

District Councillor Report – Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye, August/September 2024

New National Planning Policy Framework consultation

The new government has launched a consultation on their new National Planning Policy Framework proposal. Our planning officers are analysing the impacts this could have on South Oxfordshire and we will be responding as a council to the consultation.

The draft version the government has published would mean that our area would need to commit to build a higher number of houses than the current standard method of calculation.

The consultation details are here below, and I encourage Parish Councils as well as individuals to respond: [Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system)

It closes on 24th September 2024.

The next steps for Councils' Joint Local Plan

South and Vale councils have now set out the next steps for their Joint Local Plan in the light of this new government approach.

The Joint Local Plan is fundamental to achieving many of the councils' strategic ambitions and as such we are now striving to submit it as soon as possible as we recognise the importance of ensuring that any development is properly planned.

We are nearly ready to submit the joint plan to be examined – anticipating it being ready to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in December 2024, four months earlier than previously thought.

We have updated a document known as the Local Development Scheme that sets out the timetable for this work, which is now available on the councils' websites: [South LDS/Vale LDS](#).

We will be publishing the proposed Joint Local Plan that will go to this Inspectorate and the public will have a six-week opportunity to comment on whether they think the plan meets all the current relevant requirements.

More details on this final publication stage will follow soon. I have written my opinion on the new housing targets in the draft National Planning Policy Framework at the bottom of this report

Local 'green skills' courses

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have partnered with Abingdon & Witney College, OxLEP (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership) and education charity SOFEA to upskill local residents and businesses.

The councils have funded 82 places for 'green' building and construction courses from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. These courses at Abingdon and Witney College, include Installation and Maintenance of Heat Pumps, Understanding Domestic Retrofit and general awareness courses.

You can find out more about these courses and how to sign up for them at a drop-in event on **Monday 19th August at the Net Zero Skills Hub, Abingdon & Witney College**, Wootton Road, Abingdon, OX14 1GG from 9.30am to 11am.

SODC has also contributed funding to OxLEP and SOFEA's 'No Limits' programme, designed to offer support for residents into green skills training and employment.

The programme includes assistance for those who need help to get a job, including free laptops and mobile phones to develop digital skills as well as travel grants for those needing financial help to get to work, school or college.

A full-time member of staff will be on hand to help with any queries and offer advice.

Councillor Community Grant Scheme

The 2024/25 Councillor Community Grant Scheme opened on 14th August and runs until 29th November. Funds can be used to support local 'not for profit' organisations whose work benefits residents, including town and parish councils.

The funding is ideal for projects which are relatively low in costs and are expected to be completed within a year. They start at £250 with a £5,000 total available for each councillor ward.

For more information, please look at the [Councillor Community Grant Scheme policy](#). For more details, please ask me or email grants@southandvale.gov.uk

New social housing

After a significant amount of hard work and dedication, a major project led by our Housing team means the councils have become social

landlords for the first time since 1997, and can provide genuinely affordable, high-quality homes to people in need.

We're launching 45 refurbished homes ready for people living in the Vale and South Oxfordshire who need them most. A mixture of houses and flats, including new combi-boilers and double glazing to make these homes as energy efficient as possible.

The homes are part of our wider work to support the councils' joint Housing Delivery Strategy.

Take a look at these infographics on our web page southandvale.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/affordable-housing-South-Oxfordshire-1.mp4 that highlight some of the key achievements and plans our teams have put in place to provide affordable, sustainable homes and prevent homelessness in the districts.

Fusion Fest at Cornerstone

Last Saturday, Cornerstone Arts Centre partnered up with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champions at South and Vale to hold an event called Fusion Fest, which celebrated different international cultures in our communities. There was truly something for everyone at this wonderful and well attended event.

The event included performances and workshops including Bhangra dancing, African drumming, and Chinese brush painting, and gave us the opportunity to hear from our local community on their thoughts on Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Capital Grant Scheme - closes 2nd September

Voluntary and community organisations in South Oxfordshire have two more weeks to apply for funding for projects that help improve people's quality of life.

The Capital Grant Scheme is open until 2nd September, and organisations can apply for up to £75,000 of funding, but **no more than 50 per cent** of their total project cost.

Thank you for helping to share our social media messages, please do continue to share this information with your voluntary sector and community contacts. Application details on timings and application information are on our [grants web page](#).

Contact me here for any District Council issue:

sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk.

Or call me & leave a message: 01235 635566

Does increasing housing targets reduce house prices and rents?

I want to emphasise that as a council administration we are very concerned with this new government's approach.

This is because increasing housing targets has a poor record of delivering large numbers of housing that are sustainable and affordable.

In the main it is not Councils that build houses (although we are beginning to work on that with our new Housing Strategy – see above), it is developers.

It is far too simplistic to say that the barriers to developers building houses are either house targets or the planning system.

There are many sites in the county which have been allocated within a local plan, some of them with planning permission already, but which show no signs of being built anytime soon.

The main barriers to house building are firstly the lack of infrastructure: power supply, sewage treatment/water capacity, availability of doctors and dentists for example, all of which are outside of the control of local councils, and secondly market conditions which allow developers to control build rates and sell at prices they want in order to make the desired profit.

If the government could address these fundamental problems, then I am sure they will find local authorities more than willing to address the housing problems they face.

But neither does solely building large numbers of houses bring prices to within affordability levels in a time period that will impact, for example, key workers working at median or lower wages.

Guidance published by the government in 2018 estimated that when holding other factors like interest rates, population and incomes constant, a 1% increase in housing stock would lead to a 2% fall in house prices.

These figures suggest that hitting a 1.5 million target would have a limited effect on values: an additional 1.5 million homes is equivalent to 6% of the housing stock so all things being equal prices would fall by 12%, BUT all things are not equal.

Interest rates, rising incomes, population increases adding to demand all have their impacts on the housing supply/availability and affordability.

The country is already adding about 1.2 million new homes every five years so an additional 300,000 homes might skim about a further 2.5 percentage points off house prices. However, interest rates are key - a

two percentage point fall in interest rates pushes house prices in the other direction by six percentage points.

Of course, it does not mean supply is irrelevant. A new analysis by Generation Rent – a pressure group – reckons that a 1% increase in the number of homes per person within a local authority between 2015 and 2023 is associated with a 1.2% decrease in rents as a share of average incomes.

But in the decade to 2010, the housing stock in England rose by 8% but real house prices soared by 70%, as the cost of debt fell.

Over the past year house prices have fallen moderately in response to higher mortgage costs and a study by the Bank of England in 2019 using an asset price model found that about half of the 170% rise in real house prices between 1985 and 2018 can be explained by falling interest rates and the rest by rising incomes.

So, it is clear that we need a much nuanced national policy for housing that takes into account these complexities. This simplistic supply-only approach will not have the desired effect but could have many undesired effects, not least on the environment, climate and nature.