

District Councillor Annual Report 2024-25 – Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye

It's been an eventful but productive year in the District Council. Here are some of the highlights.

Cleaner, greener technologies at leisure centres

Over the last year we have continued our successful bidding for funds to invest in cleaner, greener technologies at our leisure centres in Didcot, Thames and Wheatley. This means there are more solar panels, and energy saving systems like fans to keep heat where it is needed.

Homes that people need

We have worked on changing our empty homes policy to bring more empty homes into use (there are just under 600 in the District), increasing Council Tax liability but also offering support and guidance to carry out work that would make these homes habitable if that's what is needed.

We have delivered 48 affordable homes, and progressed work to buy and build more social homes for rent. We have done this using developer contributions and grants from central government, further example of our creative approach to finding funding for our priorities.

Joint Local development Plan submitted for examination by the Planning Inspectorate

We submitted this somewhat earlier than we initially planned to, in December. We included some of the most progressive policies that we could in relation to carbon, nature and community inclusion in this plan.

We did not add any more homes to the total expected to be built over the period to 2041 as the evidence showed more are not necessary.

We expect the examination to happen in June.

This was the culmination of four years of extensive work to make it the best plan for our District, while being legally compliant and sound.

Grants for communities

I have had fantastic demand for the Councillor Community Grant, and we have increased this by 50% for next year because these grants are so popular.

I have been able to award money to help fund the recreation ground in Nuneham Courtenay, a new bus stop shelter in Clifton Hampden and

some money towards the work of Oxfordshire Wildlife Rescue across the whole District.

We've introduced a new performing arts grant, adding to the list of grants for communities e.g. capital and revenue.

Launched our new four-year Council Plan

Building on our last strategic plan, we are focusing on climate action, supporting community action, providing homes people need, and being innovative but careful with council finances.

We will be delivering our first annual action plan this coming year, because even though there are local government reorganisation proposals, these will take at least two years to be finalised.

Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Charter

We have committed to supporting the county, along with other councils, by pledging our commitment to OIEP.

It means when the council agrees contracts it will assess the support the supplier can offer the local community as well as the value for money of the contract.

It means we will consider in each action we take how we can support the local community and economy.

New Garden Waste Permit scheme launched

This should work better for householders and the Council after the initial change.

It means we will spend less money and time chasing payments and fewer bins that are being collected without payment being made as people move home etc – keeping to our commitment to better council finances and reducing waste (both garden and financial!).

Flooding prevention work with parishes and the County

We collaborated with other councils to implement more prevention measures after some really horrendous flooding in people's homes last winter.

As weather patterns becomes less predictable and more severe, we are doing what we can to help people and communities adapt.

Local Government Re-organisation

Despite the very short notice given by the government, we were able to work up a viable option of a unitary council comprising South, Vale and West Berkshire.

We already had a commitment that any unitary should be small enough to be close to communities it serves but large enough to be financially viable and effective.

We do not think that at this time of deteriorating services and infrastructure in the country that local government reorganisation should be a priority but we need to respond to the government's requirements.

Strategic sites for houses and businesses design and delivery

Work continues in the background with developers and their agents on the big sites like land in Sandford and Culham.

However, there have been a number of delays outside the council's control: Thames Water failing to upgrade the sewage works and landowners taking longer to agree terms than anticipated.

We are doing whatever we can to ensure the sites will deliver developments that align with our policies and the future needs of the District.

Updates for May 2025

Website unavailability

Certain functions on the SODC website will be unavailable for a week starting on 24th May.

This is because we are updating some important IT systems, as part of bringing our IT function back inhouse from Capita. This will cover nearly all online services.

Planning applications that overlap that period will have a 14-day extension to their consultation periods.

Residents will still be able to contact the council using the online general inquiry form or by phone.

Free outdoor community park fitness sessions

These sessions are designed for those who are new to exercise or have been inactive for some time and are a perfect way to start your fitness journey.

People can find the full dates and locations on the [Active Communities Facebook page](#) and the [South](#) Open Space Activities pages

Everyone Active grant

The Everyone Active grant is now open for applications, to improve the health and wellbeing of residents.

There is a budget of £50,000 – with a maximum of £1,000 for each application – for projects that benefit more than one individual becoming active or sustaining activity, to groups of residents, in South Oxfordshire.

The grant scheme is open to a wide range of not-for-profit groups and sports clubs, town and parish councils/parish meetings, not for profit pre-schools, PTAs and local authority run schools or academies for non-statutory elements of the education programme.

For more information visit the [Everyone Active grant scheme webpage](#) or email grants@southandvale.gov.uk.

If you have any questions or issues you would like to contact me about:

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Or leave a message for me on 01235 635566.