





The Mouthpiece

Culham's Newsletter

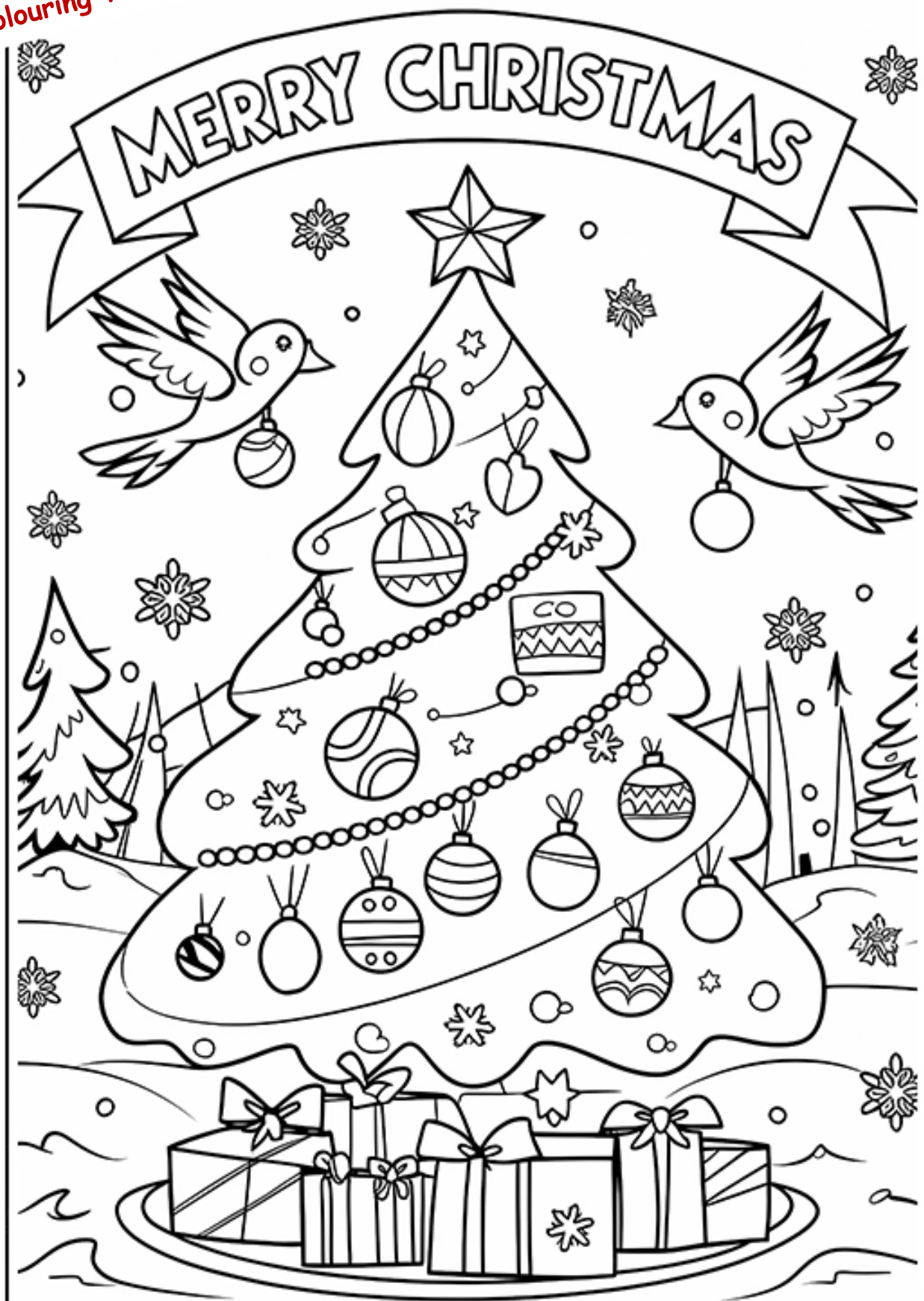
December 2025/ January 2026



Dates for your Diary

Fri 5 th Dec	7.30pm	 Ladies of Culham – Wreath Making	St Paul's Church
Wed 10 th Dec	6.30pm	Thames Water SESRO presentation/Q&A – subject to change	St Paul's Church
Wed 10 th Dec	7.30pm	Parish Council Meeting	TBC
Sun 21 st Dec	6.30 pm	Carol Service 	St Paul's Church
Thurs 25 th Dec	11.00am	 Christmas Day Service 	St Paul's Church

Enjoy colouring this Christmas picture!!



Talking point by Revd Canon Rachel Carnegie



“...and they shall call His name Emmanuel” (meaning ‘God with us’). Matthew 1.23

I love how our community celebrates Christmas. We begin preparing the way with an Advent service in the Abbey, singing that lovely carol full of anticipation, ‘O come, O come, *Emmanuel*.’ And out in the village, the living Advent Calendar begins, as people gather for the opening of the first window. The winter dark is here, but the village is full of light and warmth, preparing for the joy of Christmas.

Yet in the midst of this joy we remember that for some Christmas-time may also feel difficult. It can bring anxiety about the cost or about family dynamics. It can bring grief for loved ones no longer here to celebrate. It can bring a greater sense of loneliness when others are out merry-making. This is when the warmth and light of our community becomes most radiant, when warmth is about reaching out to include all who might be feeling lonely or sad, when light is about being together when life feels dark. At Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve we will read the hope-filled words from the Gospel of John: “*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.*” The darkness shall not overcome it.

I heard about a crib service in a parish not far from here. The children had been asked to draw a Christmas picture. One little boy drew a manger but with two babies in it. When asked why, he said: “Well the vicar told us God is with us – so I drew baby Jesus and me together in the manger.” The little lad had perfectly captured the Christmas message.

In September I was fortunate to visit Bethlehem. The Church of the Nativity, usually bursting with life, felt deserted at this tragic time, with almost no visitors. Down some steep stairs below the church, I spent time quietly in the little cave believed to be the place of Jesus’ birth. The world Jesus was born into was full of conflict, darkness and desolation. He came to bring peace, light and salvation: God who became human to live in our midst and to be with us always.

After visiting Bethlehem, I spoke with a friend from the Church in Jerusalem. We talked about where to find hope in our troubled and divided world today. He said: “For me hope is not about an easy optimism; rather it is knowing that God is with us.” Again, that same phrase.

Malcolm Guite is a priest-poet who is coming to talk at next year’s Dorchester Festival. He wrote a poem called O Emmanuel, which includes these words:

*O come, O come, and be our God-with-us...
Be folded with us into time and place,
Unfold for us the mystery of grace
And make a womb of all this wounded world.
O heart of heaven beating in the earth,
O tiny hope within our hopelessness
Come to be born, to bear us to our birth....*

Wishing you all a very joyous Christmas and may that light and warmth continue to sustain and connect us all into the new year.

Christmas
across the Dorchester Team

BRIDGE GROUP CLUSTER

CLIFTON HAMPDEN:
21st Dec 6:30pm Carol Service
24th Dec 11:30pm Midnight Mass

CULHAM:
21st Dec 6:30pm Carol Service
25th Dec 11am Christmas Day

LITTLE WITTENHAM:
24th Dec 6pm Carol Service

LONG WITTENHAM:
24th Dec 4pm Carol Service
25th Dec 9:30am Christmas Day

JOY

Team News

ABBEY CONCERT MANAGERS REQUIRED- ARE YOU INTERESTED?

The demand for Events to be held in the Abbey has been steadily increasing this year and we need to increase the number of volunteer Concert Managers who play a vital part in helping to make the events run smoothly. This is an opportunity to find out more about what goes on behind the scenes, meeting interesting artists, hearing lovely music and being the welcoming face of the Abbey to the audience.

Training will be given. For further details please contact the Office Manager, Dorchester Abbey, Samantha Turner; sam@dorchester-abbey.org.uk and 01865 340007 (Mon, Wed and Fri mornings)

Events in the Abbey

All full event information and ticket links can be found via www.dorchester-abbey.org.uk/whats-on/

Friday 05th December 11:30am & 2pm - Moving Music Seasons Greetings. Relax instrumental and song performances with sing-a-long songs. Moving Music Concerts are particularly welcome people living with Dementia and their friends and family. To Book please email movingmusicconcerts@gmail.com
Free/Donations www.soundresource.org.uk/whats-on

Saturday 06th December 7:30pm - Benson Choral Society: Bach's Christmas Oratorio This promises to be special in a number of ways, with a quintet of sparkling soloists, accompanied by the renowned period orchestra, Instruments of Time and Truth, and under the baton of new Musical Director, Tom Neal. Get tickets now for £20 reserved, or £17 unreserved www.bensonchoralsociety.org.uk

Friday 12th December 7pm - Nadia Eide Winter Light National Tour. Experience the enchanting voice of The Voice Finalist Nadia Eide in a magical concert filled with festive music. Catapulted to fame when she appeared on ITV The Voice UK 2021, Nadia Eide, presents a spectacular Christmas concert for all ages. Tickets £15 - £24 www.dorchester-abbey.org.uk/event/nadia-eide-presents-winter-light-2025-national-tour/?instance_id=10304

Saturday 13th December 7pm. A Night of Carols with the OSJ Voices

To include A child is born in Bethlehem, Adam lay abounded, Deck the halls
Ding Dong merrily on high, I saw a maiden, In dulci jubilate, Lord of the dance
See amid the winters snow, Sing lullaby, Tomorrow shall be my dancing day

With Malcolm Pearce organ & John Lubbock conductor. Tickets £15 - £25 <https://www.osj.org.uk/osjevent/a-night-of-carols-7pm-at-dorchester-abbey-3/>

Monday 15th December 6:30pm - Thames Valley Air Ambulance Christmas Carol Concert Join Thames Valley Air Ambulance for a magical evening of musical performances, traditional lessons, and festive readings. The concert will feature some truly amazing performances from world renowned soprano, Sophie Bevan MBE, and the wonderful Occasions Singers. The programme will also include some favourite carols and readings by very special guests. Please join us for seasonal drinks and mince pies immediately after the service at this fundraising event.

Tickets FREE - Pre-booked tickets are required for entry as space is limited, so reserve your place to ensure you don't miss out. <https://www.tvairambulance.org.uk/support-us/events/christmas-carol-concert-2025/>

Tuesday 16th December, 7.30-9.00pm. A Candlelit Christmas Evening. Lit up by a thousand candles, this is a truly magical event. Lucy Fleming and [Dominic West](#) will read from Dame Stephanie's books and provide festive readings, accompanied by the beautiful voices of the Magdalen College Choir, conducted by Mark Williams. Tickets £35 www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/a-candlelit-christmas-evening-in-memory-of-dame-stephanie-shirley-tickets-1503638556399?aff=oddtcreator

Thursday 18 December 7:30pm ~ THIS EVENT IS NOW SOLD OUT ~ Christmas Round Ours - Music Stories & Songs with Declan Bennett, Fra Fee & Their Friends straight from the West End!
To join the waiting list please refer to event page www.wegottickets.com/waiting-list/677830

Saturday 20 December 7pm - OSJ MESSIAH A musical rite of the holiday season, the Baroque-era oratorio still awes listeners more than 250 years after the composer's death. Using the traditional scoring. Tickets £5 - £30 www.osj.org.uk/osjevent/handel-messiah-7pm-at-dorchester-abbey-4/

Wednesday 31 December New Year's Eve Concert. 6pm Join Orchestra of St John for Waltzes, Marches and Polkas Galore! A concert to set the feet tapping, the hands clapping with its joyous dance music, dispelling all thoughts of winter's cold.

Tickets £15 – £25 www.osj.org.uk/osjevent/new-years-eve-concert-6pm-at-dorchester-abbey-4/

2026 January

Sunday 11th January 3pm – 4:15pm 'Birinus and all that' A short cantata telling the history of the Abbey, including: the establishment of the Cathedral by St Birinus in the 7th century, · the building of the present church in the 13th century, · the naughty monks and destruction of the monastery in the 15th, · and the renovation of the church in the 19th, as well as the building of the School, (now the Village Hall), Rectory and Missionary College (later Hallidays antiques.)

There will be an exhibition of facsimiles of historic documents, including the announcement by William the Conqueror that he was moving the diocese from Dorchester to Lincoln in 1072, and Richard Beauforest's will, bequeathing the abbey to the village in 1554.

There will also be another chance to hear *Henry and His Wives*, an account of the much-married monarch and his unfortunate consorts, premiered in 2025.

Free Entry: Donations Fundraising for Dorchester Abbey

Saturday 17th January 7pm FAURE AND SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Concerto No 2 is a jubilant, humorous work composed for Shostakovich's son, featuring a lyrical slow movement and a finale full of clownish energy. The Scottish Symphony is a musical journey inspired by Mendelssohn's visit to Scotland in 1829, capturing its landscapes, folklore, and history. Fauré's Pelléas et Mélisande is a suite of incidental music for Maeterlinck's symbolist play - a love triangle which leads to tragedy, jealousy, and death. Tickets: £17.50 – £30 www.osj.org.uk/osjevent/faure-and-shostakovich-7pm-at-dorchester-abbey/

For all above ticket links and for further information on all events including full listings for December, Christmas and January 2026 at the Abbey please visit: www.dorchester-abbey.org.uk/whats-on/ #DorchesterAbbeyEvents



Advent Course



Berinsfield Church

Thursdays, 10am–11:30am

27 November
4, 11, 18 December

Email Revd Jane to begin in Berinsfield – or just come along!
(janeclaremanser@gmail.com)



Stadhampton Church

Mondays, 7:30pm–9pm

1, 8, 15, 22 December

Email Revd Emma to begin in Stadhampton – or just come along!
(revemmafirth@gmail.com)

We warmly invite you to join our Advent discussion groups, based on Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani's new book, in which she links music, scripture and life experiences – and invites us to make connections with the themes of Advent.

You can join the daytime stream, the evening stream or a mix of both.

The book is available on Amazon or Eden.co.uk but it is not necessary to buy your own copy.

Culham Village Community WhatsApp Group

Please scan the QR code below to join now!



To engage with your local community, please join the '**Culham Village Community**' WhatsApp group.

To scan the QR code above simply open up your 'photo' app and hover it over the QR code and join the relevant group that interests you.

Culham Village Defibrillator



The Culham Village Defibrillator is located at the Culham Village Nursery & Preschool on an external wall facing onto the Glebe.

Village News

Village website: www.culhamvillage.org.uk

Culham Parish Council - November 12th 2025 - Summary of Meeting

The meeting was attended by three councillors, the Parish Clerk, and members of the public. The meeting opened at 7:30PM and started with public participation, continued with the Parish Councillor's report, the County Councillor's report, the Clerk's report, plus the general meeting.

Public Participation:

The meeting began with a public participation session where the following issues were raised:

- Traffic on The Burycroft can be hazardous at times, as some drivers appear unsure of the road's centre line. The council will check with Highways about the possibility of painting central road markings.
- The grass along the A415 towards the Europa School is overgrown and could be mowed. Although this is the responsibility of SODC, the Parish Council may offer assistance.

General meeting:

The SESRO planning consultation was discussed. A public presentation of the project will be held in Culham on 10 December at 18:30, likely in the church.

Other matters covered during the meeting included:

- The Emergency Plan for Culham needs to be finalised, and public input will be required to identify some outstanding elements
- The council approved the feasibility study for a sports pavilion on the recreation ground.
- A village Christmas tree will be installed near the church this year.

The following planning applications were discussed:

- A new building proposed by the Europa School.
- The HIF Thames Crossing, for which several conditions relating to visual impacts are still pending.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15PM.

Further details and links to documents referenced in these notes can be found on the Culham Parish Council website.

<https://culham-pc.gov.uk/>

Ladies of Culham Next Dates:

4th July – perfume making with Gaynor

1st August – social walk

5th September – cyanotype printing with Jo

3rd October – sewing / sewing machines /
needle felting with Laura

7th November – board games

5th December – Wreath making

Thank you so much to everyone who's run
sessions this year, it's been successful so far..

We look forward to lots of workshops, shared
experiences and socializing as the year goes on.

To be added onto the LOC WhatsApp group, or
any questions, please email us

Email ladiesofculham@gmail.com

SODC District Councillor's Report – November 2025

Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye – Sandford & the Wittenhams

Joint Local Plan update

The council has written a second letter to the Inspectors in response to their advice to withdraw the draft Plan. You can read the letter here (or at the end of this report):

[LPA40 South and Vale letter to our Inspectors 20 October 2025 Redacted](#)

The letter points out the most recent correspondence from the Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning, to Paul Morrison, Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate. The Minister outlines his expectation that local plans submitted in the current plan-making system should be treated with an appropriate degree of flexibility. He specifically refers to the Duty to Cooperate (DtC), asking Inspectors to be proportionate in what is expected as the DtC evidence, and to consider the context. His message is directly relevant to our Joint Local Plan. The Minister states: "In advance of the new plan-making system and mechanisms for cross-boundary cooperation coming into force, the final set of local plans being delivered within the current system remain essential to facilitating the effective delivery of housing, jobs and infrastructure. It is therefore critical that Inspectors approach examinations of current system plans with the appropriate degree of flexibility. The evidencing of expectations to establish whether the legal and soundness tests have been met – including with respect to the Duty to Cooperate – should be proportionate to the context in which plans in the existing system are being prepared."

Furthermore, Oxford City Council have re considered their housing need and published a draft option with lower housing numbers than in their previous one. The letter from SODC shows this revised housing requirement in a table:

Oxford's housing need	21,740
Oxford's capacity	9,851
Unmet need for Oxford already agreed in South, Vale, West and Cherwell	14,300
Balance (surplus)	+ 2,411

I hope this will convince the Inspectors to re consider their advice.

Postal Voting

New regulations mean residents who vote by post now need to reapply every three years if they wish to continue to cast their ballot this way.

Starting with a short trial in October, the Council will write to people when their postal vote is up for renewal. The first group this rule change impacts, and who will receive a notification, will be those who applied for a postal vote on or before 31 January 2024. They will need to re-apply by 31 January 2026, otherwise their postal vote will expire.

You can find more information on postal voting on the [Electoral Commission website](#).

Equalities and Diversity Roadshow

The Council is travelling across the districts over the next few weeks for an Equalities Roadshow, speaking to the public about what the councils are doing to support equality and finding out more about what equality means to them.

They have been in Thame and Wantage and the roadshow continues:

Monday 3 November, Abingdon Market Place, 8am – 3pm

Thursday 13 November, Henley Market Place, 8am – 3pm

Friday 21 November, Wallingford Town Hall, 9am – 2pm

(Didcot – date and location TBC)

Waste and Recycling Updates Guide

There are new easy-to-read guides to help residents with their waste and recycling. The guides include what items go in which bin, who to contact if a collection is missed, how to reduce your waste and much more. There are two guides, available to view now on our website. Paper copies will also be provided to new homes.

For South Oxfordshire residents:

- [houses with individual wheelie bins - guide to waste and recycling](#)
- [flats and properties with communal bins - guide to waste and recycling](#)

New webpages for Towns and Parishes

The Climate team have developed a webpage hosting a variety of information for them from funding opportunities, ready-made strategies and case studies of other community projects which could offer them a framework for what they are trying to achieve. The page is under our Action on Climate and Nature page called What Town and Parish Councils can do ([South/ Vale](#)).

Energy Saving Help and Ideas

If residents are concerned about heating bills this winter, they may be interested in our [updated energy saving leaflet](#) available on our websites ([South/Vale](#)). The flyer comprises information about energy saving solutions from insulation to air source heat pumps and details of where people can get funding to help install these - including the new Warm Homes Grant.

If Parish Councils would like some hard copies of this leaflet, please contact [our Climate Team](#).

Sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk

Policy and Programmes



Inspectors Caroline Mulloy & Rachael Bust
The Planning Inspectorate
(sent via email to the Programme Officer)

Policy Manager

Tel: 01235 422422
Textphone: 18001 01235 422422

Abbey House,
Abbey Close,
Abingdon,
Oxon,
OX14 3JE

20 October 2025
Dear Inspectors Mulloy and Bust,
Examination of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041

I am writing to ask you to reconsider the conclusions in your letter of 26 September 2025 in the light of the legal points we raised in our letter to you of 6 October 2025, the additional information set out below, and the recent Ministerial letter of 9 October 2025.

As an initial observation, I acknowledge that you have not sought the views of the Councils (or any other parties) on the conclusions in your letter. However, it is the case that, as matters stand, the examination remains open and on-going, and there is no reason why you should not reconsider those conclusions within the examination if you are provided with a sound basis to do so.

In his recent letter, Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning, wrote to Paul Morrison, Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate to outline his expectation that local plans submitted in the current plan-making system should be treated with an appropriate degree of flexibility. He specifically refers to the Duty to Cooperate (DTC), asking Inspectors to be proportionate in what is expected as the DTC evidence, and to consider the context.

As a plan submitted under the current plan-making system, his message is directly relevant to our Joint Local Plan. The Minister states:

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"In advance of the new plan-making system and mechanisms for cross-boundary cooperation coming into force, the final set of local plans being delivered within the current system remain essential to facilitating the effective delivery of housing, jobs and infrastructure. It is therefore critical that Inspectors approach examinations of current system plans with the appropriate degree of flexibility. The evidencing of expectations to establish whether the legal and soundness tests have been met – including with respect to the Duty to Cooperate – should be proportionate to the context in which plans in the existing system are being prepared."

We note the new clarification from the Minister to the Planning Inspectorate on the role of pragmatism by examining Inspectors. Whilst wanting to avoid overly long examinations or the adoption of poor-quality plans, the welcomes approaches which enable plans to proceed "by providing additional opportunities to clarify compliance with the Duty to Cooperate."

On this subject, there is further news we can share to bring you up to date. We acknowledge that the question of compliance with the Duty to Cooperate relates to what happened while the Joint Local Plan was being prepared, and that this preparation period ended on 9 December 2024 when the plan was submitted for independent examination

Nonetheless, the question of whether the submitted plan is sound, or can be made sound by modifications, is not so time limited. As explained in our letter of 6 October 2025 and expanded on below, the Councils consider that some of the criticisms which led to the conclusions in your letter of 26 September 2025 can be properly seen as raising matters of soundness rather than compliance with the DTC. We believe that recent events on Oxford's housing numbers provide important context that deserves your consideration.

1) Oxford's housing numbers

After the June 2025 hearings had closed (so you had no way of knowing), Oxford City Council published a Regulation 18 consultation on their new Oxford Local Plan 2042. This showed that the City Council's preferred approach is now to use the stock-based Standard Method of the current NPPF (December 2024) for their housing need.

The figures work out as follows:

Oxford's standard method number over their plan period is 21,740. Their preferred option is to set a (lower than the standard method) capacity-based housing requirement for Oxford in Policy H1, which would generate unmet need. Their provisional capacity in Oxford is 'at least 9,851'. With the existing sites and provision of around 7,000 homes for Oxford in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, combined with adopted supply

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from other authorities (totalling 14,300), we calculate that there is more than enough to cater for the amount of unmet need this plan generates:

Oxford's housing need	21,740
Oxford's capacity	9,851
Unmet need for Oxford already agreed in South, Vale, West and Cherwell	14,300
Balance (surplus)	+ 2,411

Therefore, based on the latest Oxford published position, there would be no additional unmet need for the JLP to address to 2041. We responded to Oxford's consultation on 8 August 2025 welcoming this. We would be happy to submit both Oxford's Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation and our responses to our examination library, if helpful to you.

As we set out in our letter to you of 6 October 2025, at that time the Joint Local Plan was being prepared there was undisputed evidence that if the former standard method was used to assess Oxford's housing need (as we had argued it should and as their local plan inspectors had found was the case), there was no additional unmet need beyond the provision already made by the JLP (together with provision made by other partners). In the light of Oxford's latest figures, we ask you to reconsider the position you set out in your letter that "it should have been obvious that there was a reasonable prospect of unmet need in this period", because that was not the case when the Joint Local Plan was being prepared and has subsequently turned out not to be the case.

Thinking back to the Minister's new letter and the need for DIC evidence to be "proportionate to the context", in our case we've fully addressed Oxford's unmet housing needs from their adopted Local Plan, which was found sound. When preparing the JLP in 2023-24 we also looked beyond their adopted plan to their emerging plan period to 2040, and it is undisputed that Oxford's future need was also being accommodated when it was assessed in accordance with the Standard Method (as it should have been). With plan preparation running in parallel, then Oxford slipping behind during 2024 as a result of their inspectors' decision, the Oxford local plan wasn't ultimately at the right stage for updated Oxford unmet need figures to inform our JLP. This doesn't mean our plan should fail - especially given the Minister's view that the final set of local plans under the current system "remain essential to facilitating the effective delivery of housing, jobs and infrastructure". Especially so here in the context of Oxfordshire being vital to the national economy. Any concerns about how the Joint Local Plan makes provision for Oxford's needs relate to matters of soundness of the plan (which we make further comment on below under point 3).

We are aware from recent engagement with Oxfordshire planning policy officers, that Oxford is currently taking advice on whether to adjust and extend their plan period. Oxford is also updating the capacity through work on their SHLAA, taking account of the Environment Agency's new flood mapping. We imagine that this could reduce Oxford's

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surplus of around 2,411 homes that we calculate in the table above. It could also, in theory, generate some new additional unmet need, although at the moment in early stage emerging work, it appears there would still be a surplus. The Oxfordshire authorities are following a joint process and timeline for discussing and confirming this.

This is, of course, not relevant to the period when the Joint Local Plan was in preparation, because Oxford's plan is only now reaching this stage, but it may have a bearing on matters of soundness. It is important to share this with you as context for our proposal in point 3 below.

2) PINS checklist

We would be more than happy to be among the first authorities to complete the new PINS checklist if that would help consolidate and summarise the examination material. We are aware that our DIC evidence of engagement is lengthy, with LPA02.1 (table of entries 61 pages long) LPA02.2 (compilation of minutes and correspondence amounting to 483 pages) and LPA28 (revised table of engagement, 53 pages).

We would be happy to use the checklist to make it clearer and to assist you in determining whether proportionate evidence has been provided on compliance with the DIC in the context in which the Joint Local Plan was prepared. If you would like us to present the previously submitted information using this new checklist, we would welcome this.

3) Proposals for modifications

We have already touched on the question of soundness and explained that we consider some of the criticisms in your letter relate to the soundness of the Joint Local Plan rather than legal compliance concerning the DIC.

First, on the topic of unmet housing need, we'd like to highlight the approach taken by the Inspector for the Waverley Local Plan (Jonathan Bore) in his report dated 1 February 2018. At the time, the adopted Woking Core Strategy showed a clear unmet housing need in an adjacent borough (para 26 of report). However, the Waverley Local Plan didn't include any provision for that need (para 27). Despite this, Inspector Bore considered it a matter of soundness - not a failure to comply with the DIC:

"Whilst the submitted plan does not contain any allowance for unmet housing need arising in Woking District, this is a matter dealt with through modifications to the housing requirement and does not demonstrate any failure under the Duty to Co-operate." (para 15)

We recognise that deciding whether something falls under the DIC or is a soundness issue involves planning judgment, and different views are possible. But even in a case where a plan doesn't make any allowance for clear unmet need from a neighbouring

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area (in an adopted, not just an emerging plan), it can still be treated as a soundness issue and so capable of being addressed through modifications to the submitted plan.

Second, we'd also like to draw your attention to the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan, examined by Inspectors Matthew Birkinshaw and Helen Hockenhull. In their 15 July 2021 report, they considered a situation where Central Bedfordshire Council had agreed to help meet neighbouring Luton's housing need by providing 7,350 homes. However, Luton argued that the plan didn't clearly address the 'where and how' those homes would be delivered, or how affordable housing nomination rights would work. The Inspectors concluded these were soundness issues, not DIC failures. They said (at paras 24 and 25):

"Having read and heard a significant amount of evidence on this matter, it is clear that the issues, and the strategic sites, are well known to both Councils who simply hold different views on the most appropriate strategy for the future expansion of Luton. In our opinion, this is a soundness matter. The Duty to Cooperate is not a duty to agree and having discussed and debated the issue over a number of years, it is unlikely that any further agreement could have been reached on the 'where and how' when the parties are so diametrically opposed on which direction Luton should expand..."

Similarly, LBC seek changes to the Plan in order to address concerns regarding the provision of affordable housing, affordable housing nomination rights and transport infrastructure. These matters relate to the effectiveness, and thus soundness, of the Plan. Although further dialogue could have been pursued, we are not convinced that this would have significantly narrowed the issues any further or led to agreed policy outcomes..."

In short, it's clear that the Central Bedfordshire Inspectors saw the mechanics of how the unmet need would be delivered as matters of policy effectiveness and so matters properly addressed as issues of soundness. They went on to propose various modifications to address those soundness issues.

We'd be happy to share copies or extracts of these reports if it would help you consider whether the concerns raised in your letter can properly be seen as soundness matters.

Third, we would also like to address further points with you through modifications to the plan. We have a suggestion. Since our JLP is running ahead of the new Oxford Local Plan, meaning that the final number of homes needed in Oxford in the JLP plan period was unknown at the point at submission and remains unknown, we could propose a modification to Policy HOU1 and paragraph 6.10 to provide a 'reserve position'.

This could for example propose that should the next Oxford Local Plan (currently at Regulation 18 stage) generate additional unmet need that South and Vale are asked to contribute to accommodating, those homes will be provided through the surplus in the

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Joint Local Plan at Policy HOU2, and by extending the arrangements in the Memorandum of Understanding for longer, so that households from the Oxford waiting lists are given priority for a larger number of affordable homes in South and Vale (number to be determined by the agreed scale of the unmet need and set out in an updated MOU). These MOU arrangements are already delivering homes for Oxford. Latest figures from our Lettings Team show that in Vale, we are ahead of target on number of affordable homes we've advertised for those in housing need from Oxford. We have fast tracked over 350 Oxford City housing register applications and assisted Oxford to address the needs of those they owe a homeless duty to by allocating a property to nearly 80 Oxford applicants in this most acute category.

Although no formal decisions have been made yet, if the Joint Local Plan doesn't go ahead, it's unlikely we could prepare a new plan under the current local plan system in time for the Government's December 2026 submission deadline. With Local Government Reorganisation coming in April 2028, and the statutory instruments for the new local plan machinery not yet in place, there is unlikely to be enough time to prepare another plan even under the new regime. We think a modification to the JLP is the quickest and most pragmatic way that any additional Oxford unmet need, were it to be needed once processes described in (1) are further advanced, could be addressed within South and Vale.

This proposal would meet the Minister's wish to see local plans adopted which meet housing needs over the plan period. In our case, this approach of progressing the JLP would have the advantage of making provision for our gypsy and traveller communities and expanding the Dalton Barracks allocation, which without the JLP, are pressing needs which could be left unachieved.

We note the Minister's revocation of the Nick Boles March 2014 letter, providing Inspectors with the option to recommend as part of the examination that a Green Belt review is undertaken to consider whether additional sites could be identified, in line with national policy, to meet development needs. We think this could be of merit in our case, considering the wider opportunities at Dalton Barracks Garden Village for example. We are already in discussions with the other Oxfordshire districts about commissioning a new joint Green Belt study.

In the light of this information, our proposals for potential modifications, and the Minister's message in his letter, we kindly ask you to reconsider your initial letter. The JLP remains at examination, and these matters are material to that examination. We would welcome discussion of next steps with you via the Programme Officer if helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Policy Manager

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CAROLINE BAIRD GIVES A PERSONAL OVERVIEW OF THAMES WATER'S SOUTH-EAST STRATEGIC RESERVOIR (SESRO) PLAN (also referred to as the Abingdon Reservoir,and its impact on CULHAM

*****The Parish Council will have representatives from Thames Water for a presentation and Q&A in St Pauls Church on Weds 10 December at 6.30pm (subject to change)*****



The statutory consultation on Thames Water's plans is currently open, **with a closing date of 2359 hrs on 13 January 2026**. Drop-in exhibitions were held in November but all the information is available on their website at: <https://thames-sro.co.uk/public-consultations/south-east-strategic-reservoir-option-sesro-statutory-consultation-2025/> You cannot click it from the paper copy in The Mouthpiece but just put 'SESRO' into your search engine and it will come up.

If you missed the exhibitions and would like a paper copy of the 129-page brochure, you can call 0800 033 6677 and they will send one per household free of charge.

IMPACT ON CULHAM

The impact on Culham is much greater than previously anticipated. The intake /outfall structure on the west bank of the river at Culham, connected to the reservoir by a 5km tunnel, bored underground, will involve:

- + An intake on the river bank, with tunnel entrance below water level
- + A vertical maintenance shaft at the intake/outfall structure (p.52)

+ “a floating barrier system in the river to stop floating material from being drawn in, and further safety measures such as guard piles, buoys and signage to prevent unauthorised access” (p.59). Due to this, the “navigable width of the River Thames will be permanently narrowed” (p. 109).

+ The outfall will need “a broad weir and spillway measuring 40 metres wide and 65 metres long”, with gravel or crushed stone needed to reinforce the banks on both sides of the river (p. 59)

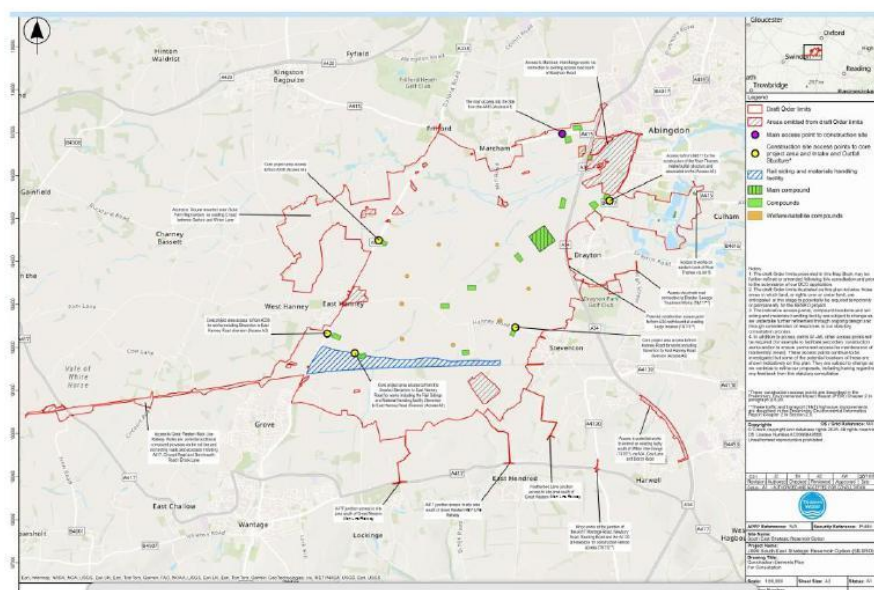
+ and instead of “a small building to house control equipment” noted in previous documents, we would now have about 6 or 7 buildings. When I have queried this, I have been informed by Thames Water’s community liaison officer by email that “we are showing separate buildings for the intake and outfall. These buildings would house control equipment, mechanical equipment, air cleaner, and an electrical generator”. When I have questioned this at the exhibition saying that this is not a ‘small building’, the answer was “it’s small relative to the other reservoir buildings”....

+ access roads (plural) to these buildings.

+ not mentioned in the brochure is the security fencing around all these buildings.

+ On the eastern bank (our side, i.e. the Thames National Trail), the Environment Agency have told Thames Water that to compensate for all the building work and loss of floodplain on the west bank they need to construct a ‘berm’ on the eastern bank (our side): “on the eastern bank, a lowered area of land (known as a berm) would be created to provide extra flood capacity. This area would extend for about 500 metres and be up to 90 metres wide, with ground level lowered by around 2 metres.” (p. 60).

+ And to access the eastern bank to do this work, which would take 6-8 months, during which time the Thames National Trail will be diverted, they will need a compound in the field to park vehicles, with ‘facilities’, and an access road from The Burycroft, likely involving a new roundabout at the junction of the A415 and The Burycroft, as you can see from the land grab map:



The sketch of the intake/outfall structures they have provided (p.60) doesn't show the **security fencing** and all the metal and construction chaos. Nor does it have any marker to show where the intake/outfall structures actually would be, so I have attached a Gmaps image with a pin. It is just adjacent to the Jubilee spur of the Wilts-Berks canal.



- 1 Intake
- 2 Outfall
- 3 Protective pile barrier
- 4 Crane pad
- 5 Thames Path National Trail
- 6 Berm

Below is a photo looking across at houses in Culham from the exact point of the structures:



And, not in the consultation brochure, but to be found on p. 49 of the Non-Technical Summary or in Appendix 9.4 Part 3 (p. 80, there is a CGI image of what the collection of buildings and intake/outfall structure would look like (though I am told not white).



Reminder of the facts:

- + Largest non-impounding reservoir in the country
- + will hold c 150 billion litres of water
- + 7 square miles. Approximately the size of Gatwick Airport. If anyone knows Farmoor Reservoir see the illustration below where Farmoor Reservoir has been superimposed over the proposed Abingdon Reservoir.

SESRO and Farmoor



- + embankments between 18 – 27 metres high (also 25 metres across the top and 100 metres across the base).
- + Some of the material will come from digging down to the clay level, but c. 1.5 million tons of aggregate will be brought in by train every day and night for 2 years.
- + will require re-routing the Hanney Road, relocating a solar farm, relocating the gas mains, sewage and other utilities, building a new access from Marcham, etc, etc.

+ will take 10 years to build and 2 years to fill. Operational 2040, Landscaping works to continue until 2043. So 18 years of chaos on our roads.

+ will cost between £5.5 – 7.5 billion (their estimate 'at 2022/23 prices'.... (p. 13) and cost £1.9 billion to operate over 65 years (again at 2022/23 prices)

DIRECT COST TO US

+ Thames Water told me they will be charging every Thames, Southern and Affinity customer an extra £5 a month for the reservoir. Another £60 on our water bills every year.

WAYS TO RESPOND

The ways to respond are outlined clearly in the online documents and brochure. I do urge you to ask for a brochure or look online at the documents.

And whether you support or object please do consider responding to the consultation requesting that Thames Water do whatever they can to minimise the footprint of the structures on the river bank at Culham, and to minimise the changes to our landscape on the walk along the Thames National Trail.

+ Fill in the feedback form available on the above link

+ email to SESRO@ipsos.com

+ write FOC to FREEPOST SESRO CONSULTATION

Deadline: 2359 hrs on Jan 13 2026.

Other News

Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum hosts exhibition of local students' art remembering the end of the Second World War and reflecting on the Holocaust.

- Exhibition of work by Abingdon & Witney College Level 3 Art & Design students.
- Commemorating 80 years since the end of the Second World War.
- Focuses on the story of Oxfordshire soldiers involved in the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.
- Part of a series of events and exhibitions supported by the family of Holocaust survivor Naomi Warren (nee Kaplan).



Soldiers of
Oxfordshire
Museum

Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock, is now hosting a powerful new exhibition of artwork by Level 3 Art & Design Students of Abingdon & Witney College. The exhibition, **open until 9 December 2025**, marks 80 years since the end of the war and since the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp by Allied forces.

The exhibition forms part of the museum's wider commemoration of the Holocaust and the Oxfordshire Yeomanry's role in liberating Bergen-Belsen.

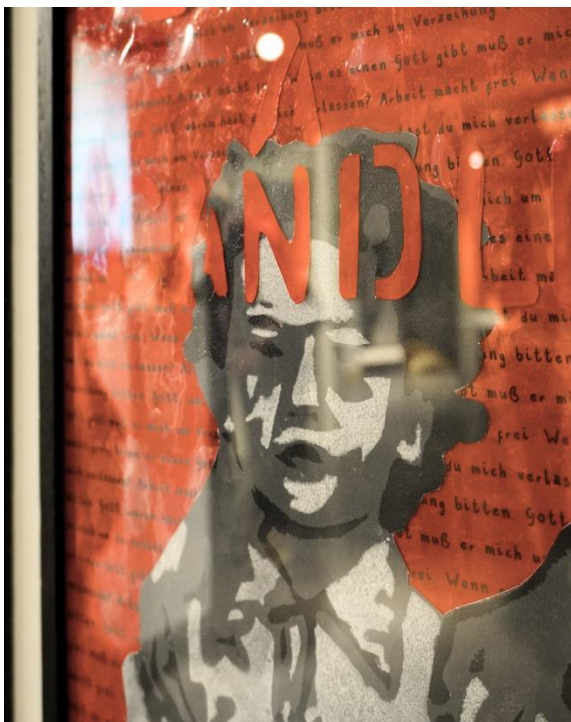
The project has seen students respond to deeply personal stories and artefacts from the museum's collection - among them, those of Holocaust survivor Naomi Kaplan and Oxfordshire Yeomanry soldier Arthur Tyler. Arthur was approached by Naomi and wrote letters to her family in the US, eventually leading to her reuniting with them, and the start of a new life in Houston, Texas.

Through creative interpretation, the students have produced thought-provoking works that explore memory, loss, hope, and resilience - offering a new generation's response to this historic event. Naomi dedicated much of her later life educating on the Holocaust and the dangers of discrimination, leaving a legacy which continues to this day through the Holocaust Museum Houston and now in the UK through Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum and projects like this one.

Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum would like to thank the Warren Family (Naomi's descendants) for their support of its arts and educational programmes.

Letters from Liberation stands as a poignant testament to the power of art to bridge generations, connect communities, and highlight history's most vital lessons.

Abingdon & Witney College explain, 'Our learners are encouraged to think, create, and collaborate like professional artists from their first day at College.'



£200,000 taken from criminals going to local crime prevention initiatives

I have recently announced the award of nearly £200,000 to 49 community and voluntary organisations to support crime prevention Initiatives. My Community Fund is always hugely over subscribed with 248 applications submitted for over £1.7m of funding, so unfortunately I know many will be disappointed.

The Community Fund provides support to voluntary and community groups that help to prevent crime and keep communities safe. Importantly money for the Community Fund comes from proceeds from the sale of items seized from criminals that cannot be returned to their rightful owners and court orders. Making criminals pay, rather than the cash coming from taxpayers.

I'm delighted that we are able to take money away from criminals and use it in a positive way, to support many of our hard-working communities and voluntary organisations in the Thames Valley to reduce crime further.

In total there are 49 schemes funded across the whole of Thames Valley. To a flavour of the types of projects supported, here are a few of the local applications that were successful...

- Bright Futures Oxfordshire, Youth mentoring scheme - £5,000.00
- Didcot and Wallingford Didcot TRAIN, Inspiring young people - £6,000.00
- Improving Road Safety in Long Wittenham - £5,700.00
- Sandford-on-Thames Road Safety Initiative - £3,300.00
- Gloves Not Gangs, Spartans Boxing Club, Abingdon - £4,000.00
- Sweatbox Youth Work, Wantage - £5,000.00
- Abingdon Damascus Youth, The Gazebo Project - £4,000.00
- CCTV at Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall - £1,500.00
- Fraud and Scam Awareness, Vale Community Impact - £5,000.00

Successful recipients will attend a presentation event with members of the judiciary and Chief Constable in November.

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Please send contributions for the February 2026 issue of The Mouthpiece by **January 15th** to:
generalmouthpiece@gmail.com

The Mouthpiece Team

We always welcome new volunteers to join the team whether you enjoy editing, marketing or distribution – please contact Anne or Gordon directly if you are interested in joining us



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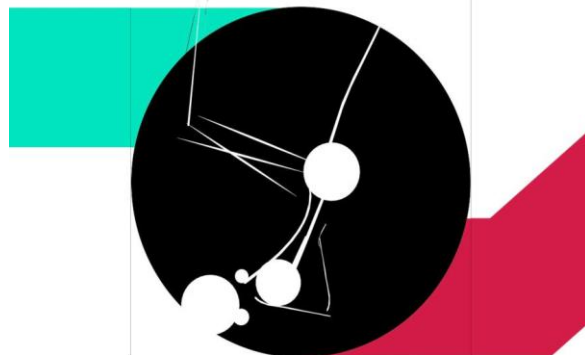
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