

Report to Woolhampton Parish Council

District Councillor: Chris Read, Member of West Berkshire Council for Bucklebury Ward

Date: 20-07-2026

Full Council – 15th October

Extraordinary Executive Meeting – 23rd July

Consultations

- Draft All-Age Autism Strategy 2026-2029 Ends on 2026-08-23
 - To support the National Strategy, the Autism Partnership Board decided that the Council's local document should be an All-Age Strategy with the aim of improving the lives of autistic people and their families and carers in West Berkshire. It would also align with local policies, including the West Berkshire Council Strategy 2023-2027 and the West Berkshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029. The Council's draft strategy sets out the aims, vision, and priorities for improving the lives of autistic people. The Care Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities in England to prioritise wellbeing, prevention of need, and the promotion of independent living for autistic people.

Planning

New West Berkshire Local Plan

Preparation of a new Local Plan for West Berkshire.

A local plan sets out a vision and framework for the future development of an area, with policies used to decide planning applications.

The new WBLP will set out the spatial vision and strategic objectives for the future development of the District of West Berkshire over the Plan period. It will contain policies and site allocations designed / formulated to achieve the vision and a framework for monitoring and implementation. When adopted, it will form part of the Development Plan for West Berkshire and will replace the policies contained in the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041.

Planning Enforcement Plan

Approved on 12th June 2026, a new Planning Enforcement Plan institutes a new priority system to investigate planning breaches within two working days for urgent cases, giving residents clearer channels for reporting unauthorised developments

Devolution of West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council has been informed that a new Ridgeway Council will be formed from April 2028.

The new council will bring together West Berkshire along with most of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts in one new unitary authority - delivering better services and value for money for residents. It's part of a wider programme of reorganisation across Oxfordshire and West

Berkshire which will see seven existing councils replaced by three new unitary councils from 1 April 2028.

The new councils will be:

- Ridgeway Council - covering West Berkshire and most of the existing South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts.
- Northern Oxfordshire Council - covering most of the existing Cherwell and West Oxfordshire districts.
- Greater Oxford Council - covering Oxford and its immediate surroundings.

West Berkshire Council has consistently supported the creation of a Ridgeway Council and has worked closely with South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse to develop the proposal. The council believes the decision will create a stronger, more resilient authority that is better placed to protect and improve local services, attract investment and meet the challenges of the future.

The proposal was shaped through extensive engagement with residents, businesses and local stakeholders. Throughout that process, West Berkshire Council argued that a Ridgeway Council would bring together communities with strong existing links while creating a council with the scale, capacity and resilience needed to deliver excellent public services for generations to come.

A joint proposal for Ridgeway Council and Northern Oxfordshire councils (including Oxford City) was submitted by West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire councils and was one of three proposals submitted.

The government has instead opted for a three-council model of reorganisation, keeping an expanded Oxford City council separate rather than a part of a Northern Oxfordshire Council. While it means a slightly smaller geographical footprint for Ridgeway Council, it will nevertheless create a stronger, more resilient council that is better placed to protect and improve local services, attract investment and meet the challenges of the future.

No changes to the border with Reading were proposed - a move welcomed by West Berkshire Council following a campaign by Reading Borough Council to move three Tilehurst wards out of West Berkshire and under its control.

Highways

Government Director General visits West Berkshire to see award-winning highways works

West Berkshire Council and Volker Highways welcomed senior representatives from the Department for Transport (DfT) end of June to learn more about the council's successful approach to maintaining its road network and delivering active travel improvements across the district.

Antonia Williams, Director General of the Road Transport Group, and Becky Morrison, Director of Roads Strategy, met with councillors, officers and our highways contractor, Volker Highways, to see first-hand the council's ongoing investment in maintaining and improving the local road network.

During the visit, council representatives highlighted the innovative approaches being used to keep roads in good condition, maximise value for money and ensure residents can travel safely and efficiently. Discussions also focused on the council's active travel programme, which is helping to create safer and more accessible routes for walking, wheeling and cycling.

The visit follows recognition of West Berkshire's strong performance in highway maintenance, including achieving a 'green' rating for its highway maintenance activities. This rating reflects the council's commitment to delivering high standards of asset management, planning and investment in the local highway network.

Council selects Marlborough Highways as preferred partner for highways contract

West Berkshire Council has appointed Marlborough Highways to deliver highways maintenance services from 2026, helping keep roads safe and reliable while delivering value for money.

Following a competitive procurement process, Marlborough Highways has been awarded the Council's £150 million Highways Term Maintenance Contract, which will run from 2026 to 2033 (with a three-year extension clause).

The new contract will cover the maintenance and improvement of roads, footways, drainage, streetlighting and other highway assets across West Berkshire, supporting residents with safer journeys and a better maintained network.

The contractor was selected after a robust evaluation of quality, price and social value. Marlborough Highways achieved the highest overall score, offering a strong balance of service delivery, affordability and long-term benefits for the district.

The new arrangement is designed to improve how highway services are delivered, with a focus on efficiency, innovation and customer experience. This includes more durable pothole repairs, smarter planning of works and reducing repeat visits by completing more tasks in a single visit.

The new contract also delivers strong environmental benefits and supports the Council's ambition to reach Net Zero. Marlborough Highways has committed to a carbon-neutral service from day one, alongside a wide range of measures to reduce emissions, minimise waste and enhance biodiversity through more sustainable working practices. This includes greener fleet operations, more efficient material use and local sourcing, as well as initiatives expected to save around 525 tonnes of CO₂ and significantly reduce waste through reuse and recycling.

The approach also focuses on improving energy efficiency across equipment and operations, embedding sustainable procurement across the supply chain, and introducing more environmentally sensitive maintenance practices for verges, vegetation and drainage.

Alongside these environmental gains, the contract introduces a new Parish Watch initiative, giving town and parish councils a more direct route to access maintenance services and raise local issues, helping to improve responsiveness and strengthen connections with communities across West Berkshire.

In addition, the contract will deliver significant benefits for the local economy, with around £68 million in social value commitments, including investment in local businesses, job creation and skills development opportunities for residents.

The Council and contractor will work closely together in a collaborative 'one team' approach, focusing on continuous improvement and clear communication with residents.

Youth

Recruitment opens for West Berkshire's new Youth Council

West Berkshire Council, in partnership with Berkshire Youth, is inviting young people to apply to become members of the new West Berkshire Youth Council.

The opening of applications marks the next exciting step in delivering plans announced in December 2025 to establish a Youth Council and a network of Youth Forums across the district. Working together, West Berkshire Council and Berkshire Youth are creating opportunities for young people to have a stronger voice in local decision-making and play an active role in shaping the future of their communities.

Applications for the Youth Council open on Monday 6 July and **close on Friday 14 August**, giving young people aged 12-17 the opportunity to represent their peers and influence decisions that affect young people across West Berkshire.

The Youth Council is a major step forward in empowering young people to shape the future of the district. Run by young people, for young people, it will provide a platform to discuss the issues that matter most, engage directly with councillors and council officers, and help influence policies, services and projects for the benefit of young residents.

The initiative delivers on a key priority within the Council Strategy to ensure young people have a meaningful voice in local governance.

To help launch the initiative, West Berkshire Council and Berkshire Youth are hosting the first Youth Forum on Wednesday 15 July 2026, from 4:30pm to 6:00pm at the Waterside Centre, Newbury.

Open to all young people across West Berkshire, the forum is an opportunity to share ideas, discuss the issues that matter most, and help shape the future direction of the Youth Council in a comfortable space. Whether you're interested in becoming a Youth Council member or simply want your voice to be heard, everyone is welcome. You'll also have the chance to meet the team behind the initiative, ask questions and find out more about how to get involved.

Business

West Berkshire Council invites businesses to inaugural Business Expo at Shaw House

Local businesses are invited to connect and collaborate at a new West Berkshire Business Expo this September, bringing support, networking and opportunities together in one place.

West Berkshire Council, in partnership with the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, will host the inaugural West Berkshire Business Expo on Thursday 10 September 2026 at Shaw House, Newbury.

The half-day event is designed to support small and medium-sized enterprises across the district by providing direct access to business support, council services and regional partners. It will bring together local organisations, public sector teams and the wider business community to explore opportunities for growth, collaboration and investment in West Berkshire.

Taking place from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, the Expo will include a flexible exhibition space showcasing local organisations and support providers, alongside a programme of targeted workshops covering planning, procurement and business development. Attendees will also have opportunities to engage directly with Council departments and build new commercial connections through dedicated networking sessions.

Business boost for local SMEs and VCSEs as Council commits to spending more with them

West Berkshire Council has approved a new Procurement Strategy, including its Think Local and Social Value approach, to help more local SMEs, VCSE organisations and community suppliers access Council opportunities. [Note a VCSE stands for Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise. It refers to purpose-driven organizations—such as charities, social enterprises, and community groups—that exist to achieve social or environmental objectives rather than to maximize shareholder profit. Any financial surplus is reinvested into their core mission.]

The strategy sets out how the Council will use its annual spend of around £200 million to deliver better value for residents, strengthen local supply chains, support the local economy and create wider benefits for West Berkshire communities.

At the heart of the approach is a commitment to Think Local: making procurement clearer, more accessible and more practical for small and medium-sized enterprises, voluntary and community organisations, charities, CICs, social enterprises and other local suppliers.

The Council wants to increase the proportion of spend with Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from 14 percent to 20 percent and grow opportunities for Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations. This means creating more chances for local firms and community suppliers to provide goods, works and services to the Council, while helping more public money stay in West Berkshire.

To help suppliers understand what the new strategy means in practice, the Council is hosting a free Meet the Buyer supplier day at Shaw House on Thursday 25 June, from 9.00am to 4.00pm.

- Hear what the new Procurement Strategy, Think Local approach and Social Value Strategy mean for suppliers
- Understand what the Council buys and where future opportunities may arise
- Learn how to find, register for and respond to tender opportunities
- Find out how social value can strengthen bids and support local community projects
- Meet Council representatives, procurement partners and industry speakers, including sessions on AI

The programme will include straightforward guidance on public sector procurement, opportunities to ask questions, one-to-one conversations, a dedicated afternoon session for social care providers and industry speakers covering topics such as AI and working with the wider public sector.

The Social Value Strategy is designed to make every pound spent work harder for West Berkshire. For larger contracts, at least 10 percent of the evaluation will focus on social value, giving suppliers the opportunity to show how their work can also support local jobs, skills, environmental improvements and community wellbeing.

As part of this, suppliers will be asked to contribute a percentage of contract revenue into a local grant pot. Not-for-profit organisations, CICs, community groups and charities will be able to apply for funding from the pot to support projects that benefit West Berkshire residents.

As always any questions or concerns on Council Services please contact me anytime.

Kind Regards

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