



— The Way Ahead Council Plan 2025-29

Foreword

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

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 and healthy 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 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 an emerging 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.

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.

Strategic Priorities and Objectives



What

Action on climate change and nature recovery: Leading in building climate resilient communities, reducing carbon emissions and restoring our natural environment.

Why

Having declared a climate emergency in 2019 and an ecological emergency in 2021, we are committed to taking action on climate change and supporting our residents and businesses to adapt to its impacts, restoring nature and fostering resilience within our communities.



How

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.

Enhance nature recovery: Put nature recovery at the heart of our ground’s maintenance operations. Work with partners to restore natural habitats and species populations throughout South Oxfordshire, focussing 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

What

Participation, accessibility, and accountability: Ensuring robust governance, transparency, and equitable access to council services.

Why

To keep us accountable for the work we do and the services we deliver, transparency and robust governance arrangements are key. We aim to keep residents and partners informed of our work through a variety of channels, as an important step to enabling them to participate in local democracy.



How

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.

What

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.

Why

Our diverse communities and environment are vital assets. Supporting sustainable economic prosperity, improving wellbeing, and enhancing the local environment are essential for creating places where everyone can thrive.



How

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.

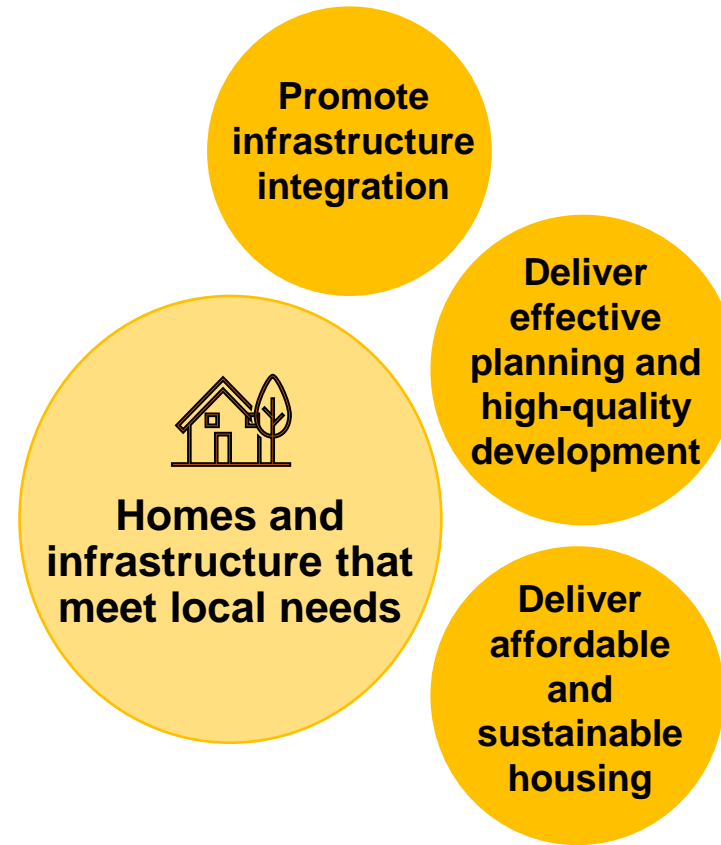
Create safe and clean environments: Work with communities to be free from pollution and other environmental hazards and provide healthy living conditions for all residents.

What

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.

Why

High-quality, genuinely affordable housing is essential for thriving, healthy communities, particularly in areas like South Oxfordshire, where housing costs significantly outpace average incomes. To address this, the council aims to boost affordable housing supply sustainably, ensuring essential infrastructure and green spaces evolve alongside new developments to create connected, climate-resilient communities.



How

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.

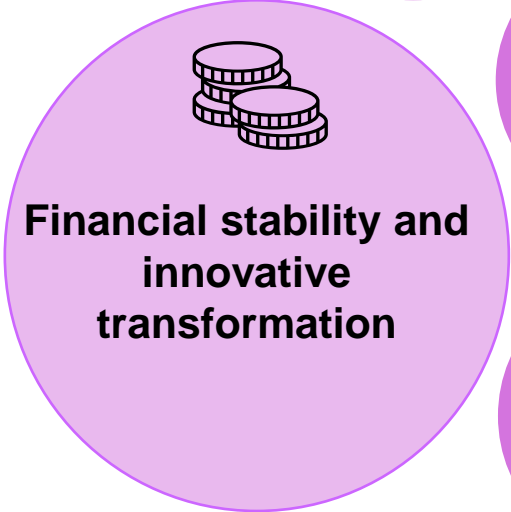
Deliver effective planning and high-quality development: Implement policies that balance growth with environmental protection and sustainability, while promoting high-quality development. Engage with residents and support neighbourhood planning to ensure developments meet community needs and preferences.

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.

Ensure financial stability

Innovate and improve service delivery

Exercise responsible and ethical investment



What
Financial stability and innovative transformation: Continuous innovation and responsible investment to achieve financial stability.

Why
Despite financial challenges across the country, South Oxfordshire has stayed stable thanks to careful management. We're focused on using resources wisely, finding new funding, and improving how we work.

How
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.