District Councillor Update to Parish Councils

October 2026

Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Ward member for Goring and South Stoke



SODC Cabinet

Dear Clerks, Chairs and Councillors,

Please find below a selection of South Oxfordshire District Council updates, focusing on opportunities for parish councils, community organisations and residents, alongside progress on local priorities.

Contents

1. Nature and Climate Action Fund: £100,000 Available 2
2. Councillor Community Grants: Applications Open 2
3. Capital Grants and Community Investment 2
4. Community Led Affordable Housing 2
5. Joint Local Plans: Progress and Next Steps 3
6. Neighbourhood Planning and Local Influence 3
7. Planning Changes and Housing Land Supply: New Figures Published 3
8. Helping Residents Stay Active and Well 4
9. Supporting Local Community Safety 4
10. More Flexibility for Community Events 5

1. Nature and Climate Action Fund: £100,000 Available

South Oxfordshire's new Nature and Climate Action Fund opened on 28 September, with £100,000 available to support community projects that tackle or adapt to climate change and help nature recover. Grants range from £250 to £10,000.

Projects could cover energy efficiency, reducing waste, sustainable travel, climate resilience, habitat improvement or better access to nature. Parish councils and community organisations with ideas are encouraged to explore the scheme and discuss proposals with the climate team at climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk.

Read more: Scheme information and applications

2. Councillor Community Grants: Applications Open

The Councillor Community Grant Scheme remains open until midday on 4 December 2026. It supports projects that bring clear benefits to local communities, and is particularly relevant to parish councils, charities and voluntary groups seeking support for local improvements and activities.

If you have a project in mind, please get in touch early. The council's grants team can explain the eligibility criteria and application process at grants@southandvale.gov.uk or 01235 422405.

3. Capital Grants and Community Investment

The council has received substantial interest in its 2026/27 Capital Grants Scheme, with applications exceeding the available budget. Decisions on awards are expected later in the year. The response demonstrates the strength of demand for investment in local facilities and community assets.

The council also continues to use developer contributions, including Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy, to support infrastructure associated with growth. Parish councils should continue identifying local priorities and exploring whether available parish and district (Via our CIL grant scheme) contributions could help deliver them.

4. Community Led Affordable Housing

South Oxfordshire is promoting its Community Housing Seed Fund to help community led affordable housing projects move forward. The aim is to support locally driven schemes, including those led by Community Land Trusts, that meet identified housing needs and help people remain in the communities where they have roots.

Parish councils interested in exploring affordable housing for local people, including rural exception sites or Community Land Trust projects, are welcome to contact me. Please let me know if your parish would like to discuss an idea and I can put you in touch with the relevant housing officer. The money is intended to help establish community lands trusts etc., rather than support the actual delivery of affordable housing.

5. Joint Local Plans: Progress and Next Steps

The examination of Joint Local Plan 1 continues. A further hearing took place on 9 September and the next stage of hearings is scheduled from 17 November to 16 December, with sessions available to watch online. The plan remains important for determining where growth happens and what infrastructure and environmental safeguards are expected.

The first consultation on the next Joint Local Plan ran from 8 to 29 September, inviting views on the issues it should address and how communities should be involved. Further opportunities for public and parish council engagement will follow as that plan develops.

6. Neighbourhood Planning and Local Influence

Council officers continue to support groups preparing or updating Neighbourhood Plans through advice, meetings and feedback. With national changes to planning decision-making placing greater weight on adopted policy, locally prepared plans and design expectations are an increasingly important way for communities to shape development before individual applications are submitted.

I would encourage parish councils considering a new or updated Neighbourhood Plan, or local design guidance, to make contact early and explore the support available.

7. Planning Changes and Housing Land Supply: New Figures Published

South Oxfordshire's latest five-year housing land supply statement, published in September, shows that the district now has 3.98 years of housing supply, against the Government's requirement for five years. There are three important points to understand.

The legacy of our previous Local Plan

The Local Plan adopted in 2020 included very high housing numbers and several large strategic development sites. When we took control of the council, we sought to change this approach. However, the then Secretary of State at the time, Robert Jenrick, intervened and issued a legal direction requiring us to progress the plan inherited from the previous administration.

Delays in delivering planned housing

Much of our housing supply depends on large strategic sites, many of which are progressing far more slowly than expected. Economic conditions, development viability and infrastructure challenges mean developers are not building homes at the anticipated pace. This, combined with the Government's requirement for an additional 20 per cent buffer, has reduced our calculated housing land supply.

What this means for planning decisions

The new National Planning Policy Framework has changed how housing applications are assessed, moving away from the previous approach known as the ‘tilted balance’. However, a shortfall in housing supply can still strengthen the case for development outside areas allocated in the Local Plan.

One particular concern is the treatment of land near railway stations. The new national policy gives greater support to housing development in accessible locations close to railway stations, with the aim of encouraging public transport use and reducing car dependency. While this principle has merit, I am concerned about the potential pressure for development around some of our smaller rural stations, where

roads, local services and other infrastructure may already be stretched. I am looking into the implications with planning officers, particularly what protections remain for our villages.

Why these matter

Our communities have already planned for substantial housing growth yet delays in delivering these homes risk creating pressure for additional development elsewhere. Our priority is to unlock existing allocated sites, progress the Joint Local plan which will improve out 5HLS position, secure the infrastructure our communities need.

8. Helping Residents Stay Active and Well

The council's Active Communities annual report for April 2025 to March 2026 highlights programmes designed to help residents who may otherwise struggle to access physical activity. Move Together supports adults with long term health conditions, mental health difficulties or a risk of falls, while Move Together Maternity supports people during pregnancy and the first year after birth. Across South Oxfordshire, 2,474 people had taken part in the Move Together pathway by March 2026. Activities included home visits for people unable to attend classes, falls prevention sessions in Thame and Wheatley, support for people with cancer, and a menopause webinar attended by 16 people.

Other initiatives include Community Park Fit, which offers free beginner friendly outdoor exercise using equipment in local parks. Six groups were established across South and Vale, including Cholsey and Chinnor, with 478 attendances. Be Active Together brings Ukrainian guests and other residents together through community activities such as yoga and dance, helping strengthen local connections.

The team has also supported inclusive tennis for disabled and non disabled participants, New Age Kurling, and practical wellbeing projects such as Shed Space, which brings people together to learn woodworking skills and reduce isolation. The Ride Revolution scheme repairs donated bicycles and makes them available to residents who need them.

These are opportunities for parish councils to help identify residents who could benefit, publicise activities and explore whether a similar class or initiative could be brought to their community. Please let me know if your parish would like an introduction to the Active Communities team.

You Move helps children and families facing financial or other barriers, including families eligible for benefits related free school meals, children with disabilities, young carers, children in care and refugee families. The programme had 3,213 people signed up in South Oxfordshire, an increase of 922 over the year. Activities included holiday sports and family events in places such as Benson, Cholsey, Wallingford, Watlington and Woodcote, together with early years activities including mum and baby yoga in Wallingford and sessions in Cholsey. Across South and Vale, holiday activities recorded 3,426 attendances.

9. Supporting Local Community Safety

October is Domestic Abuse Awareness Month. This year's theme is Supporting Friends and Family, recognising the important role of people close to someone experiencing abuse. Domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence and can include coercive control, emotional abuse and financial abuse. The council's Domestic Abuse Support Officer, Cristina Franklin, can provide confidential advice, guidance and signposting to specialist services.

Parish councils may wish to invite Cristina to speak at a council meeting or local community event about recognising abuse, responding sensitively and signposting residents to help. If your parish is interested, please let me know and I can arrange an introduction. The internal report names Cristina but does not provide a verified email address, so I have not included an unconfirmed contact.

10. More Flexibility for Community Events

The national rules on Temporary Event Notices have changed, allowing premises to use up to 20 notices per calendar year rather than 15, and up to 26 days of licensable activities rather than 21. These higher limits have now been made permanent.

This could be useful for village halls, community venues and organisers planning occasional events involving licensable activities. Organisers should still check the licensing requirements and apply for notices where necessary.