

District Councillor Update for Hendreds Ward – July 2026

Clr Sarah James

Sarah's latest news in Hendreds Ward

I continue to support residents with issues they bring to me. Residents and Parish Councils are always welcome to get in touch on Sarah.James1@whitehorsedc.gov.uk or 07811 085661 (WhatsApp or phone).

Enforcement follow up construction related parking in Milton Heights

Construction traffic parking on Trenchard Avenue next to the Greencore development in Milton Heights was causing congestion affecting access for residents and to the primary school. I found that the planning permission included clear conditions on construction site access and parking that were not being followed and passed this on to the Planning Enforcement team at Vale of White Horse District Council.

Enforcement found that there had been a breach of the conditions and they have contacted Greencore. Greencore have provided two additional parking areas for construction vehicles and have said that their site team has reminded all staff, contractors and delivery companies of the expectations, including considerate behaviour towards neighbouring residents and parking in signed areas.

It sounds as though the situation is much improved. I am happy to follow this up again if that changes, please just let me know.

Ancient trees and a bat filled woodland in the reservoir site

On 14th June I joined a guided nature walk near Drayton on part of the planned reservoir site. The walk was organised by Group Against Reservoir Development (GARD) and led by Julian Parfitt, an expert volunteer with GARD and with the Woodland Trust who has spent hundreds of hours logging ancient and veteran trees and other wildlife across the huge site. We met ancient trees and heard about a barn owl that is skilled in catching bats, amongst other wild delights.

Knowing what is there is important to a fair assessment of whether the reservoir project should get permission. It also affects what habitats must be protected or replaced if it

does go ahead. Thames Water plans to use land south of the railway line, including in the north part of West Hendred Parish, for species relocation. Thames Water have relied on desktop assessments and survey short cuts which underplay the wildlife and habitats on the site. Julian and GARD have been working tirelessly to make sure the true picture is published.

You can find out more about the proposed reservoir from Thames Water at <https://thames-sro.co.uk/whitehorsesreservoir> and from GARD at <https://groupagainstreervoirdevelopment.org/> with GARD's proposed alternatives to ensure our water supply.

National Emergency Briefing

The National Emergency Briefing is a 50-minute film summarising for the public an event held in Westminster last November. Ten of the UK's leading experts briefed an invited audience of over 1,200 politicians and leaders from business, culture, faith, sport and the media on the implications of climate and nature breakdown for health, food systems, national security and the economy.

The film is being shown for free in community screenings all over the UK, and I was pleased to be invited to one in Charney Bassett Hall on 24th June (during a red heatwave alert).

It's sobering viewing, and to my mind a real holding of account to all elected representatives, including myself. I'd encourage others to seek it out or even organise a local viewing. The website <https://www.nebriefing.org/> has information on planned screenings and how to hold one. Together with Cllr Hannah Griffin who was also in the audience in Charney Bassett, I am trying to arrange a screening for Vale Councillors.

Local Government Reorganisation

There has still been no Government announcement on the form that Local Government Reorganisation to form unitary councils will take in Oxfordshire. We are still expecting an announcement by 16th July. The expected timeline is:

- Announcement by 16th July.
- Structural Changes Order in November 2026 – this is the legislation that creates the new council/councils and abolishes the current councils.
- Election of new councillors to a shadow unitary council May 2027.
- Vesting day 1st April 2028 – the unitary council takes over and the old councils cease to exist.

All the Oxfordshire Councils and West Berkshire Council are already actively working together to share data and create structures to carry out the reorganisation in whatever form it takes.

Spatial Development Strategy

Regions will have to create Spatial Development Strategies (SDS) by July 2029. These will be high-level regional growth, nature recovery and infrastructure plans with a 30-year planning horizon. Local Plans will continue and will still deal with specific housing allocations and look at a 10-year planning horizon as before. Local Plans will need to align with the local SDS and also with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as they do now.

The Government will decide the geography and has indicated that we will likely be in a Thames Valley SDS made up of Swindon, Oxfordshire, Berkshire and (probably) Buckinghamshire. The order creating the Thames Valley Strategic Planning Board is expected in Autumn 2026. Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Swindon councils are already working in partnership to prepare for the SDS.

Joint Local Plans 1 and 2

Vale of White Horse District Council's Joint Local Plan 1 has its next stage of examination from 7th July to 9th July at Abbey House, Abingdon with more details on this website - <https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/joint-local-plan-2041-examination/> .

New planning law requires Vale of White Horse District Council to start a new Local Plan under a new 30-month process. The Council voted to make this also a Joint Local Plan with South Oxfordshire District Council. Both councils must twin track the new JLP2 alongside the JLP1 that is currently under examination.

In the vote at Council to go ahead with JLP2 I abstained and spoke against the requirement from Government to start an expensive and resource intensive 30-month Local Plan process when we are to be abolished in 21 months' time. Naturally the administration made sure that starting a new plan passed as it is a legal obligation. However, I felt it was right as an opposition member to voice the frustration that I know many councillors felt at this use of Council resources when so much time and effort is already going into Local Government Reorganisation.

Land charges and mapping changes

The Council updated its planning systems earlier in the year, and more recently has been replacing the system for Land Charges. This has significantly overrun with no access to Land Charges in the meantime. Do contact me if this is creating a problem for you.

Next on the to-do list is replacing the mapping system. The current mapping system was last updated on Friday 10 April. The latest information is that during the system changeover, the old maps will remain available, but no updates will be made.

I have am chasing an overdue response on where the current (old) mapping system is to be found. (I used to get to it from the planning search tools and these have changed.) I am also chasing an answer on whether the new system will keep the capability to return a historic list of planning items for a location.

The page with planning, land charge and mapping system updates is here - <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/uncategorised/important-changes-to-planning-and-land-charging-services/>

Signposting for Parish Councillors and Residents:

Cost of Living Help

[Cost of living advice and support from Vale of White Horse District Council.](#)

This page summarises help from the district council and other sources.

The Community Hub can also point people to a range of help:

- Tel: 01235 422600
- Email: communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk

Help with energy bills

Better Housing Better Health is a free service for Oxfordshire residents to help you keep warm and save money on energy bills. Now also offering advice on keeping cool in summer. - [Better Housing Better Health – free energy and heating advice](#) or ring 0800 107 0044.

Rural Services Network's Latest Funding Digest

A digest of funding opportunities which may be useful to rural councils and community groups. This is updated every month. [Rural Services Network – monthly rural funding digest.](#)