

District Councillor Update for Hendreds Ward – August 2026

Cllr 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).

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government has confirmed that councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire will be reorganised into 3 unitary councils following the proposal put forward by Oxford City Council. There is more information on the 3 councils on this website - [3Councils](#) .

This is the most complex reorganisation model on the table as all existing services provided by Oxfordshire County Council or Vale of White Horse District Council will have to transfer to be delivered by 2 or 3 new councils and there will be boundary changes. Some parishes that are currently in Vale of White Horse will be in Greater Oxford after reorganisation. Most parishes, all the rest, will be in Ridgeway. All of Hendreds Ward will be in the new Ridgeway authority.

The expected timeline remains elections to the new shadow unitary councils in May 2027 with vesting day on 1st April 2028. Until vesting day services will be run by the existing councils, when they will pass to the new councils and the current councils will cease to exist.

Joint Local Plan 2

As I reported last month, despite having a local plan at examination and the short remaining time for the Vale of White Horse Council, the Council is starting the process of developing a new local plan because it is obliged to. It is a second joint plan with South Oxfordshire and so is known as JLP2 for short.

There is more information, including the outline timetable, at [Joint Local Plan 2045 \(JLP2\) - South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council](#) . First up is a scoping consultation which will seek views on what the new plan should contain and how the councils will approach future engagement on the plan. This will run from Tuesday 8th September to Tuesday 29th September.

When Vale Council ends it is likely that the new Ridgeway authority will make use of any work so far on local plans that cover their council area so despite the change of councils this local plan will be as important to engage with as always. It will have a real impact on future planning decisions.

Council confirms support for trans residents

At our full council meeting in July Greens proposed an important motion in response to new statutory guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) which affects service providers, including the councils, who are operating single-sex services or spaces. Vale council has a longstanding commitment to equality and inclusion, including a 2021 resolution to support trans rights. Our Liberal Democrat colleagues offered their support and seconded the motion.

The motion recognised that organisations, groups and businesses are left with a legal minefield and significant expenses if they wish to continue being inclusive. Gender reassignment remains a protected characteristic under the Equality Act. The guidance creates huge uncertainty and has a real-life impact. It will cause real harm to trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people who have accessed inclusive spaces and services for years with no issue.

The motion, which was unanimously supported at Vale Council, recognises that the council has an obligation to comply with the law in its provision of services. It makes it clear that the council will do all it can within the law to continue to create a safe environment for transgender and non-binary residents, staff and visitors to access essential services and public spaces. The motion's intent is to show residents that we are still committed to inclusion, equality and the safety of our trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming residents.

The council's news item on the motion is available here - [Councils reaffirm commitment to being welcoming and inclusive organisations for all - Vale of White Horse District Council](#) .

Speaking up on transport infrastructure for Science Vale

Oxfordshire County Council is spending £14.5 million from business rates raised in Science Vale towards the cost of reopening the Cowley Branch Line railway in Oxford to passengers. I responded to a request for comment from the Oxford Mail.

“I’m very worried that millions of pounds of business rates from Enterprise Zones in my area have been redirected to rail development in Oxford. The Enterprise Zones and the wider Science Vale bring exciting opportunities and interesting jobs, but also high housing and population growth to this rural area. We have serious congestion and transport issues locally that the Cowley Branch line will do nothing to fix. What Science Vale desperately needs is real progress on a Wantage and Grove station. That actually

would get traffic off the A34. I have no confidence that we will recoup these funds for our area, especially since we have just learned that we will shortly be in different council areas.”

“I’m also concerned that this decision should not delay funding for the long-overdue cycle bridge over the A34 from Milton Heights. The village of Milton Heights has more than doubled in size in just a few years, but is left cut-off by the A34 from neighbouring Enterprise Zones and high-quality jobs in Milton Park. This funding is needed to link new homes and jobs in Science Vale. It’s not spare cash to be spent elsewhere.”

Speaking up on waste vehicle purchasing policy

Vale of White Horse District Council's Cabinet approved a Waste and Street Cleansing Vehicle Selection and Procurement Policy, joint with South Oxfordshire recently. This is a vital policy for the Councils because it is a very large procurement, because it affects a key service that all residents use, and because that service is now the largest part of the Councils' carbon emissions.

I spoke at a meeting of Joint Scrutiny Committee that reviewed the decision in June, and then again at South Oxfordshire's Cabinet meeting on 2nd July, sending the same statement in advance to Vale’s Cabinet as unfortunately I was not available for their meeting.

Some improvements were made to the policy following input from Joint Scrutiny Committee, but I remain concerned that it is timid in its ambition to move towards electrifying as much of the fleet as practicable and affordable, with not enough emphasis on reducing carbon emissions despite the stated priorities and targets of the Council Plan. Consideration is fully on upfront capital costs and not the lifetime costs of buying and then running the vehicles. The lack of climate leadership was disappointing.

As I said to the Cabinets, the data is clear that a majority of people in the UK say that climate change is an important issue for them and they want to see action. For people frightened by our worsening climate anxiety is compounded if they cannot see anyone taking leadership or with a plan for what to do. That’s why the councils’ targets are so important. That’s why being seen to have and to follow a plan to meet those targets is so important.

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.](#)