

# Your West Berkshire

Spring/Summer 2025

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



## Inside

Active West Berkshire, Grazeley Solar Farm, are you ready for Ridgeway, investing in education...and more!



WestBerkshire  
C O U N C I L





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**@westberkshire**





## Welcome to the new Your West Berkshire magazine.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Spring/ Summer 2025 edition of 'Your West Berkshire'. Our aim is to keep residents informed about the latest news, events and initiatives from West Berkshire Council. In this publication, we highlight the Council's ongoing efforts to enhance community life, deliver essential services and invest in the district's future.

Inside, you'll find updates on key projects such as the Grazeley Solar Farm, our leisure centre refurbishments and highways improvements. We tell you how the Council is spending its budget for 2025/26, including our investment in schools, our infrastructure and environmental sustainability. We celebrate the achievements of local heroes through the Community Champion Awards and discover how outreach services are bringing support directly to residents.

From fostering opportunities and education projects to waste management strategies and active travel initiatives, this edition showcases the Council's commitment to creating a greener, healthier and more connected community. Whether you're interested in leisure activities, volunteering, or staying informed about local developments, "Your West Berkshire" has something for everyone.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition and invite you to share your feedback or explore more through our e-newsletters and social media channels. Together, let's continue building a vibrant and thriving West Berkshire!

### Councillor Nigel Foot

Executive Member for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside

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



**We would love to hear what you think of this magazine.**

**Send your feedback to [communications@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:communications@westberks.gov.uk)**





## Honouring the 'heartbeat' of our communities

The 2024 Community Champion Awards celebrated outstanding contributions to West Berkshire's community, honouring individuals and groups for their exceptional impact.

With an overwhelming number of nominations, winners and highly commended nominees were recognised during a ceremony at Shaw House, Newbury, with certificates presented by Councillor Billy Drummond, Chairman of West Berkshire Council.

### Award Winners

- **Volunteer of the Year:** Kerry Bird, for forming and growing the Speen Community Café.  
Highly Commended: Maria Shackell, Paula Saunderson.
- **Community Group of the Year:** Lambourn Junction Community Interest Group  
Highly Commended: Downsway School Hub Coffee Morning, Newbury Velo.
- **Lifetime Achievement Award:** Paul Cooke, for 40 years of dedication as head coach at Thames Valley Amateur Boxing Club.  
Highly Commended: Pamela Beddoes.



To see the full story scan the QR code.

## Let the music play at your local library!

Newbury, Theale, and Hungerford libraries now have pianos, thanks to Berkshire Music Trust's Musical Communities initiative. Whether you're a pro or just giving it a go, these pianos are available for practice, creativity, and fun. Sheet music is provided, and digital pianos come with headphones for quiet sessions. But if you prefer a lively atmosphere, you'll love our free, interactive Sing Along sessions.

- **Children's Music** – Mondays at Newbury Library 10am–10:45am. Little ones can sing, clap, and move to upbeat tunes with their parents or carers.
- **Adult Music** – Mondays at Newbury Library, 11am–12pm. No experience needed—just bring your love of music!
- **All-Ages Music** – Thursdays at Theale Library 3pm–4pm, and Tuesdays at Hungerford Library 4pm–5pm.



Whether you're a pianist, a shower-singer, or just looking for a fun community activity, there's something for everyone. Visit your local library or contact Berkshire Music Trust for more details. These sessions are in partnership with West Berkshire Council and Berkshire Music Trust, with support from Greenham Trust.

Don't forget that you can keep up with the daily news about everything that's happening in our libraries by following @WBerksLibraries on **Facebook** and **Instagram**.



# Grazeley Solar Farm

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**“The solar farm  
has been carefully  
designed to  
integrate with  
the natural  
surroundings”**

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West Berkshire Council is taking a big step towards a greener future with the development of a new £18 million solar farm at Grazeley. Helping to deliver on commitments made in our Environment Strategy, the project will move us towards achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

The Grazeley Solar Farm is designed to generate renewable energy locally, feeding it back into the grid to help reduce carbon emissions. Projects like this are crucial in securing sustainable power supplies, stabilising energy costs and mitigating the long-term impact of rising energy bills for residents. Current estimates suggest that the farm will reduce our carbon footprint by more than a third, while also generating an annual income to support the essential services we deliver.

The solar farm will be constructed on council-owned farmland at Bloomfield Hatch, situated between Mortimer and Grazeley. Equipped with approximately 35,000 solar panels, the farm is expected to generate around 20 megawatts peak (MWp) of energy – enough to supply electricity to approximately 6,500 homes. With a 30-year lifespan, the project will save roughly 111,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions – the equivalent of removing 1,500 cars from the road.

The solar farm has been carefully designed to integrate with the natural surroundings, minimising disruption to trees and hedgerows while enhancing biodiversity through wildflower meadows and grassland planting.

As climate change continues to be one of the greatest global challenges, initiatives like the Grazeley Solar Farm pave the way for a more sustainable future.



# OUR SPENDING PLANS FOR 2025/26

This year, the Council has prioritised delivering critical services and infrastructure improvements, allocating £187 million for essential services and £73 million for capital projects. Despite financial challenges, we remain committed to enhancing our district through targeted investments:

- **Schools and SEND Facilities:** Significant improvements to support education and pupils with Special Educational Needs.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Improving core infrastructure to better serve the community.

On top of infrastructure projects, the £187 million budget for daily services ensures the continuity of vital operations that residents depend on, such as:

- Waste and recycling collections
- Maintaining open spaces
- Housing
- Education

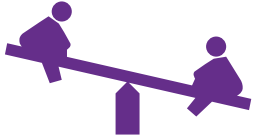
In alignment with our cost-saving plans:

- The Garden Waste Scheme has been updated with charges linked to Council Tax Bands.
- Proposals are under consideration for charging replacement fees for waste and garden bins.





Our £73m capital programme is funding these projects in 2025/26 - and many others too.



**£100,000**  
on new playground  
equipment



**£12m**  
improving our roads



**£400,000**  
to improve pavements



**£146,000**  
on new library  
books



**£50,000**  
to provide real-time  
passenger  
information and  
other public  
transport  
infrastructure



**£2.4m**  
on nutrient neutrality  
projects to improve  
the River Lambourn



**£1.6m**  
on active travel  
projects



**£1m**  
providing two additional  
classrooms at Brookfields School



**£18.6m**  
delivering a new  
solar farm

Furthermore, the Council is driving progress with several key initiatives:

- **Solar Farm at Grazeley:** £18.6 million investment towards renewable energy goals.
- **Highway Drainage and Flood Risk Improvements:** Doubling the budget to £1.7 million.
- **Highway Surfacing:** gets an additional £4 million, bringing the total investment to £12 million, to improve road quality significantly.
- **Bus Service Enhancements:** £1 million to strengthen transportation options across the district.
- **Nutrient Neutrality Programme:** £2.4 million dedicated to reducing nutrient pollution in the River Lambourn, supporting environmental sustainability.

Recognising the challenges posed by the current economic climate, the Council has secured **Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)** from the Government. This decision was not made lightly, and we join other councils across the country in seeking additional assistance to bolster financial resilience. The EFS funding will:

- Reinforce the Council's general reserve fund by the end of the 2024/25 fiscal year.
- Strengthen the budget for 2025/26 to safeguard the delivery of essential services and infrastructure improvements.

Through strategic planning and decisive action, we continue to deliver essential services and infrastructure, create financial stability, sustainable growth and unwavering support for our residents during these challenging times.





# Are you ready for Ridgeway?

**New 'Ridgeway Council' proposed for the area**

**A new unitary council has been proposed which would cover West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.**

The new council would build on strong demographic and economic similarities between the three areas and the shared historical ties. This shared history is reflected in the proposed name 'Ridgeway Council' – named after the famous 5,000-year-old footpath that travels through the heart of the three council areas.

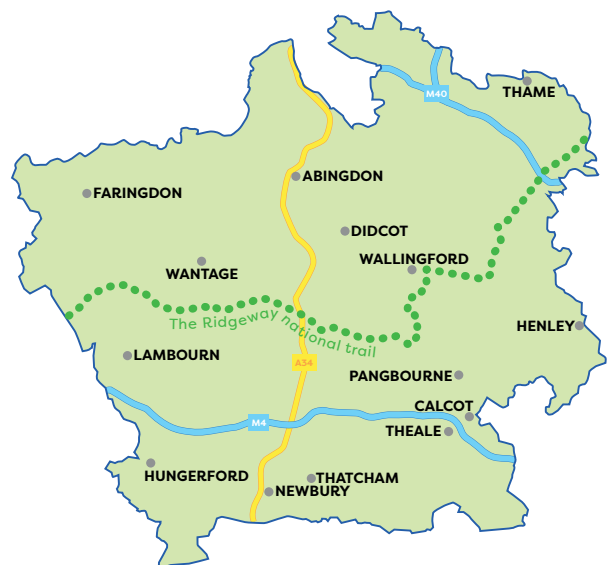
Discussions about the proposed new council started in early 2025 and involve West Berkshire Council, South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council. The proposal would be a once-in-a-generation opportunity to design a new model of local government for the area. It would support the delivery of high-quality services, improve financial resilience and value-for-money and ensure we are able to maintain truly local representation for local people.

A final proposal is expected to be submitted to the Government in summer 2025 with a decision from them expected at some point after November.

There will be opportunities to share your views through May and June 2025. You can find out more about the proposal and the latest development at [ridgewaycouncil.org/home](https://ridgewaycouncil.org/home)

## Why a new council?

The proposal is the result of an announcement by the Government which will see two-tier authorities, as seen in Oxfordshire, end and new unitary councils created. It will also mean unitary authorities will need to serve around 500,000 residents or more, which will require West Berkshire Council - which covers around 170,000 people - to merge with neighbouring councils.





# Working for recycling success



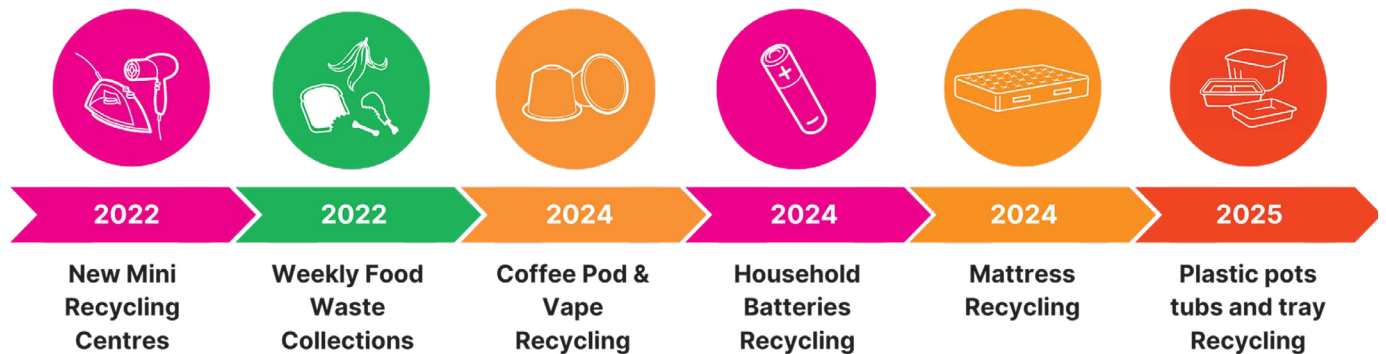
West Berkshire Council's new plan for waste, recycling, and keeping our streets clean will guide us through to 2032. We're already working to put the plan into action, with steps like:

- Changing how often black bins are collected
- Rethinking the recycling containers we use
- Adding more materials to the list of what can be recycled

Learn more about the plan at

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

## Together, we're making a difference



Over the past few years, we have made huge strides in making recycling easier, more accessible, and more impactful for our residents and the results speak for themselves!

Since launching weekly food waste collections in 2022, we've already diverted over 10,000 tonnes of food waste from landfill, which is a proud moment for our community. In 2024, we kept the momentum going by introducing recycling services for coffee pods, vapes and mattresses at our household waste recycling centres, making it even simpler for residents to do their part.

We've also rolled out kerbside battery collections and, most recently, expanded our kerbside recycling to include plastic food pots, tubs and trays - these can now go in your recycling bag alongside bottles, tins, cans and aerosols.

Thanks to your efforts, we're reducing waste, protecting our planet and leading the way in sustainable living. For more information on kerbside collections, please visit: [www.westberks.gov.uk/recycling](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/recycling)



# Work with us

With over 1,500 corporate staff and additional employees across local schools and education settings, West Berkshire Council is one of the area's largest employers.

From the services we offer to the training and benefits available, there are plenty of reasons to consider a career with us.

Sam Sturgess, an Occupational Therapy Assistant at West Berkshire Council, began her fifteen-year career in social care, where she discovered her passion for helping others. Her journey highlights her dedication and the supportive environment at the Council.

*"I didn't know what I wanted to do after leaving school, but once I started in social care, I realised helping people was what I was meant to do"*

Her roles have ranged from care assistant to working with sheltered housing, district nursing teams, and as a senior therapy assistant, which led her to occupational therapy. A role at West Berkshire Council was the perfect fit.

Sam works with clients referred by occupational therapists, supporting individuals with disabilities through meaningful activities, home visits, and assistive solutions like technology and equipment. She specialises in fall prevention and holds a Level 2 qualification in the field.

Balancing work with an Occupational Therapy degree at Coventry University, Sam appreciates the autonomy in managing her caseload. Her work helps clients overcome barriers and reconnect with the community.

**Search for jobs at West Berkshire Council to see our latest vacancies.**



*"You're never too old to change careers, I'll be in my 40s when I qualify, but it will have been worth the wait"*

## The Tudor Garden – A flourishing oasis at Shaw House

The beautiful Tudor Garden at Shaw House has been open to visitors since April, offering a tranquil space to relax and enjoy the beautiful surroundings.



Designed by horticulturist and designer Andrea Fearon of Ivy Hill Garden Design, this unique community space was created with relaxation in mind and is perfectly placed to enjoy views of Shaw House.

While the plants are all true to a Tudor period garden, their arrangement offers a contemporary interpretation, with ornamentals, herbs, and vegetables mixed together in the borders rather than separated into dedicated spaces.

The planting took place during the winter months, so we encourage you to return throughout the seasons to see its transformation. The garden will be in full bloom during summer, making it the perfect time to experience its charm.

Shaw House is open to the public every weekend from 11am to 4pm until the end of September, and Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm during school holidays.

*The project, led by West Berkshire Council's Community Services, was made possible through funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.*



# From Military Air Base to Wildlife Haven



This year marks the 25th anniversary of Greenham and Crookham Commons reopening to the public after military occupation. The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) hosted a special event in April at the Commons, celebrating their transformation into wildlife havens and treasured green spaces.

The Commons have a rich history, from being grazing land to housing an RAF airfield, later managed by the US Air Force. During the Cold War, Greenham Common gained global attention when women protested against nuclear weapons stored at the American air base. By 2000, the military runway was dismantled, fences removed, and grazing resumed.

Now, Greenham Common is West Berkshire's largest lowland heath, performing a dual role as a sanctuary for wildlife and a community asset. It's a uniquely beautiful place to visit, boasting rare wildlife like nightingales, skylarks and autumn lady's-tresses orchids.

Visit [bbowt.org.uk](http://bbowt.org.uk) for details.

West Berkshire's beautiful wildflower verges are much more than stunning sights - they're vital for biodiversity and wildlife.

Thanks to a four-year collaboration between West Berkshire Council and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), these verges are thriving. Stretching over 1,700km of rural roads, they create space for nature, improve habitats and support fragmented ecosystems.

BBOWT's focus was to identify biodiverse verges and guide the council on sensitive management to protect and enhance these important wildlife corridors and the results are simply showstopping.

Why do verges matter for wildlife? Greater plant diversity on a verge leads to more insects, which in turn provide food for birds, bats and small mammals. Expanding and connecting wild spaces boosts the resilience and abundance of native wildlife.

While beautiful, some verges require sightline clearance to help driver visibility. We begin this work early in May to prevent obstruction before wildflowers peak.

Their vibrant blooms bring life and colour to our landscapes while fostering habitats for pollinators and other wildlife. They are a wonderful example of how small changes can significantly enhance the natural beauty of our countryside. Enjoy!

## On the Verge...





# Active West Berkshire

We've been working with our partner Everyone Active, to make sure our health and well-being offerings across the district are the very best they can be.

Many leisure facilities have already received upgrades and will be ready in time for people to enjoy during spring and summer.

Here's a roundup of all the exciting developments we've funded that are in progress.



## Northcroft Leisure Centre

Northcroft Leisure Centre and its new fitness suite has been given a resounding thumbs up by the local community.

The centre opened its 80-station gym at the start of January, which was part of our wider £4.6million project. The gym has a new look and feel, providing members with a modern, inviting space where they can achieve their fitness goals.

Extended across two floors, the gym features state-of-the-art Life Fitness equipment. The ground floor has brand-new free weights, benches, dumbbells and squat racks, creating an all-new strength area to meet the increasing demand for weight training among all age groups. Meanwhile, the second floor has been transformed into a cardiovascular and resistance area.

Happy customers were quick to praise the new facility.



**Nick Drewe** said, *"I always liked using the old gym, but it is now top notch. I mostly use the weights but also the bikes and rowers and they are fantastic – far better than the previous equipment"*



## Brand-new exercise studio at Hungerford Leisure Centre

Hungerford Leisure Centre's new multi-functional activity and fitness studio has opened.

The project saw the design and construction of a purpose built, state-of-the-art studio complete with a top-of-the-range sound system and LED lighting.

With the new exercise studio complete, the leisure centre is now able to expand its fitness offering and increase the number of group exercise classes.

Residents of all ages and abilities are already enjoying a variety of instructor-led classes available in the brand-new studio, such as HIIT, yoga and Pilates, as well as the popular Les Mills fitness series.



## New gym at Kennet Leisure Centre

Kennet Leisure Centre has unveiled its newly refurbished gym and exercise studios.

Boasting a fresh, modern look, the upgraded gym has undergone complete redecoration and received a full suite of top-of-the-range cardio and resistance equipment.

The centre's exercise studio and indoor cycling room, alongside the facility's squash courts, have also been modernised and refreshed as part of the renovation project.



## Brand new 3G Pitch at Cotswold Sports Centre

Work to install a 3G artificial playing pitch at the Cotswold Sports Centre in Tilehurst has kicked off.

Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the project will redevelop the multi-sport courts situated behind the sports centre.

The development includes a 3G surface with suitable fencing and goals to be primarily used for football, although the space will be available for residents to book and use for a range of sports.

The new pitch will be the same size as the existing courts, allowing for small-sided match play and will be used for a mix of social and formal sport for local clubs and teams to book as a training space, but also for parties and activities.

The pitch is due for completion early Summer. As part of the sports centre offering, Everyone Active will run an exciting and varied programme at the facility on behalf of the Council.



## Swimmers take to the water at Northcroft Lido

Northcroft Lido is open once again for swimmers keen to take to the water outdoors. The Olympic length 50m heated outdoor pool is perfect for lane swimming, while the splashpad and spiral flume is an ideal day out with family and friends.

## 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?

You can find out more about this online [Everyone Active - Leading Operator for Gym, Swim and Activities](#) or scan the QR code.





# Road Plan will keep West Berkshire on the move!

West Berkshire Council has approved its ambitious 2025/26 Highway Improvement Programme (HIP) which will significantly improve the condition of our roads by resurfacing almost 65km of roads, doubling the number of schemes compared to previous years. This programme will invest extensively in roads, infrastructure, drainage, and sustainable transport, all funded through the Council's Capital Programme.

*"This ambitious programme enhances roads, drainage and transport networks, making our district more resilient to climate change. These improvements will benefit residents, businesses and visitors across West Berkshire and reflect our commitment to creating a safer, greener and more efficient transport network for all"*

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

## Key highlights include:

- £12m investment in highway resurfacing - £4m more than 2024/25 - covering major routes like the B4009 Long Lane, A4 Woolhampton, A329 south of Streatley and A339 near Newbury.
- £1.7m for drainage and flood risk improvements, nearly doubling last year's funding, with works at Burghfield Bridge, Paices Hill in Aldermaston and Membury Industrial Estate.
- Increased funding for white line maintenance (£300k), footpath improvements (£400k) and pothole repairs (£400k).
- £1.6m for active travel initiatives to promote walking and cycling, and further rollout of 20mph zones, involving Town and Parish Councils.
- Investments in Theale Station (£3.5m) and bus services (£1m), alongside £1m for expanding electric vehicle charge points.



# The Mowing Mystery

## When and why we cut (or don't) cut grass

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**Grass mowing isn't just about keeping things tidy; it's often about creating a balance between urban spaces and nature.**

However, the 'green divide' around making the decision of when and where to cut often raises questions.

So, why does some grass stay long and what informs the balancing act of the Council's grass management?

Sometimes, Mother Nature is the key decision maker as we're always bound by weather conditions. Or are we just trying to save money? Less mowing certainly means less expenditure, but the biggest driver is to ensure we foster an environment where biodiversity thrives.

Longer grass encourages wildflowers to bloom, supporting pollinators like bees and butterflies that are vital to our ecosystem. It also creates habitats for small mammals, birds, and insects, which play critical roles in maintaining ecological balance. Allowing grass to grow uncut reduces soil erosion, improves water absorption and can even help to sequester carbon, making it an important tool in the fight against climate change.

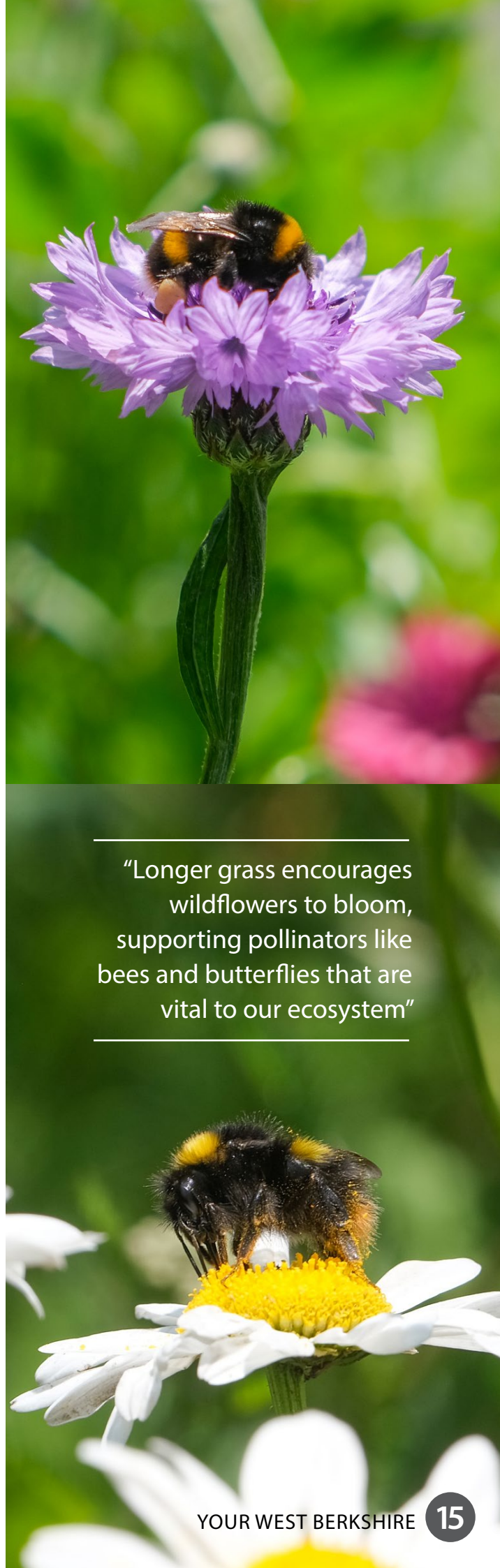
This approach isn't just about letting nature take the lead; it's also about sustainability.

By reducing mowing, councils can decrease emissions from lawn equipment, cut maintenance costs and align with environmental targets.

Explaining these benefits is key to creating a shared understanding of how these practices contribute to healthier, greener spaces.

So, while less mowing may raise eyebrows at first, it ultimately redefines what 'an acceptable appearance is' shifting the focus from manicured lawns to a more harmonious coexistence with the natural world.

Check the council's social media for updates on urban grass cutting schedules in your area.



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“Longer grass encourages wildflowers to bloom, supporting pollinators like bees and butterflies that are vital to our ecosystem”

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# Can't come to us? We'll come to you...

Did you know that we bring a lot of our services out into our communities, direct to you? West Berkshire is blessed with lots of beautiful countryside and stunning rural villages, but for some travelling to reach services and leisure activities can be tricky. That's why if we can, we'll come to your community. Here's a little round up of some of our outreach projects...



## FREE HEALTH WALKS

at The Nature Discovery Centre, Thatcham  
**every Thursday from 10:30-11:30.**  
All you need is a comfortable pair of shoes, a drink and weather appropriate clothing.

## Community Wellness Outreach Service

Community Wellness Outreach Service, in partnership with Solutions4Health, provides health checks in West Berkshire to assess risks for conditions like heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, or stroke. To host a session or invite the mobile clinic to an event, contact Solutions4Health by emailing:

[WestBerkshire.CWOS@nhs.net](mailto:WestBerkshire.CWOS@nhs.net)



## Community Garden

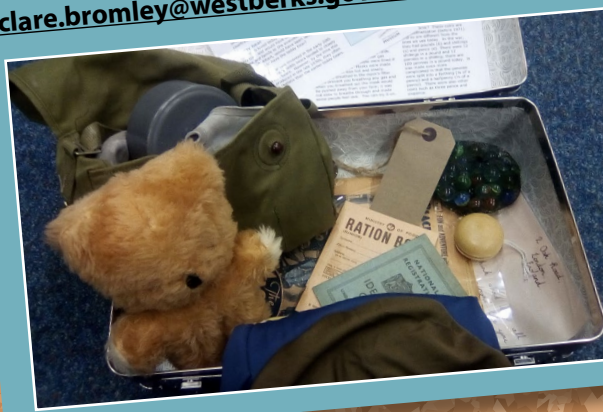
You'll find Amy (and her watering can) busy making things bloom at the Shaw House Community Garden on **Thursday mornings from 10am-12.30.** Just drop in to get growing...



## Artefact Loan boxes



West Berkshire Museum offers artefact loan boxes for schools, care homes, and resource centres. The boxes include real and/or replica artefacts on topics like Fossils, the Stone Age, WWII evacuees and Newbury Market Place. Handling these artefacts sparks memories and discussions. For more details, email: [clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk)



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West Berkshire LIBRARIES **At Home library service**

David is one of our many brilliant volunteers who chooses and delivers books to people who can't get to their local library. He loves a cuppa and a natter when he's on his rounds.

Please contact At Home Library Service, Telephone: 01635 519827 Email: [library@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:library@westberks.gov.uk) or visit [www.westberks.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/libraries)



**SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE**

## Senior Circuits!

Dawn is one of the many fans of the Senior Circuits classes held by our leisure provider, Everyone Active, weekly in Mortimer Community Centre, John Cumber Hall in Theale and Pangbourne Village Hall.

**Our fostering team** are all over the district chatting to potential foster carers. You're sure to see them out and about over the summer.




**CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT**

**“**I've been coming to Senior Circuits at the Village Hall since breaking my shoulder. It's great that I'm with other people, there's music, Callum is very inspiring and I find I'm relaxed when I do the exercises. It's much easier being in the local village hall as I can walk from my house and we go to the local café after the class. I've got to know the people in the village and there'd no worry about driving.**”**

Dawn 72



everyone ACTIVE

**Community Connect – on demand transport**

Right around the district, our Community Connect bus provides a door-to-door pick-up and drop-off service for those living in rural areas or those who are unable to drive. If you're you'd like to know more, call our team, and they'll plan a journey to suit your needs. This door-to-door service may be available for those who are unable to drive. Call (01635) 519650.



**Reduce, Reuse and Recycle with Neil**

Neil from our Waste Team is always out and about spreading the word on how to reduce waste and bump up recycling rates. He'd love to visit your school or community group, just email: [recycle@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:recycle@westberks.gov.uk) to find out more or book a session.







Officially opened February 2025

Keevill Unit revamped outside space

We're committed to shaping the future through education and are making significant investments to enhance local schools and learning facilities.

These projects reflect our commitment to sustainability, innovation and inclusivity in education.

- Keevill Unit Revamp:** £140k to redesign its outdoor space. The newly revamped outside area was officially opened in February by former student Andy Stevenson, who fondly remembers the Keevill Unit as a significant and happy part of his life. Andy, born with multiple physical challenges, has achieved success as a TV Presenter and Radio Reporter, covering prestigious events like the Paris Olympics and Paralympics for BBC TV and NBC. His presence at the opening ceremony highlighted the enduring impact of the Keevill Unit.
- Falkland Primary School:** £4m to replace outdated classrooms with sustainable, energy-efficient buildings, targeting BREEAM 'Excellent' standards and biodiversity enhancements. Construction starts summer 2025 to be completed during Summer 2026.
- Brookfields School:** £1.3m for two modern classrooms. Plans are progressing, with further updates to follow.
- Castle School:** £2.6m to replace an unused house with a state-of-the-art facility, offering 28 places for pupils with severe learning difficulties, physical disabilities and sensory needs. The building aligns with the Council's Zero Carbon 2030 goals and includes sustainability features such as Air Source Heat Pumps. Completion is expected by December 2025, ready for students in January 2026.

## Investing in Education for the Future

Due Summer 2026



Falkland School, Newbury new two-storey building

Due January 2026



Castle School, Newbury expansion project



# Shared Lives, why wouldn't you?

**Lynne and Chris had waved off the last of their grown-up children and following a period of peace and quiet, found themselves looking for somebody to join their family.**

Lynne said, "We're a fostering family and missed having young people in the house. We heard about Ryan who was looking for a long-term foster family, so I went to meet him at his school. He showed me around and I came home and told Chris I'd met the most amazing young man in the whole world and that we had to have him as part of our family."

Ryan moved in with Lynne and Chris when he was eleven and as fostering came to an end when Ryan became an adult at eighteen, he stayed with them for three more years under the Staying Put scheme then under Shared Lives.

Ryan said, "Living with Lynne and Chris is absolutely a lot of fun, it's an absolute joy and privilege. We have some amazing holidays, and we create fantastic memories. It's brilliant and I love them to bits."

Chris added, "Everybody without exception loves Ryan. He is one of those people.



Some people are a cup half empty, Ryan is the other type, the cup half full. He is such a joy to be around, everyone who meets him says so."

Ryan has a full, busy life. He volunteers three times a week at the Art Café in Marlow and has become a keen cook and baker as part of his Alfie course for cooking and performing arts. He is also on the Shared Lives Panel where he uses his own life experience to help match others with Shared Lives families. On Fridays, he and Chris enjoy their time at the pub.

"Ryan keeps us young, he's amazing, inspirational and fun, just a great person to be around"

Lynne said, "Ryan keeps us young, he's amazing, inspirational and fun, just a great person to be around. We can't imagine what our lives would have been like without our wonderful Ryan. Rather than saying why would you want to be Shared Lives carers, why wouldn't you? Why wouldn't you want to have the wonderful experiences, the fun, the joy and the life we share with Ryan and his friends. Who wouldn't want that?"

Search **West Berkshire Shared Lives** to find out more.



**Kelly, a resident in a local Residential Home, was dearly missing the companionship of a furry friend. Her face would light up whenever she saw animals, a clear sign of the joy they brought her.**

Recognising this, one of her care team suggested introducing a 'companion cat' to Kelly. These lifelike robotic pets mimic the behaviour of real cats, responding with purrs and movements when stroked. They offer the comfort and companionship of a real pet without the demands of daily care. For residents like Kelly, these Companion Cats provide a soothing presence, helping to alleviate stress and loneliness.

This solution is just one of many options available through our Adult Social Care services. By embracing technology, the ASC team are able to significantly enhance the quality of life for our residents, ensuring they feel supported and connected, even in the absence of a living pet. They have a selection of companion cats and are exploring options for other types of robotic pets.







# A spare room, a big heart, that's all it takes

**Your spare room could be a safe haven.**

**Your support could be a fresh start.**

Fostering isn't about being perfect, it's about being present.

## Why Foster?

- Transform a child's life with love & stability
- Earn a professional fee from £247.06 - £421.60 per week
- Join a welcoming community of foster carers
- Comprehensive training

## Curious?

Let's chat!

No pressure,  
just possibilities.

**01635 503155**

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

**[fostering@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:fostering@westberks.gov.uk)**

Scan the QR code  
to download the  
information pack.





# More childcare before and after school

We know that finding good, affordable childcare is one of the biggest challenges facing parents and carers. Now, primary school children will be able to access more term time childcare help following our successful bid to the government's Wraparound Childcare Fund.

More than 80% of schools are now able to offer Breakfast and After School Clubs from 8am to 6pm with a further 15% offering slightly shorter hours.

Whilst most schools provide on-site Wraparound Childcare, alternative options such as local childminders are also available to accommodate individual family needs.

The extra money will also allow some schools that don't currently offer Wraparound Childcare or wish to offer more places to do so, depending on parental demand.

We're working to offer flexible, accessible childcare options for every family. Learn more about Wraparound Childcare options, tax-free childcare, Universal Credit childcare support, MOD childcare vouchers and other resources available near you.



"We're working to offer flexible, accessible childcare options for every family"



Scan for more information





# e-billing - a more convenient way to receive your Council Tax bill

## Did you know it's now possible to opt-in to receive your Council Tax bill online?

With more people making online transactions, we wanted to make this service available too.

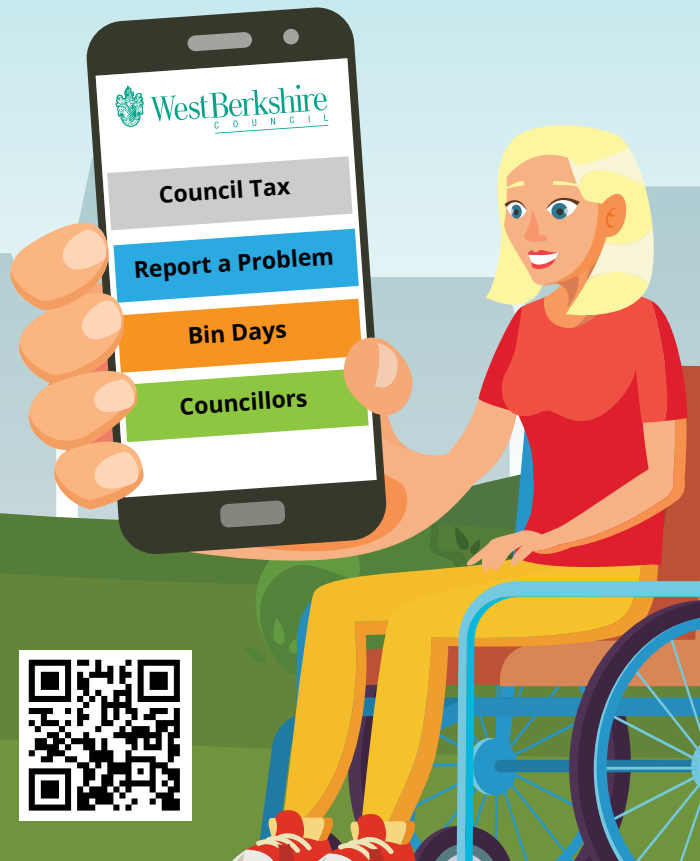
It will be more convenient for many residents as well as using less paper and being less costly for us to issue.

We hope many people will welcome this new service. If you're not one of them, that's OK, you can continue to receive council tax bills in the post as normal.

What e-billing provides:

- You will receive an email when a new bill is ready to view
- You can view bills on your preferred device and at a time which suits you
- It gives you peace of mind knowing where your latest bill is - and where to see previous years' bills
- It helps reduce the amount of mail you receive through your letterbox

Find out more on our website or scan the QR code.



## Step Into Wellness: Walk, connect, and feel good

Ramblers Wellbeing Walks West Berkshire offer 16 regular walks taking place either monthly, twice a month or weekly from various locations across the district.

Some take in some of the beautiful West Berkshire countryside, and some meet locally from local greens, commons and doctor's surgeries.



Everyone over 18 is welcome to attend and will be given a warm welcome by all our wonderful walk leaders. The walks are accessible to all and everyone is welcome to go at their own pace and enjoy walking and making new friends.

"The walks have 100% changed my life. I was housebound for two and a half years, but through the walks I've been meeting people and socialising"  
**Burdwood Wellbeing Walker**

To find a walk near you, search West Berkshire Wellbeing Walks or scan the QR code.





# Working to create lasting change for families and communities

Through our dedicated Transformation Programme, West Berkshire Council is delivering impactful change that directly improves the lives of local families. One of our latest successes has been repurposing a council-owned property into temporary supported accommodation for families awaiting permanent housing settlement. With space for up to 27 families, this initiative provides much-needed stability, privacy and support—moving children and parents out of bed and breakfasts into a more comfortable and secure environment.

This transformation means we are making the best use of council assets but more importantly it's about enhancing well-being for families in transition, ensuring they receive the dignity and care they deserve. It exemplifies our programme's commitment to operating more effectively, improving services and reducing costs, all while prioritising people's needs.

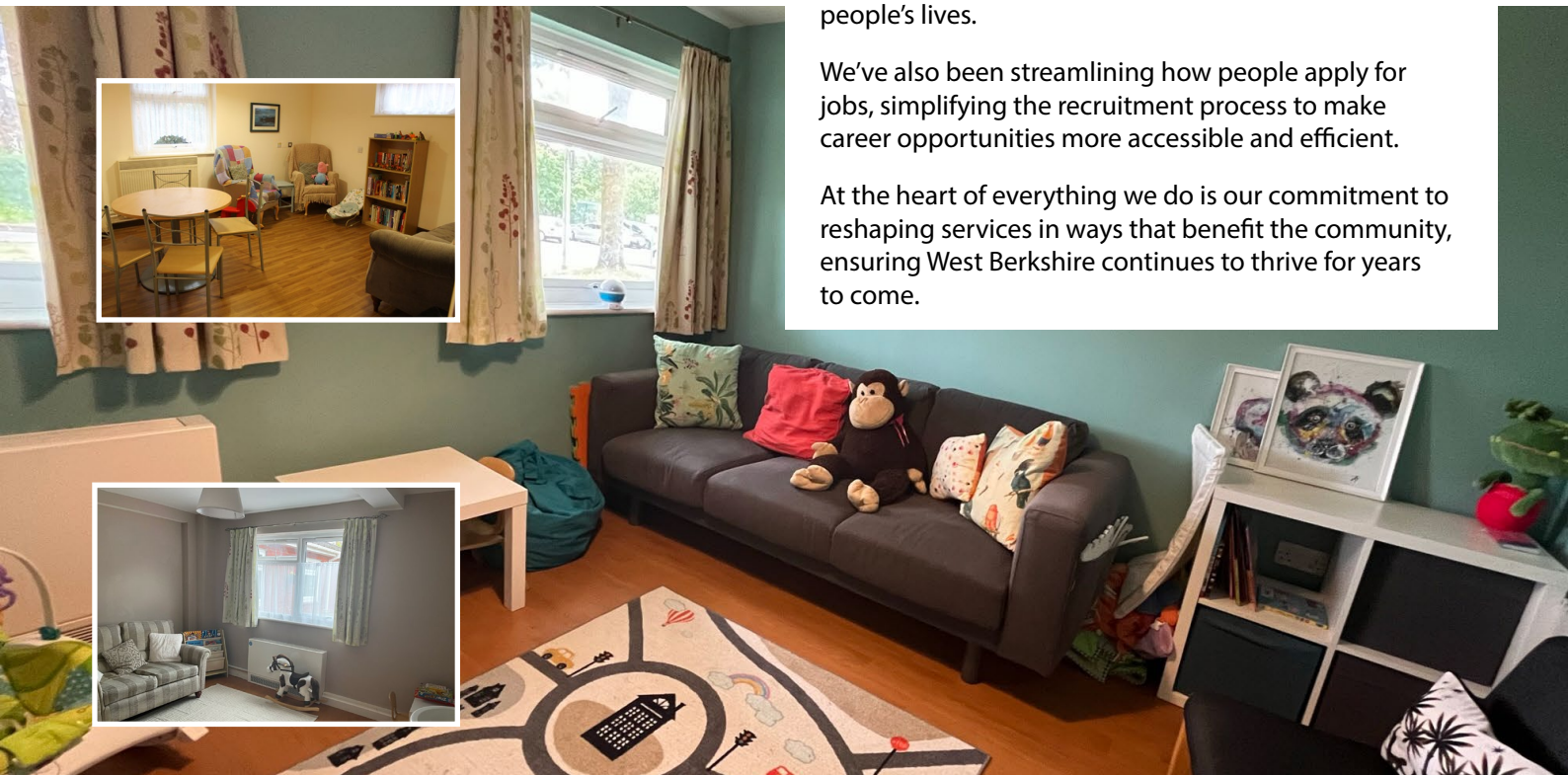
Our commitment doesn't stop there. Last year, our team transformed part of Walnut Close into a family contact centre for children to spend time with their birth families in a supportive setting. From babies to teenagers, every child benefits from the welcoming, family-friendly environment we've created.

*"It's about enhancing well-being for families in transition"*

The success of our transformation efforts has gained national recognition, with our Transformation Team winning two Smarter Working Live Awards—'Innovation as a Service' and the Judges' Choice Award for 'Beyond Smarter Working'. This achievement is a testament to our team's vision, innovation and dedication to making a tangible difference in people's lives.

We've also been streamlining how people apply for jobs, simplifying the recruitment process to make career opportunities more accessible and efficient.

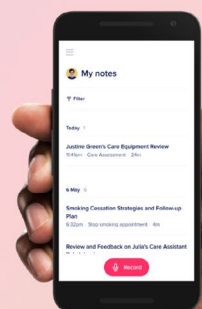
At the heart of everything we do is our commitment to reshaping services in ways that benefit the community, ensuring West Berkshire continues to thrive for years to come.



## Enhancing Social Care Through Technology

Following a successful pilot West Berkshire Council has adopted Magic Notes, an AI-powered tool and is now adopting it across its Adult and Children's Social Care teams.

This innovative solution records and summarises conversations, assessments and visits, freeing up social care professionals to focus on providing personalised care-plans for residents rather than filling in paperwork.







# 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 of our services and many transactions can be performed quickly and easily online.

Go to [westberks.gov.uk](https://www.westberks.gov.uk) to find out more.

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



[westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem](https://www.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.**



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

<b>Blue Badges:</b>	<b>01635 503276</b>
<b>Council Tax:</b>	<b>01635 519520</b>
<b>Adult Social Care:</b>	<b>01635 503050</b>
<b>Main Switchboard:</b>	<b>01635 551111</b>
<b>Out of Hours Emergencies:</b>	<b>01635 42161</b>

We're always working to improve our services and make life better for our residents, and your feedback - good or bad - helps us do that. If you've got thoughts, suggestions, or experiences to share, we'd love to hear them at [westberks.gov.uk/HowDidWeDo](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/HowDidWeDo)

If you'd like to stay connected with us, why not sign up to our e-newsletters?  
Subscribe at [westberks.gov.uk/newsletters](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/newsletters)

You can also follow us on **Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Tik Tok, Nextdoor, LinkedIn and YouTube**  
**@WestBerkshire**

