



Council Report for April 2026

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

Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

West Berkshire Council

Council

There was no meeting of Council this month.

The next meeting is the Annual Meeting on 14 May.

Executive

There was no meeting of the Executive this month.

The next meeting is on 21 May.

Community

Safe Places

Safe Places are here to help anyone who is feeling worried, scared, lost, or at risk while out and about. Safe Places are registered venues where anyone can ask for support, whether that's finding a quiet space, contacting a friend or family member, arranging a taxi, or calling 999 in an emergency.



In West Berkshire, Safe Places currently include all libraries, leisure centres and family hubs, and they can be found by looking for the Safe Places sticker or using the free Safe Places app.

New figures show the scheme is being actively used and searched for locally. Since 1 June 2025, the West Berkshire Safe Places membership page has been visited 539 times.

Businesses or community venues who would like to help expand the network, can register as a Safe Place, email safeplaces@westberks.gov.uk or call 01635 551111 and ask

for Rhys Lewis.

Environment

Discover the Ridgeway National Trail

A new interpretation board has been unveiled at Streatley Warren as part of the Historic Ridgeway Project. We are partners with the project, which is connecting local communities, landowners, visitors and volunteers to this historic routeway and the ancient landscapes that it passes through in West Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

The first board, funded by Mend the Gap, highlights human activity from over two thousand years ago. Streatley Warren was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its rare chalk grassland habitat, and the lack of modern ploughing has also preserved the earthworks of Iron Age and Roman fields, which show up well in low light in the open landscape. The ancient field systems would have been widely distributed across the Berkshire Downs, and their range is mapped on the board.



Archaeological information from the West Berkshire Historic Environment Record was provided for the board, in collaboration with Historic England, the Friends of the Ridgeway and others. Further boards funded through the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and Farming in Protected Landscapes will be installed in the coming weeks. A QR code on the panels allows visitors to access all of the project's sites on an interactive map.

Improving the Kennet and Avon Waterside

WBC are working with Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, the Canal and River Trust and Greenham Trust to improve access along the Kennet and Avon Waterside, helping everyone to enjoy the route safely and comfortably.

The long-term programme, called Reimagining the Kennet and Avon Waterside, aims to make the route more accessible in stages, so you can enjoy walking, wheeling, cycling or spending time by the water.

The first phase focuses on the 'Heart of Newbury', between Faraday Road Football Ground and Goldwell Park.



Planned improvements include path upgrades near Faraday Road Football Ground, towpath and canal bank repairs between Town Bridge and Victoria Park, and new signage and lining on Northcroft Lane linking the town centre with Goldwell Park.

These works build on recent improvements elsewhere, including upgraded sections near Aldermaston, Ufton Lane, Burghfield and Calcot.

The partnership is developing plans for future improvements in Newbury, Thatcham and Calcot, taking account of the natural environment, heritage, flood risk, accessibility and wayfinding.

Transport

A4 Improvements

As part of the Active Travel scheme to upgrade footways and crossings, supported by funding from Active Travel England, WBC have improved and resurfaced all footways from Skillman Drive through to the park next to Kennet School in Thatcham.

On the A4, a central island has been removed and a new crossing with traffic lights that now allows users to cross the road in one go has been installed. The road has been resurfaced with new road markings. The greenery from Archangel Way has been tidied, as well as the A4 to remove overhang from the footway.

Whilst the road was closed for the A4 carriageway resurfacing, further potholes and defects were also repaired.

Health and Wellbeing

Wellbeing Support

Parents, carers and those who work with families in West Berkshire can now access free online emotional wellbeing support through a new NHS platform called Togetherness.

Togetherness offers short, self-guided learning residents can complete at their own pace. It covers topics such as pregnancy and early bonding, children's feelings and brain development, family relationships, and the changes children and young people experience as they grow. There are also dedicated pathways for teenagers and resources to help professionals support emotional wellbeing in their work.

Developed by NHS experts and backed by psychological research, Togetherness is designed to help better understand emotions, behaviour and relationships, and build confidence, resilience and stronger family connections.

Access [here](#) using the code **BWFAMILIES**.

Culture

Leisure Centres

Leisure centres are seeing more people through their doors following multi-million-pound Council investment to upgrade facilities across the district.

At Cotswold Sports Centre in Tilehurst, the new 3G pitch has proved particularly popular, recording almost 3,000 bookings in its first six months and significantly boosting overall attendance. Hungerford Leisure Centre has also seen encouraging growth, with more people using the gym and taking part in fitness classes since the addition of a new fitness studio.

Kennet Leisure Centre has reported a marked rise in visitors following improvements to the gym and squash courts. Squash in particular has seen a resurgence with participation up 86%, alongside gym visits more than tripling and increased attendance at fitness classes.



Northcroft Leisure Centre has also experienced one of the biggest upturns in activity, with far more people using the gym (up 973%), soft play sessions (up 494%) and children's parties (up 103%) since the facility upgrades. These positive trends extend to Northcroft Lido, where last season's attendance increased by 37%, including significant rises in family swims, lane swimming and SEN sessions.

The refurbished Northcroft café has been warmly received too, drawing in both centre users and visitors from the wider community, as visitors don't need to be leisure centre users to enjoy a great cup of coffee in this lovely space.

Pianos for use



Pianos are available to use in Newbury, Theale and Hungerford libraries, provided by Berkshire Music Trust as part of their Musical Communities programme, giving individuals the opportunity to practise and explore music, particularly those who may not have access to a piano of their own. The Trust has also supplied a selection of sheet music for visitors to use.

Everyone is welcome to play on a first-come, first-served basis. The digital pianos must be used with headphones to ensure other library users are not

disturbed

Shaw House

As part of the ongoing project to bring Shaw House's history to life, WBC are working to reinstate the Edwardian Rose Garden. Complementing the Tudor Garden, which opened at the front of the house in March 2025, the tree work to the rear is helping to recreate the gardens as they appeared in 1910, as originally featured in Country Life magazine.

Over the past few weeks, the historic yew trees have been carefully tamed using wire to restore their elegant, manicured shapes. These are the very same trees that stood here in 1910, and they are now ready to be showcased just as visitors would have seen them over a century ago.

The garden works form just one part of a wider programme of improvements. Inside the house, four rooms have also been dressed to reflect different periods of Shaw House's long history. These house and garden enhancements have been made possible thanks to funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Looking ahead, a brand-new accessible playground, funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), is planned to open by summer 2026.

Current Consultations

- [Planning Public Access Service feedback survey 2026- 7 May 2026](#)
- [Residents' Survey \(2026\) – 10 May 2026](#)
- [Proposed amendment to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2025-2030 with respect to protected plates and accessibility- 15 May 2026](#)