across the district and provided more than £800,000 in vouchers and grants to households experiencing financial hardship. This has ensured people were able to pay vital energy bills and afford household essentials and food. A further £200,000 has been awarded to local voluntary and community organisations, helping them continue their invaluable support provided to residents.

£590,000 will be made available through council grant schemes to support community projects such as improvements to public facilities, energy upgrades, local events and tree planting.

Berinsfield will benefit from a new floodlit multi-use games area, improved signage and public amenities and improved drainage for local sports pitches.

The council continues to fund an ongoing programme to improve the district's leisure centres, including major decarbonisation projects at Henley Leisure Centre and Abbey Sports Centre and new equipment for Didcot Wave's Spin Studio. Money for these projects comes from the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 funding the council has secured from developers of new homes.

The budget also includes funding to support the design and delivery of sustainable, affordable housing and ancillary community space in Didcot Broadway. Despite a very unstable national economy, the budget maintains investment in key areas while ensuring that residents will continue to receive excellent value for money for services provided by the district council.

South Oxfordshire District Council receives just six per cent of the total council tax that its residents pay each year. The rest is divided between Oxfordshire County Council (77 per cent), Thames Valley's Police and Crime Commissioner (12 per cent) and local town/parish councils (five per cent).

South Oxfordshire's council tax is currently the 10th lowest among all shire district councils nationally and is less than half the equivalent charge in neighbouring Oxford City.

Council tax for services provided by South Oxfordshire District Council between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 will be set at £151.24 for a Band D property. This means just £2.91 per week for a wide range of services including waste and recycling collections, community support, leisure services, parks and play areas, housing and planning services, environmental health and licensing.

Alongside the six per cent portion of residents' council tax, South Oxfordshire's budget will also be financed by £7.8 million in government funding, including just over £1.4 million in New Homes Bonus[^] funding and £1.3 million from Extended Producer Responsibility, a new national policy that requires larger organisations to pay additional fees based on the packaging they produce.

To view the 2025-26 South Oxfordshire District Council budget, visit [the 13 February 2025 Council meeting agenda page](#)