



Council Report for May 2026

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

Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

West Berkshire Council

Council

Council met for its Annual Meeting on 14 May to discuss:

- Election of the Chairman for the Municipal Year 2026/2027
- Election of the Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2026/2027
- Appointment of the Executive by the Leader of the Council for the Municipal Year 2026/27
- Leader of the Council's Annual Report
- Formation of an Audit and Risk Committee
- Appointment and Allocation of Seats on Committees for the 2026/27 Municipal Year
- Appointments to Outside Bodies for the 2026/27 Municipal Year
- Lambourn Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Member Development Programme 2026/27

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

The next meeting is on 16 July.

Executive

Executive met on 21 May to discuss:

- Extended Pedestrianisation Hours in Newbury
- Adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy
- Review of Ethical Investment Policy Relating to the Council and Berkshire Pension Fund
- Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report 2024/2025
- Disposal of Ramsbury Drive Play Area to Hungerford Town Council
- Adult Social Care Self-assessment
- Response to Emotional Wellbeing Task Group
- Bond Riverside 13B, C & D
- Scrutiny Review of Called-In Decision: Response to Council Motion: decisions following public consultation

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

The next meeting is on 11 June.

Environment

The West Berkshire Conservative Group has called on the Liberal Democrat administration to provide greater transparency about whether the Council remains on track to meet its net zero by 2030 target, and the affordability of proposals linked to the flagship Grazeley solar farm.

Residents deserve clarity about whether the Council is genuinely on track to meet its 2030 net zero ambitions and what the true implications of projects such as the Grazeley solar farm could be for taxpayers.

The previous Conservative administration was prepared to be transparent about the scale, complexity and potential costs associated with major infrastructure proposals. What we are seeing now is far more political presentation and far less clarity.

If the Grazeley solar farm is no longer realistically going ahead, and the Portfolio Holder all but acknowledged at yesterday's Executive meeting that this is a major risk, then the administration needs to explain what the alternative plan is for achieving net zero by 2030. Residents deserve transparency about whether the strategy remains achievable and affordable under current assumptions.

The Conservatives are calling on the administration to clearly explain what contingency plans exist if assumptions underpinning the Environment Strategy and the Grazeley solar farm proposals fail to materialise, and whether the Council's climate targets are now at risk.

Switch Together registration launched on 1 June

WBC have partnered with Switch Together to help residents reduce their carbon footprint, save money, and switch to renewable energy solutions.

Switch Together now supports:

- Solar panels
- Battery storage
- Heat pumps
- EV chargers
- Smarter energy tariffs

Switch Together brings homeowners together to unlock better rates on solar panels, heat pumps, and smarter energy tariffs, all through group buying.

Registration is free and without obligation. Residents can register from 1 June until 7 August and experience benefits such as:

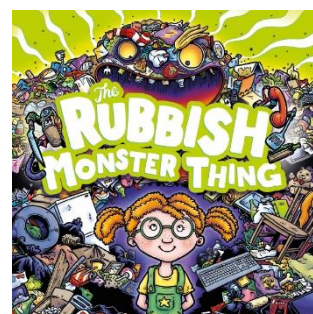
- Exclusive group savings
- Handpicked installers, suppliers and expert guidance
- A supported journey from start to finish

Free recycling workshops for schools and clubs

Fun and interactive Reduce, Reuse, Recycle sessions are still available for primary schools, clubs, and guiding groups across West Berkshire, and they're completely free!

Led by WBCs Waste Minimisation Officer, each session lasts around one hour and includes at least two breakout activities. There will be educational books and activity sheets to spark curiosity and inspire action.

Want to book or learn more? Email: recycle@westberks.gov.uk



Flooding



The Great Shefford groundwater alert was the last flood alert in West Berkshire to be removed this month after a long-wet winter.

Over the winter, the Environment Agency issued the below flood alerts in our district:

- four flood warnings (risk to properties flooding)
- 15+ flood alerts (flooding is possible)
- three groundwater alerts

The main impact period was at the end of January and the start of February when all the rivers were either on flood alert or flood warnings and the groundwater alerts were in place.

Now is the time to do checks and take action to protect property at risk of flooding. It is too late when flood water is approaching a house.

More information about being prepared can be found on our website along with information about flood risk management, who is responsible for what and who to report issues to.

Economy

New Magazine



This edition of the Your West Berkshire Magazine is packed with stories that celebrate the people, places and projects that care for our environment. From hedgehog heroes in Curridge, the River Lambourn climate mitigation initiative in Shaw, winning the prestigious green flags for our parks and open spaces (for the 17th year!), stories of the mighty band of volunteers and residents who give their time, energy and enthusiasm to strengthen our communities, plus the new visitor experience at Shaw House - and much more!

Printed copies are available to pick up at locations around the district, including leisure centres, libraries, family hubs, The Nature Discovery Centre and Greenham Control Tower cafe.

Transport

Pedestrianing Newbury

The West Berkshire Conservative Group has condemned the Liberal Democrat administration's handling of the Newbury pedestrianisation experiment following the Executive's decision to abandon the scheme after months of defending it publicly.

The Conservatives say the decision represents a humiliating political U-turn which the administration is now attempting to dress up through "hopeless spin" and carefully managed communications.

Despite more than 3,100 consultation responses being submitted, with approximately 77% objecting to the scheme, Liberal Democrat councillors repeatedly claimed the trial was proving successful and sought to present the exercise in a positive light.

Internal analysis later acknowledged there was "no clear retail uplift", with spending reportedly below expected levels and no measurable increase in town centre footfall.

This entire episode has exposed a Liberal Democrat administration that simply cannot run the council competently. Residents and businesses were ignored for months while councillors pushed an ideological scheme which never had convincing evidence behind it in the first place.

What we are now witnessing is a desperate attempt by the Liberal Democrats to dress up a complete U-turn as though it were some kind of success story. The public can see straight through it.

The administration spent months insisting the trial was working, talking up supposed economic benefits and trying to dismiss legitimate concerns from residents, businesses, disabled groups and town centre users. Now, after overwhelming public opposition and mounting evidence of failure, they are quietly retreating while pretending this was always the plan.

The Conservatives say serious questions remain unanswered about:

- the total taxpayer cost of the experiment,
- consultancy and officer spending,
- legal and enforcement costs,
- the impact on congestion elsewhere in Newbury,
- what further financial exposure may now arise through continuing “masterplanning” proposals.

This has been chaos from start to finish: poor decision-making, contradictory messaging, weak evidence and endless political spin.

At a time when residents expect the council to focus on core services and sound financial management, the Liberal Democrats instead pursued an expensive and divisive vanity project which they are now trying to quietly back away from.

The most damaging part of this entire process is the growing sense that this administration starts with a political objective and then works backwards to justify it, regardless of the evidence or the views of residents.

The Conservative Group says the handling of the scheme has significantly damaged public confidence in the administration’s judgement, transparency and ability to manage major projects effectively.

Active Travel ambitions showcased to national partner

WBC were delighted to welcome Max Longley, Regional Manager at Active Travel England, to West Berkshire to share ambitious plans for walking, cycling and active travel improvements across the district.

Max met with the team to hear about West Berkshire’s priorities and see first-hand a range of recent, planned and proposed schemes in Newbury, Hermitage, Thatcham and Theale.

WBC value the strong partnership we have with Active Travel England and their support in developing and delivering these schemes, and we look forward to continuing to work together to create safer, more accessible routes for our communities.

Culture

Playing Pitch Strategy

The West Berkshire Conservative Group has criticised the Liberal Democrat administration’s Playing Pitch Strategy, warning that the document is “not worth the paper it is written on” because it contains no credible funding plan and relies heavily on third parties to deliver its promises.

While the strategy identifies significant shortages in football provision, overused pitches and growing demand for all-weather facilities, Conservatives say the document amounts to little more than an aspirational wish list with no realistic route to delivery.

Everyone supports improving sports provision and investing in grassroots facilities. The problem is that this strategy is long on ambition and desperately short on reality.

“When you actually read the detail, much of this plan depends on external funding, voluntary cooperation from schools and clubs, or third parties delivering projects the Council neither controls nor appears capable of funding itself.”

The strategy raises major unanswered questions about affordability, long-term maintenance liabilities and future taxpayer exposure at a time when council finances remain under severe pressure.

This administration has produced another glossy document full of aspirations and headlines, but without the funding, certainty or delivery mechanisms required to make it happen.

Residents are entitled to ask which parts of this strategy are actually funded, which are realistic, and which are simply being included to create the impression that the administration has a plan.

The group also warned that the strategy risks creating unrealistic expectations among sports clubs and local communities without any guarantee that projects will ever materialise.

There is a real danger here that clubs and young people are being sold false hope. Producing a long list of ambitions is easy. Delivering them, particularly in the current financial climate, is something very different.

Conservatives have also questioned whether the council has fully assessed the long-term revenue implications associated with maintaining new facilities, including artificial pitches and associated sinking fund commitments.

The Liberal Democrats increasingly govern through press releases, masterplans and strategies rather than funded, deliverable policies.

West Berkshire needs serious financial discipline and credible delivery plans, not another unfunded wish list designed to generate positive headlines.

Newbury Library - a place of welcome and support

Newbury Library has once again been recognised as a Library of Sanctuary – celebrating its ongoing commitment to welcoming and supporting refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

This re-accreditation recognises the library’s sustained work to promote compassion, inclusion and wellbeing, and its role as a trusted, free and accessible space for the whole community. Working closely with council teams and partners such as EduCafe and the Community Engagement Team, the library helps people access vital support, from digital inclusion and language learning to wellbeing services and opportunities to connect.

From free Wi-Fi, IT support and multilingual resources, to events that celebrate culture and shared experiences, Newbury Library continues to go above and beyond to ensure everyone feels safe, supported and part of the community.

Archaeology and Nature Conservation in the Kennet Valley 11,000 years ago!

Archaeology and Nature is the theme for this year’s Council for British Archaeology’s Festival of Archaeology. On Thursday 23 July at 7pm WBC will be hosting a talk at Shaw House by Martin Bell (Emeritus Professor of Archaeology at the University of Reading).

The one hour talk on the environmental and landscape history of the Kennet Valley will consider the setting it provided for Mesolithic hunter-gatherer communities between about 11,000 and 6,000 years ago when the middle Kennet had one of the most significant concentrations of human activity in Britain. Discover how the activities of animals, especially deer and beavers, shaped the landscape and how human communities, even at this early date, transformed aspects of the landscape by the use of fire.



The talk will be from **7pm to 8pm at Shaw House on Thursday 23 July**, doors open at 6pm for refreshments in the café. Tickets are £5 per person.

Public Protection

Spot something unsafe? Speak up and help protect others

If you come across a product that seems unsafe or has caused injury or damage, reporting it can help prevent harm and protect others in your community.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards encourages residents to report concerns through the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 0808 223 1133 (or text relay 18001 0808 223 1133). Reports are passed to local Trading Standards teams to investigate, and you may also be entitled to a refund, repair or replacement.

When reporting, include as much detail as possible - what the product is, where you bought it and what happened. If it's safe to do so, keep the item as it may be needed for investigation.

By speaking up, you're helping to remove dangerous products from circulation and keep others safe.

Current Consultations

- [Your West Berkshire Magazine feedback survey \(2026\)](#) - Closes 9 June
- [Draft Adult Social Care Strategy 2026-2030](#) - Closes 22 June
- [Proposed school term and holiday dates for community and voluntary controlled schools 2027/28](#) - Closes 24 June

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