

Your West Berkshire

Autumn/Winter 2024

www.westberks.gov.uk



Inside

Improving our roads, boosting rural businesses, supporting you this winter... and more!



WestBerkshire
COUNCIL



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Please pass this on for others to read, or pop it in the recycling.



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Information in this magazine is correct at time of publication (October 2024).

Cover photo by Phil Cannings.



INTRODUCTION



Welcome to this edition of the Your West Berkshire magazine.

At West Berkshire Council we have ten Executive councillors, each taking responsibility for a particular area and collectively forming the main decision-making body on the Council. I was delighted this year to be asked to lead on planning and housing – key issues for residents and the district.

Housing and house building is always a hot topic and now as much as ever. The Planning Inspector has required us to find more places to build homes to meet additional demand while changes to national planning policies are likely to push that number even higher. No one would disagree with the need to build new homes – they will be homes for our children, to support the growth of our local economy and our towns and villages.

However, this needs to be balanced against the need to ensure these homes are in the right place and supported by the necessary infrastructure. That's why we proceed carefully to make sure we get it right – while ensuring we meet our housing targets and that decisions are taken locally and not subject to Government intervention.

Keep in touch by subscribing to our e-newsletters at westberks.gov.uk/newsletters

Work on the Local Plan Review continues and will be subject to further consultation and approval by the Planning Inspector and at meeting of all the district's councillors. We'll be keeping you updated as we go so do sign up to our newsletters and follow us on social media to keep in touch on this issue.

We continue to make good progress though. Last year we delivered 275 new affordable homes – boosting us towards our target to deliver 1,000 by 2030. Residents have started moving into the new homes at Sterling Gardens in Newbury and their feedback has been extremely positive.

Our support for those who need additional help remains steadfast with a plan in place to support those people who are homeless this winter, and a Household Support Fund to support households who would otherwise struggle to meet essential living costs. You can read more about these in this magazine. It's another packed edition sharing with you just some of the work we are doing with you and for you to ensure West Berkshire remains such a wonderful place in which to live.

Councillor Denise Gaines
Deputy Leader of West Berkshire Council
Executive Member for Planning and Housing

Supporting rough sleepers this winter

During cold weather we work hard to support rough sleepers by providing a warm place to stay.

Our Winter Plan and Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, or SWEP, is a proactive plan to minimise the impact of cold weather on rough sleepers this winter across West Berkshire.

Beds are set aside to ensure anyone who is verified as sleeping rough can have access to accommodation 24/7 to be safe and warm.

It helps the small number of people who are not normally eligible for services, choose to sleep rough or have previously refused support from housing services and feeds into a broader programme of activity to tackle homelessness in the district.

More information about the support available for rough sleepers can be found here.

westberks.gov.uk/homelessnessupport

If you spot a rough sleeper, here is some information on what you can do:

Report a rough sleeper to Streetlink on:
<https://thestreetlink.org.uk>.
If you are a rough sleeper you can also self-refer yourself via Streetlink

Contact our Rough Sleeper Team:

RSI@westberks.gov.uk

If you think the person you are concerned about is in immediate danger or needs urgent care, please call 999

Donate to **local homeless charities** rather than directly to **individuals**



Welcome Spaces continue to grow

Community Welcome Spaces are warm, comfy places where people can get together for company and a hot drink. They're a great place to socialise and keep in touch, especially during the winter months.

We currently have 23 Welcome Spaces across the district and we're not stopping there.

Hamstead Marshall resident Anne Budd started the Hamstead Marshall Parish Café in 2023 with friends Liz Copas and Chris Moss. They self-fund the Café with help from donations given by the people that go there, and it's now a popular Welcome Space.

"We wanted to bring people together so they could catch up with friends and neighbours. It's been welcomed by so many people because it's so inclusive and really helps to stop anyone feeling isolated for any reason."

Anne Budd

We're always on the lookout for more Welcome Spaces and are asking communities, organisations and individuals to get in touch if they have a space that could be used.

If you, or someone you know, have a potential space, email rhys.lewis@westberks.gov.uk and play a vital part in helping people meet others and put a stop to social isolation.

To find a welcome space near you visit westberks.gov.uk/community-welcome-spaces or call **01635 551111**.



COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARDS 2024



The Community Champion Awards are an opportunity to say thank you to people who have done something special for their local community. They honour those individuals and community groups who have gone above and beyond to support residents throughout West Berkshire.

There are four categories, which are:

- **The Pat Eastop MBE Junior Citizen of the Year**
- **Volunteer of the Year**
- **Community Group of the Year**
- **Lifetime Achievement Award**



To find out more and nominate someone visit
westberks.gov.uk/community-champion

Boosting rural businesses in West Berkshire

West Berkshire Council has awarded just under £298,000 in grants to rural businesses, helping to drive the local economy and promote sustainability through the Rural England Prosperity Fund Business Grant Scheme.

Small rural businesses were able to apply for grants between £10,000 and £40,000 to fund projects to improve productivity and strengthen both the rural economy and local communities. Eleven local businesses were able to benefit from the scheme.

Applications for the grant are now closed. We'd like to thank all the businesses who put the time in to apply for the grant - we saw an amazing response to the grant scheme and are pleased to have fully allocated the funding to support the local economy.



Nino's Italian Gelato and Coffee Van:

"Thanks to the grant, we launched a mobile gelato and coffee van, reaching new customers at events and festivals. This has boosted local tourism and created new jobs. We're excited for the future!"



Tom Fortune and Sons Hedge Laying:

"With the grant, I was able to buy new equipment and offer more services to the local community. It's helped me raise the profile of hedge laying and expand my business."



Charlotte Manser Ceramics:

"The grant helped me expand my studio, buy new equipment, and increase production. It's boosted local tourism and created new opportunities for collaboration and growth."

Keeping West Berkshire Moving: Better Roads, Safer Journeys!

We are dedicated to enhancing the way we deliver services, with a strong focus on improving and maintaining our highways infrastructure. Our ongoing efforts highlight our commitment to keeping our roads safe, efficient, and accessible for everyone.

Throughout the year, we're on the ground working to enhance your daily journeys. Whether it's fixing potholes, resurfacing roads, or ensuring proper drainage, our work is all about keeping you moving smoothly and safely across the district.

Road signs get a makeover!

Have you noticed that some road signs in West Berkshire are looking a little grubby? Well, there's some good news – we've allocated funding in this year's budget to give them the attention they deserve! This project is part of our ongoing effort to take pride in our community and improve the look of the district, making it more enjoyable for residents and visitors alike.

Over the next few months, we'll be rolling out a cleaning schedule, prioritising the signs that need it most. Clean and clear road signs not only make our streets look better but also ensure that important information is easily visible for everyone.

Keep an eye on our website and social media for updates on the project and to see when the clean-up is happening in your area. We're excited to share our progress as we work to enhance the beauty of West Berkshire.



Smoother roads ahead with new pothole criteria for faster repairs

We are stepping up our game when it comes to road repairs. We've introduced new criteria for fixing potholes, aiming to achieve better results and keep our roads in top condition. From now on, we'll be repairing potholes that are 4cm deep instead of 5cm, as long as they're at least 30cm wide. This means we'll be catching more potholes earlier than we previously were.

By reclassifying the way we measure potholes, we'll be inspecting and repairing more of them, improving the overall quality of our primary, secondary and local roads. This change is part of our ongoing commitment to investing in and improving road conditions for all residents and highway users.

With these new criteria, we expect to repair 20% more potholes in the next year -that's around 600 extra repairs! Keep an eye out as we continue to make West Berkshire's roads smoother and safer for everyone.

Keeping West Berkshire roads safe over Winter

Over the winter we'll be working hard to keep roads safe and traffic moving smoothly, even in the toughest weather. Our Winter Service Policy and Plan outlines how we respond when ice and snow are forecast, minimising delays and accidents during the colder months. From November to March, we closely monitor the weather to decide when gritting and snow clearance is needed – treatment is usually carried out before or after rush hour for maximum efficiency.

For the first time this winter, we'll be using state-of-the-art thermal sensors fixed to street lighting columns along winter maintenance routes and on winter gritting vehicles. The data from the new sensors will be integrated into the Council's winter forecast process allowing more informed decisions to be made on when roads should be treated.

While we handle most roads in the district, the M4 and A34 are managed by National Highways, and private or unadopted roads are not covered by our gritting or snow clearance plans. You can help by clearing snow and ice from pavements - it's safe and easier than you might think!

Tips for clearing snow and ice:

- Clear early in the day before snow hardens.
- Don't use water; it could refreeze into black ice.
- Use salt to melt ice and snow, but don't take it from public salting bins as this is used to keep roads clear, not private properties.
- Ash or sand can help if you're low on salt as it will provide grip underfoot.
- Take extra care on steps and steep paths, adding more salt for grip.

Stay updated on road conditions and closures throughout the winter by visiting our live roadworks map:

westberks.gov.uk/roadworksmap

Let's keep West Berkshire moving safely this winter!



Road to progress - 2024 improvements so far:

2024 has been a busy year for road improvements in West Berkshire, and we're proud of the progress we've made. So far in 2024, we've:

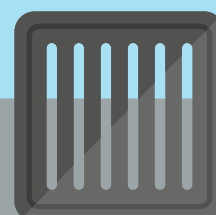
repaired 2,258
potholes



resurfaced 31.8km
of road



cleaned 12,054
gullies



repaired 437
streetlights



These efforts show our ongoing commitment to maintaining and improving West Berkshire's highways for everyone!

The first 1001 days of a baby's life include pregnancy and their first two years. There is clear, compelling evidence that this is a significant and influential phase in development.

What happens during this period lays the foundation for every child's future health, wellbeing, learning and earnings potential. During this period, our Family Hubs are there to offer a range of services to support families, parents and carers. They're a rich source of advice, support and friendly, social interaction with so much on offer, from antenatal, postnatal, breastfeeding support and baby massage to applying for free childcare.

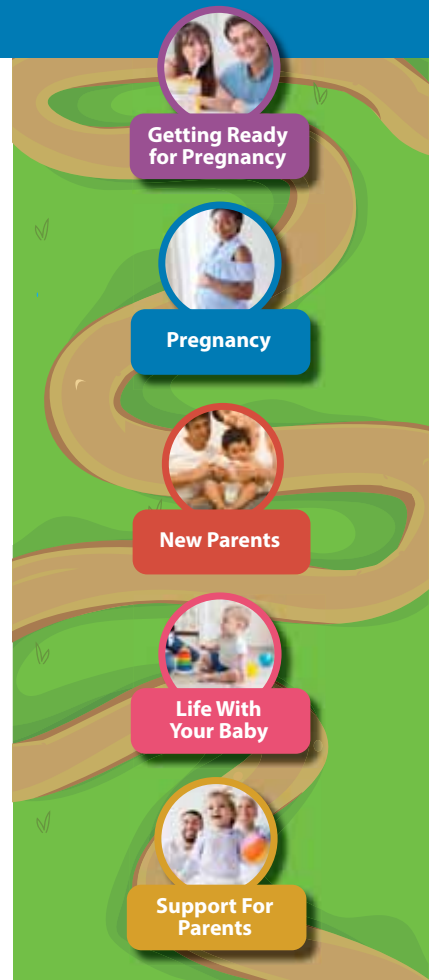
Here's what two of our mums have to say:

Jenny: "It's like a little family here and everyone's always asking you how you are. They keep in touch, give you a quick text if you haven't been for a week. You get a lot of support here and you can ask them anything."

Maria: "When my fifth child was six and a half months, the pandemic hit so we stopped going to baby groups and that really affected him. I can see the difference in him now that we come here to the Hub every week and to other baby groups too, he's just developed so much. It's a really good place for them to learn and develop, especially social skills. I can't stress how important that is."

Families with children under 5 can get 1-1 support from a Family Support Worker or take part in groups and play-based activities to support early learning and development.

Find your closest Family Hub at westberks.gov.uk/familyhubs



Social media not your thing?

You can now get updates from West Berkshire Council by following our WhatsApp channel!

Simply scan this QR code, hit follow and turn on notifications!



Using AI to Improve Local Services—With People Always in Control



At West Berkshire Council we're starting to use artificial intelligence (AI) to assist our staff - making work more efficient and helping improve the services you rely on, while keeping people firmly in charge of all the important decisions.

One great example of this is how the Council is tackling road maintenance.

AI technology is helping the council monitor the condition of the roads. Using video surveys, an AI tool scans the roads to spot problems like potholes and cracks. This technology identifies which areas need attention more quickly than traditional methods alone as it's able to look through hours of video footage.

While AI helps spot these issues, the decision on what to repair and when is still made by human experts. This means roads get fixed faster, improving safety, without losing the personal oversight of experienced council staff.

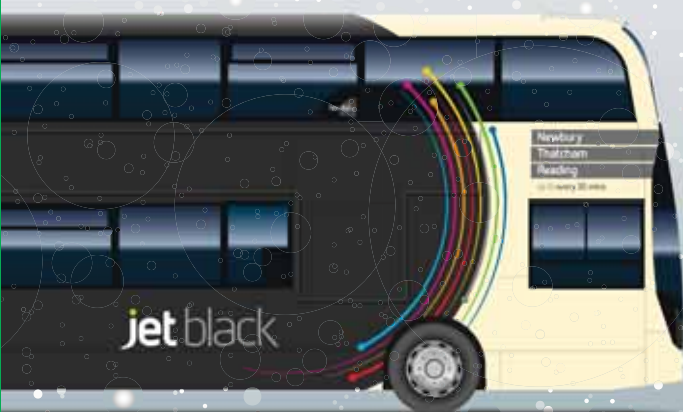
Another area is the implementation of a document translating programme. This tool translates documents into 75 languages while preserving formatting and will continue to increase our annual savings as it becomes more widely adopted across the Council.

AI is also helping to streamline other Council operations. For example, the recruitment process is being sped up with the help of AI, which assists in creating job adverts. Future initiatives will include the launch of an AI-powered assistant embedded on the council's website, aimed at facilitating residents' enquiries.

By using AI, we are making every day processes smoother and quicker, freeing up staff to focus on more complex tasks that require a human touch.

But rest assured, while AI is being used to assist and improve efficiency, it's not replacing the role of people in making decisions and we're showing how AI can be a valuable tool, but one that works alongside humans—not in place of them.

Travel by bus for free over the festive season



To help you get ready for a jolly holiday season, we are once again offering free bus travel in West Berkshire!

On Saturdays 16 November, 14 December and 21 December you can travel all day, any time, completely free within West Berkshire.

But that's not all! Free travel extends beyond West Berkshire to our neighbouring areas such as Reading, Didcot, Basingstoke, and Swindon. If you start your journey in West Berkshire, your return journey is also free! You'll need to request a return ticket from the driver when boarding to take advantage of this offer.

More information will be made available about the free bus travel offer here: [westberks.gov.uk/transportchanges](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/transportchanges)

Easy electric vehicle charging for West Berkshire residents



We're excited to be one of the first UK councils to launch the Kerbo Charge system, making it easier than ever for residents to charge their electric vehicles (EVs) at home, even with street parking!

This innovative through-pavement charging channel allows you to connect to your home's power supply without hazardous cables crossing footpaths.

Here's how it works:

1. Apply for a channel installation.
2. Once approved, purchase and arrange for the installation of the charging channel.
3. Insert the charging cable into the channel — the lid closes like a zip, keeping the path safe and tidy!

You can find out more and apply here:
westberks.gov.uk/evguidance

New pedestrian and cyclist path unveiled in West Berkshire

We have successfully completed Stage 1 of the Stockcross Linkway, a brand-new shared path connecting pedestrians and cyclists from Stockcross Village to Newbury. Running alongside the B4000, this new path enhances accessibility and safety for active travel in the area.

Looking ahead, the next phase of the Linkway will extend across the A4 and A34 towards Speen Lane, further connecting the local community with safe travel routes.



Community Connect - your flexible bus service



Say hello to JamBuster, our new Community Connect bus. To give the bus some personality, we held a competition with local school children. Chloe from The Willows Primary School won with her creative name for the bus linking Northwest Downlands to Newbury – meet JamBuster!

We're also expanding the service to villages near Thatcham, replacing the 41/44 fixed route with our first fully electric bus. Operating Monday to Friday, this new eco-friendly service will keep you connected.

To find out more about our on-demand bus service visit
westberks.gov.uk/communityconnect



Council signs Armed Forces Covenant

West Berkshire Council has proudly signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant. Cllr Jeff Brooks, Leader of West Berkshire Council signed the Covenant at Shaw House alongside Lt Col Tim Heberd, PWRR, Denison Barracks to show the Council's continued support for the military community.

The covenant ensures that members of the Armed Forces community have equal access to public services, ensuring they are not disadvantaged due to their military service. This support includes areas such as housing, healthcare, and education.

By signing the covenant, we acknowledge the significant contributions made by Service personnel, veterans and military families to both the local community and the nation. This commitment extends beyond words, with practical measures such as offering discounts to Armed Forces members and veterans at Everyone Active leisure centres. You can find out more, including concessionary prices, by searching for 'everyone active discounts' on our website.

The council has a longstanding history of supporting the Armed Forces, having initially signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in 2011. The recent strengthening of the covenant through the Armed Forces Act 2021 underscores the council's dedication to addressing the unique challenges faced by service personnel and their families.



Did you know?

Armed Forces members and veterans receive discounts at Everyone Active leisure centres. You can find out more by searching for 'everyone active discounts' on our website.

Join us at a Community Forum

Community Forums are back underway for 2024/25 with the first, held in September, focusing on planning.

The aim of these forums is to provide an opportunity for residents and stakeholders to come together and discuss issues of significance to communities in West Berkshire, and to ask questions with councillors and senior officers at in-person meetings. These forums are also hybrid meaning that residents can join from the comfort of their own homes.

Since the forums have been re-established, we have already hosted three events. The first looking into bringing sports back to Faraday Road, the second looking into rural issues faced across the district and most recently focussing on the planning process.

The latest forum hosted 45 residents in the room and around 90 residents online via YouTube Live and Zoom. Although there were a few technical issues at the start, the forum went off without any major issues and welcomed questions across the board from those in the room and online.

Sign up to our West Berkshire Council weekly news bulletin to hear about future forums. You can subscribe at westberks.gov.uk/newsletters

Tackling Flooding: Our commitment to protection and preparedness



We understand that flooding has been a significant challenge for many residents. We're working hard to play our part in preventing flooding and to support our communities when it does occur.

To do this, we've enlisted experts to help identify flood risk measures and are collaborating with key partners like the Environment Agency and Thames Water. We're working to clean blockages and are delivering initiatives which could help - from local drainage improvements to large-scale flood mitigation projects.

Are you aware of the flood risks in your area? Being informed and prepared can make a huge difference in how you respond and recover from flooding. Stay proactive, and make sure you know your risks and preparation steps.

The check list below can help with what you can do to prepare:

- ✓ **Step 1:** Check your flood risk – visit [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) to see if your property is at risk and get advice on how to protect it.
- ✓ **Step 2:** Sign up for Emergency Alerts – register for Flood Alerts and Met Office Severe Weather Alerts. Turn on Emergency Alerts on your phone for any national notifications.
- ✓ **Step 3:** Pack a grab bag – prepare essentials in case you need to leave quickly. Keep it somewhere handy to grab and go.
- ✓ **Step 4:** Create a 'Household Emergency Plan' – list key contacts and important information that your household can follow.
- ✓ **Step 5:** Join the Priority Services Register - register for extra support during emergencies if you are eligible.

More information can be found on our website:

[westberks.gov.uk/flooding](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/flooding)

Use our **'Report a Problem'** form on our website to report issues such as blocked gullies, flooding, or roads that you think are likely to flood: **[westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem)**

Reporting them early will allow our teams time to fix the problem sooner.

Staying safe and healthy after flooding: essential tips

Flooding can lead to various health issues, including physical injuries, skin or gut infections from contaminated water, and long-term problems like mental health challenges and respiratory issues from mould and damp. Here are some important actions you can take to help you stay safe while cleaning up after a flood:

- ✓ **Protect yourself:** Wear rubber boots, waterproof gloves and protective clothing to avoid direct contact with floodwater.
- ✓ **Hygiene first:** Wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap after cleaning or handling flood affected items.
- ✓ **Take care of your well-being:** It's normal to feel tired, anxious, or have trouble sleeping after a flood. Take regular breaks and seek support if needed.
- ✓ **Safe water use:** If water services are disrupted, use bottled water for handwashing.
- ✓ **Electrical and gas safety:** Do not turn on gas or electrical appliances if they have become wet. Have them inspected by a qualified technician first.
- ✓ **Laundry:** Wash clothes worn during cleanup separately from other laundry.
- ✓ **Handle with care:** Watch out for hidden hazards like sharp objects or electrical risks in floodwater.
- ✓ **Dry out your home:** Use heating, dehumidifiers, and ensure good ventilation to help dry out your space.
- ✓ **Check your insurance:** Consult resources like the National Flood Forum and the Property Care Association for advice on flood defence technology and insurance.

Stay safe and seek help if you need it during the recovery process. More detailed information can be found online here: westberks.gov.uk/cleaning-your-home-flooding

Flood Forums: Support and advice from those who know

Flood Forums provide invaluable support from people who have personally experienced flooding or have helped others through it. These forums are designed to offer advice and strengthen resilience for communities, residents and businesses affected by or at risk of flooding.

In West Berkshire, you can connect with these local Flood Forums:

- The Pang Valley Flood Forum
- Lambourn Valley Flood Forum
- Newbury Flood and Drainage Action Group (find them on Facebook)

These forums are great resources for support and practical advice tailored to your specific needs.

More information can be found on the National Flood Forum website: nationalfloodforum.org.uk



West Berkshire Customer Charter

West Berkshire is a great place to live, work and visit

Our Customer Charter sets out how we will interact with you and value your opinion to ensure we deliver great customer service, value for money and put you at the heart of everything we do.

This Charter is our commitment to you

We promise to...

Be polite, open and friendly

Listen and respect your needs

Treat all customers fairly and equally

Be responsive, helpful and courteous

Make sure our teams are trained to help with your needs

Offer a variety of ways to access our services, including a quicker and easier online experience

Deal with your personal data sensitively

Use easy to understand language and provide other formats if needed



In return we ask that you...

Treat our staff politely and with respect

Inform us if you are unhappy with the service you receive and let us have feedback if we have done well

Treat our offices with respect so that everyone can enjoy them

Tell us if you need information in a different format or language

Make use of our online portal wherever you can to conduct transactions and seek advice

Keep us up to date about changes in your circumstance or household

If you would like to know more about our commitment to you or details on how we can support you in all forms of communication visit www.westberks.gov.uk

Affordable accommodation

Residents have started moving into Sterling Gardens in Newbury – a mix of social and affordable rent, and shared ownership properties.

One resident who has already moved in said:

"I moved into Sterling Gardens a few months ago with my two children and we are enjoying our new home and very happy. The environment is lovely, we are close to town, work and schools. This is the best place to be. Our previous place was not very nice, and my children suffered with PTSD but since moving here they have calmed down a lot. My children are now doing really well at school and are less anxious which is due to living in this beautiful place."



That's a wrap!

Northcroft Lido is now closed after its first full season.

It's been a fantastic summer and we hope you've enjoyed using the fabulous lido. Since opening in April, over 40,000 visitors have used the lido, whether that's for lane swimming or for family swim sessions.

The lido will reopen in Spring 2025 and we hope you're looking forward to it as much as we are.

You can still enjoy swimming in our indoor pool at Northcroft Leisure Centre, and in case you haven't heard, the centre is currently being redeveloped too. You can find out more about this on page 20.



Helping deliver a greener West Berkshire

The new Garden Waste Collection service for 2024/25 has begun. This year, we've gone digital - no more bin stickers! Our crews will use in-cab technology to track subscriptions, so mark your green bin with your house number for easy identification. We're ramping up checks to ensure only subscribers get their bins collected, including spot inspections and removal of non-subscriber bins. Haven't signed up yet? Subscribe at: westberks.gov.uk/gardenwaste.

Battery recycling is now even easier with our new kerbside collection service. Simply place common household batteries in a clear bag and pop it on top of your black bin on collection day.

We'll collect:

D, C, AA, AAA, AAAA (1.5-volt), A23 (12-volt), PP3 (9-volt), CR2032 (3-volt), and LR44 (1.5-volt) batteries.



Safety tip: Never put batteries inside the bin.

We'll gladly collect most household batteries, but there are some exceptions: Car/moped batteries, lithium-ion (Li) power tool batteries and vapes, should continue to be taken to our household recycling centres at Newtown Road, Newbury, or Padworth.

Podback is here!

We're thrilled to announce the collection of used coffee pods at our Newtown Road and Padworth Recycling Centres. Just collect your used pods at home, separate by material (aluminium and plastic pods), and drop them off at the designated containers. It's that easy to recycle your coffee habit!



These exciting projects are all part of our commitment to making West Berkshire greener and more sustainable!

Community Infrastructure Levy review scheme

West Berkshire Council has started issuing discretionary payments to homeowners who became liable for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments due to mistakes made when completing paperwork.

Anyone building their own house, residential annexes or extending their homes may be exempt from CIL payments but must first complete paperwork to be formally assessed as being exempt. Where the paperwork was not filled out correctly those householders have found themselves liable to CIL charges and subsequent enforcement action if these weren't paid.

A new discretionary review scheme has so far considered seven applications – and found that six were charged when they would have been exempt had the paperwork been completed properly. Those homeowners will be receiving discretionary payments between £12,000 and £40,000.

West Berkshire Council is believed to be the first local authority to review CIL payments and to make discretionary payments where residents have made mistakes with the paperwork.

The move has been welcomed by the Leader of West Berkshire Council, Councillor Jeff Brooks, who commented that this is right thing for the Council to do and underlines a commitment to listen to residents and to act with fairness, integrity, and a focus on customers.



Shaw House historic gate restoration and Tudor knot garden plans

Work has been taking place over the last few months to restore the historic gates at Shaw House which were destroyed in an unfortunate incident last year. This has included repairing the original iron gates and rebuilding the brick pillars and decorative stone tops.

The gates were originally installed in 1908 by the Honourable Mrs Farquhar who had them moved to Church Road from the edge of the estate, while making improvements to the grounds.



We're sure that Mrs Farquhar would have approved of the restoration of the gates and be delighted to hear of our plans to create a new Tudor Garden on the front lawns of the House, with thanks to funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The garden will be created using a mix of low maintenance hedging, shrubs and herbs to create a symmetrical design in the style of a Tudor knot garden.

Knot gardens were first created in the 1550s, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, but originated from medieval kitchen gardens where medicinal and cooking herbs were divided into separate beds to prevent confusion. The gardens were formed into intricate patterns to resemble woven knots or interlocking geometric shapes designed to be viewed from an upstairs window.

Work on the Shaw House knot garden is due to take place during the winter months ready for opening in Spring 2025.

Supporting fostering across West Berkshire

Fostering is a way of providing a family life to a child unable to live at home. As a West Berkshire foster carer, you'll be part of a team of professionals helping to provide a child with a safe environment. Our fostering team are busy supporting our foster carers, and encouraging others to be involved.

Out and About

Our fostering team had a vibrant summer, raising awareness across the community about fostering and the need for more local foster carers. Thank you to everyone who came along!

The fostering team will continue to be out and about across the district so come and say hi if you see them!

We are a Foster Friendly Employer!

West Berkshire Council is proud to be recognised as a "Fostering Friendly" employer by the Fostering Network, supporting staff who foster and helping them balance work and care.

Why our foster parents love doing what they do. Here's what they say...

"It feels amazing to get calls from young people who have moved on but want to let you know about an achievement they've accomplished."

"Listening to a young person's story, they *finally trust* enough to share."

"A message on Mother's Day thanking you for being there for them while they were with you, four years after they left."

Are You an Empty Nester?

Is your home quieter now that the kids are grown or gone to university? Fostering could bring new energy and purpose into your life. We're encouraging empty nesters to explore this rewarding journey.

Why You're Perfect for Fostering:

- **You've Raised Kids:** You know how to care, guide, and support.
- **Bring Life Back Home:** Fill your home with the joy of children again while making a real difference.

Flexible Options:

Foster full-time, part-time, or just during weekends, whatever fits your lifestyle. All you need is a spare room and the will to make a difference in a child's life, giving them the same opportunities growing up as any other child.

- **Financial Support:** Receive an allowance to cover the child's expenses, plus a professional fee for your time and dedication.
- **Training & Support:** Benefit from comprehensive training and a dedicated support network, including our fostering hubs run by experienced carers, where you can connect and find additional guidance.



New facility opens at Kennet Valley Primary School



Deirdre Devine, Headteacher at Kennet Vally Primary School says,

"We're absolutely delighted with our new SEMH/ASD resource base. It's a great building, with lots of natural light which is good for the children. We've spoken with parents who have children coming here, who are excited about their children attending the Resource Base. This is because it has been recognised that their children need to be part of a smaller group, in a more intimate environment that offers the nurturing and alternative learning opportunities that they need. To be able to provide those is a great honour for us."

A project at Kennet Valley Primary School to create a special facility for primary school children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and/or a diagnosis of Autism is now complete.

Almost £3 million has been invested in the purpose-built space which will eventually provide places for twelve children, starting with the first six who joined in September.

Over 17% of children and young people in West Berkshire schools have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) and West Berkshire has seen a 52% rise in the total number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) over the last five years.

Currently, almost 5% of children and young people in West Berkshire have an EHCP. This is slightly higher than the national average and highlights our need for additional capacity to meet SEND needs.

The facility at Kennet Valley will give a much-needed boost in making sure that more of our children get the special educational support they need. The resource base will provide a mix of educational and medical professionals who will be a team around the child to fully support them and help them to reach their full potential.



Start your learning journey today



It really is never too late to learn something new. Whether this is just for fun, a new career path or a change of direction, there's a course in West Berkshire with your name on it.

In the 2023-24 academic year, almost 1,300 adults enrolled on a course funded by West Berkshire Council. Around 200 courses were delivered in community venues across the district through twenty providers, so there really is something for everyone!

We know that learning as an adult can be tough, with a multitude of commitments to juggle. But where there's a will there's a way, and there are many flexible learning options to help you reach your goals.

Our annual Learner Achievement Awards are testament to local people achieving results they never thought possible, and we never fail to be inspired by our brilliant adult learners.



Find your course at
[westberks.gov.uk/
community-learning](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/community-learning)

Download the
West Berkshire
Libraries app today



Search the catalogue



Access e-books and e-audiobooks



Renew and reserve books



Manage multiple accounts



Keep up with our news

Baby, it's cold outside...



Weather can be unpredictable at the best of times, but winter weather can stop us from getting out and about and it's worth making sure you're prepared for severe weather, especially storms, ice or snow.

Some of us are more vulnerable to the risks posed by cold weather. Age is often a factor, with babies and children under the age of 5, people aged 65+ and those with disabilities, health conditions or impairments being most at risk, along with pregnant women.

As the cost of living continues to rise, many of us are finding it difficult to afford to heat our homes as much as we need to and anyone experiencing homelessness is particularly vulnerable.

There are a number of health risks associated with cold weather such as respiratory illnesses - COVID, flu and bronchitis, cardiovascular issues - heart attack and stroke and accidental injuries from falls, and much less commonly, hypothermia.

There are some things that can help yourself and others stay well in winter. This includes getting your flu vaccination, keeping warm over the winter months and making sure your home is safe.

You can contact **NHS 111** if you have an urgent medical problem and are not sure what to do. In an emergency, go to A&E immediately or call **999**.

There are lots of ways to save energy in your home, and you can call the government helpline on **0800 444 202** to find out more. If you're worried about a relative or elderly neighbour, contact us on **01635 551111** (office hours) or call the Age UK helpline on **0800 678 1602** (8am to 7pm every day).

Check your heating, cooking appliances and alarms are safe. Contact a Gas Safe registered engineer on **0800 408 5500** or visit [gassaferegister.co.uk](https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

Find out more at about keeping warm and well on our website [westberks.gov.uk/bad-weather](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/bad-weather)

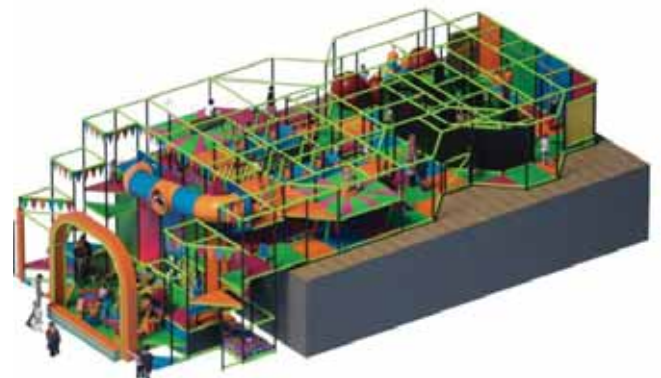
“Enhancing the current facilities, and creating new offerings that cater to the whole community.”



Redevelopment of Northcroft Leisure Centre

Work has started on an exciting transformation to Northcroft Leisure Centre in Newbury, with full completion predicted for June 2025.

We’ve invested £4.6million to upgrade this popular centre – where the recently refurbished lido is a particular favourite with residents and visitors - and are working in partnership Everyone Active to give the centre a new lease of life by enhancing the current facilities, and creating new offerings that cater for the whole community.



Improvements include:

- A larger gym with top-of-the-range equipment
- A new dedicated cycle studio
- Dedicated gym changing rooms for added convenience
- A larger and improved soft play area for children to enjoy
- The addition of a café
- An overall improved look and feel throughout



The gym is the first of the facilities to be refurbished, with plans to reopen in early 2025.

The Centre will remain open throughout the renovation, but there may be some temporary disruptions. Classes and activities may be relocated within the site to avoid the need for closure and ensure that customers continue to receive an excellent service. Parking will also be reduced. Alternative parking is available at Northcroft Lane West Car Park.



Have you thought about setting new goals, making a new routines or reigniting healthy habits? We're working with our leisure provider Everyone Active to give everyone in the district and beyond great leisure and exercise opportunities and choices.

Find your local leisure centre

We work in partnership with Everyone Active to manage seven leisure centres across the district. Find your nearest centre on our website and if you're not already a member, why not kickstart your membership now?

Everyone Active also runs a community outreach programme to help make sure that everyone has access to physical activity. This includes community venues in Theale, West Illsley and Hungerford. You can find more about this online.

What's new

Currently the fastest growing sport in the world, pickleball combines elements of tennis, badminton and ping pong to create a fun, challenging game for people of all ages and abilities.

Several of our leisure centres have launched regular pickleball sessions, including Northcroft, Hungerford, Cotswold and Kennet.

Coached sessions are available at:

- Cotswold Sports Centre – Monday 10.30am-12pm and Friday 6-7pm
- Kennet Leisure Centre – Wednesday 7- 8.30pm
- Casual bookable sessions are available at Northcroft and Hungerford Leisure Centres.



"Pckleball combines elements of tennis, badminton and ping pong"

Looking for information? We can help...

Our West Berkshire Directory brings together information about groups, activities, and signposts to local help.

Divided into three sections (Adults, Family Information Service and the SEND Local Offer), you'll be able to explore care and support available to you and your family, clubs and groups in your communities, volunteering opportunities, childcare provision and much more!



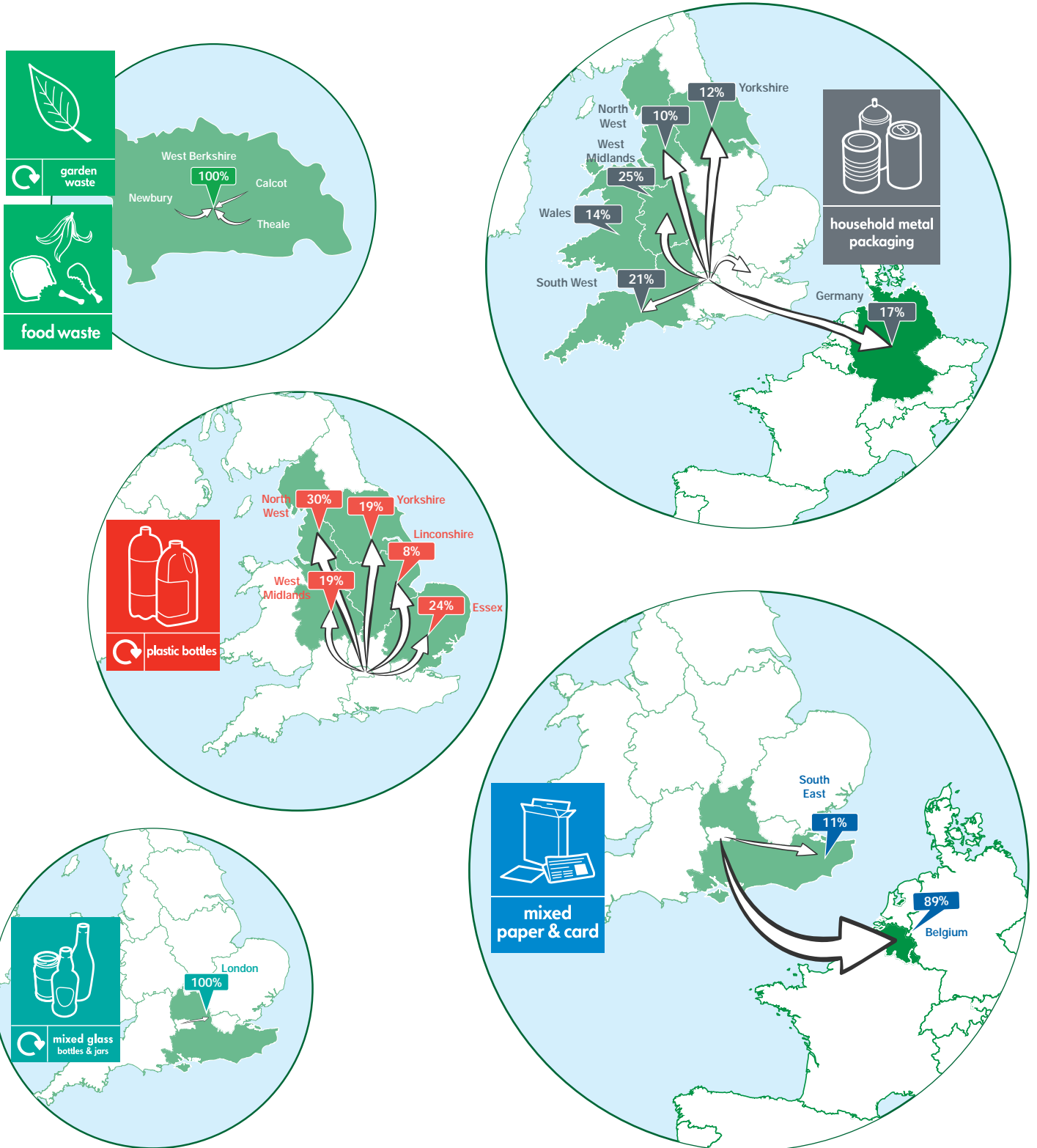
If you're part of an organisation that provides a service or are running an event in West Berkshire, you can list your details on the Directory by registering for a provider account via the Directory home page or email directory@westberks.gov.uk for further information.

Visit the Directory at <https://directory.westberks.gov.uk> or scan the QR code.



Where your recycling went in 2023-24

Have you ever wondered where your household waste goes once we've collected it from your kerb?



53% of the recycling collected stays in West Berkshire for processing

32% is processed in other parts of the UK

Only 15% leaves the UK for processing within the EU

You can find more info on our waste services at www.westberks.gov.uk/waste

Be sure of a warm and friendly welcome in your local library this autumn

As well as offering a warm, comfortable space to relax and a friendly welcome, library members can borrow up to 15 books from an extensive collection of free e-books, e-magazines and e-newspapers.

It is free to join and borrow books for everyone who lives, works or studies in West Berkshire.

Babies and young children can have their own library card and borrow up to 15 books at a time.

All details, including how to join and the current opening hours, can be found at westberks.gov.uk/libraries.



Household Support Fund

As living costs continue to soar, we have been assisting the local community through the **Household Support Fund**. Since January 2024 we have given £115,000 to charities, helped over 4,000 children with free school meal vouchers to families during the school holidays, and distributed £260,000 in hardship funds to applicants who needed financial assistance with household necessities.

The funding aims to support households who would otherwise struggle to meet essential living costs. This could help if you're struggling to afford things like:

- **energy and water bills**
- **food**
- **essential items**

Funding through the Household Support Fund is aimed at anyone who's vulnerable or cannot pay for essentials. You do not have to be getting benefits to get this help.

We strongly encourage residents not to suffer in silence but to reach out for assistance if they need it.

For more information and to apply for the next round of available funding, please visit our website: www.westberks.gov.uk/householdsupportfund.

Careers that
matter impact
that lasts



Build your
future with us

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Building better futures, together



West Berkshire
COUNCIL