

Cherwell District Council - July 2026

Heyford and J10 Major Developments - initial stakeholder meeting

The first meeting was recently held and set the groundwork for how OCC, CDC, parish councils and other organisations could work together to look at the cumulative impact of the developments around Bicester and Heyford.

I'll keep you in the loop on meeting dates and agendas.

Designation

Cherwell District Council has been designated by the Secretary of State (SoS) under Section 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in relation to its handling of major planning applications.

This designation took effect from 15 June 2026 and will remain in place until it is formally withdrawn.

What this means:

The designation relates specifically to applications for major development (for example, larger housing schemes or commercial developments).

While the Council will continue to determine planning applications as normal, the designation introduces an additional option for applicants:

- Applicants for major development can continue to apply to Cherwell District Council, or
- They can choose to apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) for a decision.

This does not remove the Council's planning powers, but it does provide an alternative route for determining certain types of application.

For applicants:

If you are considering submitting a major planning application, you should review the [Government's guidance](#) on how to apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate under Section 62A.

Applicants may wish to seek their own professional advice before deciding which route to take.

Link to the official notice

www.gov.uk/government/publications/cherwell-district-council-notice-of-designation

Email sent to all councillors on behalf of Ian Boll, Executive Director Place and Regeneration

Dear Councillors

I am writing to notify you that government has today designated Cherwell District Council under section 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in respect of quality of decision-making for major planning applications.

The designation means the council no longer has exclusive decision-making powers in respect of major applications. Applicants can now choose to submit their application to the Council or go directly to the Planning Inspectorate for determination.

The designation is based on performance data from planning appeals for major developments for the period April 2023 to March 2025. Just over 11% of those decisions were overturned at appeal for that period, which is just above the government's threshold of 10%.

Since the 2023 to 2025 monitoring period, the council has been working with the Planning Advisory Service to improve performance, increase capacity, and strengthen governance, and has made significant improvements to the quality of decision-making for major developments.

These improvements are already having a positive impact. Our current performance figures indicate that major applications decisions are now within the government's thresholds for the coming year, demonstrating that the Council has been taking this matter seriously and acting positively to address it.

We will continue working with PAS and MHCLG, to ensure further improvement and to do everything we can to get the designation removed as soon as possible.

Please let me know if you have any queries about this.

Ian

Ian Boll
Executive Director Place & Regeneration, Cherwell District Council

The experience of designation

There are a few planning officers at CDC who have worked in designated councils and their previous experience (under a different government and different circumstances) is that most applicants continued to submit applications to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) rather than Planning Inspectorate (PINS).

If an applicant does go straight to PINS, then CDC will not receive the planning application fees but still have to do the preliminary work including Section 106 and then the entire, complete application goes to PINS.

The applicant's risk is that they lose the ability to appeal.

Puy du Fou and Dorchester Group will make their own determination on their best route forward.

How does CDC extract itself from designation?

CDC can submit a quarterly report and request for reconsideration. If the planning team and planning committee perform as desired then the SoS may bring us out of designation.

What does this mean for Neighbourhood Plans?

No officer at CDC is offering a clear view as the reality will only be discovered when PINS or the SoS make a determination at some future appeal hearing. Nothing has changed and yet everything is changing is the planning world.

On a brighter note, Bloxham Neighbourhood plan (as modified by the inspector) made it through CDC Executive last night and will now go to referendum.

Message from Paul Sekington to Parish and Town Councils

As a Town or Parish Council within Cherwell District, I wanted to provide some helpful context following the recent designation of the Council in relation to major planning applications -see [here](#)- and explain what this means for you and your important role in the planning process.

Firstly, I want to reassure you that Cherwell District Council remains the Local Planning Authority for the district and continues to determine planning applications in the normal way. The recent designation does not remove the Council's planning powers. What it does mean is that applicants submitting major planning applications now have a choice: they can either continue to submit their application to Cherwell District Council (CDC) or submit it directly to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) for determination under the Section 62A process.

For applications submitted to CDC, there is no change to the planning process, consultation arrangements, or the role of Town and Parish Councils.

However, where an applicant chooses to submit a major application directly to the Planning Inspectorate, there are some differences that it is useful to be aware of.

What Will Change?

For Section 62A applications, the Planning Inspectorate becomes the decision-maker rather than CDC. The Planning Inspectorate will undertake the formal consultation process and publish the application documents on its website. [\[gov.uk\]](https://www.gov.uk)

However, Cherwell District Council still has an important role in the process and remains heavily involved. The Council is required to provide the Planning Inspectorate with:

- Relevant planning policy context and local guidance.
- Planning history and site constraints.
- Responses from internal specialists and consultees.

- A professional assessment of the application.
- A recommendation on whether planning permission should be granted or refused.
- Recommended planning conditions and planning obligations.

In many respects, the Council will still undertake much of the same assessment work that it would for an application determined locally.

What Does This Mean for Parish Councils?

Town and Parish Councils remain a critically important part of the planning process.

The Government's guidance specifically recognises the need for local community involvement and requires local authorities to provide details of Parish Councils and community stakeholders to the Planning Inspectorate as part of the process.

For applications submitted directly to the Planning Inspectorate:

- You may receive consultation notifications from the Planning Inspectorate rather than CDC.
- Any representations should be submitted directly to the Planning Inspectorate using the details provided in the consultation.
- Consultation periods will usually be 21 days and responses received after the deadline may not be taken into account. [\[gov.uk\]](https://www.gov.uk)

Importantly, the views of Town and Parish Councils will continue to carry significant weight as local representatives with detailed knowledge of their communities, local infrastructure, neighbourhood issues and community priorities.

Whether an application is determined by CDC or PINS, we would strongly encourage Parish Councils to continue to provide clear, evidence-based comments on planning applications and to do so within the consultation period wherever possible.

Publicity and Community Engagement

A concern some Parish Councils may have is whether local residents will still be informed about applications that are submitted directly to the Planning Inspectorate. I would like to reassure you that local publicity arrangements remain in place. Cherwell District Council continues to be responsible for:

- Displaying site notices where required.
- Neighbour notification where required.
- Undertaking other statutory notification requirements.
- Carrying out additional consultation where appropriate. [\[gov.uk\]](https://www.gov.uk)

The Planning Inspectorate also publishes all Section 62A application documents online and undertakes the statutory consultation process. This means that local communities will still have opportunities to view proposals and make representations.

How Parish Councils Can Help

As you will appreciate, applicants now have a choice as to whether they submit major applications to CDC or directly to the Planning Inspectorate. Our ambition is to encourage applicants to continue working with Cherwell District Council wherever possible. We firmly believe that applications are best determined locally because it enables:

- Greater input from local communities.
- Stronger engagement with Town and Parish Councils.
- Better understanding of local circumstances and issues.
- Democratic accountability through local decision-making.
- Collaboration between applicants, consultees and planning officers to improve schemes before decisions are made.

A key part of this is demonstrating that the local planning process works effectively.

Your timely responses to consultations play an important role in helping us achieve this. Prompt engagement helps us:

- Determine applications more efficiently.
- Meet statutory timescales.
- Provide applicants with confidence in the local planning process.
- Ensure local knowledge and community concerns are fully understood.
- Retain planning fee income within the district, supporting continued investment in planning services and service improvements.

Most importantly, timely Parish Council responses help ensure that local views are heard and considered at the earliest possible stage of the process, whether an application is determined by CDC or by the Planning Inspectorate.

Moving Forward

We are actively working with MHCLG and PAS to address the designation and our performance has already started to improve. Our focus remains on delivering a proactive, collaborative and high-quality planning service that works closely with Town and Parish Councils, communities and applicants.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the invaluable role that Town and Parish Councils play in the planning process. Your local knowledge, community insight and constructive engagement are fundamental to achieving good planning outcomes across Cherwell.

If you have any questions regarding the designation or the Section 62A process, please do not hesitate to contact the Development Management Team.

Kind regards,

Paul Seckington

Devolution

Email sent on behalf of Cllr Lesley McLean, Leader of the Council

I am writing to update you on the position regarding the proposed Thames Valley Foundation Strategic Authority (FSA).

As you will be aware, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has made it clear that progression to an FSA requires consensus from all Council Leaders across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Swindon on the proposed geography.

While views differed on the way forward on the Government proposal, both Cherwell and West Oxfordshire remain supportive of the benefits a Foundation Strategic Authority could hold for our districts. It would bring increased investment and provide that strategic scale to proactively tackle key issues like economic growth, transport, net zero and skills, and would support the ambitions we jointly hold as councils to improve our districts.

With significant change coming imminently through Local Government Reorganisation, we will be focusing on making sure that process delivers for our residents and we are ready to revisit the strategic authority conversation in future when it is right for our area.

Kind Regards,
Lesley

Quite what happens next remains to be decided.

I hope that we have some say and control over these events and HM Gov don't simply impose a structure upon us.

Cllr David Rogers
Cherwell District Council