

Title	County Councillor's Report
Author	Cllr Robin Bennett
	Berinsfield & Garsington Division
Date	January 2025
Contact	robin.bennett@oxfordshire.gov.uk

OxonCC Cabinet to meet to discuss Local Government Reform

As noted elsewhere, the government announced major reform to local councils just before Christmas.

County councils in two-tier areas have been given until 10th January to write to say how they wish to proceed; Oxfordshire's cabinet is meeting to discuss this issue this Thursday at noon, with the response due the following day. Needless to add, this is a very tight timetable which does not allow for much in the way of consultation.

The Government is hoping to press ahead with the first tranche of reorganisations quickly; this could even result in the postponement of County Council elections, due in May, if Oxfordshire is in one of the first round of reorganisations.

County and District Councils to be Abolished

One key proposal is to abolish District and County Councils completely and to create new Unitary Authorities covering much larger areas of population.

At the time of writing, the Government is proposing that each Unitary Authority should cover an area with a population of around 500,000 people; as a comparison, Oxfordshire's population is around 750,000 (which would make for a very large Unitary authority area) and the population of South Oxfordshire is around 153,000.

Each new Unitary Authority would also be a member of a new "Strategic Authority" covering approximately 1.5m people, possibly with an elected Mayor at its head (that would be known as a Mayoral Strategic Authority).

These new regional Mayors would have some powers to override council decisions on planning matters, and would be required to create a "Local Growth Plan". The implications for our area could be significant and we could lose more local accountability.

HIF 1 decision published

The Secretary of State's [decision notice](#) has been published for the Didcot Garden Town Housing Infrastructure Fund 1 Scheme. Planning permission has been granted subject to a number of conditions.

A public local inquiry began on 20th February 2024 and sat for 21 days until 9th May 2024 to consider the scheme in detail following call-in by then Secretary of State, Michael Gove.

The approved scheme consists of:

- The dualling of the A4130 carriageway (A4130 Widening) from the Milton Gate Junction eastwards, including the construction of three roundabouts;
- A road bridge over the Great Western Mainline (Didcot Science Bridge) and realignment of the A4130 north east of the proposed road bridge including the relocation of a lagoon; how
- Construction of a new road between Didcot and Culham (Didcot to Culham River Crossing) including the construction of three roundabouts, a road bridge over the Appleford railway sidings and road bridge over the River Thames;
- Construction of a new road between the B4015 and A415 (Clifton Hampden bypass), including the provision of one roundabout and associated junctions; and
- Controlled crossings, footways and cycleways, landscaping, lighting, noise barriers and sustainable drainage systems.