

# Your West Berkshire

Spring/Summer 2026

[www.westberks.gov.uk](http://www.westberks.gov.uk)

**FREE**



## Inside

Hedgehog heroes, our award-winning parks, making your patio a wildlife haven, community energy in action and much more!



Improving your  
**Services**



**West Berkshire**  
C O U N C I L



## On the cover: Be a Hedgehog Hero

The children of Curridge Primary School are on a mission to help one of Britain's most loved - and most threatened - creatures. Shocked to learn how dramatically hedgehog numbers have fallen, pupils across the school have thrown themselves into hands-on projects to give their spiky neighbours a better chance.

Year 4 and 5 pupils have been busy painting and selling beautiful shopping bags, raising enough money to buy a brand-new hedgehog home for their quiet garden.

They've also built a cosy log pile, perfect for nesting. Meanwhile, the youngest children have been listening to hedgehog stories and learning simple things they can do at home to help wildlife thrive.

The school has even set up night time cameras, hoping to spot a hungry hedgehog enjoying the food left out - especially important as they wake from hibernation having lost up to a third of their body weight.

**Inspired by the children?** Here are five easy ways you can be a Hedgehog Hero too:

Make a log pile • Leave cat or dog food and water  
• Add a small pond ramp • Cut a 13cm x 13cm hole in your fence for hedgehog highways • Build a bug hotel to boost their food supply.



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We'd love to hear what you think of our magazine. Send your feedback to [communications@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:communications@westberks.gov.uk)

Please pass this on for others to read, or put it in the recycling once you've read it.



Information in this magazine is correct at time of publication (April 2026). Cover photo and left by Phil Cannings.

# INTRODUCTION



## Welcome to the latest edition of Your West Berkshire magazine

Hello and welcome to this special environment focused edition of Your West Berkshire magazine.

I'm delighted to introduce an issue packed with stories that celebrate the people, places and projects helping our district flourish.

Caring for our environment is something residents tell us matters deeply, and it's a responsibility we are committed to fulfilling.

Across West Berkshire, individuals, community groups, and schools are working together to protect wildlife, enhance our green spaces, and make sustainable choices part of everyday life. This edition shines a light on many of those inspiring efforts.

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**"From wildlife to warm homes and better travel choices, this issue is full of ways we're helping West Berkshire thrive."**

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On our cover, the wonderful children of Curridge Primary School show what can happen when enthusiasm meets action. Their 'Hedgehog Heroes' project is a reminder that small steps, like building bug hotels or creating hedgehog highways, can make a big difference to local wildlife.

You'll also find stories about the sustainable transformations of Bradfield Village Hall and the Hungerford Hub, the fascinating work to bring

history to life at Shaw House, and the pride we feel in achieving multiple Green Flag Awards for our lovely open spaces.

We're sharing practical tips too, including making your patio a haven for wildlife, to enjoying sustainable travel options of going by bus, exploring our great local leisure offer with Everyone Active, understanding food ratings in our restaurants, and discovering how our new bin collections have helped West Berkshire hit new recycling highs.

Looking ahead to the warmer months, there's plenty to get involved in, from taking a dip in the fabulous Northcroft Lido, taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge (West Berkshire remains top of the South East charts for this), to welcoming our growing network of electric vehicle charging solutions. And for those thinking about making their homes more energy efficient, our Warmer Homes advice could be just the help you need.

Wherever your interests lie - wildlife, heritage, travel, leisure, or simply making more sustainable choices, I hope you'll find something in these pages that sparks your curiosity or inspires you to try something new.

Thank you for everything you do to keep West Berkshire such a wonderful place to live, play, work, and visit.

**Councillor Stuart Gourley**  
Executive Member for Environment and Highways

# West Berkshire's award winning parks



Volunteers and members of Friends of Linear Park (FOLP)

## Nature, heritage and the volunteers who make it all shine

If you've ever wandered through Northcroft and Goldwell Parks or Holybrook Linear Park, you'll know just how special these spaces are. They're places where dog walkers greet each other, children race between play areas, wildlife thrives beside meadows and chalk streams, and where extraordinary teams of volunteers work to keep everything looking its best.

Their hard work truly shows. Together, these parks have proudly held the prestigious Green Flag Award for 17 consecutive years, from 2009 to today - a testament to both the Council's ongoing care and the passion of residents and local volunteer groups who give their time, energy and enthusiasm to the parks they love.

*"A ribbon of green weaving through woodland, grassland and riverside paths."*



### Holybrook Linear Park – two parks, double the heritage

Although often spoken of together, Linear Park (east of Mill Lane) and Holybrook Park (west of Mill Lane) are two distinct areas, each with its own character, history, and wonderfully long, heritage rich name that we're committed to preserving.

Located in the east of the district, Holybrook Linear Park offers a gentler pace, a ribbon of green weaving through woodland, grassland, and riverside paths. It quietly performs heroic work for the community, reducing flood risk in the Calcot area through its balancing ponds, meadows, and water holding landscapes.

Here, practical flood management infrastructure blends seamlessly with beauty, biodiversity, and community enjoyment, supported by volunteer group Friends of Linear Park (FOLP), whose vital work helps keep the park looking its best through a range of projects.

It also boasts five children's play areas, a welcoming new community café, football pitches and open green spaces, scenic walking routes including Holybrook Footpath 4, regular community walks, an abundance of wildlife from red kites and siskins to treecreepers, and the rare chalk stream habitats that line the beautiful Holy Brook.



## Northcroft and Goldwell Parks

Once part of Newbury's historic 'common pasture', Northcroft and Goldwell Parks supported the town's working animals for generations. Today, it's a much loved landscape where heritage features, such as the Northcroft Ditch and remnants of the Goldwell House estate, sit happily alongside modern facilities.

Visitors can enjoy a brand new pump track, basketball court, a children's play area with a zip wire, football pitches, Newbury Cricket Club, the nearby, newly refurbished Northcroft Leisure Centre and café (open to all visitors via the Leisure Centre Reception) and sweeping panoramic views across Newbury.

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**"These parks shine thanks to the dedication of local people."**

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Nature flourishes here. Riverside buffer zones support birds and small mammals, and the globally rare River Kennet chalk stream (SSSI) threads through the park.

One football pitch has even been restored to nature, evolving into a biodiverse wet meadow that links beautifully with habitats created by local environmental partners such as NEWT.



*Volunteers and members of Friends of Linear Park (FOLP)*



*Pump track and views over Newbury - Goldwell Park*



## The volunteers behind the Green Flags

These parks shine thanks to the dedication of local people. Local volunteer groups help clear paths, maintain habitats, support wildlife, organise events and make the parks welcoming for all. Their aims include supporting day to day park care, ensuring accessibility for all, enhancing visitor facilities, protecting local wildlife, raising awareness of the parks, and running regular volunteer days.

**Their pride is our pride - those 17 Green Flags belong to them, too.**

If you enjoy the outdoors, meeting friendly people or making a difference locally, there are many volunteer roles available. It's rewarding, sociable, and a wonderful way to support the parks that mean so much to our community.



Find out more about volunteering by scanning the QR code.

# Go by bus – it's just the ticket to a great day out!



Kennet & Avon Canal, Hungerford



Leckhampstead Church

West Berkshire is a wonderful place to explore by bus. It is characterised by market towns, beautiful villages, and exceptional countryside, with 74% of the district falling within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

So why not take advantage of our bus services to explore the district?

- **Let the bus take the strain.** Travelling by bus can be more enjoyable and less stressful than taking the car. It also contributes towards sustainable travel. Transferring from car to bus can help reduce emission levels and congestion.
- **Relax on your journey.** Enjoy the sights. Catch up on your reading or have a chat with your fellow travellers.
- **Keep costs down.** Choose from a range of ticket options to get the best price. These include a Group Ticket, which allows four people of any age to travel together on one keenly priced ticket. Those with the National Concessionary Bus Pass travel free on buses in West Berkshire - Monday to Friday after 09:30 and any time over the weekends.
- **Stay fit.** The walk to the bus stop contributes to your daily exercise and fresh air.

Many bus routes in West Berkshire can give you a great day out. Check timetables, and plan your journey at [westberks.gov.uk/planyourjourney](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/planyourjourney)



**“West Berkshire is a wonderful place to explore by bus”**

Shelsmore Common Country Park by Wendy Tobbit

Scan QR code for days out in West Berkshire by bus.

SCAN ME





# Planting for the future

**Helping to protect one of the rarest natural habitats in the world - right here in our district.**

In February 2025, our Environment Delivery and Countryside Teams created a new riverside tree buffer along the River Lambourn at Almond Avenue Park in Shaw. This is part of our ongoing work to look after this very special chalk stream.

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**Only 220 chalk streams exist worldwide, with around 80% found in Southern England.**

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The River Lambourn is one of the finest examples. The clear water, stable temperature and rich plant life support fish, birds, insects and other wildlife that rely on this unique environment.

The stretch of river at Almond Avenue is so important that it is protected as both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Working with the Wild Trout Trust and the Environment Agency, we have planted 48 native riverside trees such as alder, hawthorn, and willow. These were planted in new areas that will now be left unmown, with biodegradable guards to protect young trees without harming the environment.

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**As the buffer zone matures, it will stabilise the riverbank, support carbon storage and provide valuable food and shelter for local wildlife. It will also enhance biodiversity across this sensitive chalk stream corridor.**

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We've also introduced a three metre no mow strip along the river. Allowing the grass and plants to grow naturally helps stabilise the bank, provides food and shelter for wildlife, and creates cooler, shaded spots in the river, which are important during hotter, drier summers.


These changes are a long term investment in the health of the River Lambourn. By improving habitats now, we are helping this rare chalk stream remain resilient to climate change, pollution and changing water levels, so it can thrive for generations to come.


# Make your patio a haven for wildlife





## Tips from BBOWT's Ben Vanheems

Patios might seem an unlikely place for wildlife, but with a few simple changes, they can become buzzing, bird-filled spaces full of life.

 Start with containers. Pots are the easiest way to welcome nature in. Choose simple, single flowers that pollinators love, and don't forget herbs – they're great for wildlife and useful for you too.

 Lavender works beautifully as a centrepiece, with plants like petunias and trailing ground ivy to fill the pot and spill over the sides.

 Cornfield flowers are another easy win. Grown in pots or beds, they provide lots of pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies and other insects. Sow them in spring, or in autumn for flowers the following summer.

 Water is just as important as food. A small water feature gives birds a place to drink and bathe, while a bird feeder keeps them well fed. Remember to clean feeders regularly to keep birds healthy.

If you're feeling adventurous, why not make a mini wildlife pond? Use a watertight container, add gravel to the bottom, and build up the edges with stones so creatures can get in and out safely. Fill with rainwater if possible, then add a mix of water plants.

*Photos by Emma Robertshaw and Megan Lowe*

Don't forget vertical spaces like fences and walls. Climbers such as jasmine or honeysuckle add scent and colour, while ivy and wall-hugging shrubs provide shelter.

You can also soften paving edges with plants like sedum, creeping thyme or even self-seeders popping up between the cracks.

With just a few well-chosen pots and plants, even the smallest patio can become a beautiful space for you to enjoy and a welcome refuge for local wildlife.

For more wildlife gardening ideas, visit [bbowt.org.uk](http://bbowt.org.uk)

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**"Pots are the easiest way to welcome nature in. Choose simple, single flowers that pollinators love, and don't forget herbs – they're great for wildlife and useful for you too."**

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# Turn your time into a force for nature

Looking for a rewarding way to spend your time this year? Volunteering for the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) is a great way to meet new people, enjoy the outdoors, and make a real difference for local wildlife.

Whether you prefer welcoming visitors, getting hands on with conservation, or lending practical skills behind the scenes, there's a role to suit you – and every hour you give helps protect and enhance the Nature Discovery Centre for people and wildlife alike.

## There are so many ways to get involved

### Visitor Centre Volunteer Rover

Be a friendly presence out on the reserve, chatting to visitors as they explore, and helping them get the most from their visit. You'll play a key role in creating a welcoming, informative experience while inspiring people to care about nature.

### Retail and Information Volunteer

As the first point of contact in the visitor centre, you'll greet visitors, share information about the reserve, and support retail sales that directly fund conservation work. It's a sociable, rewarding role at the heart of the conservation community.

### Facilities Maintenance Volunteer

Put your practical skills to good use by helping maintain and improve buildings, paths, and facilities. Your support helps BBOWT look after its site sustainably, ensuring it remains safe, welcoming, and fit for the future – all while making the most of limited charitable resources.

### Conservation Volunteer

Get hands-on with nature recovery. From habitat management to seasonal conservation tasks, you'll work outdoors with a friendly, supportive team of like-minded volunteers, directly helping wildlife to thrive.

BBOWT is the only voluntary organisation in the region concerned with all aspects of nature conservation. They give wildlife a helping hand to ensure it thrives in their three counties. As well as managing nature reserves, this includes monitoring species and running special projects to support declining species like water voles and threatened habitats such as chalk grassland.

If you'd like to get involved and make a positive difference for nature on your doorstep, email [volunteering@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@bbowt.org.uk) to find out more.

For opportunities to get involved elsewhere in West Berkshire, try the conservation work party at Padworth Common or help out at an event of your choice as an Events Assistant Volunteer. Find out more about both of these at [bbowt.org.uk/volunteering](http://bbowt.org.uk/volunteering)



Photo by Pete Hughes



Kevin Shaw, one of the conservation volunteers, says,

**"I thoroughly enjoy volunteering at the Nature Discovery Centre. It gets me out of the house, and I enjoy working with my fellow volunteers. We've recently been creating a new dead-hedge and brush-piles in the woodland hide area, which has attracted loads of birds to the feeders."**

# Community energy in action: two sustainable transformations



**Bradfield Village Hall** has been given a new lease of life thanks to an extraordinary community effort, transforming it into a modern, energy efficient, and environmentally responsible space. After months of hard work, the hall reopened to great celebration in November 2025.

fully modernised. Even the original parquet floor has been beautifully restored.

This impressive upgrade was made possible through collaboration and joint funding from national, regional and local partners, including the Rural England Prosperity Fund, Bradfield Parish Council, ACRE, Englefield Trust, Greenham Trust, and The Good Exchange. With more than 150 people celebrating the reopening, the hall now stands as a shining example of community determination and sustainability in action - a warm, welcoming venue ready for future generations.

Sustainability was at the heart of the project. The old asbestos roof was replaced with a fully insulated structure, and new solar panels with battery storage now allow the hall to generate and store its own clean energy. Inside, the main hall has been insulated, new energy efficient heating and cooling installed, and the electrics



Generating its own clean energy and glowing with community pride



**The Hungerford Hub and Library** has been on a remarkable journey toward Net Zero, driven by passionate local volunteers and donors.

What began as a response to ageing infrastructure has become a powerful community led climate mission, guided by the Hungerford Environmental Action Team (HEAT) and the Hungerford Library & Community Trust (HL&CT).

A major turning point came in 2022. After installing modern thermostatic controls, the Hub replaced its failed gas boiler with a 17kW air source heat pump - removing the need for gas entirely.

Supported by a £5,000 Boiler

Upgrade Scheme grant, this cut heating related emissions by 75% and saved over £1,000 a year in gas charges.

By mid 2025, a 21kWp solar array, the largest possible for the site, pushed the transformation even further. In just four months, its 36 panels generated 10,346kWh of clean power, covering 62% of the Hub's energy use, reducing net emissions by 103% and cutting energy costs by 64%.

With nearby EV chargers installed by West Berkshire Council, the Hub now champions sustainable travel too. Thanks to community-charged commitment, Hungerford now has a future proof, low carbon Hub that inspires the whole town.



A community led leap to Net Zero





## West Berkshire hits record recycling highs

Thanks to the fantastic efforts of our residents, West Berkshire is celebrating some of its best recycling results ever, following the move to three-weekly black bin collections.

Our provisional recycling rate for 2025/26 stands at 55% - the highest our district has ever achieved.

And the progress doesn't stop there. Comparing the most recent reporting period with the same time last year shows just how much of a difference residents are making:



Residual black bin waste has dropped by 1,049 tonnes. That's a huge 15% reduction. That means far less waste ending up in landfill or energy used from waste facilities.



Food waste recycling has surged by 22%, with 260 extra tonnes collected and transformed into soil conditioner instead of going into landfill.



Dry recycling is up by 199 tonnes (6%), showing that more materials are being sorted at home and given a new lease of life.

These figures reflect an impressive community effort. Every rinsed can, every separated plastic pot, and every caddy of food scraps is helping West Berkshire to recycle even more!

## Great British Spring Clean 2026

Every spring, volunteers across West Berkshire play a huge part in keeping our towns, villages, and countryside looking their best, and we'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who took part in this year's Great British Spring Clean. Your time and energy really do make a difference.

**But you don't have to wait for spring to get involved.**

If you missed the organised events this year, don't worry. We loan litter picking equipment all year round, provide sacks for collected rubbish, and arrange for everything you gather to be picked up afterwards.

Litter picking is also a great excuse to get outdoors, enjoy some fresh air, and help protect local wildlife as we head into the warmer months.

Find out more or book equipment at [westberks.gov.uk/communitylitterpick](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/communitylitterpick)

If you or your community group are interested in becoming a local hub for lending out litter picking equipment, get in touch at [recycle@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:recycle@westberks.gov.uk)



SCAN ME





## Who won West Berkshire's 2025 Community Champion Awards?

The 2025 Community Champion Awards celebrated the outstanding individuals and groups whose dedication has strengthened communities across West Berkshire. Held in early 2026, the ceremony highlighted the exceptional impact of this year's nominees and the vital role volunteers continue to play in local life.

Volunteer of the Year was awarded to Mike Karasinski, recognised for his remarkable commitment to helping others. Sue Bennett and David Hamilton were Highly Commended.

Cold Ash Countryside Volunteers received Community Group of the Year for their significant contribution to conservation and community wellbeing, with Carebus Community Transport and Bradfield Village Hall and Associated Communities Highly Commended.

The Lifetime Achievement Award went to Tim Barton, honouring his long-standing service to residents, while Robert Wyatt received a Highly Commended acknowledgement.

## Don't let rogue waste collectors spoil our countryside

### How to protect yourself, and West Berkshire, from fly-tipping

We all want to keep West Berkshire looking beautiful. Unfortunately, it only takes one dumped bin bag, or a whole truckload of rubbish, to spoil our countryside and leave taxpayers footing the clean-up bill.



We can all play our part in preventing fly-tipping by following the **SCRAP** code whenever someone offers to take rubbish away for you:

**Suspect** - be cautious of anyone who turns up unexpectedly or offers a deal that seems 'too good to be true.'

**Check** - make sure they're a licensed waste carrier. You can look them up on the Environment Agency website or call 03708 506 506.

**Refuse** - walk away if they can't show proof of registration.

**Ask** - find out where your waste will go and how it will be disposed of.

**Paperwork** - always get a waste transfer note or receipt, including their licence number and vehicle registration. Reputable businesses will be happy to provide this, and if they can't, it's a red flag.

It's also worth knowing that if your waste is later found fly-tipped by a rogue trader, and you haven't completed these checks, you could be held responsible and fined £600.

A quick check now can save a lot of trouble later. Find out more at: [westberks.gov.uk/dutyofcare](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/dutyofcare)

# Active West Berkshire - spring/summer highlights

We've been working with our leisure partner, Everyone Active, to bring a mix of fun, accessible and feel good activities to the district.

## Step into spring with weekly health walks

Looking for a gentle, fun way to boost your wellbeing? Join our free Thursday health walks at the Nature Discovery Centre. They're relaxed, friendly and open to everyone - plus there's time for a chat with walking buddies in the café afterwards.

All you need is a comfortable pair of shoes, a drink, and weather-appropriate clothing.

## Free inclusive activity sessions for adults and children

We want to make activities as inclusive and accessible as possible, so we're pleased to introduce our new free physical activity sessions, funded by West Berkshire Council's Public Health Team, to help keep everyone active.

Northcroft Leisure Centre is offering free 90-minute inclusive drop-in sessions on Thursdays at 1:30 pm. These sessions give adults with learning disabilities the chance to be active in ways that suit them, with healthy lifestyle discussions, and built-in healthy eating guidance.



Free sensory circuits for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families are also running at:

- **Northcroft Leisure Centre: Tuesdays, 4:30 - 5:30pm**
- **Cotswold Sport Centre: Tuesdays, 5 - 6pm**
- **The Lambourn Centre: Saturdays, 12 - 1pm**

These sessions support children to be active and help with emotional regulation.



Find your nearest leisure centre!

Everyone Active manages seven centres across the district, offering everything from gyms and pools to group exercise classes and family-friendly spaces. If you're not a member yet, now is a great time to get started. You can find out more at [everyoneactive.com](http://everyoneactive.com)



"Relaxed, friendly and open to everyone."

## Top marks for three local leisure centres

It's celebration time for Northcroft, Kennet, and Willink leisure centres, which have all received fantastic ratings for service quality in a recent industry assessment. Northcroft earned an 'Excellent', while Kennet and Willink scored 'Very Good', recognising brilliant customer experience and strong community-focused services.

These ratings come from the rigorous Quest Plus Assessment on behalf of Sport England, which looks at everything from customer experience to operational excellence. A huge well done to all the teams involved!



Staff at Northcroft and Willink Leisure Centres



# West Berkshire Fully charged

Connected  
Kerb

“The network will provide convenient, reliable charging for everyone”



Charging your car is about to get easier as we prepare to roll out around 300 new chargers with more than 600 sockets through our partnership with Connected Kerb, a leading UK provider of long term, sustainable charging infrastructure.

With around 30% of households lacking a driveway, public charging is essential for making EVs a realistic choice. By installing chargers in residential areas, public car parks, and key destinations across towns and rural communities, the network will offer convenient, reliable options for everyone. This will be especially helpful for residents who can't charge at home.

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**Designed to grow as demand increases, many sites will be built with underground ducting and foundations, so additional chargers can be added later without repeat roadworks, which will reduce disruption and keep costs down.**

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Importantly, the programme comes at no cost to local taxpayers. Over the next 20 years, Connected Kerb will install, operate and maintain the network, supported by LEVI grant funding from the Department for Transport. A cap on operator margins will help keep prices fair and competitive.

The partnership also brings wider benefits, including commitments to local training, community education, inclusive service design, and strong environmental standards.

As installations begin, residents can look forward to cleaner air, quieter streets, and a district ready for the future of transport - another major step toward a more sustainable, healthier West Berkshire.

# Warmer Homes



## We've helped Nancy

### Now let us help you

## Make your home cosy and cost friendly

Spring is a great time to improve your home's energy efficiency. Warmer Homes offers funding for upgrades like solar panels, heat pumps, and insulation, helping residents enjoy lower bills and warmer homes. The scheme is funded by the Government's Department for Energy Security & Net Zero and supported locally by West Berkshire Council.

Some items, such as loft and cavity wall insulation, solar PV panels, air source heat pumps, high heat retention storage heaters, and heating controls could be fully funded (subject to availability).

You may qualify if your household income is £36,000 or less, you receive eligible means-tested benefits or live in a low-income area.

Check your eligibility:



## Renters' rights are changing: what you need to know

New rules come in on 1 May 2026 and will change how renting works.

### The big changes

- No more 'no fault' evictions (Section 21). Landlords will only be able to end a tenancy for specific legal reasons.
- All tenancies become periodic, meaning no fixed end date. You can stay as long as you need unless you give notice or your landlord has a valid reason to end the tenancy.
- Fairer renting. Landlords can't refuse tenants because they have children or receive benefits.
- You can ask to have a pet, and your landlord must consider it reasonably.
- Rent protections. Rent can only go up once a year, with two months' notice.
- No rental bidding or large upfront payments.

More changes, like a new landlord database, will follow later.

For more information visit the Public Protection Partnership website by scanning the QR code or visiting [housinghub.campaign.gov.uk/renting-is-changing/](https://housinghub.campaign.gov.uk/renting-is-changing/)

If you're worried about losing your home, contact our Housing Options Team: call **01635 519530 (option 2)** or email [housing@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:housing@westberks.gov.uk)



# OUR SPENDING PLANS FOR 2026/27

We're investing in the services and facilities that matter most to you, while continuing to manage significant financial pressures responsibly.

A large part of this year's funding continues to support residents with complex needs, help people live independently, and ensure children in care have stability and opportunities. We'll also continue using tools like the Low Income Family Tracker to help households access unclaimed benefits.

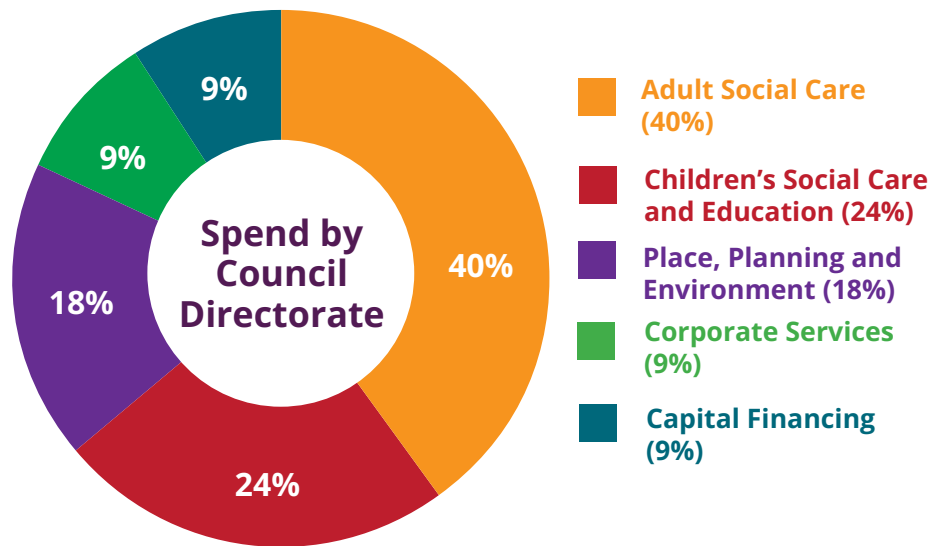
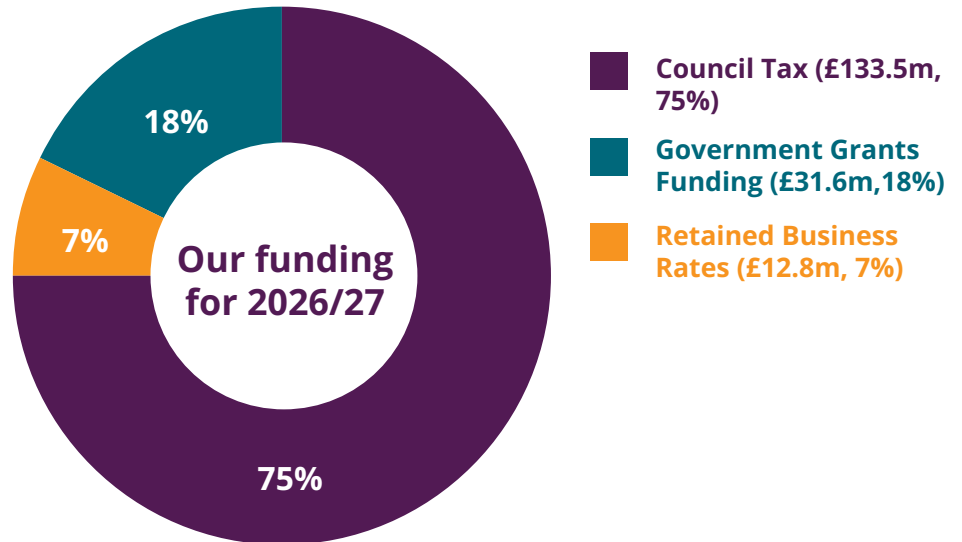
## Improving everyday services

Residents tell us that well maintained roads and reliable services are important. This year we're investing in resurfacing, drainage, street lighting, and wider maintenance to improve journeys and reduce potholes.

We're also expanding sustainable travel options, including new EV charging points. Our schools will continue to receive investment to support high quality learning environments and better facilities for children with special educational needs.

You'll also see improvements such as enhanced facilities at Shaw House and new temporary accommodation in Hungerford funded by external funding sources.

We face ongoing pressures from reduced government funding and changes to business rates, which will reduce our income by at least £28 million over three years. Despite this, we remain committed to protecting essential services and investing in our communities.







Alongside day to day services, we're delivering a £46 million capital programme, including:



### Disabled Facilities Grant

Home adaptations for independence

£1,600,000



### Temporary accommodation

More rooms for people facing homelessness

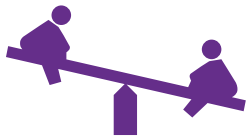
£1,000,000



### Improving schools

Helping maintain and improve our schools

£9,000,000



### Playgrounds

Maintaining and improving our playgrounds

£80,000



### Street lighting

Repairing and upgrading street lights

£105,000



### Active travel

Improved walking and cycling routes

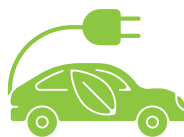
£1,800,000



### Pavements

Repairing and upgrading pavements

£400,000



### EV charging

Expanding local charging facilities

£780,000



### Accident reduction works

Helping to deliver safer roads

£95,000



# Support that gives you a LIFT



Across West Berkshire, many residents are still missing out on financial support that could make a real difference to their daily lives. To help change this, we are using the Low Income Family Tracker, known as LIFT. This tool helps us identify households that may be entitled to benefits but are not currently claiming them. By reaching out directly, we are making sure that money which should be in residents' pockets reaches them.

LIFT brings together anonymised information from the Department for Work and Pensions and the Council. This highlights people who could claim support such as pension credit, Healthy Start vouchers, free school meals and wider financial help. We then contact residents by letter or text and offer friendly support through our Let's Talk sessions in libraries, food banks and community hubs across the district.

We are already seeing the difference this approach can make. One recent campaign alone has the potential to return more than £700,000 to eligible residents. We have also seen more than £140,000 in previously unclaimed benefits now going to pension age residents every year.

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**LIFT is helping residents feel more secure, supported and able to access the help they deserve**

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Alongside LIFT, we have launched the new Better Off Calculator to help residents quickly check what financial support they may be entitled to. The free online tool, developed by Policy in Practice and customised for West Berkshire, gives an instant breakdown of benefits and local support schemes you may be missing out on. This includes universal credit, council tax reductions, pension credit, carer support and social tariffs. With more than £43 million in unclaimed benefits across West Berkshire, the calculator is helping close the gap by making it easier for people to understand and access the support available to them.

We have already seen its impact. After completing the calculator with a team member during a visit to a local food bank, one family discovered support they were eligible for and are now £500 a month better off.



Together, LIFT and the Better Off Calculator are helping residents feel more secure, supported and confident in accessing the help they deserve. Scan the QR code to find out more.

SCAN ME



# Fostering comes in many forms

A safe space starts with you. Here are some of the types of fostering you can provide that fit in with your lifestyle:

## Emergency placements

Fast, flexible, and vital. Sometimes children need somewhere safe right now. Emergency carers step in at short notice when a child's safety or family situation suddenly changes.

## Long-term fostering

Stability that lasts. Long-term carers offer a lasting home until a child reaches independence. This is a chance to provide dependable love, support and security.

## Short-term placements

A bridge to a brighter future. Short-term carers support children for anything from an overnight stay to several months while long-term plans are made.

## Parent and child placements

Guidance for young families. Young parents who feel overwhelmed can thrive with the guidance of a foster carer.

## Short break care

Small commitments, big impact. Ideal for those who want to help but are unable to foster full-time. Short break carers support children a few hours a week or a couple of weekends a month.

## Find your perfect fit

Contact us at [Fostering@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:Fostering@westberks.gov.uk) or complete a referral form by scanning the QR code.





**“It’s changed our lives.”**

## How the Disabled Facilities Grant helped ‘happy bunnies’ Richard and Tina reclaim safety and independence at home.

For Richard and Tina, who share a cosy three-bedroom home, everyday routines had slowly become a source of worry, strain and, at times, danger.

Richard’s mobility challenges meant that something as simple as getting into the bath placed him at constant risk of falling. For Tina, who supports him daily, the fear of an accident was never far away.

But thanks to the Government’s Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), administered locally through West Berkshire Council, life at home looks and feels very different now.

With funding from the DFG, the couple received several life changing adaptations to their home, designed to improve Richard’s independence and safety:

- A dropped kerb and hardstanding, enabling easier access to the property.
- A new ground floor WC, converted from the understairs cloakroom.
- A full first floor bathroom adaptation, including a level access shower.

These changes weren’t just practical - they brought peace of mind.

“We didn’t realise quite how much we needed it until it was finished,” Tina explains. “The old shower over the bath just wasn’t working for Richard, and it was dangerous getting in and out.”

“Now, it’s completely life changing. He’s so much more independent, and it’s much safer. I don’t have to worry anymore about him slipping or falling.”

Richard quietly chips in with a smile: “Well...you did before. I did fall out of the bath.” They both laugh, but beneath the humour lies the weight of a very real fear.

“If Richard had another fall and broke his leg,” Tina continues, “I honestly don’t think we’d ever get him mobile again. That was my biggest worry.”

When it came to the design, Tina was determined that their home shouldn’t end up looking clinical or hospital-like.

“Much to Richard’s disgust,” she jokes, “I didn’t want anything that looked medical, so, I chose a pale pink floor. I wanted it to feel like our bathroom - pretty as well as practical.”

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**“It’s lovely. I was worried about slipping, but it’s brilliant. No problems at all.”**

With new blinds and fresh paint, the bathroom is now a space they both genuinely enjoy.

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Richard rolls his eyes affectionately: "Well, I'm happy if she's happy. The reason I've got an orange car is that someone else chose the colour!"

But even he agrees: "It's lovely. I was worried about slipping, but it's brilliant. No problems at all." With new blinds and fresh paint, the bathroom is now a space they both genuinely enjoy.

One of the biggest wins is the new level access shower, complete with a rainfall head and handheld attachment.

"The shower is super duper!" Tina says. "It's very swishy and posh."

Most importantly, the adaptations mean Tina can step back a little and Richard can do more for himself, something that means the world to them both.

"You're far more independent now," she tells him.

"Yes," he nods, "much more."

Richard and Tina can't speak highly enough of the contractors. "The guys who did it were great. Really helpful," Richard says.

And now? "Happy bunnies," they say in unison.

For Richard and Tina, these adaptations haven't just made their home safer, they've transformed how they live in it.

"It's fantastic," Tina says. "It really has changed our lives." Richard agrees, "Yeah. We're happy...even though it's pink."



West  
Berkshire  
Libraries –  
the heart  
of our  
community

Championing wellbeing,  
inspiring young readers, and  
bringing people together.

Step into any West Berkshire library and you'll feel the connection, curiosity, and community. Far more than places to borrow books, our libraries are vibrant hubs of learning, support, and belonging.

A £12,000 wellbeing boost every year

A new report from *Libraries Connected* shows just how powerful our libraries are. Using Treasury approved methods, *Shared Intelligence* found that volunteering in West Berkshire Libraries creates over £12,000 in wellbeing value annually, through reduced loneliness, greater confidence, improved mental health, and NHS savings.

Researchers say the real value is likely even higher!

Open to all

West Berkshire Libraries are free for anyone who lives, works or studies locally. Children can join from birth and borrow up to 15 books, and there's a great range of free e-books, audiobooks, and online magazines too.

Whether you're discovering stories, joining rhyme time, finding a quiet place to work or volunteering, our libraries are here for you.



Summer Reading champions – five  
years running

For the fifth year in a row, West Berkshire has led the South East in the Summer Reading Challenge. This year, 18% of children under 11 took part, 8% above the regional average, with 3,750 readers of all ages joining in. All 2,721 finishers received a medal and certificate. 409 pre schoolers also took part in the Mini Challenge.

Find your nearest library at  
[westberks.gov.uk/libraries](https://westberks.gov.uk/libraries)

Interested in volunteering?

Be part of the next chapter, scan  
the QR code.



We hope you love our libraries as much as we do. Tell us how West Berkshire Libraries have made a difference in your life here: <https://eu.surveymonkey.com/r/library-service-stories>

West Berkshire Council has launched two new pop-up libraries this spring - giving more rural communities easy access to books and friendly library support closer to home. The new pop-ups in Aldworth and Shaw-cum-Donnington will join the existing services in Basildon, Compton, and Leckhampstead.

**“Very useful and needed in rural areas.”**

Pop-up libraries are provided by our West Berkshire Libraries service and funded by the local town or parish council. Each one is staffed by trained library staff who bring a selection of books, help with reservations, and offer advice about other council services. They are designed to make library services more accessible for people who may find it harder to travel.



Residents who already use the pop-ups say they appreciate the friendly service, the convenience of picking up reserved books locally, and the chance to stay connected with the wider library network.

**“I value that the library comes out to us.”**

Between April 2025 and February 2026, the three current pop-ups welcomed 476 visitors and loaned nearly 1,500 books. There were also 72 residents who became registered borrowers thanks to the easier access the pop-up libraries provide.

To find dates, times, and any changes to future sessions, visit: [westberks.gov.uk/outreach](https://westberks.gov.uk/outreach)

## Say hello to Stacey, our new Animal Health Warden!

We're delighted to welcome Stacey Butler to the Public Protection Partnership (PPP). Stacey is here to help with all things animal related, including stray or lost dogs, dog fouling concerns, dangerous dog behaviour, and advice on responsible pet ownership, such as microchipping.

Whether you need support, guidance, or want to report an issue, Stacey and the wider team are here to help keep our communities safe, clean, and pet-friendly.

### A quick reminder about microchipping

Microchipping isn't just a good idea – it's the law. Dogs must be microchipped by eight weeks old and wear a collar and tag showing the owner's name and address when out in public. Cats (including indoor cats) must be microchipped by 20 weeks old, a legal requirement introduced in 2024.

Microchipped pets are far more likely to be reunited with their owners, so remember to keep your contact details up to date if you move house or change your phone number.

### Need to get in touch?

If you've lost or found a dog, witnessed dangerous dog behaviour, or want to report dog fouling, please visit the PPP Animal Warden webpage for the latest advice and contact details using the QR code or visit [publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk/animal-warden](https://publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk/animal-warden)

**Stacey is looking forward to working with residents and their four-legged friends!**

Dangerous dogs should be reported to Thames Valley Police. Call 999 if there is an immediate risk to public safety, or 101 if it is not an emergency.





# Bringing history to life at Shaw House

**We're excited to unveil a brand-new visitor experience at Shaw House for 2026. Step inside beautifully dressed rooms that bring the House's remarkable past to life, each reflecting a different era - from Tudor and Stuart through to Georgian and Edwardian influences.**

Explore displays interpreting family life at Shaw House across the centuries, offering glimpses into how the building evolved, and the people who once called it home. Complementing the room settings are engaging exhibition rooms telling the story of the House. A special exhibition 'Dressed for Battle', displays English Civil War arms and armour on loan from the Royal Armouries, plus our 'Dressed for Shaw' displays replica costumes highlighting the changing fashions through time.

## There are so many ways to enjoy Shaw House

With its rich history, from royal visits to Civil War drama and even serving as a wartime school, Shaw House continues to offer stories, surprises, and fresh perspectives for every visitor.

The House has stood on the north edge of Newbury since 1581. It has welcomed royalty, seen action during the Civil War, housed soldiers during World War II and schooled generations of local children.

With changes in ownership and use of the House over the centuries, the original contents have long since gone. Much was sold off in 1905 and 1945, leaving the rooms available for more practical uses, such as a school and, more recently, a perfect venue for hosting conferences, community meetings, and training.





Alongside its vibrant visitor offer, Shaw House is also a stunning venue for meetings, events, and special occasions such as weddings. We offer six stunning rooms for hire, each full of historic character, natural light and a calm, elegant atmosphere. Flexible half-day, full-day, and evening rates are available. Room hire includes all technical facilities, including projector, screen, and Wi-Fi.

We also host celebration drinks receptions, afternoon tea gatherings, and bereavement receptions for up to one hundred guests, with a choice of buffet, canapé, and drinks options.



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“With its rich history, from royal visits to Civil War drama and even serving as a wartime school, Shaw House continues to offer stories, surprises, and fresh perspectives for every visitor.”

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You don't need to tour the House to enjoy our café and gift shop, which are open to everyone - ideal for a coffee break, a browse for gifts, or a relaxing stop during your walk, cycle or visit to the gardens or playground.

For enquiries or bookings, please email: [shawhouse@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:shawhouse@westberks.gov.uk), visit [westberkshireheritage.org](http://westberkshireheritage.org) or call **01635 279279**.



# Dishing out local food ratings and kitchen kudos

Whether you're planning a night out, grabbing lunch on the go, or ordering your favourite takeaway, it's easier than ever to make sure the place you choose takes food hygiene seriously.



Those green and black 'Scores on the Doors' stickers you see in café and restaurant windows are part of the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, run by the Food Standards Agency and delivered locally by West Berkshire Council's Environmental Health Officers.

The ratings give clear, reliable information about how well businesses are meeting food hygiene standards. After a thorough inspection, each business receives a score from 0 to 5. A 5 means hygiene standards are very good, while a 0 means urgent improvement is needed.

The rating is a snapshot of the conditions on the day of inspection, and reflects hygiene only, not food quality or customer service.



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**"It's easier than ever to make sure the place you choose takes food hygiene seriously."**

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Inspections look at three key areas:

- ★ How food is handled - preparation, cooking, cooling, and storage.
- ★ The condition of the premises - cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation, and pest control.
- ★ How food safety is managed - staff training, record keeping and processes.

West Berkshire has excellent results to be proud of. By the end of 2025, 87% of food premises had achieved the top score of 5, with no businesses rated 0 and only seven rated 1.

## Know before you go

Businesses are encouraged to display their rating stickers proudly, and these can also be checked online at [ratings.food.gov.uk](https://ratings.food.gov.uk) or via many online food delivery platforms.



# Changing the conversation



## How two young people are influencing council decisions

We spoke to Charlie Gale and Natasha Rowe, the two young people now sitting on West Berkshire Council's Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, about why they stepped forward, what they've learned, and what they want to change.

The Committee reviews and monitors the council's services, performance, and policies regarding children and education to hold the council's Executive to account.

It aims to improve outcomes for residents by ensuring services meet local needs and provide value for money. Its work includes reviewing OFSTED reports, school attainment, SEND support, and children's social care provision.

### What first sparked your interest in getting involved with scrutiny and local decision-making?

**Charlie:** I've always been involved in student voice at school and I wanted to take that experience into a local setting. Youth participation is often missing, so when these roles came up, it felt like the right moment to get involved.

**Natasha:** I care about helping people and this felt like a real opportunity to influence decisions that affect young people. Councils make choices that shape our lives, so I wanted to bring our perspective to the table.

### How was your first scrutiny meeting?

**Charlie:** Quite daunting at first, very formal, but really interesting. We talked about OFSTED, children's services and school attendance, which has so many causes.

**Natasha:** It was intimidating but fascinating. Hearing the reports helped me understand how decisions are made. Now that I know the process, I'm looking forward to the next one.

### Why does having young people on the committee matter?

**Charlie:** Because the committee is about children and young people. Having us in the room adds a lived experience adults can't bring.

**Natasha:** Life for young people now is very different to even ten years ago. We can show how decisions will play out in the real world.

### What are you working on next?

**Charlie:** We're designing training for Councillors on how to engage with young people properly and involve us in shaping decisions.

**Natasha:** Making meetings more accessible. If young people are expected to contribute, barriers need removing.

### What is the one change you'd make for young people right now?

**Charlie:** Better support around education and attendance.

**Natasha:** Equal access to resources early in life. It shapes everything.

### Who has supported you in taking on this role?

**Charlie:** Berkshire Youth has been fantastic, helping us prep, supporting us in meetings and with our training work.

**Natasha:** Yes, Kerrie Hiscock from Berkshire Youth and Gordon Oliver from the Council have supported us at every stage.

### What would you say to other young people thinking of getting involved?

**Charlie:** Go for it. Young people have so much to offer.

**Natasha:** Don't underestimate your impact. Your voice can make a real difference.



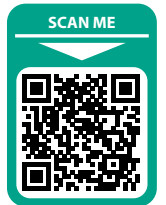
Photo by Alan Garnsworthy

# West Berkshire Council Here to help

Your council is here to help you and provides a wide range of services, such as adult social care, education, planning, roads, waste, and council tax.

Our website contains information about all our services and many transactions can be performed quickly and easily online.

You can also report problems such as potholes or missed bin collections online or by scanning this QR code:



Find out more at: <https://westberks.gov.uk>

<https://westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem>



If you're not online, there are many other ways to get in touch with us:

You can write to us at:

**West Berkshire Council,**  
Market Street,  
Newbury RG14 5LD

If you need to visit us in person, our Market Street offices are open:

**8:30am-5pm Monday-Thursday** and  
**8:30am-4:30pm on Fridays.**

**Our advisors are available until 4:30pm**  
**Monday - Thursday and 4pm on a Friday**



If you would like to contact us by phone, you can call us on the following numbers:

<b>Adult Social Care:</b>	<b>01635 503050</b>
<b>Children's Social Care:</b>	<b>01635 503090</b>
<b>Council Tax:</b>	<b>01635 519520</b>
<b>Housing:</b>	<b>01635 519530</b>
<b>Parking:</b>	<b>01635 519213</b>
<b>Streetcare and Waste:</b>	<b>01635 519080</b>
<b>Main switchboard and</b> <b>Out of Hours Emergencies:</b>	<b>01635 551111</b>

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