

Title	District Councillors' Report to Thame Town Council
Authors	Clrs Pieter-Paul Barker, David Bretherton & Kate Gregory
Date	April 2024

Help set the 'Way Ahead' for South Oxfordshire

Previously known as the Corporate Plan, this is the document that sets the direction for SODC for the next 4 years. We've changed the name to The Way Ahead to make it clearer that it is different from the Local Plan and to drive greater engagement.

Delivering new council owned homes and increasing the amount of land protected for nature are just two of the ideas being discussed in the consultation:

- *South Oxfordshire District Council is setting a new council plan for the next four years and is encouraging everyone within the district to join in the conversation 'The Way Ahead'.*
- *The conversation runs until Tuesday 14 May.*
- *It's a four-week discussion around creating a fairer, more inclusive South Oxfordshire where all residents can thrive both now and in the future.*

To find out more and take part, visit: www.southoxon.gov.uk/TheWayAhead

Councillor Grants awarded

The SODC cllr grants for 2023-24 have now all been awarded, where each cllr has £5000 to allocate. Grants made for Thame ward are as follows:

Application	Total Awarded	
330 - Thame Youth Projects Group Marketing Material	£	500
299 - Thame Youth Memorial Renovation Project	£	900
314 - 21st Century Thame Grow Your Own Food	£	2,118
315 - 21st Century Thame Wild Gardens	£	1,950
344 - Red Kite Family Centre Neurodiversity Support	£	1,461
291 - Thame Sports Club bowls mats	£	900
102 - Thame Museum trust – Active Thame exhibit & booklet	£	3,000
240 – Be Free Young Carers laptop upgrades	£	675
143 - Citizens Advice Public Use Computer + Advisor Headsets	£	2,548
92 - MP Sports Trust – Water Walks & Diving Catches event	£	948
Totals	£	15,000

Empty homes policy

The new SODC Empty Homes Policy aims to bring more empty homes back into use. The SODC housing team, working proactively with owners of empty homes, will use the support on offer through the policy to help homes become reoccupied. The focus will be on making homes available for those that are in most need of housing.

SODC will be promoting the policy and the help available to empty homeowners and residents shortly. SODC will also be offering residents advice on reporting any empty homes causing issues in their neighbourhoods.

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Hundreds of new voices engage with new Local Plan

Well over a thousand individuals and organisations have shared their thoughts on an emerging district plan for South Oxfordshire. Their comments will contribute to the development of a new Joint Local Plan, which will guide planning decisions in the districts until 2041.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils are working together to deliver the Joint Local Plan, which will guide what kinds of new housing and jobs are needed and where they should go.

Determined to reach more people than ever before, the councils used innovative online engagement tools and held a variety of community events in unique and interesting locations, such as Candelo Lounge in Thame, to reach people who haven't commented on local plans in the past, as well as those who regularly engage with council planning consultations.

Testament to these innovative methods, around half of those responding to a Joint Local Plan in a Nutshell survey said it was their first time taking part in a local plan consultation.

The councils used their new engagement website, Join the Conversation, to provide a more user-friendly and accessible way to engage, featuring explainer videos, interactive maps, a calendar of upcoming events, and two surveys for respondents to choose from. The shorter 'Joint Local Plan in a Nutshell' option featured topics summaries and explainers and gave a unique opportunity for those less familiar with Local Plans to get to grips with the huge array of topics and technical issues a Local Plan covers. For those who wanted to delve into more detail, respondents could also view and comment on all the detail of the proposed plans and draft policies in the full 'Preferred Options' survey.

It has proven to be a huge success – the councils are still processing the vast number of responses and have calculated that over 1,200 individuals and organisations have provided a total of several thousand comments to the consultation.

Almost 600 people also attended 10 drop-in events held across the districts in a mix of traditional community venues and social café-bar lounges, where people could find out more about the plans and draft policies, get their questions answered by planning experts, and have their say.