

Blewbury Parish Council

Clerk to the Council
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MINUTES of the Annual meeting of the Parish Council held on **Wednesday 20th May 2026** at 7.00 pm in the Melland Room at the Blewbury Clubhouse.

In attendance:

Cllr. Julia Saunders
Cllr. Anne Millman
Cllr. Andrew Calder
Cllr. Andy Evason
Cllr. Sarah Parkin
Cllr. Shelia Austin
Parish Clerk: Michelle Taylor

1. 1. Election of Members

1.1. Nomination and election of Chairman, Julia Saunders was proposed to remain as Chair, by Cllr. Millman and Cllr. Parkin, Council members unanimously agreed.

1.2. Nomination and election of Vice-Chairman, Cllr. Millman was proposed to remain as Vice-Chairman, by Cllr. Saunders and Cllr. Austin, Council members unanimously agreed.

2. Apologies for Absence

-District Councillors Hayleigh Gascoigne, Debra Dewhurst and Andy Cooke
-Cllr. Benedict Scott
-Cllr. Lee Robinson
-Cllr. Mark Shayler

3. Declarations of Interest-None

4. Public Participation- None

Planning Matters

5. Planning Updates

5.1. Planning Applications – for review and comments

- [P26/V1113/HH](#): 6 Bohams Cottages Westbrook Street Blewbury OX11 9QF.

Proposal: Removal of existing single storey side extension and replacement with new single storey side extension and alternations to existing

BPC had no objections to this planning application.

- [P26/V1101/HH](#): 31 Bridus Mead Blewbury Didcot OX11 9PJ.

Proposal: Two storey side extension.

BPC had no objections to this planning application.

- [P26/V1213/LB](#): The Cleve South Street Blewbury Didcot OX11 9PR.

Proposal: Removal of later (C18/19) infill to reveal original fireplace aperture in order to fully expose painted plaster to allow for examination and conservation of the painted plaster.

BPC had no objections to this planning application.

- [P26/V1144/LB](#): Wayside Cottage Westbrook Street Blewbury Didcot OX11 9QA.

Proposal: Replacement of section of rotten soleplate to the rear of the property and making good works.

BPC had no objections to this planning application.

- [P26/V0832/HH](#): The Old Mill Berry Lane Blewbury Didcot OX11 9QJ.

Proposal: Erection of a part two-storey and part single-storey rear extension with minor alterations to existing fenestration.

BPC had no objections to this planning application.

- [P26/V1200/LB](#): Chapmans Nottingham Fee Blewbury Didcot OX11 9PG.

Proposal: Alter the thatching type of the barn from long straw to combed wheat reed. Alter the roof covering of the link building from timber shingle to clay tile.

BPC had no objections to this planning application.

- [P26/V0846/HH](#): Location: Humfreys London Road Blewbury OX11 9PB

Proposal: Extension and remodelling.

BPC had no objections to this planning application.

- [P26/V0848/LB](#): Location: Humfreys London Road Blewbury OX11 9PB

Proposal: Extension and remodelling.

BPC had no objections to this planning application.

5.2. Planning Decisions from Vale of White Horse DC-Council to note

- [P26/V0326/FUL](#): Downside Farm Woodway Road Blewbury Didcot OX11 9EX.
Erection of storage barn.

Permission Granted: 1st May 2026.

- [P26/V0292/HH](#): Orchard House Chapel Lane Blewbury Didcot OX11 9PQ.
Proposed single storey rear extension, remodelling works including recladding of existing garage, replacement of front porch-veranda structure, changes to the fenestration and the introduction of PV panels.

Permission Granted: 8th May 2026.

6. County Councillor- Cllr Rebekah Fletcher- Annual report received and circulated to Council. **Appendix 1 (BPC Website)** Cllr. Fletcher confirmed the A417 crossing near Savages is now on the highway schemes and works are due to commence in quarter 4 of the financial year, being January 2027. The flooding at Sheencroft corner, all gullies have now been cleared and the potholes are on schedule to be repaired. Cllr Fletcher announced that a full review of the OCC Highways team is due to be conducted reviewing the network management across Oxfordshire to reduce the overlapping of scheduled works. A review of Comms will also be carried out to ensure better communications between County Councillors and Highways. It was confirmed the road from Blewbury to Upton is scheduled for patching works from October 2026 to March 2027 as a priority, following the surface dressing works that is currently being conducted in other areas, and major potholes will be filled prior to the works commencing. Cllr. Fletcher confirmed following the elections, she is now responsible for adult social care in Oxfordshire.

7. District Councillor – Cllr. Hayleigh Gascoigne, Cllr. Debra Dewhurst and Cllr. Andy Cooke-Apologies acknowledged. May report received and circulated to Council.
Appendix 2 (BPC Website)

8. Lengthman's Report – Iain Wood

8.1. Paths (New Cemetery) Iain announced that rabbits and squirrels have been digging holes in the cemetery which may be hazardous for residents, especially during the no mow May period, and reminded residents to be careful when visiting the cemetery during this time due to uneven grounds.

8.2. The Lych Gate entrance hedge (New Cemetery) Iain notified Council members that the hedge at the entrance of the new cemetery by the lych gate has had blight and has now completely died off. The hedge and roots will need to be removed. Council agreed to put a sarcococca confusa (sweet box) in its place once the area is cleared.

8.3. Tennis Club border- Iain confirmed this is still ongoing and will commence with the agreed gravel in due course.

8.4. Zip Wire Platform Chain. Iain announced the chain which was placed on the zip wire platform had been stolen, however, sign is in place at the Play Park stating 'Equipment is used at your own risk'.

Clubs and Societies

9. Clubhouse

9.1. Council to note Hall Administrator Report. April report circulated to Council.

9.2. **Roof Repairs.** Update on the repair to the Clubhouse roof ahead of the Cricket Season. **(AM & SA)** Cllr. Austin reported further investigation is required and will report back at the next meeting of Full Council.

9.3. **Request from Blewbury Cricket Club**

To agree the installation of a dishwasher in the Clubhouse kitchen, purchased and maintained by the Cricket Club. **(AM & SA)** Council agreed for the Cricket Club to purchase and install a dishwasher in the Clubhouse kitchen on the agreement that they service and PAT test annually as their own cost.

10. Village Hall

10.1. To appoint a Village Hall Trustee. Council unanimously agreed to appoint Cllr. Austin as the Village Hall Trustee as a liaison between the Village Hall Committee and Blewbury Parish Council.

11. Traffic & Safety

11.1. Speedwatch data report for April and data trends over time. Report circulated to Council and noted.

11.2. Update on installation of traffic calming measures; Wig Wags, informal bollards, crossing at Savages **(AM)**: Cllr. Millman announced feedback had been given with regards to the traffic calming measures that had been installed, stating traffic had slowed down and stopped for pedestrians to cross the road safely. Following the announcement from Oxfordshire County Councillor Rebecca Fletcher, the work will be commencing on the A417 crossing near Savages in January 2027.

11.3. Oxfordshire County Council community transport grants 2026-27 **(JS)** Cllr. Saunders announced following the email that had been circulated to all Council members if anyone had any ideas for community transport schemes for Blewbury, the deadline is Friday 10th July 2026. Cllr. Saunders confirmed she would also mention this at the Annual Meeting of the Parish being held tomorrow.

12. Environment

12.1. Cob Wall Ownership/Maintenance/Village Fund **(AC & JS)** Cllr. Saunders said a date will be confirmed for a Cob Wall maintenance shop event later in the year.

12.2. A417 London Road flood alleviation **(AE & AM)** Cllr. Evason confirmed there were no further updates at present.

12.3. Church End flood alleviation **(AE & AM)** Cllr. Evason raised two current issues, one being the ditch which needs clearing to allow the water to drain off fully (Phase one) and the pipe at the end of Church End, having been cleared by OCC, further investigation is required to ensure the pipe is fully cleared (Phase two).

12.4. The Cleve / Spring Lane **(AC, JS & LR)** Cllr. Saunders announced confirmation had now been received stating that Spring Lane is common land, being the responsibility of the Parish Council, and clearing works and installation of a new gate can now commence.

12.5. To receive an update on installing a bench at the bus stop near Savages A417 **(AC/MS)** Cllr. Calder announced the bench had now been ordered and the installation requirements will be discussed with Cllr. Shayler following delivery.

12.6. Vale of Whitehorse District Council Deep Cleanse Service 22nd June-25th June 2026. Email circulated to all Council members. Cllr. Millman recommended a note in the bulletin and on social media to all residents asking them to contact the Clerk with any problem areas in and around the village prior to the works commencing.

12.7. Climate and Nature Recovery Projects Funds-South & Vale **(AM & AE)** Email circulated to Council members. Cllr. Saunders announced this would be mentioned at the Meeting of the Parish tomorrow for information.

Administrative Items

13. Approval of Minutes

13.1. The minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 15th April 2026 were approved.

13.2. To review the effectiveness of Communications **(AM/ SP)** Cllr. Millman recommended, Council should be proactive in communicating the Parish Councils achievements to residents. All Council members unanimously agreed.

14. Finance

14.1. The April payments were approved-**(Appendix 3)**

14.2. Council approved the following bank reconciliations to be signed by the Chair:
-February 2026

-March 2026

14.3. To approve the appointment of the Internal Auditor. Council approved to appoint Lisa Wilkinson to carryout Blewbury Parish Council's yearend internal audit for 2025/2026. Engagement letter to be signed by the Chair.

15. Annual Approvals

15.1. Standing Orders. Council unanimously agreed to approve the Standing Orders for 2026/2027.

Projects & Ongoing Matters

16. Skatepark Tender Update (SA, AE & AC)

To receive an update from Skatepark Working Group to include Comms. Cllr. Austin announced following a recent TEAMS meeting with Bendcrete the skatepark refurbishment had now been moved forwards for works to commence in the next week due to rescheduling of Bendcrete's current commitments. The design of the skatepark

has now been changed slightly moving the main half pipe to the TTF side of the site to increase the flow of the skatepark and to ensure there is sufficient space for the bike track. Cllr. Austin circulated the current sign which will include all societies that have donated towards the refurbishment. It was agreed that BPC would check if relevant societies' logos should be included. A site meeting has been scheduled for the 1st June 2026 and further updates will be given at the next meeting of Full Council.

Correspondence & Reports

17. Action Points

See **Appendix 4** for update on actions.

18. Chairman's Report

For information only – any additional updates. None

19. Councillors' Reports

Other updates from Parish Councillors (not listed on agenda). None

20. Future Agenda Items

- Neighbourhood Plan Review – (Following the adoption of the OCC Local Plan)
- Skatepark opening event

21. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 17 June 2026.

Appendix 4

Actions from May Meeting, table 1

Item	Action	Ownership
9.3	Installation of Dishwasher at Clubhouse-To write to the Cricket Club with terms of an agreement.	Cllr. Millman/Clerk
10.1	Village Hall Trustee- To write to the Village Hall Committee to confirm the appointment of Cllr. Austin.	Clerk
12.3	Church End flood alleviation-To obtain quotations to carryout investigation works.	Cllr. Evason/Cllr. Millman

12.4	Clearing of Spring Lane- To obtain quotations for the installation of the gate and clear the lane of debris.	Iain/Cllr. Shayler
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Outstanding Actions from previous meetings - table 2

Item	Mtg	Action	Ownership	Update on action
8	December	Clubhouse roof tile repair	Cllr. Austin	In Process
10.2	December	Clubhouse Roof Repair- Research into preventive measures to protect the Clubhouse Roof from further damage during the Cricket season.	Cllr. Millman and Cllr. Austin	In Process
10.3	December	Removal of shrubs in Clubhouse Car Park to allocate extra parking	Iain/Cllr. Shayler	In Progress
15.4	January	Transfer their current 32-day notice account with Lloyds to Unity Trust Bank.	Clerk	In Progress
16	January	Transfer of email accounts to gov.uk	Clerk	In Progress
12.2	February	Cob Wall Ownership/Maintenance- To set a date for a workshop day for residents	Cllr. Saunders/Clerk	In Progress
14.4	February	Transfer of the Current Account from Lloyds to Unity Bank	Clerk	In Progress
10.6	April	Arrange installation of Bench- A417 Bus Stop	Cllr. Calder/Cllr. Shayler	In Progress

PART 2

Exclusion of Press and Public

To resolve that under Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

22. Clerk's appraisal (AM & SP) Cllr. Millman announced the Clerk's appraisal has now been conducted. Hours of work were confirmed as being 5 hrs over the original contracted hours which will be reviewed at the annual appraisal.

Appendix 3

Finance April 2026			
Inv Date	PAYMENTS TO APPROVE IN MEETING	Payee	Amount
17.04.2026	Private Water Supply Testing-Clubhouse	Vale of White Horse	354.62
18.05.2026	Skatepark Repairs	M Shayler	92.51
30.04.2026	Grass Cutting Blewbury Graveyard-April	J.J Woodage	200.00
21.04.2026	Annual PAT Testing-Clubhouse	Walters Electrical Services	340.00
11.04.2026	Repositioning of SIDS	MAC traffic Solutions	648.00
30.04.2026	Clerks Travel Expenses 1st August 2025-30th April 2026	M Taylor	157.36
30.04.2026	Land Registry and HMRC SIM Application fees (Spring Lane)	Mr L Robinson	30.70
07.05.2026	Tool Hire-Skatepark Repairs	Didcot Plant Hire	234.32
10.05.2026	Ferris Mower Repairs	Will Denton	182.00
13.05.2026	2 x Defib Pads for Clubhouse	Defib Store	151.20
19.05.2026	New bench along the A417	Castle Joinery Ltd	655.64
18.05.2026	Installation of EV Chargers final bill	A3A Energy Ltd	6,319.80
PAID: Salaries for April Month, Paid on 01.05.2026			
01.05.2026	March Cleaning Clubhouse & Village Hall	Jayne Newman	474.60
01.05.2026	M Taylor, April	M Taylor	1,403.72
01.05.2026	Expenses, Working from home allowance, April	M Taylor	26.00
01.05.2026	Village Hall and Clubhouse Administrator Salary, April	Helen Evi Holroyd	1,089.24
01.05.2026	Expenses, Working from home allowance, April	Helen Evi Holroyd	26.00
01.05.2026	Lengthman Service Salary, April	Iain Wood	1,012.57
01.05.2026	Employer/ee Tax/Ni Contributions, April	HMRC	797.31
01.05.2026	Payroll, April	SME Accounting Services Ltd	20.00
PAID: Direct Debits/Standing Order			
05.05.2026	BT Group PLC-Internet (Clubhouse)	Bt Group PLC	39.54
08.04.2026	Clubhouse Electricity	British Gas	264.94
09.04.2026	Clubhouse Electricity	British Gas	64.11
20.04.2026	Clubhouse Electricity	British Gas	3.15
20.04.2026	Bank Charges	Lloyds	4.25
21.04.2026	Clerk and Lengthman's Pension Contributions	NEST	215.81
27.04.2026	Waste Collection	Biffa	216.9
29.04.2026	PWL Repayment	Publics Work Loan	3997.5
PAID: Since previous meeting			
05.05.2026	Postage for Tennis Lease	Post Office	3.55
18.05.2026	Refreshments for the Annual Meeting of the Parish	Tesco	18.80
17.04.2026	Stationary	Amazon	42.95
Total Expenditure			19,087.09
RECEIPTS			
11.05.2026	Cemetery Fees	D & W Cawley	60.00
30.04.2026	Deposit Account Interest for April-Final	Lloyds	161.25
21.04.2026	Cemetery Fees	Oxfordshire Memorials	95.00
17.04.2026	Refund of salaries-Village Hall (January-March)	Blewbury Hall Executive	2,160.61
09.04.2026	Clubhouse bookings Transfer (January- March)	Blewbury Hall Executive	4,130.64
09.04.2026	Annual donation for Kids at Play	BVS	1,500.00
08.04.2026	Precept 2026-2027 (First half)	Vale of White Horse District Council	63,750.00
Total Income			71,857.50

Appendix 1

County Councillor annual report

Date: June 2025 - May 2026

Author: Cllr Rebekah Fletcher

Parishes: Blewbury, Chilton, Harwell, Upton, Western Valley

Contact details: rebekah.fletcher@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Dear Parish Councillors and residents,

It's been a very busy first year as a councillor, and I want to thank everyone who has been in touch, raised concerns, or invited me to meetings and events. The advocacy work I've taken on has followed clear themes, and I've done my best to push for progress on the issues that matter most to our parishes. It has also been a steep learning curve, and I'm extremely grateful for the patience and support of our parish councils as I've found my feet.

Scrutiny & Policy Work

As a member of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I've worked to ensure that the Council has a 'critical friend' to its own services. This year, we examined Supported Living for Adults with Learning Disabilities, Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation, and the Unpaid Carers Strategy. I've raised concerns about the timing of support sessions for carers and pushed for more accessible options. In Oxfordshire, we have over 50,000 unpaid carers, saving the system an estimated £1 billion per year. They're the backbone of our community and I'm keen that we do as much as we can to support them.

On the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, we've focussed on SEND provision, including quality and timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and the clarity of EOTAS (Education Other Than at School) guidance. I was also elected to chair a review panel on the forced academisation of an Oxfordshire SEND school, to ensure lessons are learned from what happened at Woodeaton.

Highways, Transport & Flooding

Highways and flooding have dominated my casework. In Harwell, traffic calming works have finally been confirmed, with 20mph signage and raised tables on the way. A crossing on the A417 at the Winnaway is also in the 2026/27 budget.

In Blewbury, we secured funding for wigwags, dropped kerbs and bollards, and I continue to push for a crossing at Savages, expected this financial year.

I've escalated concerns about soft verges on Hagbourne Hill, (now under review for a permanent fix), and highlighted the poor surface along the A417 through Upton, which will be prioritised for repairs before planned surface dressing.

Flooding hotspots in Harwell, Blewbury, Grove Road and Frank Williams Way have required repeated escalation. I've arranged site visits from senior officers and continue to push for interim measures while we wait for longer-term drainage solutions. In Grove Road, the suspected cause has now been identified and work is underway.

I've challenged poor contractor performance, including the Milton Interchange markings (now corrected), substandard works in Blewbury (under formal review), poorly run works on

Grove Road, and poorly communicated closure of Didcot Road (where I was able to arrange for the suspension of a bus gate so that resident access was maintained). I also prevented a proposed three-month full closure of Harwell High Street by SGN, securing a safer, shorter alternative using traffic lights.

I've also challenged officers as necessary. Harwell has suffered from poor Network Planning this year. In the last few weeks, I've met with the Operational Manager for Network Co-ordination, the Head of Network Management and the Director of Environment and Highways. I also wrote to the Leader of the Council, articulating mine and others' concerns about planning and oversight.

A major review of highways planning, communications and quality assurance is now underway. The scope for this review was originally limited to the network management team, who schedule roadworks, but I have asked for it to also include Planned Maintenance schemes, who plan and run the scheduled works. In addition, I'm involved in a small pilot to address gaps in communication of planned works to councillors. Following my escalation of concerns around bus provision to villages during the Didcot Road closure in October, officers now hold weekly meetings between network management, contractors and bus companies. This has improved contingency planning for bus routes during road closures (although there is still more work to be done on communicating these plans with residents!)

Community Engagement & Local Support

I've attended most Parish Council meetings across the division and joined Speedwatch teams, councillors and officers on site visits to discuss signage, trees, roadworks and road safety. I've supported residents at meetings with the Trees Officer in Chilton and coordinated flooding and pavement repair visits in Harwell and Blewbury. I've visited the sites of all major roadworks over the last year, to keep residents as informed as possible during disruption.

In October, I hosted the 'Pubs of the Parishes' walk – a great opportunity to meet residents informally across the division.

I visited Didcot Fire Station to hear concerns from our local firefighters and ensure their voices were heard during the Fire and Rescue consultation. Off the back of this consultation, the council has rolled back its proposals to close two stations in Oxfordshire and remove engines from service. I also visited Didcot Primary Academy, to hear directly from staff and parents about the challenges they face, particularly around space and SEND support.

Major Service Changes

This year saw the introduction of a booking system for Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). While I understand the short-term need, I remain concerned about the evidence behind the decision and have secured a commitment that the system will be reviewed once Redbridge HWRC reopens. Early data (not yet confirmed) is not as damning as I had originally expected; although there are fewer visits, the tonnage of waste brought per visit is up by 13kg. We have saved over £40000 so far in landfill costs, as more waste is being recycled, and we've raised over £5000 from out-of-county users, who now pay to use our HWRCs. However, I remain sceptical that a booking system is the only means by which we could achieve these outcomes, and I look forward to the chance to review the data more fully.

It's been a full and fast-paced first year, and I'm incredibly grateful for the support and engagement from residents, parish councils and community groups. Much of the work has required persistence; chasing updates, escalating concerns, and holding services to account – but I remain committed to making sure your voices are heard and your priorities acted upon. Please do continue to get in touch if there's anything I can help with.

Best wishes,
Bekah

Appendix 2

Annual Report from District Councillor

Please find below my report.

Local Government Reorganisation

The three options were officially put forwards for Unitarisation were:

- Option 1 for “One Oxfordshire,” where the County Council absorbs all of the Districts and their functions, for a 760,000 population Unitary Authority (above the 400,000-500,000 guidelines, but possibly too large and remote).
- Option 2 for “Two Councils” of Ridgeway (Vale, South Oxfordshire, West Berkshire) and Oxford & the Shires (Oxford City, Cherwell, West Oxfordshire), for 460,000 and 450,000 population respectively. This looks to meet guidelines without being too remote, but needs to ensure cross-border co-operation and successful absorption of West Berkshire.
- Option 3 for “Three Councils” of Greater Oxford (absorbing multiple wards from each surrounding District to extend over the Green Belt), and remnant “North Oxfordshire” (from what is left of Cherwell and West Oxford) and remnant “Ridgeway” (what is left from Vale and South Oxfordshire, plus West Berkshire). This would have populations of 240,000. 265,000, and 430,000 respectively. It does not look to come close to minimum guidelines for two of the Councils, requires a lot of changes and absorption from one council into another, creates multiple borders and worsens the potential pitfalls of the cross-border issues of Option 2, and results in a rather unbalanced final situation between the three councils. It has, however, just seen a “Greater Oxford Corporation” created by Central Government that coincidentally follows the boundaries of the proposed Greater Oxford. I note that Central Government have said this does NOT prejudge the outcome.

We should find out the Government's decision in Autumn. Elections in 2027 will be to a “Shadow Unitary” rather than the District Council.

Meanwhile, a “Foundation Strategic Authority” will be created at an upper level. This will create a joint committee of representatives from the Unitary Councils within the Strategic Authority area to form a decision-making body. In time, this will be replaced by a directly elected Mayor.

This body should have responsibility for:

- Major transport infrastructure
- Skills and employment
- Environment and climate change
- Economic development
- Regional level strategic planning

We have proposed an Oxfordshire-plus-Berkshire Authority for this (noting that Buckinghamshire doesn't want to join with anyone at this time). Swindon wishes to join us and it looks likely that Central Government will require that. We had expected to hear from Central Government in mid-April as to the decision, but this has been deferred until after the Local Elections.

Planning – Joint Local Plan

The key Joint Local Plan with South Oxfordshire went through its hearings in June of 2025 and all looked pretty good for a while. Then the Inspectors decided we had failed in our Duty to Co-operate with Oxford City, despite us having followed the approved housing number method and Oxford having come up with a special one of their own (which was later found to be unsound). The Inspectors then recommended that we withdraw the Plan.

We responded by challenging their recommendation. The argument went on for a while, before the Government made a ruling that Local Plans being stopped at Inspection stage should not be stopped over Duty to Co-operate issues, and in the future “the Duty to Co-operate will not be preserved.”

This was, of course, excellent news to us and we then contacted the Inspectors to get things moving again. Hearings should resume later this year.

I will note that throughout all of this, we retained a 5-year land supply.

Planning – Changes

Vale have just moved to a new Planning and Land Charges system as the previous system is neared the end of its support lifecycle, which meant it will no longer receive essential updates.

This means there are changes to the look and feel of the new site, but it should achieve the same functionality as before.

A Town & Parish Council briefing event (an online forum) was provided last month and should have been flagged up through the Parish Council system. Presentation slides from this, FAQ, a forum recording, and Demo Videos are available online.

From 26 March this year, if we, as the Local Authority, are minded to **refuse a planning application for 150 homes or more**, the application must now be **referred to the Secretary of State (SoS)**. The SoS will review the case and state whether we may proceed to issue the refusal, or whether they intend to **call in / recover** the application and take over the decision.

For Planning Committee decisions, where the Vale Planning Committee overturns an officer recommendation for approval and resolves to refuse the application, the next step will be a **referral to the SoS** before any formal decision can be issued. Please see the link to the legislation for further details.

[The Town and Country Planning \(Development Management Procedure\) \(England\) \(Amendment and Transitional Provision\) Order 2026](#)

Given we have a 5 year housing supply, the majority of applications we receive for over 150 houses are connected to already-allocated sites, therefore we don't envisage there will be many situations where the referral to the SoS will occur.

Budget

The annual Budget went through and is again balanced for the medium term.

As well as statutory spending, there are leisure centre improvements (with upgrades to gym equipment, changing facilities and accessibility, as well as energy-saving measures designed to reduce long-term running costs). Parking fees were frozen.

There has been a £5 increase for a Band D council tax bill, taking the annual charge (for the District Council component of council tax) to £166.69.

Waste and Recycling

The new ticketless brown bin sticker system for garden waste went live at the start of April last year. It did seem to not have too many issues, despite my fears. The payment year is now aligned for everyone from 1st April to 31st March. The first renewals have just occurred.

Despite the Government's "default expectation" that Councils introduce separate bins for paper and card to separate that from other recycling – unless they have a good argument not to, we completed an assessment and concluded that another separate recycling bin on top of our green bin and food bin was not the right option. The Government have agreed, and as a result, we're keeping the all-in-one recycling bin for simplicity and to make it as easy as possible for residents to continue recycling.

As our approach has worked well enough to consistently put us in the top five of the country for recycling – if it's not broken, don't try to fix it.

Ticketless car parking machines

We trialled a move to ticketless parking last year, which seemed to go well. We're therefore now proposing a move to ticketless parking meaning displaying a physical ticket in a vehicle is no longer needed (however, people would still be able to pay with coins).

The consultation on these changes runs until Friday 8 May 2026 (here:

<https://theconversation.southandvale.gov.uk/development-and-corporate-landlord/off-street-parking-order-in-south-oxfordshire-2026/>)

Valley Park Updates

We are expecting a number of applications to be submitted in the next 6 months, including applications relating to the allotments, Common Park and the Local Centre

Applications Under Consideration

P25/V0563/RM – seeks approval of 397 dwellings on Phase 3P. Amended plans were submitted at the end of March and these are currently being reviewed.

P25/V0875/RM – seeks approval of the infrastructure surrounding Phase 6T (Clover Meadow) including spine road; noise bund with associated fence; landscaping; open space, including paths,

LEAP and SuDS attenuation basin; infrastructure and works. This application is being assessed alongside application P25/V0879/RM for the housing. Amended plans have been submitted and the majority of issues have been addressed, however we are still awaiting comments from OCC. Officers are aiming to determine the application by the end of May.

P25/V0879/RM – seeks approval for 225 dwellings on Phase 6T. This application will be assessed alongside application P25/V0875/RM for the infrastructure surrounding the parcel. Amended plans have been submitted and the majority of issues have been addressed, however we are still awaiting comments from OCC. Officers are aiming to determine the application by the end of May.

Great Western Park surgery

After a lengthy saga, the former NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) managed to secure a developer to deliver the new building within the financial parameters agreed by the Valuer. Woodlands Medical Centre has appointed London based Apsley Henley Med Ltd as the new developer for the Great Western Park project.

There's still a long way to go – the legal agreements must be progressed, the land transfer must be completed, and the project needs to be completed without falling through again.

SESRO Reservoir

The saga of SESRO has run on throughout the year. Thames Water, in an effort to make it seem friendlier, have tried to call it "White Horse Reservoir." This has gone down badly with most those of us in the Vale of White Horse District Council, and most people I've spoken to are calling it "White Elephant Reservoir"

Last winter, Thames Water were forced to admit that the cost would be at least triple their earlier claims (I would predict further increases, personally). This blew a hole in the Business Case for it and they are being forced to make up a new justification for it (although you'd not notice that from their publicity).

Thames Water released a "Map Book" prior to their Statutory Consultation in which they revealed that the amount of land they're after has vastly expanded and now extends into no fewer than ten wards. They sent out "land ownership questionnaires" to anyone with land in this now-expanded area of interest.

They have not given any information as to which parts of this land will and won't be bought – it's highly likely they won't need to acquire all the land. In cases where they can, we expect they'll prefer agreement by private arrangement as far as possible and only compulsory action where unavoidable – if for no other reason than they'll prefer not having to pay too much in the way of compensation.

Following this, they finally carried out their Statutory Public Consultation. This did not go smoothly and due to them messing up with the online forms, and following our MP, Olly Glover, raising it at Westminster, they had to extend the timelines.

The Consultation seemed to me to be a perfunctory attempt to "jump through the hoops" rather than a sincere attempt to provide needed information and obtain feedback. Despite giving over a thousand pages of information (most of it seeming to be telling us their process for working things out), they failed to give useful information on:

- Flood-risk modelling (despite this now being years late)
- What land they'll want and what they'll use it all for.
- Emergency drawdown details (and what information there was indicated that it could not be safely used for a noticeable proportion of the year, especially when water levels were already high)
- Dam Breach analysis and emergency planning
- Security (which, given the risks inherent in such a huge strategic asset over multiple villages and even a mid-sized town, and the apparent lack of information on Dam Breach, Emergency Drawdown, and emergency plans, should be essential). However, they acknowledge there will be huge security fencing, CCTV, lighting, control of access, and guards.
- Water Quality and water environment
- Biodiversity Analysis
- Construction and Logistics Strategy and related Community Impacts, including traffic effects and access and management of construction.

... most of which would seem fairly essential. We have raised this to the relevant Minister, the Environment Agency, and OFWAT but are still to have any substantive answer. We've noticed that they never completed the Clay Compaction Trial, despite it being extended repeatedly.

Thames Water indicate they intend to submit SESRO to the DCO process this November. We will press them on these areas throughout.

All the best,
Andy Cooke

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