Report to Midgham Parish Council

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

Date: 14-09-2026

Full Council – 15th October
Extraordinary Council – 30th September
Executive Meeting – 24th September
Extraordinary Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee – 15th September
Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee – 22nd September

Consultations

- Domestic abuse services: lived experience survey. closes 4-10-2026
    - This survey is part of that process and the information you give the council will help the council to understand what is working well, where improvements are needed, and help shape future services in West Berkshire.
- SEND reform: education otherwise than at school consultation. Last Day.
    - Alongside the government consultation, the West Berkshire SEND Parent Carer Forum (WBSPCF) has developed this reflection survey to gather the lived experiences of local parent carers. The WBSPCF is a pan-disability independent group of local parent carers. They gather, understand and represent parent carer feedback about the SEND services used by children and young people aged 0-25, and use this to help shape local SEND services through co-production with education, health and social care partners.

Local Government Reorganistion of West Berkshire Council (…or not)

Parish Councillors and residents will be aware that the Government's Local Government Reorganisation programme originally proposed replacing existing councils across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire with new unitary authorities. In July 2026 the Government confirmed that West Berkshire, Vale of White Horse and most of the South Oxfordshire would form a new unitary authority known as “Ridgeway Council”, with implementation planned for April 2028. The proposal would see West Berkshire Council cease to exist as a separate authority and its responsibilities transferred to the new council.

However, in a significant recent development, the Government has announced a pause to the Local Government Reorganisation programme while further legal and policy issues are reviewed. As a result, the planned transition to Ridgeway Council has been put on hold and the previously anticipated shadow elections in 2027 are not expected to proceed at this stage.

For residents and parish councils, this means that nothing changes in the immediate future. West Berkshire Council continues to operate as the local authority, existing services remain in place, and parish councils should continue to engage with the Council in the normal way. While substantial work has already been undertaken to prepare for reorganisation, the future structure and timetable are now uncertain pending further announcements from Government.

I will continue to monitor developments closely and will keep parish councils informed as more information becomes available. Whatever the eventual outcome, it will be important to ensure that the interests of Bucklebury ward and our parish communities are properly represented during any future reorganisation discussions and decisions.

Green Matters

West Berkshire residents can collect free peat-free soil conditioner this September as West Berkshire Council and Veolia bring back their popular giveaway at Padworth. More than 450 tonnes of soil conditioner have been collected by residents since the giveaways began.

The giveaway will take place on Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 September from 10am to 4pm at Veolia's Waste Management Facility, Padworth. No booking is required.

Residents should bring proof of their West Berkshire residency, along with their own bags (not bin liners as they tear), boxes or containers, as the soil conditioner will be provided loose. They are also advised to bring their own shovel. To support fair access for everyone, residents are asked to take a reasonable amount, at peak times restrictions of five containers per vehicle will be enforced.

The event is always popular, but residents do not need to arrive early. The soil conditioner is restocked throughout the day.

The soil conditioner is produced at Veolia's In-Vessel Composting Facility in Padworth using food and garden waste collected from residents across West Berkshire. Recycling food waste helps reduce the amount of waste in black bins and supports a more sustainable, circular approach to waste management.

The initiative demonstrates how residents' food and garden waste can be transformed into a valuable resource for the local community, while supporting the Council's ambitions to reduce waste, increase recycling and protect the environment.

Community Events

Explore Shaw House for free as it celebrates 20 years since reopening to the public

Residents and visitors are invited to discover four centuries of history, heritage and hidden stories when Shaw House opens its doors later this month as part of the national Heritage Open Day festival.

The free event, on Sunday 20 September, mark an important milestone for one of West Berkshire's most treasured historic buildings, celebrating 20 years since Shaw House reopened to the public following a major restoration project.

Open from 11am to 4pm, the day provides a chance to explore the Grade I listed Elizabethan mansion, learn about its remarkable past and experience some of the many enhancements that have helped transform Shaw House into one of the district's leading heritage attractions.

Recent improvements include newly dressed historic rooms, enabling visitors to better imagine how different areas of the building may have appeared and been used throughout its long history, alongside beautifully restored Tudor and Edwardian gardens, and a new accessible play area for younger visitors. Visitors can also enjoy the site's café and extensive grounds.

As part of the Heritage Open Day celebrations, visitors will have the rare opportunity to book a visit to the Elizabethan Bake House. Normally closed to the public, the Bake House offers a fascinating glimpse into domestic life at Shaw House centuries ago. Tours will be available at 12pm, 1pm, 2pm and 3pm, and advance booking is recommended due to limited availability.

Shaw House has played many roles during its history, from a family home and school to a military headquarters during the Second Battle of Newbury. Since reopening to the public in 2006 following

extensive restoration, it has become a popular destination for residents and visitors alike, hosting heritage events, exhibitions, family activities, weddings, conferences and community events.

Family Services

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) campaigns deliver more than £2 million in additional support for West Berkshire residents

West Berkshire Council's Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) programme has helped residents secure more than £2 million in additional financial support by identifying benefits they may be entitled to but are not currently claiming.

The programme launched its first resident outreach campaigns in January this year and passed the £2 million milestone in August. Through a series of targeted campaigns, residents have successfully accessed support including Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Healthy Start and other central government-funded benefits.

LIFT helps identify households that may be eligible for financial support and prompts them to check their entitlement. Residents receive a letter explaining the benefits they may be able to claim, how to apply and where to access further support.

The initiative forms part of the Council's wider commitment to supporting residents through ongoing cost of living pressures and helping individuals and families improve their financial resilience by accessing support they are entitled to receive.

Residents who receive a LIFT letter can access help through a range of local services including the Council's Let's Talk programme, Citizens Advice West Berkshire and other community partners. The Council's Customer Services team is also available to provide guidance and answer questions.

Digital Family Hub launched for West Berkshire families - https://familyhubs.westberks.gov.uk/

Families across West Berkshire can now access information, support and local opportunities through a new Digital Family Hub, designed to help give children the best start in life and support families at every stage of their journey.

Accessible through a dedicated website and app, the Digital Family Hub brings together services, advice and opportunities in one place, making it easier for parents, carers, children and young people to find support when they need it.

From pregnancy and early years through to services for children, young people and adults, the Digital Family Hub provides a single gateway to information, guidance and local opportunities. Users can explore Family Hub services, parenting programmes, SEND support, local events and activities, alongside trusted national resources and advice.

A key feature of the Digital Family Hub is its personalised experience. Families can create a profile and receive relevant information, advice, support and opportunities tailored to their family's journey, helping them stay informed and connected throughout key stages of family life.

The Digital Family Hub forms part of West Berkshire's Family Hubs programme and supports a more joined-up approach to helping families access the right support at the right time.

Adult Social Care

Investment in dementia support helps residents access advice sooner and stay independent for longer

People living with dementia in West Berkshire are receiving support much sooner after diagnosis thanks to additional investment from West Berkshire's Locality Integration Board.

Eighteen months ago, the Board, which brings together local health and social care partners, invested Better Care Fund funding to expand local dementia support services. The funding enabled Alzheimer's Society, which delivers the Dementia Care Advisory Service in West Berkshire, to recruit an additional Dementia Care Adviser.

The investment is already making a significant difference. Before the additional funding, people diagnosed with dementia could wait up to six months to access support. Today, waiting times have reduced to just 8 to 10 weeks, helping residents and their families get advice, information and practical support much earlier.

Accessing support soon after a dementia diagnosis can have a lasting impact. Early guidance helps people understand their condition, plan for the future, connect with local services and support networks, and develop strategies that enable them to remain independent for as long as possible. Providing the right support at the right time can also help prevent or delay the need for more intensive health and social care later on.

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

Kind Regards

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