

The Way Ahead

Council Plan 2025-29



**South Oxfordshire
District Council**

Listening Learning Leading

Contents

Foreword	1
Our vision	3
Our priorities	4
Our priorities and objectives	5
Action on climate change and nature recovery	6
Participation, accessibility, and accountability	9
Thriving, healthy, and inclusive communities	12
Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs	15
Financial stability and innovative transformation	18
Get in touch	21

To find out more information you can also visit the council's website.

Scan the QR code or visit
www.southoxon.gov.uk/CouncilPlan25-29



Foreword

I am pleased to welcome you to ‘The Way Ahead’, our new Council Plan to guide how we will seek to do things for the next few years.

Our aim is to create a fairer, more inclusive South Oxfordshire where all residents can thrive both now and in the future. It's important this plan reflects the priorities and aspirations of the communities we serve, so last year we spoke to many of you about our ideas for this plan. I'm so grateful for everyone who took the time to give us their valuable thoughts, which have helped shape the plan we have now.

‘The Way Ahead’ outlines our five key priorities for the future. It builds on what we have achieved over the last four years, using our previous plan as a foundation and overcoming significant challenges along the way.

With big challenges in mind, ‘Action on climate change and nature recovery’ is at the forefront of everything we do. We have made strong and positive progress in our goal to achieve net zero and have nearly halved our carbon emissions

since 2010. This progress has been driven in recent years by our ambitious targets.

We will continue to strive for genuinely affordable homes and good local infrastructure and I'm incredibly proud of our work to become social landlords for the first time in over 20 years, helping us to help those in most need. Our innovative Joint Local Plan will require half of the homes on large new housing sites to be affordable.

We continue to invest in quality, cost-effective local services and facilities – with leisure, arts and community projects supporting our ‘Thriving, healthy, and inclusive communities.’ Our services, such as waste and recycling and prevention of homelessness, rank highly in national league tables.

Providing services that are inclusive, accessible and accountable is important to us all, as is communicating in a way people can understand and being open and clear about how we make

Foreword continues on following page



Foreword continued

decisions. We've been shortlisted for awards thanks to our innovative approach to engaging with residents in the past few years and we would want to take that to the next level.

Financial stability and innovative transformation form the bedrock of everything we seek to achieve. Thanks to our careful budgeting and targeted investment in recent years, our financial position remains positive. We do not take this for granted, nor will we take the eye off the ball – we continually seek to improve how we do things to ensure we offer the best possible customer service for the communities we serve.

I hope the following plan will give you a greater understanding of the priorities we are working towards. We will in our Annual Delivery Plan detail the ways we will achieve our aspirations in the next few months. We acknowledge central government's plans to reorganise local government and we will reflect this in our plans as and when that develops further.

**Foreword by Cllr David Rouane,
Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council**



Our vision

The Way Ahead for South Oxfordshire: building a sustainable, inclusive and prosperous future

Our vision for South Oxfordshire is to build on our past successes and lead the way in creating a vibrant, resilient, and inclusive district. We are committed to bold local action on tackling and adapting to climate change, fostering community wellbeing, restoring nature, and promoting sustainable development. We aspire to create a greener, fairer, and prosperous community where all residents enjoy a high quality of life, equitable access to resources, and robust support systems. To do this we commit to working together with all sections of our local community to encourage innovation, champion inclusivity, and to build a sustainable future for generations to come.



Our priorities

Work to deliver our priorities is underpinned by objectives which we will seek to achieve by focusing on a range of outcomes. The outcomes are listed in each of the relevant sections throughout the document.

Action on climate change and nature recovery:

Leading in building climate resilient communities, reducing carbon emissions and restoring our natural environment.



Participation, accessibility, and accountability:

Ensuring robust governance, transparency, and equitable access to council services.



Financial stability and innovative transformation:

Continuous innovation and responsible investment to achieve financial stability.



Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs:

Meeting local housing needs through sustainable development that is supported by appropriate infrastructure, protects green spaces, and mitigates the effects of climate change.

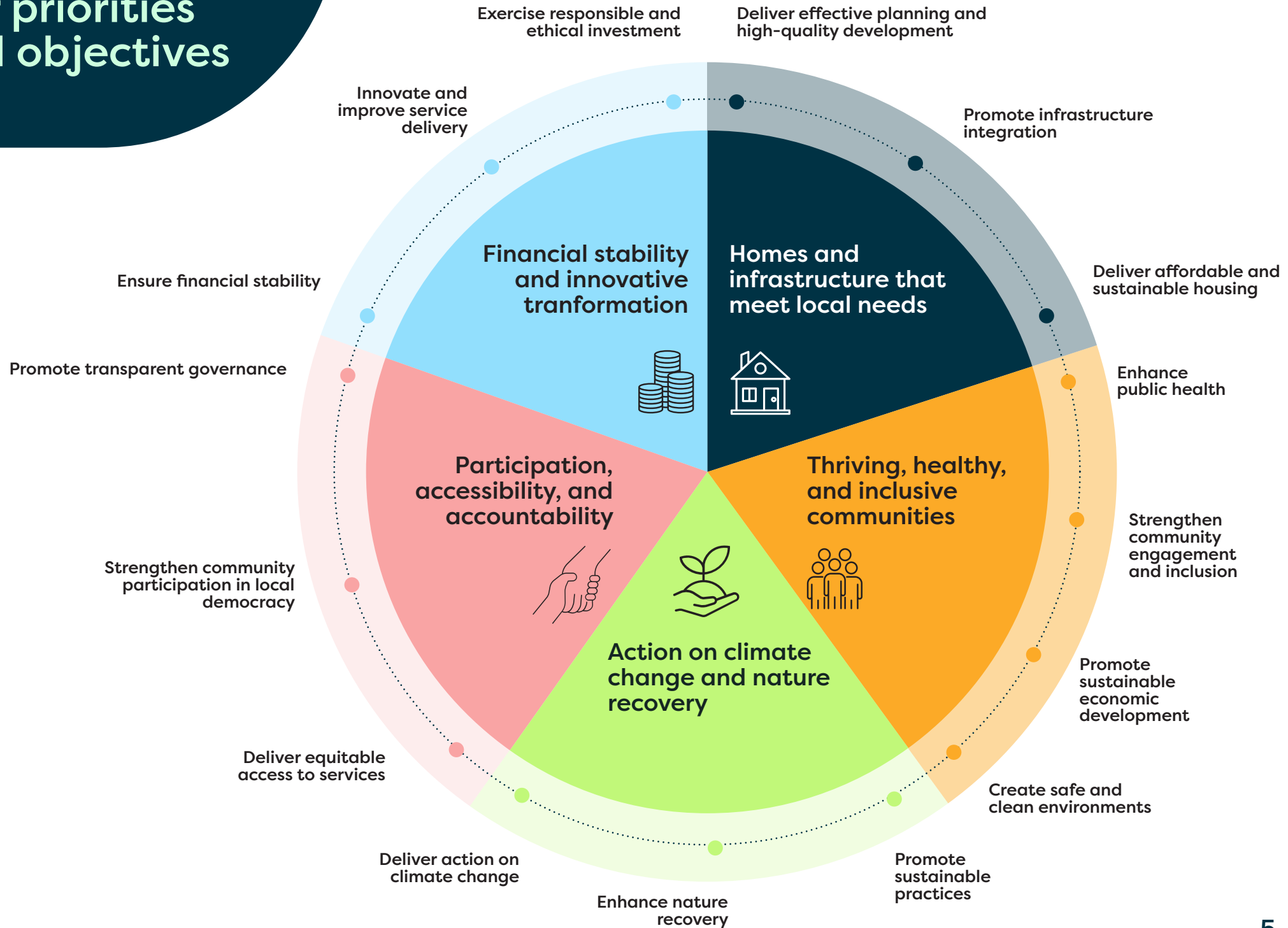


Thriving, healthy, and inclusive communities:

Nurturing healthy, safe, and resilient communities in our rural and urban areas while being responsive to the impact of national changes on local need. Championing local businesses, local food production and a thriving, sustainable local economy and fostering community cohesion and inclusion.



Our priorities and objectives



Action on climate change and nature recovery



Leading in building climate resilient communities, reducing carbon emissions and restoring our natural environment.

South Oxfordshire is a largely rural district that is home to parts of two National Landscapes, the Oxford Green Belt, and a long stretch of the River Thames. Protecting and enhancing our environment is key to preserving it for future generations.

We have already made significant progress in reducing carbon emissions, taking climate action, and restoring nature, with firm plans to build on this through the delivery of our Joint Nature and Climate Action Plan 2025-2029 with Vale of White Horse District Council. However, despite our ongoing efforts climate change and ecological degradation remain significant ongoing threats which need to be mitigated.

Where we are now: Having declared a climate emergency in 2019 and an ecological emergency in 2021, South

Oxfordshire has made significant strides in taking action on the climate and ecological emergencies and protecting and restoring our natural world. However, there is still more work to do.

Where we want to be: By 2029, the council will have made significant progress towards achieving its ambitious target of becoming net zero in its operations by 2030. The district will also be on track to becoming net zero by 2045. Our natural habitats will help to provide safe havens for wildlife and enhance biodiversity.



Action on climate change and nature recovery: Objectives

Deliver action on climate change:

Seek to achieve net zero in council operations by 2030 and a net zero district by 2045. Support our residents and businesses to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and foster resilience to extreme weather events.

Enhance nature recovery:

Put nature recovery at the heart of our grounds maintenance operations. Work with partners to restore natural habitats and species populations throughout South Oxfordshire, focusing our efforts on the priorities identified in the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Integrate natural habitats and balance growth with net gains for nature.

Promote sustainable practices:

Encourage residents and businesses to adopt sustainable practices through education, incentives, and community programmes. Foster community-led sustainability initiatives and environmental stewardship and partnerships with local businesses and organisations to promote sustainable practices.

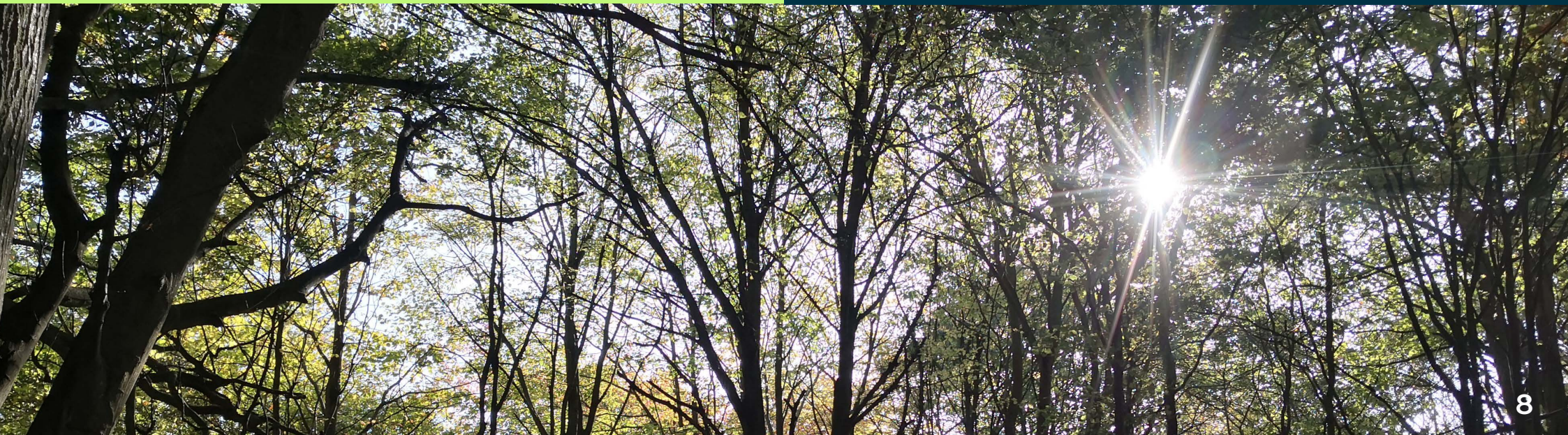


Outcomes

- Expand and scale-up decarbonisation activity
- Reduce operational greenhouse gas emissions
- Support communities to alleviate and adapt to extreme weather events
- Enhance biodiversity
- Collaborate to achieve our climate and ecological goals

How we will measure progress

- Progress towards net zero carbon district by 2045
- Biodiversity Net Gain reporting
- Reduction in operational greenhouse gas emissions
- Narrative and number of flood and drainage alleviation schemes facilitated and/or implemented
- Amount of residual waste per household
- Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting



Participation, accessibility, and accountability



Ensuring robust governance, transparency, and equitable access to council services.

Equitable and inclusive access to services is one of our central commitments to our residents. Achieving this means maintaining and improving our culture of openness and engagement while championing and promoting diversity.

Where we are now: South Oxfordshire is committed to transparency, robust governance, and the delivery of accessible services. Through inclusive community engagement, the council seeks to ensure that the diversity of our district and voices of local people are reflected in decision-making processes.

Where we want to be: South Oxfordshire will proactively ensure that all residents have equitable and inclusive access to services and opportunities. We will celebrate diversity and uphold the highest standards of governance and transparency. The council will actively engage with and empower local communities, recognising that they know their area best.



Participation, accessibility, and accountability: Objectives

Strengthen community participation in local democracy:

Build and maintain strong relationships with residents, Town and Parish Councils, and partner organisations, ensuring they are informed, listened to and empowered to be actively involved in decision-making.

Deliver equitable access to services:

Champion and promote diversity, including identifying and removing barriers to council services to ensure equitable access for all.

Promote transparent governance:

Maintain a culture of openness, transparency, and accessibility in all our operations.



Outcomes

- Keep residents and communities informed of our work
- Ensure transparency and accountability in council processes
- Enable and increase active participation in decision-making
- Ensure all residents have equitable and inclusive access to council services

How we will measure progress

- Embrace the opportunities that social and digital media bring
- Improve accessibility of websites run by the council
- All digitally enabled council meetings are livestreamed
- Response rate to Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests



Thriving, healthy, and inclusive communities



Nurturing healthy, safe, and resilient communities in our rural and urban areas while being responsive to the impact of national changes on local need. Championing local businesses, local food production and a thriving, sustainable local economy and fostering community cohesion and inclusion.



South Oxfordshire's strong, vibrant communities are one of the district's most valuable assets. We are proud to work with a host of community groups and other partners to help strengthen community cohesion, and foster resilience. Ensuring robust support systems to safeguard vulnerable residents, a flourishing arts and culture scene and opportunities to promote physical and mental health remain a priority.

Through direct work and exerting our influence to advocate for change, we have a continued focus on enhancing the local environment to ensure it is safe and clean. Our ambition is to have a district free from litter and fly-tipping, where pollution in our air and water is maintained to at least the minimum safe levels.

As a popular destination with plenty to see and do, we are committed to supporting and promoting our vibrant visitor economy. We will continue to encourage sustainable local economic development and support local businesses and organisations to become leaders in sustainable technology and innovation.

Where we are now: The safety and wellbeing of our vibrant communities is a key focus of our work. However, ongoing challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis, the impacts of climate change, and social inequalities have impacts on our communities that require continuous attention and innovative solutions.

Where we want to be: Our vision is to be a district where all communities thrive and people live healthy lives. We want our communities to be cohesive, adaptive and resilient so they can respond to and recover from unforeseen and challenging events. This will be underpinned by a vibrant visitor economy and sustainable economic development.

Thriving, healthy, and inclusive communities: Objectives

Enhance public health:

Support initiatives that promote physical and mental health.

Strengthen community engagement and inclusion:

Work with communities and partners to build strong relationships and promote participation in community life.

Promote sustainable economic development:

Support, champion and collaborate with local businesses to enable the creation of high-quality job opportunities, use of new technologies, and promotion of responsible resource use that align with sustainable practices.

Create safe and clean environments:

Work with communities to be free from pollution and other environmental hazards and provide healthy living conditions for all residents.



Outcomes

- Work in partnership to enhance health and wellbeing in our communities
- Promote equalities within our communities
- Support residents via the Community Hub
- Promote a thriving and sustainable local economy
- Take action to improve the safety and cleanliness of the local environment

How we will measure progress

- Number of people (You Move) and families (Move Together) participating in the council's physical activities programmes/events
- Public participation in equalities roadshow events
- Number of residents accessing community hub services
- Number of leisure centre improvement projects underway/completed
- Business engagement activities
- Number of projects to promote and enhance water quality including driving improvements in the ecological health of our rivers



Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs



Meeting local housing needs through sustainable development that is supported by appropriate infrastructure, protects green spaces, and mitigates the effects of climate change.

In South Oxfordshire, the average price of a home is many times higher than the average salary, particularly for young people, and renting is also expensive. Our ambition is to increase the supply of affordable housing, including council-owned social housing, for our residents, using our planning policies and engaging with communities to ensure that this is done in a sustainable way.

It is crucial that the provision and enhancement of essential infrastructure keeps up with the pace of housing development and that new developments seamlessly integrate with existing urban and rural communities and environments. The provision of green infrastructure, green, open spaces and access to nature, and prioritising connectivity via walking, cycling and public transport will support sustainable lifestyles and promote healthy place-shaping.

Where we are now: South Oxfordshire faces the dual challenge of meeting housing demands while protecting the environment and mitigating the impact of climate change. We have made progress, but the need for affordable, sustainable housing continues to be a challenge. Ensuring that new developments are both environmentally friendly and responsive to community needs remains a priority.

Where we want to be: South Oxfordshire will take a balanced approach to development. We will deliver genuinely affordable homes and essential infrastructure that will help to support sustainable lifestyles and seamlessly integrate with existing communities.



Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs: Objectives

Promote infrastructure integration:

Ensure that new developments are accompanied by the timely delivery of essential infrastructure and that existing infrastructure is enhanced to cope with increased demand as a result of development.

Deliver effective planning and high-quality development:

Implement policies that balance growth with environmental protection and sustainability, while promoting high-quality development. Engage with residents and support neighbourhood planning to ensure developments meet community needs and preferences.

Deliver affordable and sustainable housing:

Set and achieve appropriate targets for the delivery of genuinely affordable homes across the district which meet high environmental standards.



Outcomes

- Increase delivery and acquisition of affordable housing
- Prevent and tackle homelessness
- Deliver integrated infrastructure that meets local need
- Increase and enhance green infrastructure
- increase public and community involvement in planning
- Ensure effective planning policies

How we will measure progress

- Number of accommodation units directly provided by the council as a housing landlord
- Homelessness prevention rate/percentage of potential homelessness cases successfully prevented
- Average length of stay in Emergency Temporary Accommodation
- Amount of CIL funding received for use by the district council and approved for spend, and details of council projects delivered
- Joint Local Plan examined and adopted



Financial stability and innovative transformation



Continuous innovation and responsible investment to achieve financial stability.

Despite the challenges facing local government finances across the country, South Oxfordshire remains financially stable thanks to our responsible and robust financial management. While pressures caused by macro-economic factors outside our control and the uncertainties of local government reorganisation persist, we remain committed to solidifying our financial future by continuing to act responsibly with the resources we have and exploring opportunities for revenue generation.

Our ambition is to innovate and transform service delivery. We aspire to have modern, accessible and user-friendly services that deliver the great outcomes and customer service excellence that our residents expect and deserve.

Where we are now: We are committed to providing excellent value for money, continuously improving our services, and securing external funding to support our initiatives and drive innovation. However, maintaining long-term financial stability in the face of uncertain Government funding allocations and local government reorganisation remains a challenge.

Where we want to be: We aim to be a model of responsible financial management and innovation while navigating the uncertainties of local government reorganisation, devolution, and future funding. We will continue to drive responsible investments, transformation, and efficient service delivery while maximising external funding opportunities.



Financial stability and innovative transformation: Objectives

Ensure financial stability:

Ensure strong stewardship over public funds to ensure efficient and effective resource use, maximise external funding opportunities from grants and partnerships, and influence Central Government for an appropriate and longer-term financial settlement for local government.

Innovate and improve service delivery:

Drive continuous improvement to ensure efficient, effective delivery of high-quality services, including embracing technology to promote resilience in service delivery.

Exercise responsible and ethical investment:

Prioritise responsible investments and projects that provide tangible improvements in quality of life and wellbeing, and manage council assets effectively to deliver community benefits.



Outcomes

- Deliver robust financial reporting and forecasting
- Maximise external funding opportunities to support our services and deliver great outcomes
- Deliver strategic and operational change projects to drive transformation
- Ensure all residents receive great customer service
- Exercise strong stewardship of all council assets

How we will measure progress

- Value and benefits of external funding secured
- Number and outcome of complaints
- Customer Services waiting and response times
- Comprehensive tracking of our financial performance
- Sign-ups to customer services 'My Account' and Council Tax and Benefits online portal



Get in touch

South Oxfordshire District Council

www.southoxon.gov.uk

Abbey House

Abbey Close

Abingdon

OX14 3JE

You can ask for alternative formats such as paper copies, large print, or translations by emailing communications@southandvale.gov.uk or calling 01235 422 422