# Council Report for August 2026

## Written by your local Conservative team to keep you up to date.

## Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

# West Berkshire Council

## Council

There was no meeting of Council this month.

The next meeting is on 15 October.

## Executive

There was no meeting of the Executive this month.

The next meeting is on 24 September.

## Local Government Reorganisation

### *Ridgeway Confirmed*

West Berkshire Council welcomed an announcement 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.

### *The story so far*

Three proposals were presented to government in November 2025 by Oxfordshire and West Berkshire councils - for a single county unitary, two unitary councils and three unitary councils.

These councils have been working together since the start of the year to plan for any decision the government may make. This work has focused on ensuring services continue without disruption for residents and on delivering the benefits that unitary councils can offer.

Each of the proposals submitted included fully costed options for the government to consider.

The government ran a statutory consultation in February 2026, with local stakeholders, residents and businesses invited to have their say. The results of the consultation have been published today on the government's website.

Over the next two years, the existing councils will continue working together to prepare for the new arrangements, keeping people informed as plans develop ahead of April 2028.

The full details of the three-unitary proposal can be found on 3councils.org

## Education

### *Back to School*

As the new school year gets under way, West Berkshire families can find everything they need for the term in one place. From admissions and school transport to childcare, term dates and support services, the WBC website brings together a wealth of information to help parents and carers navigate the school year with confidence.

Parents and carers can find school term dates for the 2026/27 academic year, along with information about admissions, transport and childcare. Applications for secondary school places for September 2027 opened on 1 September, while applications for primary school places open on 12 September, giving families plenty of time to plan ahead.

Families can also find information about wraparound childcare and early years provision, helping parents balance work and family commitments before and after the school day. Details of available support, funding and local providers are available online.

If the journey to school is short enough, consider walking, wheeling or cycling where possible. Active travel can help reduce congestion around schools, improve road safety and provide a healthy start to the day. School Streets Schemes and Walking and Cycling to School pages give more details about this.

### *Better Learning Spaces*

Many pupils across West Berkshire will return to improved, more inclusive school facilities this term following a major programme of investment delivered over the summer holidays.

While classrooms stood empty, work was carried out across the district, including the creation of a new £828,000 early years facility at Thatcham Park, accessibility improvements at Brookfields Special School, and specialist early years SEND accommodation at Spurcroft Primary School. New security fencing has also been installed at Victoria Park Nursery, while Burghfield St Mary's School is benefiting from a replacement hall floor.

Meanwhile, construction continues on a modern two-storey teaching building at Falkland Primary School (pictured), which is expected to welcome pupils in October. Plans are also progressing to expand specialist provision at Westwood Farm Infant and Junior School and Brookfields Special School, helping to meet growing demand for additional support places.

This investment is creating safe, modern and inclusive learning environments, ensuring more children and young people across West Berkshire have the facilities they need to learn, grow and thrive.

## Transport

### *Robin Hood Roundabout*

Major improvement works at Robin Hood roundabout in Newbury have now been completed.

The £1 million project, funded through developer contributions, included widening part of the roundabout to create an additional lane for traffic travelling towards Shaw and the A4 Thatcham, as well as resurfacing the entire junction. The scheme also included upgrades to traffic signals, new road markings and vegetation clearance to improve visibility.

As one of the busiest junctions in West Berkshire, Robin Hood roundabout plays a vital role in connecting Newbury, Thatcham and surrounding communities. These improvements will help keep traffic moving more efficiently and support future growth in the area.

While West Berkshire's roads were rated Green by the Department for Transport earlier this year, WBC remain committed to improving roads and transport infrastructure across the district.

### *Three Firs*

A new pedestrian crossing has been created at Three Firs roundabout in Burghfield Common making it easier and safer for people to walk between Burghfield Common and Mortimer.

The scheme includes new staggered dropped crossings with a central refuge island, improved sight lines and updated road signage. Together, these improvements help pedestrians cross the busy junction in two stages, providing a safer route for those travelling on foot.

The crossing connects with a new footway being delivered by Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council, creating an important link between the two communities and supporting more people to choose walking for local journeys.

It's also part of the ongoing work to improve walking infrastructure across West Berkshire, helping residents travel more safely and encouraging active travel wherever possible.

### *New evening and Sunday bus services boost travel in and around Newbury*

Residents in and around Newbury will soon benefit from more evening and Sunday bus services, making it easier to get out and about across the weekend.

From Friday 4 September, Newbury & District will introduce later evening journeys on routes 2 and 8 operated by Newbury & District every Friday and Saturday. Sunday services on both routes will then begin from Sunday 6 September.

A new Sunday service, route 34, operated by Thames Travel, will launch on Sunday 20 September, connecting Newbury with West and East Ilsley, Beedon, Chieveley and Didcot.

The improvements have been made to support better local bus services, and will make it easier for people to access shops, leisure activities and onward travel connections throughout the weekend.

### *Giving waste materials a second life on local bridleway improvements*

Chieveley Bridleway 5M has been improved to make this well-used local route safer and more reliable for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The bridleway crosses the M4 providing an important countryside link, with alternative crossing points several kilometres away.

Regular use and soft clay ground had left the path worn and difficult to maintain. Sustainability was carefully considered and most materials used in the improvements were recycled: depressions were filled and foundations built with recycled Type 1 crushed concrete made from selected demolition waste, giving the materials a second life.

The new surface uses road planings reclaimed from resurfacing works, creating a durable finish while reusing waste material. Together, the recycled foundation and surface should better withstand both the climate changes and regular use - reducing future repairs.

The upgraded bridleway strengthens links north to Chieveley, the Berkshire Downs, the Ridgeway and Oxfordshire, and south west via Snelsmore Common towards Bagnor, Wickham and Elcot.

## Health and Social Care

### *Planning ahead for care fees*

Residents who pay privately for their care are encouraged to plan ahead if their savings are expected to fall below the current upper capital threshold of £23,250. WBC's Adult Social Care team has produced new guidance explaining the support that may be available and the steps to take before reaching this level.

WBC recommend contacting Adult Social Care around three to four months before savings fall below £23,250 to allow time for financial and care assessments. If eligible, residents may receive support with care costs and advice on suitable care options.

Changes to care funding can feel worrying. Contacting the team early allows them to discuss the situation and explain what support may be available.

For more information email adultcare@westberks.gov.uk or call 01635 503050

## Environment

### *Heat Pump Grants*

Households that use heating oil or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) may be able to get extra support to switch to a heat pump.

On 21 July, the government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme grant increased from £7,500 to £9,000 for eligible off-gas grid properties replacing heating oil or LPG with an air source or ground source heat pump. The grant helps reduce the upfront cost of installing a low-carbon heating system.

**Residents are eligible if:**

- they own the property
- it is not connected to the gas grid
- they currently use heating oil or LPG
- the property is in England or Wales.

Residents can get a quote from a Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) installer.

They can also use the government's heat pump checker tool to see whether a heat pump could be suitable for their home.

### *Free recycling session*

Social group leaders, teachers, and parents can get a free, fun session for children's schools/groups. To book or find out more, email **recycle@westberks.gov.uk**

### *Garden waste subscriptions are now open for 2026/27*

## Public Safety

## Eggs

The Food Standards Agency is investigating a Salmonella outbreak that may be linked to eggs imported from outside the UK and mainly supplied to some restaurants, cafés and catering businesses. There is currently no evidence that UK-produced eggs are affected.

Residents can continue to eat supermarket eggs as normal. UK-produced eggs carrying the British Lion mark or produced under the Laid in Britain scheme are considered safe to eat, including raw or lightly cooked, for most people. Eggs that are properly handled and thoroughly cooked should not present a food safety risk.

Young children, older people, pregnant people and those with underlying health conditions should take extra care when eating out by choosing well-cooked eggs and avoiding dishes containing raw or lightly cooked egg unless they are confident they are safe to consume.

At home, practise good food hygiene by buying eggs from reputable retailers, checking they are clean and undamaged, storing them correctly, washing hands and surfaces after handling, and cooking eggs thoroughly where needed.

Anyone experiencing symptoms such as diarrhoea, stomach cramps, vomiting or fever should stay hydrated and seek advice if symptoms are severe or do not improve.

### *Beware of wildfires this summer*

With the risk of fires across the district remaining very high, everyone has a role to play in helping prevent fires this summer.

- Dispose of cigarettes responsibly and never throw lit ends from car windows
- Take any litter home, especially glass bottles which can start fires in hot weather
- Avoid disposable barbecues and bonfires during dry conditions
- Keep cooking equipment away from tents and have an escape plan
- Farmers should ensure fuel, hay and machinery are stored and managed safely

If there is a fire, do not attempt to tackle it. Move to a safe location and call 999 immediately, giving as much information as possible about the location.

## Culture

### *21 years on, Newbury Mosaic still brings people together*

More than two decades after it was created, the Newbury Mosaic once again brought the community together as residents gathered to celebrate its 21st anniversary.

Visitors of all ages dropped in to Newbury Library on Saturday to revisit the artwork, spot the section they helped create and share memories of the project.

Families explored displays about the mosaic's creation, while children enjoyed activity worksheets inspired by the artwork. Artist Paul Forsey, who designed the mosaic, was also on hand to meet visitors and reminisce about the project.

Created with the help of more than 4,000 local people, the Newbury Mosaic remains one of Newbury's most enduring examples of community creativity.

### *Shaw House Entrance*

The ornamental iron work (overthrow) of Shaw House's historic gate is having some repair work done, so the front gate will be looking a little different for a while.

The gates remain in place, so please take care if driving through as the width restriction remains.

### *Newbury Wharf Crane*

The historic crane has been reinstated at its home in the Wharf alongside the Kennet and Avon Canal in Newbury following a careful restoration project.

The restoration returned the crane to its original appearance, with layers of paint removed to reveal the original timber beneath. The wood has been treated and preserved, while the ironwork has been cleaned, repaired and freshly repainted.

The crane once again stands as a reminder of Newbury's canal heritage and an important feature of the Wharf.

### *West Berkshire What's On*

The new West Berkshire Heritage What's On guide is now available, packed with events and activities at Shaw House and West Berkshire Museum throughout autumn and winter.

Residents looking for family days out, fascinating exhibitions, local history talks, theatre, trails, workshops or festive events, can find something for all ages to enjoy. Highlights include Heritage Open Days, the School of Enchantment Halloween event, Christmas at Shaw House, family activities during school holidays and a wide range of exhibitions celebrating the area's rich heritage.

It's also a great time to visit Shaw House, where visitors can enjoy newly dressed historic rooms, beautiful Tudor and Edwardian gardens, a new wooden play area, exhibitions, café and gift shop.

Residents can pick up a free copy of the guide from libraries, council offices, Shaw House or West Berkshire Museum, or visit the West Berkshire Heritage website to view the full programme and book tickets.

### *Shaw House Gardens*

Shaw House has a new Tudor Garden, regular exhibitions are held in the Orangery Gardens, and now a quiet area has been left to grow wild creating a mini-meadow. With 97% of wildflower meadows lost since the 1930s, there's sign encouraging visitors to create similar spaces in their own gardens and green areas.

In just 5 minutes of exploring, it is possible to find ladybirds, grasshoppers, butterflies, moths, bumblebees and damselflies. Visit Shaw House gardens and grounds for a mini safari!

## Current Consultations

- Community Governance Review for Shaw-cum-Donnington parish 2026 – Closes 3 September 2026
- Community Governance Review for Lambourn parish 2026 – Closes 3 September 2026
- New West Berkshire Local Plan Scoping Consultation – Closes 4 September 2026


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