



Ridgeway Council: Supporting our eastern wards

What the Ridgeway Council proposal means for our eastern wards, and why we'll continue to support you through the period of Local Government Reorganisation.

'Ridgeway Council' is a proposed new unitary council covering the districts of West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. The proposal is a response to an announcement by the Government which will see two-tier authorities, as seen in Oxfordshire, end. Further, all new and existing unitary authorities, such as West Berkshire, will need to serve around 500,000 residents. We currently cover around 170,000 people as a council, and we will therefore be subject to reorganisation under these proposals.

We believe this proposal is the best solution for our communities. It maintains a sense of local identity while delivering high-quality services that protect our most vulnerable residents and provide value for money.

The new Ridgeway Council will enhance the unique character of our market towns and rural areas. West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire, and the Vale of White Horse share deep historical, economic, and geographic connections. The new councils will support innovative businesses and foster economic growth across the region.

You can find out more about the proposal at ridgewaycouncil.org

In response to the proposal Reading Council are taking the opportunity to call for an expansion of its borders into West Berkshire as part of a new 'Greater Reading' unitary authority. There is no mandate for change as the Government has been clear that Local Government Reorganisation should be undertaken within existing boundaries – and because many residents have told us they would prefer to remain in West Berkshire, or the equivalent new Ridgeway Council. This has caused confusion and concern and these FAQs seek to address questions that we've been asked about what they are proposing.



WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

FAQs

Below are a summary of some of the key questions we've been asked by town and parish councils in relation to the proposal by Reading Council to redraw council boundaries.

Q. *What is being proposed by Reading Borough Council?*

- A. Reading Borough Council is proposing a Greater Reading Unitary Authority to include parts of West Berkshire on the basis that "Over time Reading has grown: the current Borough boundary does not reflect the area people generally recognise as Reading or the way people travel and access services."

If West Berkshire becomes part of a new Ridgeway Council, Reading wants to expand its boundaries to include Calcot, Tilehurst, Theale, Pangbourne, and Purley-on-Thames. Reading Borough Council describes these areas as "the urban areas close to Reading's boundary" and claims these areas rely on Reading for services and say many of these residents feel more part of Reading than West Berkshire. However, we consider that these areas are best served by West Berkshire Council – and many residents we've spoken to over the summer agree with us. Reading Borough Council currently have a survey open to gather views on the proposal.

Q. *Why are Reading Borough Council proposing to do this?*

- A. The Greater Reading proposal is Reading Borough Council's response to plans by West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire, and Vale of White Horse to form a new unitary authority called Ridgeway. This Ridgeway proposal is part of a wider government initiative to simplify local government structures and improve service delivery by creating larger unitary councils. You can find out more about the 'Ridgeway Council' proposal here <https://ridgewaycouncil.org/article/43911/The-Proposal>

Q. *Does Reading Council have a mandate to do this?*

- A. In setting out its plans for Local Government Reorganisation the Government have said that change should only be considered within existing local authority boundaries – so they are not looking for councils to undertake extensive and time-consuming boundary change reviews. In addition, they have only invited the Oxfordshire councils to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation – Berkshire is not currently within the scope of this work. As such, while West Berkshire Council supports the Ridgeway Council proposal the submission to Government will be done via the Oxfordshire councils.

Q. *Why should these areas remain part of West Berkshire?*

- A. West Berkshire Council is proud to provide high-quality services to all its residents across the entirety of the district. It is also important to note that our links to these communities dates back to 1894, when we came together under Bradfield Rural District Council. West Berkshire Council offers better maintained roads, a more effective recycling system, and does so with lower council tax. It is also worth noting that we have excellent schools across our district.

This is supported by recent comparative data – which speaks for itself. For example:

- 92% of our secondary schools are rated good or outstanding compared with 80% in Reading - with more of our primary schools scoring better too.
- Just 3% of our roads should be considered for maintenance - Reading's is more than double that
- Children's Services are Good in West Berkshire but Require Improvement in Reading.
- We have more sports facilities per 100,000 residents
- We collect glass recycling at the kerbside...the list goes on.

When you add the above to lower council tax bills, residents should be in no doubt as to which local authority offers them the better deal.

Q. *When will all this happen?*

- A. The Reading survey is open until 21 September. The Ridgeway survey closed on 16 June with the final proposals due to be submitted to the Government in November 2025. The Government have indicated that they will make their decision before the Parliamentary summer recess in 2026.

Whilst the survey was open, we undertook comprehensive engagement events, including drop in sessions and information stands across the district and a hybrid community forum for those who might not have been available to attend in person. It was important for us to hear the views of residents across the entire district.

If the proposal is approved by Government the next steps include:

- Summer 2026 – LGR Implementation Governance Arrangements will be introduced to oversee delivery and provide assurance regarding the programme
- Autumn 2026 – Detailed planning work will commence
- May 2027 – Shadow Unitary Elections and Interim Statutory Officers appointed
- Spring 2028 – Ridgeway Council comes into effect.

This will not be an immediate transition, with the focus of the move from West Berkshire Council, and the relevant Oxfordshire councils, being to ensure that we continue to deliver safe and legal services on day 1 of the new Ridgeway Council .

Q. *How can you engage/respond*

- A. Reading is currently undertaking a survey, you can take part here www.reading.gov.uk/news/council-to-propose-boundary-change-with-west-berkshire/

Q. *Why do we value our relationships with parish and town councils?*

- A. We have worked closely with our town and parish councils for many years and support the work they do in their communities. We often work together to enhance the local communities and have a range of initiatives in place to provide support for them. We recently helped Tilehurst Parish Council implement a new 3G pitch at the Cotswold Sport Centre, and we worked closely with Pangbourne Parish Council to implement a Public Spaces Protection Order in Pangbourne Meadows.

Town and Parish Councils do important work, hold a local voice and help preserve the local identity of their areas. We want to continue to support the towns and parish councils as they provide local amenities whilst remaining a voice of the residents in that area.

Q. *What will happen to town and parish Councils under Reading?*

- A. Reading does not have town and parish councils as part of its local government structure. Reading has recommended that parish and ward boundaries are maintained under this proposal, but has not specified what will happen to the parish councils in this area.

At a Reading Council meeting, concerns were raised about how these councils would be affected. Reading Borough Council responded by saying they want to engage with these communities and ensure their voices are heard during the process. They also clarified that residents wouldn't pay twice for services currently provided by parish councils.

Q. *Would this affect the provision of public health services?*

- A. No, health authorities are a different entity and will not be affected by this.