

# Annual Report 2025-26

Cllr Sarah James, Hendreds Ward

During the last year I have followed up a wide range of casework raised by residents and Parish Councils in the ward. Whilst some of this is confidential in nature, some have been more visible in the community.

The year began with some success as the new path to St Blaise Primary School was completed in Milton Heights. The path was delivered by Milton Parish Council across VWHDC land. I had been involved in conversations with officers at Vale Council to try to speed up the slow process of getting a legal agreement to put the path on the land, to cap the legal costs to be passed on to the Parish Council, and to resolve the clearance of asbestos that was found in the site when work began. Following the path completion I also got Vale to fix a boundary fence that had failed.

After trees were cut without permission on housing association land in East Hendred, I followed up the incident with residents and made sure that the appropriate team in the housing association was aware so that they could take action.

Early morning work at the Greensands site in East Hendred breached the planning condition for construction working hours. I reported this to planning enforcement and eventually managed to speak to someone at Sovereign Network Group about the Greensands site. The work was short-lived and carried out by Mears who are no longer involved in the site. SNG assured me that it would not happen again.

Construction traffic parking next to the Greencore site on Trenchard Avenue in Milton Heights is causing congestion and this is another example of a breach of a planning condition. I have raised the issue with Greencore directly and reported it to enforcement.

Residents often raise planning concerns with me and I make sure to explain the process so that residents' views can be heard. The planning application at Mather House, East Hendred for a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) has caused particular concern. The plans submitted are for 18 bedrooms and up to 32 residents with shared facilities. Mather House has in parallel applied for and been granted a licence to operate a 6 person HMO. This application is still under consideration. I have spoken multiple times with the planning officer who has a good understanding of the community's concerns. I have called the application into Planning Committee.

As well as casework I have responded to many consultations that impact our area. I have expended a lot of effort on reservoir consultations in particular. I visited the clay compaction trial in May last year and used that opportunity to raise concerns about the safety of the reservoir design and emergency drawdown, and impacts on local infrastructure.

From November 2025 to January 2026, we saw the statutory consultation ahead of the application for a Development Consent Order (DCO). The new plans revealed were shocking for Hendreds Ward. The land take for the entire reservoir project has more than doubled, with much of the new land affected falling in Hendreds ward. In addition, a substantial portion of the construction traffic is now routed through our area, along the A4130 and the A417 and through Wantage and Grove. I visited many people in or close to the new project boundary to make sure that they had been notified by Thames Water about the consultation and knew that the site had been expanded. Not everyone had been contacted. I prompted the Oxford Mail to run an article early on in the consultation which highlighted the extra land impacted in the plans and I know this did alert some people that they were more directly affected than they had previously realised. I liaised with council officers to make sure that Hendreds residents views were considered in their response to the consultation, and I also responded to the consultation myself with a focus on the impacts for Hendreds ward.

In May 2025 I responded to the consultation on Southern Water's Resource Management Plan, specifically on the plans for a transfer pipeline through Hendreds Ward from the reservoir to Southern Water's network.

I have also with my political group written to Government and regulators about the reservoir, and I have seconded two motions in Council related to the reservoir in the last year.

I have also used Council motions to seek action and a public stance from Vale Council on a number of other issues in the last year. These include the impact of Government planning changes on nature protection; calling for greater support for community energy and community benefits from large scale energy projects; calling on Government to deliver the Great Western Park Health Centre and to reconsider the use of private finance in health centre delivery, which has caused further delays to this project.

At the February Council Budget meeting I proposed a successful budget amendment to include an additional sum of £22,500 as a one-off growth bid in this financial year to support the administration of the Disabled Facilities Grant. This unlocks £2m of previous underspend on this grant so that it can finally go to helping residents adapt their homes to meet their health needs. Disabled Facilities Grants are targeted help that has a huge impact on people's lives when they need help most, so I am particularly proud of this.