Reading
Borough Council
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Proposed modification to the 'Ridgeway' Local Government Reorganisation proposal for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire

Reading Borough Council
November 2025

Foreword from the Leader

Reading's success is undeniable. With productivity levels higher than London, it is home to some of the world's leading technology firms, it boasts unrivalled connectivity with a strategic location close to both Heathrow and London, and it is now also on the Tube map with the opening of the Elizabeth Line. A major economic powerhouse both in the region and nationally, Reading's stock will continue to rise. That sustained success however is despite constraints, and it must be prioritised when reorganising Local Government.

What was once an entirely logical boundary line, drawn over a century ago to separate fields, now splits communities.

While Reading has grown exponentially, our administrative boundary has not. It has failed to adjust to an expanding urban area where residents just across the border understandably consider themselves as belonging to a vibrant, dynamic, economically successful and culturally diverse town.

With a footprint of just 15.5 square miles, Reading's population is 178,000, as against the 233,000 people who live in its catchment. Fundamentally, it means a substantial proportion of Reading's workforce and housing market lies outside its control. Key strategic decisions on housing, transport and infrastructure are spread across multiple councils, leading to delays, higher costs and missed opportunities. An under-bounded borough like Reading makes every one of those tasks harder, slower and more expensive, because both decision making and funding are fragmented.

Delivering this Government's ambitious growth agenda demands a planning system which has the freedom to consider a place as a whole. Many of the places which power Reading's economy sit across administrative lines, meaning growth is curtailed. And as our town's burgeoning economy continues to accelerate, the cost of that fragmentation continues to rise.

Foreword from the Leader

While no Berkshire council has been invited to make a submission at this time, West Berkshire's decision to join with Oxfordshire's proposals means Reading cannot ignore the once-in-a-generation opportunity to address its outdated and constrictive boundary in the most pragmatic way possible. The Oxfordshire proposals do not provide the platform for further economic growth in Reading.

The proposed 'Ridgeway' includes parts of West Berkshire which undoubtedly form part of Reading. Residents here see themselves as part of Reading, rely on services provided by Reading Borough Council and yet, have no say over how these services are run. Having personally taken the time to speak to many of these residents during recent consultation events, the appetite for change is clear. This proposal aligns where people pay their council tax and where decisions are made, with local identity, use of local services and patterns of daily living. To pretend that the three Tilehurst wards positioned on the town's western boundary are anything other than suburbs of Reading, flies in the face of the Government's prescribed criteria that proposals should be based on 'sensible economic geography.'

This submission is an essential precursor for wider reorganisation across Berkshire. It is also the essential first step towards unlocking the full potential of devolution across the Thames Valley region. By aligning local structures with the region's economic and social realities, we are laying the foundations for a coherent and effective strategic authority.

Ultimately, reorganisation is about opportunity. Without reform, Reading risks failing to grasp it and losing ground to better-integrated locations which offer investors greater certainty and scale. Loosening the constraints which slow Reading's growth is the only way to ensure the continued prosperity of the town and the wider region.

Liz Terry

Cllr Liz Terry
Leader, Reading Borough Council

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Executive Summary

This proposal sets out Reading Borough Council's request and supporting case for a modification to the proposal to create a new Ridgeway Council incorporating West Berkshire Council.

The proposed Ridgeway Council area includes parts of West Berkshire that are already part of the urban area of Reading, specifically the three wards of Tilehurst Birch Copse, Tilehurst & Purley, and Tilehurst South & Holybrook. Residents in these wards see themselves as part of Reading and rely on services provided by Reading Borough Council – yet have no say over how these services are run and pay Council Tax to West Berkshire.

Our proposal is that, if the Ridgeway proposal is approved, these three wards should move to Reading Borough Council at the point that the new unitary authority is established.

The current boundary has not been reviewed in over 100 years and so it unsurprisingly does not in any way reflect Reading's geography or economic footprint today. The result is fragmentation of services and decisions on housing, transport and infrastructure across this boundary, creating delays, higher costs, and missed opportunities for delivering growth.

Fundamentally, Oxfordshire's Ridgeway proposal as currently written fails to meet the Government's criterion that proposals should be for a sensible economic geography. The only way to address this is through a boundary change.

The proposal of Oxfordshire to create a new Ridgeway Council provides an opportunity within the existing legislation to address the outdated boundary in a pragmatic and efficient way, without compromising the reorganisation of Oxfordshire. Making this change at the point Ridgeway is established avoids multiple sequential changes to Council boundaries and safeguards Reading's position, and economic area, for any future reorganisation in Berkshire.

By adopting our proposed modification, the Ridgeway proposal would better meet the Government criteria that proposals should be for a sensible economic geography, enabling better services for residents and coordinated planning for the continued economic success of Reading.

Extensive engagement has been undertaken to develop this proposed modification, including with residents and stakeholders to understand their views and concerns. This included an independent survey of a representative sample of residents in the affected areas, which demonstrated strong support for the proposed boundary change, and a strong connection to Reading, rather than West Berkshire or, indeed, Oxfordshire.

While not in principle opposing the creation of a new Ridgeway Council, we believe that not addressing the boundary between Reading and West Berkshire would represent a missed opportunity to align local government structures with economic geography and local identity. This is a pragmatic proposal that seeks to better recognise Reading's functional economic boundary, ensure that local governance is best placed to support continued economic growth, strengthen local democracy, and improve service provision.

1. Introduction and context

1.1 Introduction

1. All two-tier areas and some neighbouring small unitary authorities in England were invited by Government in February 2025 to develop proposals to reorganise, replacing current structures with a single tier of local government.

2. The legislative framework for making structural changes to Councils is set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Following receipt of the proposals, the Secretary of State can decide to:

   • Implement a proposal as proposed;
   • Implement with modifications; or
   • Not implement the proposal.

3. In response to this invitation, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, and West Berkshire Council have proposed a merger and the creation of a new unitary authority called 'Ridgeway Council'.[1] West Berkshire Council is a unitary authority directly on Reading's boundary with extensive joint arrangements with Reading and other Councils in Berkshire.

4. This document sets out Reading Borough Council's case for a proposed modification to the Ridgeway proposal. We recognise the arguments for the Ridgeway proposal in terms of improved sustainability for the authorities concerned, particularly given the exceptional financial support currently required in West Berkshire. Through this proposal, we seek to respond positively to the Government's programme of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution, neither of which we wish to delay.

5. The current Ridgeway proposal, however, does not recognise the economic geography and footprint of the Greater Reading urban area. The boundary between Reading and West Berkshire was set over 100 years ago when the area was almost completely rural. Since then, Reading's economic success has resulted in the town expanding significantly beyond its administrative boundary. With an area of less than 16 square miles, our boundary has failed to adjust to the reality of an expanded Reading conurbation where residents see themselves as belonging to a vibrant, dynamic, economically successful and culturally diverse town – rather than a predominantly rural area, as Ridgeway would be.

6. To perpetuate this issue is a significant flaw in the Ridgeway proposal, albeit understandable in that Berkshire authorities were not asked to submit reorganisation proposals and West Berkshire has chosen to join Oxfordshire's LGR submission. With local government structures being reshaped, this presents a once in a generation opportunity to update the boundary to bring it into the twenty-first century and create the conditions for the continued prosperity of Reading and the UK economy as a whole.

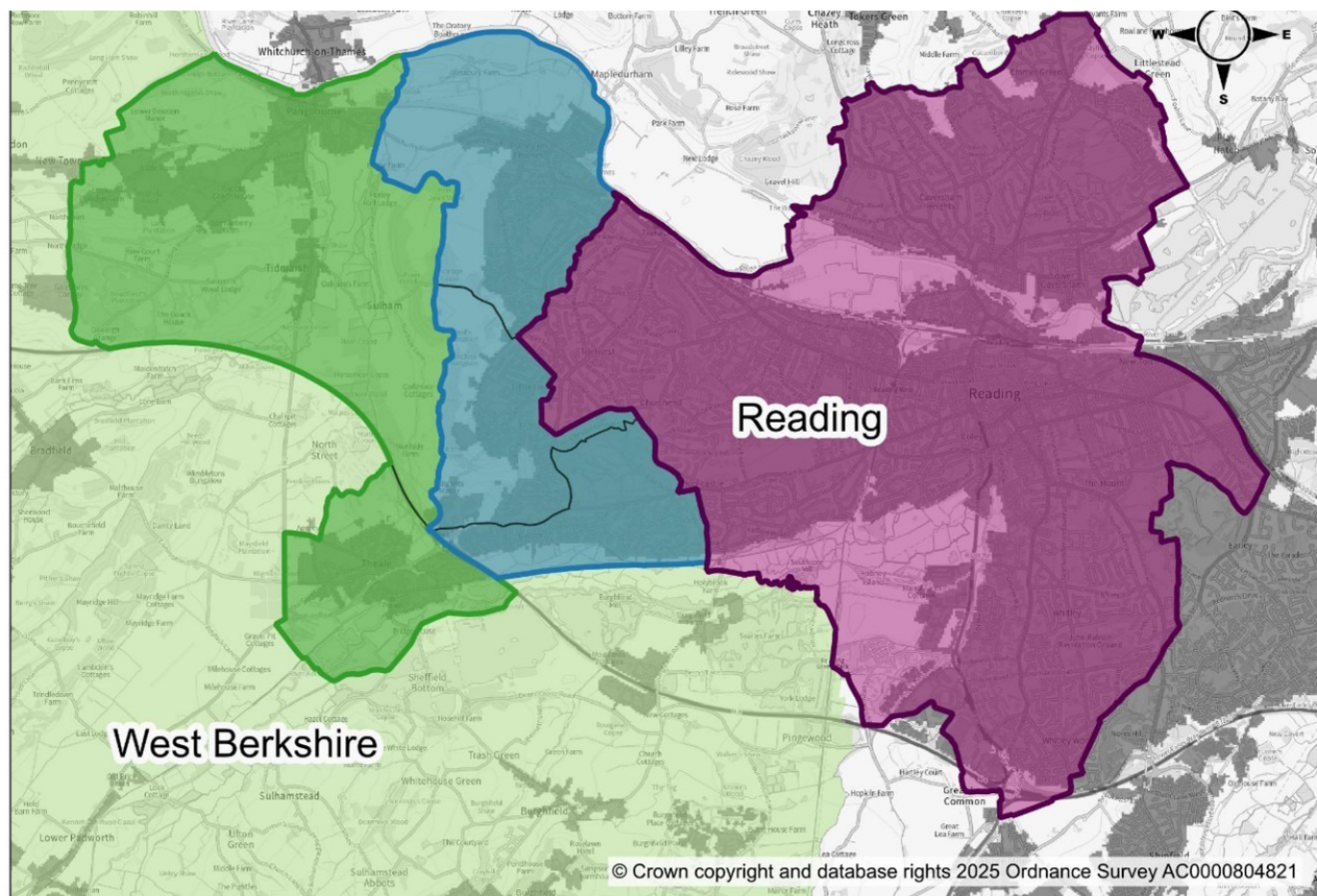1   'Two Councils, One Better Future', available here.

7. Our proposal is that, if the Secretary of State is minded to agree to the creation of a new Ridgeway Council, that they do so only with the following modification in place: that the three existing wards of Tilehurst & Purley, Tilehurst Birch Copse, and Tilehurst South & Holybrook (currently in West Berkshire but part of the Greater Reading area) transfer to Reading Borough Council concurrently with the establishment of the new Ridgeway Council. In almost every regard – economic activity, transport links, access to services, and more – these areas are already part of Reading. West Berkshire Council's own Local Plan acknowledges this fact, describing most of the area as "urban", with "a close functional relationship with Reading" and benefitting "from the facilities and services it provides [2]

> **"** **West Berkshire Council's Local Plan describes the three wards as "urban", with "a close functional relationship with Reading" and benefitting "from the facilities and services it provides.**

8. This modified version of the Ridgeway proposal should be included in the statutory consultation process as a distinct option for LGR in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire to ensure that residents are able to give full consideration to all the proposals that have been put forward.

9. Implementing this change at the point that the new Ridgeway Council is established is the most practical and cost-effective way of updating the boundary, since this:

    • Avoids multiple changes to local government for residents living in the affected wards – they would move straight from West Berkshire to Reading
    • Makes use of the powers in the existing legislative framework to implement the change as part of LGR in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire
    • Avoids the need for a separate and time-consuming Principal Area Boundary Review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

10. Reading Borough Council recommend the change is made using existing ward boundaries as they are designed around local communities and align with existing parish Councils. This approach also helps to simplify the transfer process. The map below shows the three wards (in blue) against the area of West Berkshire Council (light green) and the current boundary of Reading Borough Council (purple).

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2   'West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)', para. 4.12, available here.

Map 1: Proposed area to be transferred to Reading (shown in blue)

11. In reaching this request, we initially reviewed a larger area including the two wards of Pangbourne and Theale shown in the map above in darker green (combined population 6,900). On the basis of the Government's criteria for LGR, we believe there is a good case for moving Pangbourne and Theale into Reading. However, based on the evidence gathered during this process, the strongest case is for the three Tilehurst wards (combined population 26,100), and that is therefore what we are putting forward in this proposal.

12. In developing our case for extending Reading's western boundary, we have carefully reviewed the guidance issued by the Secretary of State. This proposal has been developed and structured around that guidance with reference to the Government's economic growth mission:

   - The rest of this section sets out the context of Reading's position as a significant driver of economic growth and how this proposal supports the Government's economic growth agenda.
   - Section 2 sets out how this proposal will meet the desired outcomes set out in the guidance for LGR.
   - Section 3 provides an options appraisal of Oxfordshire's current Ridgeway proposal against our modified version and assesses how they align with the LGR criteria.

- Finally, section 4 gives an outline of plans for implementing the proposal, covering service transition, financial implications, and an indicative timeline.

1.2 Economic context

13. With our location and transport connections, Reading is well-placed to help accelerate the Government's growth agenda for UK plc. Reading's workforce ranks third in the UK for productivity, with a GVA per hour of £52 – higher than London.[3] The Greater Reading area is forecast to be the fastest growing area in the UK over the period 2025-2028, with annual GVA growth of 2.2%. [4]

> " **The Greater Reading area is forecast to be the fastest growing area in the UK over the period 2025-2028, with annual GVA growth of 2.2%.**

Reading is home to offices for some of the world's leading technology firms, including Microsoft, Oracle, Cisco, and Nvidia. Reading University is a 'world top 200' university and a global leader in climate science with one of the largest concentrations of climate scientists in the world. Due to its strategic position on the M4 corridor and proximity to both Heathrow and London, Reading is a major transport and rail interchange with destinations in all four corners of UK. The opening of the Elizabeth Line further improved Reading's connectivity and illustrates the ongoing confidence in the town's position as a positive economic story.

14. Reading's economic success and growth have meant that our Borough boundaries no longer reflect our real economic footprint because of the development within West Berkshire on our immediate western boundary. Our Borough has 178,000 residents, but the contiguous area is around 233,000 people, meaning a large share of Reading's workforce and housing market lies outside its control. This fragmentation splits service delivery and decisions on housing, transport, and infrastructure across multiple Councils, creating delays, higher costs, and missed opportunities for delivering truly inclusive growth, such as affordable homes and joined-up public transport infrastructure.

15. This is a challenge shared by many similar sized cities. A recent report produced by Inner Circle Consulting found that in many cases historic boundaries around towns and cities were drawn intentionally close to the original urban core to limit growth. More fundamentally, these tightly drawn boundaries "undermine both local leadership and a locally led planning system which can only function well if it is considering a place as a whole".[5] If we are to remove the limit on growth, it is logical to review the boundary that was drawn with the objective of curtailing it.

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3   'Cities Outlook 2025' by Centre for Cities, available here
4   UK Regional Economic Forecast 2025' by EY, available here
5   A Case for Cities' by Inner Circle Consulting, available here

16. The Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area Study demonstrated deep cross-boundary linkages across the Greater Reading area.[6] These include commuting patterns, sectoral clusters and shared housing markets. Many of the places that power Reading's growth sit across administrative lines, creating fragmentation in plan-making, infrastructure sequencing and delivery. ONS data also shows that Reading's economy and travel-to-work catchment spill well beyond the borough boundary into West Berkshire.

17. The costs of fragmentation are rising as Reading's economy accelerates. The economic growth of the town is driven by technology and professional services (which already contribute £3.3 billion GVA locally), yet much of the employment land and housing serving this growth lies outside the borough boundary. Growth depends on the ability to assemble employment land, consent planning permission for transport and utilities, and provide homes where jobs are. An under-bounded borough makes each of those tasks harder, slower and more expensive, because the decisions and funding mechanisms are split.

18. This governance misalignment exacerbates the issues caused by UK's structural planning and housing constraints:

   • The Centre for Cities' Cities Outlook shows high housing costs in successful city regions have intensified since 2010 and now threaten the success of cities unless planning and land supply are reformed.
   • Where administrative borders do not match economic geography (as in Reading), these supply constraints hit harder: infrastructure corridors (bus rapid transit, rail stations, utility reinforcements) and large mixed-use allocations cut across authorities, complicating viability and phasing and weakening the agglomeration benefits that underpin productivity.

19. Reading's economic success has occurred despite these constraints. The risks of slower housing delivery, under-provision of affordable homes, and infrastructure lag are growing. Without reform, Reading risks losing ground to better-integrated locations that can offer investors greater certainty and scale. This risks not just local growth, but regional and national growth, given Reading's critical location and established industries.

20. It should be noted at this point that a significant portion of the urban area of Reading comes under Wokingham Borough Council. This document makes no proposal to change the boundary with Wokingham at this stage for the sole reason that Wokingham is not involved in any proposals for LGR. We therefore have no basis on which to suggest a modification in the way that we do with Oxfordshire/West Berkshire's proposal to create Ridgeway. However, if the Berkshire authorities are invited to reorganise in future, it is important to emphasise that many of the same issues outlined in this document pertaining to the western boundary of Reading apply equally to our eastern and southern boundary with Wokingham.

1.3 Geographical context

21. The current western boundary of Reading was set in 1911. The map below compares a section of the boundary in 1915 with that same area today, illustrating that what was once a logical boundary along the edge of a field now cuts through streets and houses, and does not reflect the urban area of Reading today.

6   'Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area Study' by Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, underline available here

Map 2: Detail of boundary between West Berkshire and Reading, comparison between 1915 (left) and 2025 (right)
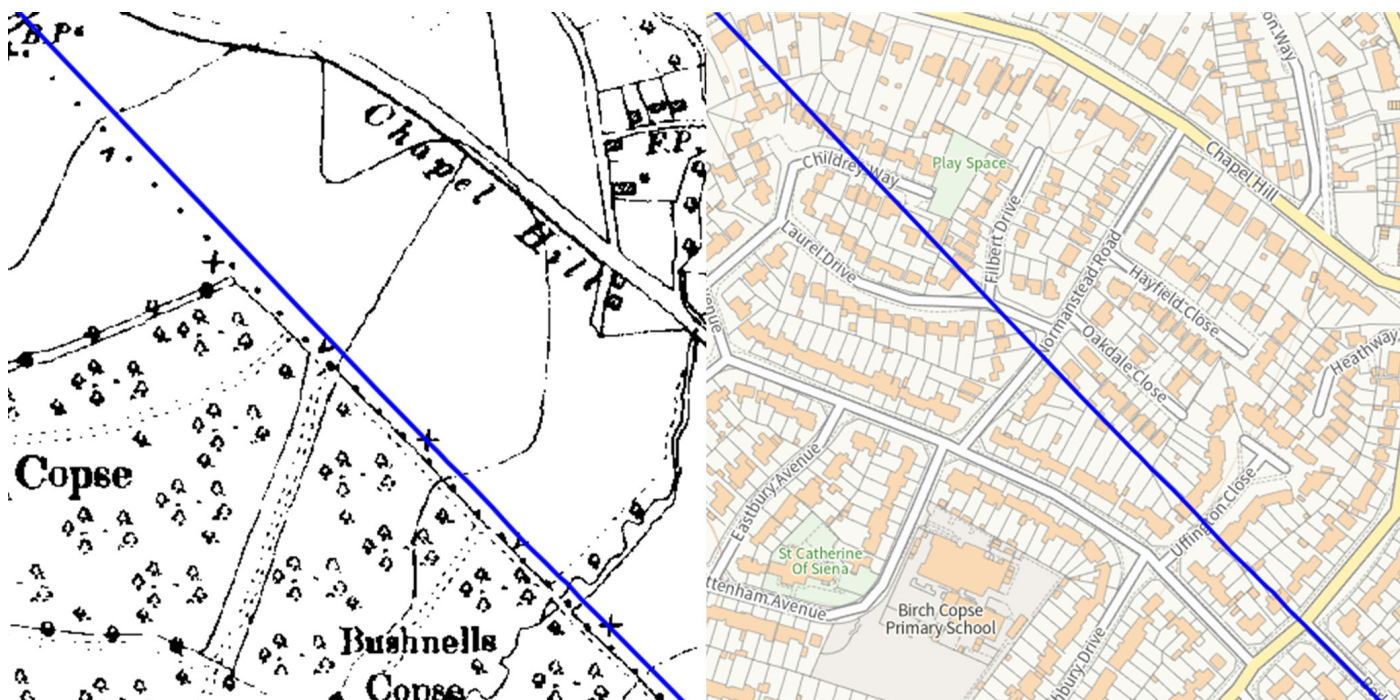
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22. By contrast, the Ridgeway proposal is focused on reflecting "the unique character of our rural area".[7] The central logic of the proposal is that it brings together areas (rural communities and market towns) that have a similar character and needs and can therefore be effectively served by a single Council with a service model tailored to that demographic and geography. We do not disagree with this logic. While Hungerford, Thame, and Farringdon may be geographically far apart, they are demographically similar in many respects, and it is reasonable to argue that they will have similar needs.

23. However, this argument breaks down when applied to the three wards identified on Reading's western boundary. These areas are urban (as defined by the ONS) and part of the Reading Built Up Area.[8][9] Demographically these wards are similar to existing wards in Reading like Tilehurst, Kentwood, Emmer Green, and Caversham Heights. There is no sensible rationale for including these areas in a large, rural local authority, with a different economic basis and public service delivery model, and any objective assessment of local government structures would clearly include these areas in Reading.

7 Ridgeway Council - Interim Proposal', p.5, underline available here
8 2021 Rural Urban Classification' by ONS, underline available here
9 Built-up Areas Web Map' by ONS, underline available here

2. The case for change

24. This section sets out how this proposal will meet the desired outcomes set out in the guidance:

1) A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.

2) Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

3) Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.

4) Proposals should show how Councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.

5) New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

6) New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

2.1 Achieves a single tier of local government

LGR guidance:

a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.

c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.

d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

A sensible economic area

25. In determining a sensible economic area for the boundaries of Reading, we have looked at the available data on travel patterns, economic activity, and the shape of the urban area.

26. The three Tilehurst wards within the scope of this proposal are part of the built up area of Reading and are clearly integrated into its roads and public transport network.

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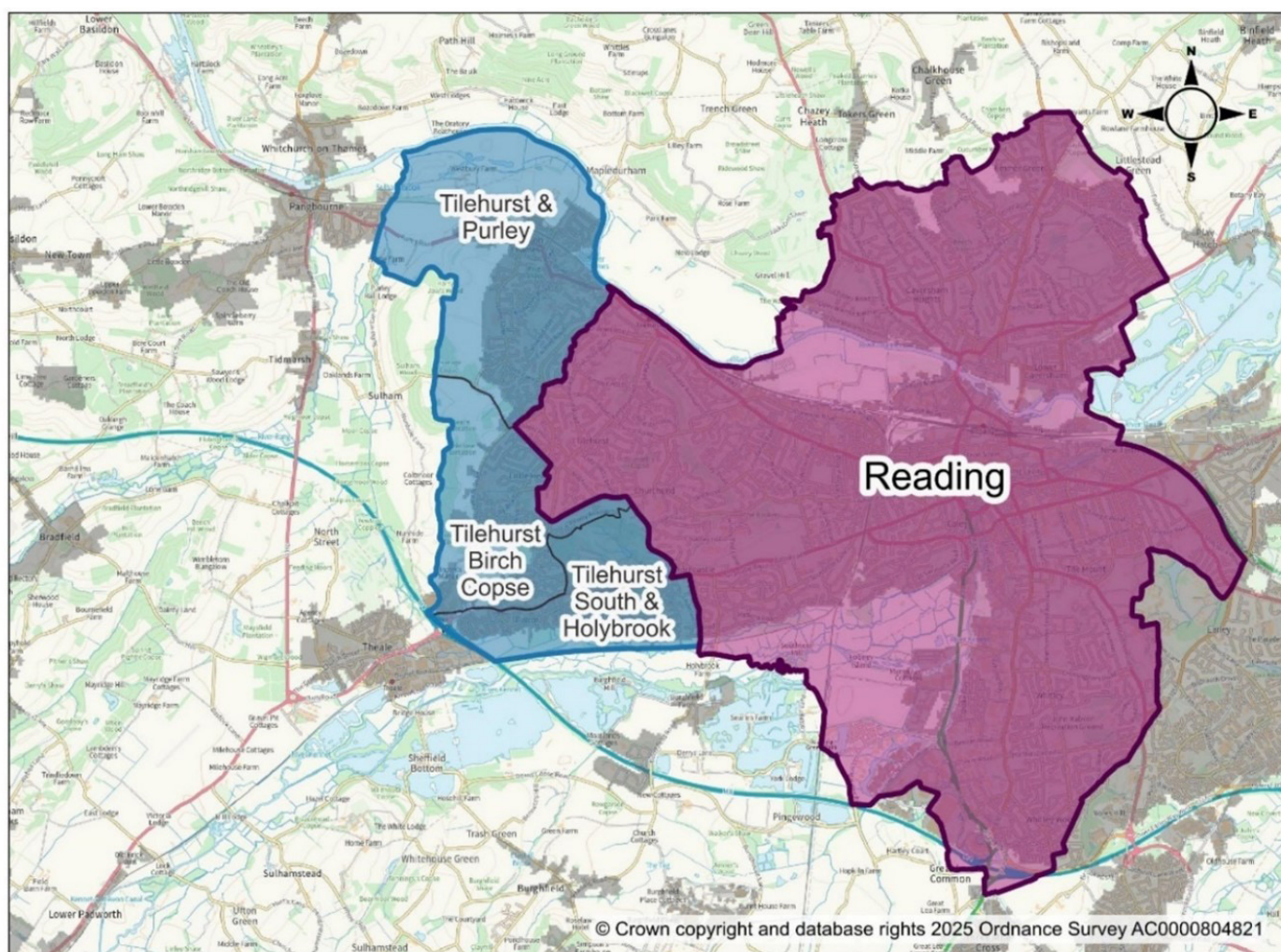
27. The three wards are also part of the functional economic area of Reading. This is best illustrated by looking at Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs), which are developed by the ONS to demonstrate areas in which people live and work, based on data from the Census.[10] The main criterion of a TTWA is "[...] that at least 75% of the area's resident workforce work in the area and at least 75% of the people who work in the area also live in the area." TTWAs are widely used to define functional economic areas, since they reflect patterns of employment, commuting, and economic activity.

10   Travel to work area analysis in Great Britain: 2016' by ONS, available here

28. The TTWA for Reading extends significantly beyond the boundaries of the Borough, encompassing (and extending well beyond) all three of the wards in the proposal. This illustrates that the wards being considered are an already well-recognised part of the functional economic area of Reading, rather than other centres in the proposed Ridgeway area such as Newbury or Abingdon.

Map 4: Reading Travel to Work Area (TTWA) and Local Authority boundaries[11]

11   Local Authorities and Travel to Work Areas', available here
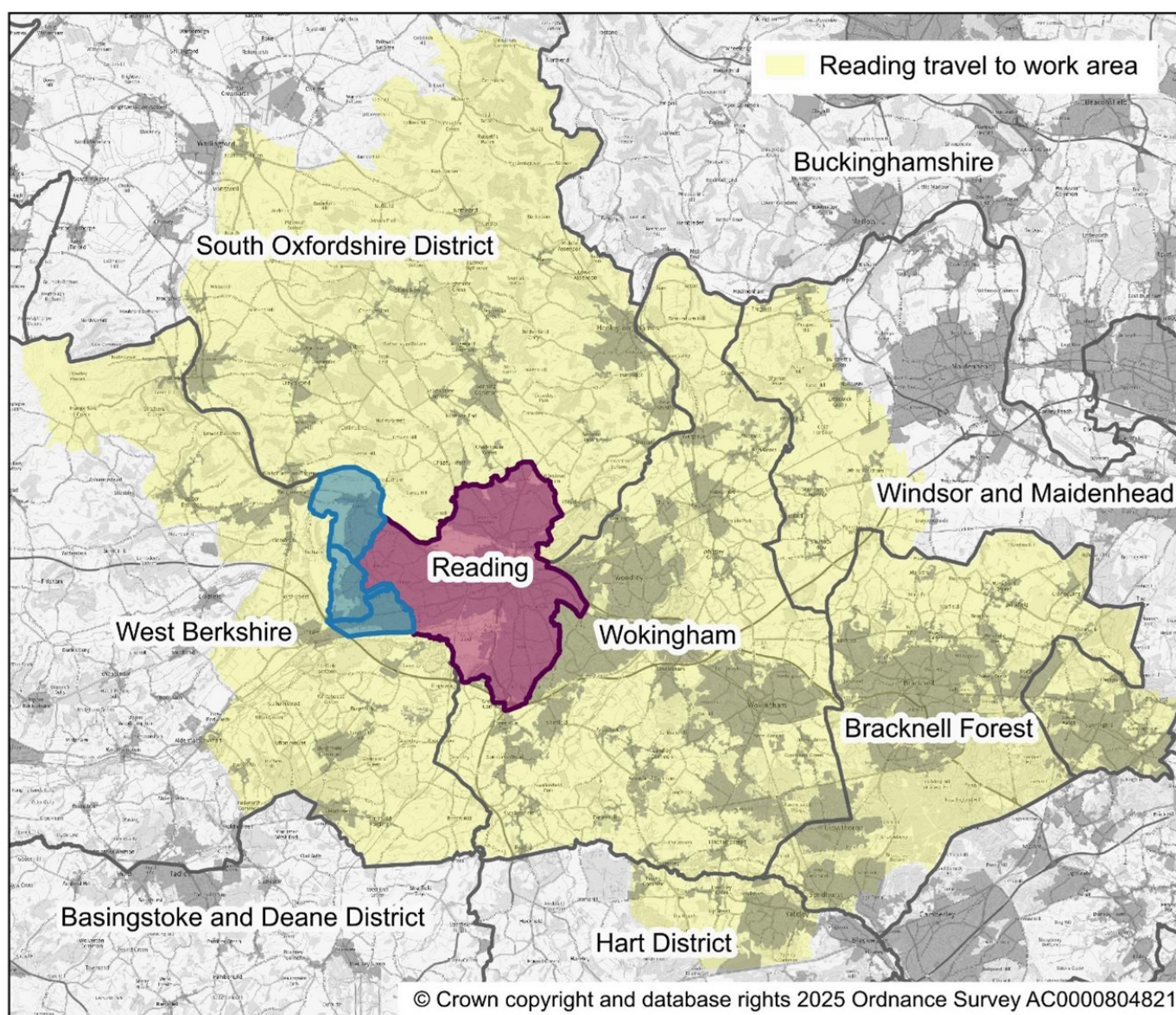
Appropriate tax base

29. There are significant disparities in social and economic indicators between the central urban areas of Reading and the outer suburbs, a portion of which fall into West Berkshire. The realignment of the Council boundary will help address this imbalance by ensuring a broader and fairer Council Tax base and balancing the costs and challenges of delivering services to areas with higher deprivation.

30. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) provides a metric for understanding deprivation based on seven domains – income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing & services, and living environment. This is a useful proxy indicator for understanding the impact of changes on the tax base and demand on services.[12]

31. Reading is ranked the 101st (rank of average score) most deprived out of 154 upper-tier local authorities in the country. Reading currently has 49% of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the most deprived 50% of areas in England, compared to 8% in the proposed area of Ridgeway. If the three wards were moved into Reading, the Borough's percentage would fall to 44%. Ridgeway would remain almost unchanged at 7%.

Map 5: Index of Multiple Deprivation decile by Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)[13]

IMD (2025) Deciles
- 1 (most deprived)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 (least deprived)

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12   English indices of deprivation 2025: statistical release' by MHCLG, available here

13   An output of the Geographic Data Service (GeoDS.ac.uk), a Smart Data Research UK Investment: ES/Z504464/1, available here
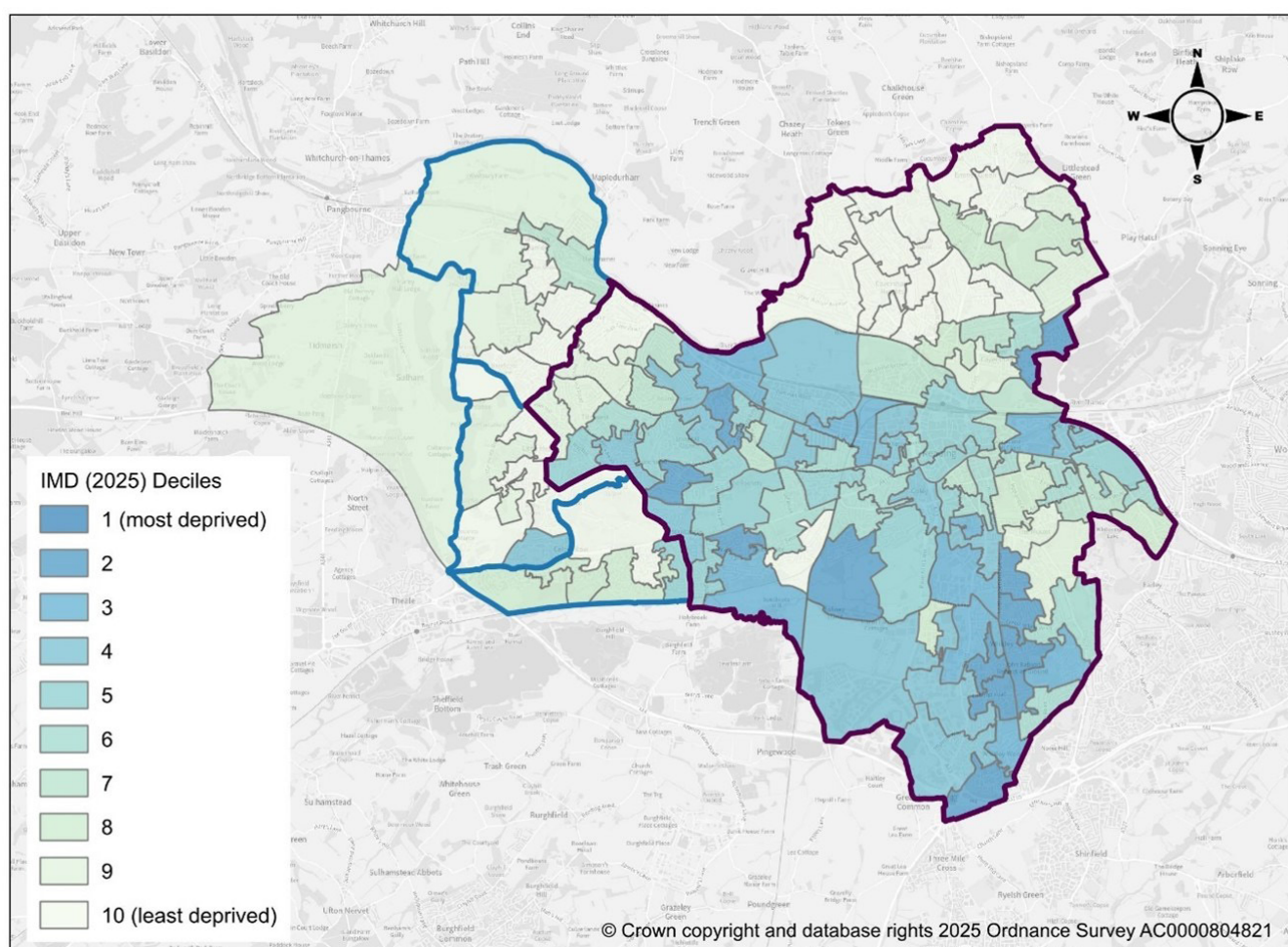
Chart 1: Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) by Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) decile
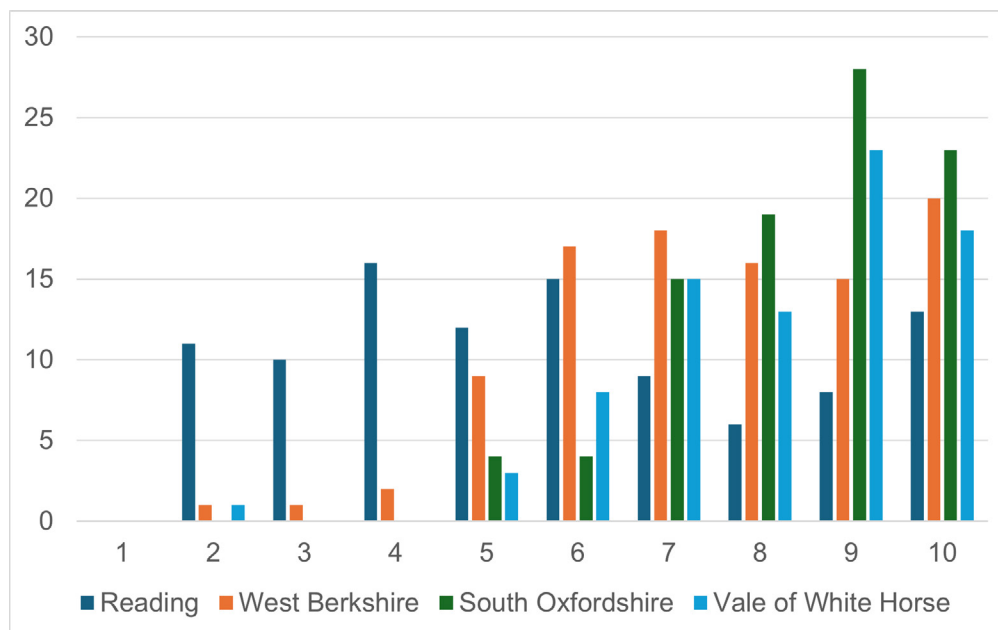
32. There are also major differences in the Council Tax base across the two authorities. 70% of properties in Reading are in band A-C, compared to only 42% in the proposed Ridgeway area.[14]

33. Our proposed modification to the boundary with West Berkshire will bring greater balance between the tax bases of the two authorities, without disadvantaging the new Ridgeway Council due to its size and scale. Reading's share of band A-C properties will fall from 70% to 64%, with an increase in properties in band E-H, while Ridgeway's share of band A-C properties will remain unchanged at 42%. The chart below summarises the current Council Tax base in the two areas and shows how it would become more equal with the proposed changes.

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Chart 2: Properties by Council Tax band (% of total)
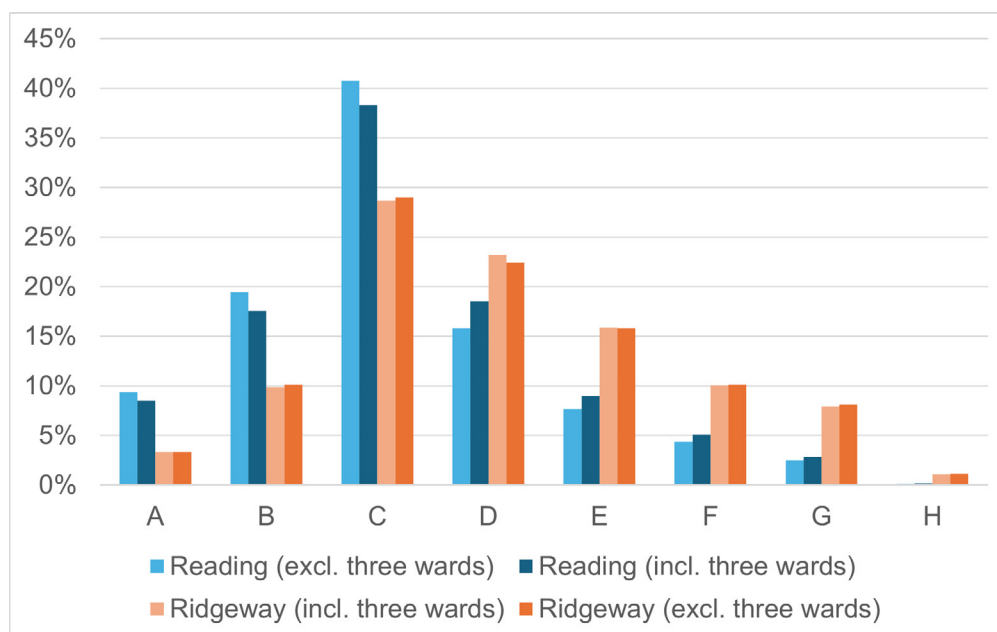
Helps meet housing needs

34. Reading has a strong track record of housing delivery:

- Despite the constraints of operating in an urban area of only 15.5 square miles, over the period FY 2021-2024, we delivered 2,759 new homes – 30% more than the Local Plan target for that period. This puts Reading in the top 10 cities in the country for housing delivery and demonstrates the Council's ability to contribute to national growth targets.[15]

- Between 2022 and 2025, the Council directly delivered 267 new Council homes through its Local Authority New Build (LANB) Programme, as part of a broader commitment to deliver 548 LANB homes by 2028.

- Partnerships are expanding supply: housing association Abri is delivering 40 affordable rental homes at Green Park Village. Alongside these new homes, Abri currently has more than 258 homes under construction or in the pipeline in Reading.

35. However, because of our strong economy and labour market, Reading's housing market is under pressure, and delivery typically meets only about one-third of affordable housing need, leaving many key workers and younger adults priced out. Our 2024 Local Housing Needs Assessment identified a shortfall of 2,831 affordable homes, with an additional 113 homes per year needed through to 2041 on top of this figure. Jobs-led projections show a requirement for 735 new homes annually, reflecting Reading's role as a high-growth employment hub.

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15   Cities Outlook 2025' by Centre for Cities, available here

36. Affordability pressures are stark in the private rented sector, which accounts for 40% of Reading's housing stock. Average rents in Reading are £1,552 a month, 15% higher than the UK average and up 7.4% on last year.[16] For employers, this can translate into higher wage costs, longer commutes, and weaker staff retention, particularly for early-career and key workers.

37. A lack of affordable housing affects economic growth. Homes England's 2025 econometric analysis shows that a 10% rise in housing costs relative to incomes in the Greater South East reduces productivity by 3.1%, as labour mobility and agglomeration benefits decline.[17] The Centre for Cities warns that worsening affordability now acts as a brake on growth across UK cities, especially in highly productive areas like Reading.[18]

38. However, Reading's ability to deliver housing that meets demand and reflects local needs is severely constrained by our outdated, tightly drawn urban boundary. As a consequence, much of Reading's housing delivery takes place within the town centre in the form of flats. We forecast that by 2041 the number of households in central Reading will increase by 161% - an increase of nearly 9,000 households. Although flats provide an important contribution to Reading's housing stock, the largely urbanised nature of the Borough makes it difficult to deliver units, particularly affordable housing, for families.

39. Aligning Reading's boundary with its functional urban area would unlock faster delivery of affordable homes where demand is highest, reducing commuting distances and supporting retention in sectors that power Reading's growth. Better-sequenced infrastructure will support affordable mass transit, active travel, utilities that lower living costs, and support for town centre renewal and brownfield regeneration.

40. Areas currently within West Berkshire's Local Plan provide appropriate sites for affordable family homes. An expanded Reading boundary would enable a stronger approach to Local Plans and spatial frameworks across the Reading corridor, which is a key growth area in national policy. Respecting the already adopted Local Plan Policies for West Berkshire, provides an opportunity for cohesive housing policy that links Reading's housing delivery with the needs of the wider community, providing more houses and a better distribution of unit size than we can currently deliver in Reading.

16   Housing prices in Reading' by ONS, available here
17   Housing affordability and productivity' by Homes England, available here
18   Cities Outlook 2025' by Centre for Cities, available here

2.2 Right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity, and withstand financial shocks

LGR guidance:

a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.

b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.

c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.

d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

e) For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.

f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

Population of 500,000 or more for new Councils

41. Reading's proposed modification is seeking a targeted amendment to the reorganisation proposals from Oxfordshire. None of the existing unitary authorities in Berkshire were invited to submit proposals to reorganise. Therefore, there is no proposal to create a new Council in Reading and therefore, the amendment does not seek to meet this criterion, but instead outline the rationale for it and the opportunity it presents.

42. This amendment is considered an essential precursor should there be a subsequent requirement from government for wider reorganisation across Berkshire. It will be considerably harder to develop reorganisation options for the five remaining Councils in Berkshire if part of Reading, a key economic centre (as demonstrated elsewhere in this document), has already been reorganised.

> " It will be considerably harder to develop reorganisation options for the five remaining councils in Berkshire if part of Reading, a key economic centre (as demonstrated elsewhere in this document), has already been reorganised.

43. The amendment would assign 26,100 residents (2022 mid-year estimates) to Reading. This would have a minimal impact on the population figures for the new Ridgeway Council proposed by Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, as set out in the table below (changes from Reading amendment shown in final column).

Table 1: Summary of LGR proposals in Oxfordshire

Proposal	Proposed Councils	2028 population (k)	2028 population with Reading amendment (k)
Single County Unitary	Oxfordshire	791	791
Two Unitary Councils	Oxford & Shires	472	472
	Ridgeway	483	457
Three Unitary Councils*[19]	Greater Oxford	240	240
	Northern Oxfordshire	265	265
	Ridgeway	430	404

* The Three Unitary Authorities proposal provides these as current figures

44. As the table demonstrates, the Reading amendment reduces the population of the Ridgeway Council by 5.6% in the two-Council option and 6.4% in the three-Council option. In both cases the current population of Ridgeway is marginally affected and still within the bounds of flexibility set out by the Government. In the three-Council option, the Ridgeway Council remains the largest new Council even with the Reading amendment.

45. Our proposed modification therefore only marginally affects Oxfordshire's Ridgeway proposal, with the modified proposal still having sufficient residents to be considered viable as a unitary.

46. Reading's proposed modification therefore has limited impact on the Oxfordshire/West Berkshire 'Ridgeway' proposal. There are significant advantages to keeping the whole urban area of greater Reading within scope should there be any future requirement for local government reorganisation in Berkshire.

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19   Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation: Three Unitary Authorities Proposal' by Oxford City Council, available here

Assuming the Ridgeway Council was established as amended by Reading Borough Council's proposal there would be a firmer foundation for meeting LGR criteria across the rest of Berkshire, enabling reorganisation based on sensible economic geographies and a population of circa 853,000 across the area.

Efficiencies and financial implications

47. Given the limited scope of the change to Reading by this proposed modification (the rationale for which is set out above), efficiencies will be incremental rather than transformational. Nevertheless, this proposal identifies the potential for efficiencies delivered through:

   • Smarter use of scale and proximity - joining up urban services across a single, continuous area (e.g., refuse collection, street cleansing) routes are optimised and resources are used more effectively.

   • Spreading fixed costs - sharing central, corporate and departmental costs (such as headquarters, depots, and IT systems) across a larger tax base, reducing the cost per household.

   • Joined-up planning and commissioning - one aligned strategy for services such as housing, transport, and social care across the wider area, avoiding duplication and enabling better value through procurement in the market area.

48. Based on our analysis of West Berkshire's share of costs for the three wards, we estimate that spend on central enabling and support services for these areas is in the region £2.3 million. There is therefore potential to deliver substantial savings within the scope of this figure and represents ~10% of the estimated service cost for the three wards within the proposal.

49. We commissioned LG Futures, a specialist financial consultancy that has worked with 91% of local authorities in England, to undertake an independent assessment of the financial implications of the proposed change, modelling the share of resources and costs for the three wards to produce a forecast of the expected impact. The output of our financial modelling is set out in section 4.1.

50. It should be noted that the development of detailed cost modelling and identifying opportunities for improvement has been constrained by limited access to West Berkshire data relating to the three wards within this proposal. West Berkshire Council's response to our request for data was limited and mainly signposted to already published data. Further data was subsequently obtained through submitting Freedom of Information requests. At this point we note the Government guidance in the invitation letter, which included the requirement that local leaders should "work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals."[20]

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20   Letter:Oxfordshire available here

Transition costs

51. The one-off transition costs to implement this proposal have been estimated at £2.45 million (with a full low to high range of £1.84 million - £3.07 million), based on a detailed, workstream-level assessment of the resources required to ensure a smooth and effective transfer. This includes the budget needed to cover programme governance, ICT integration, workforce transfer, contract novation and service harmonisation activities.

52. In line with government guidance on restructuring, the transition costs will be met through the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts in accordance with the current statutory direction. Should eligible costs exceed the level of available receipts or fall outside the scope of the direction, we will consider applying to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for a Capitalisation Direction to ensure prudent and compliant financing of these one-off transition costs.

2.3 Prioritises delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens

LGR guidance:

a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.

b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.

c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

Patterns of service use and delivery

53. Reading Town Centre is approximately three miles from the Tilehurst wards and 10-15 minutes by bus, while Newbury (the administrative centre of West Berkshire) is 18 miles and approximately 1 hour 15 minutes by public transport.

54. Unsurprisingly, Reading Borough Council services are therefore used extensively by residents in all three wards. In contrast, West Berkshire Council operates relatively few physical facilities within the three wards, with most of the services provided to residents being based in Newbury. Many facilities for residents are provided "over the border" by Reading Borough Council or the existing parish Councils.

55. For instance, West Berkshire Council only provide the following limited facilities in the three wards:

- **One community centre (Holybrook)**: all others are owned by the parish Councils.
- **Cotswold Sports Centre (Tilehurst)**: has only limited sports and gym facilities, and no swimming pool; leased from Tilehurst Parish Council.
- **Greenfield House Resource Centre (Calcot)**: adult day services hub.
- **East Area Family Hub (Calcot)**

56. The above picture of service provision is not unduly complex and reflects the limited footprint of West Berkshire Council in these three wards. In comparison, residents in the three wards can easily access the following services of Reading Borough Council:

- **Reading Buses:** Reading Borough Council-owned bus company with extensive bus routes operating across all three wards and the third highest number of bus passenger journeys per head in England outside London.[21]
- **Two large leisure centres:** Meadway Sports Centre and swimming pool in Tilehurst (30% of users live in West Berkshire) and Rivermead Leisure Centre, a brand-new sports facility, including an 8-lane competition swimming pool and diving pool.
- **Tilehurst Library:** The only library in Tilehurst and less than 700 metres from the boundary. 30% of users live in West Berkshire.
- **Several large public parks:** Most notably Arthur Newbery Park (less than 500 metres from the boundary) and Prospect Park.
- **Reading Museum and the Hexagon Theatre**
- **Tilehurst Community Centre**
- **Ranikhet and Southcote Children's Centres**

The Hexagon

Reading Buses

Rivermead Leisure Centre

Arthur Newbery Park

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21   Bus passenger journeys up 11% in Reading' by Reading Borough Council, availablehere

57. The table below shows data from a representative survey carried out by DJS Research on use of Reading Borough Council services by residents in West Berkshire wards and Reading Borough.[22] [23] The following points should be noted:

- Around two-thirds of residents in the three wards have used Reading buses in the last 12 months, and more than half have used Reading car parks. Use of Reading's car parks is in many cases higher amongst those living in the West Berkshire wards than people residing in Reading itself.
- Residents in the West Berkshire wards use Reading Borough Council's culture and leisure facilities as much as residents in Reading, or in some cases (such as theatre use) more.
- Similarly, 34-37% of residents in the three Tilehurst wards used Reading's leisure centres, compared to 36% of residents in Reading Borough. Reading Borough Council library use is similarly high in the three Tilehurst wards, reflecting the fact that West Berkshire has no library provision at all for residents in this area, with their nearest library provided by Reading Borough Council.
- Overall, between 96% and 99% of residents in the three wards had used at least one of the Reading Borough Council services listed in the last 12 months, compared to 97% of residents within Reading Borough.

Table 2: % of residents who have used the following Reading Borough Council services in the last 12 months

	Pangbourne	Theale	Tilehurst Birch Copse	Tilehurst & Purley	Tilehurst South & Holybrook	Reading
Reading Buses	45%	69%	67%	60%	59%	82%
Reading car parks	58%	53%	66%	56%	47%	53%
Reading parks	38%	27%	48%	37%	46%	67%
The Hexagon or South Street Theatre	33%	35%	33%	31%	41%	28%
Reading Leisure Centres	27%	22%	35%	34%	37%	36%
Reading Libraries	19%	11%	31%	22%	28%	31%
Reading Museum	13%	15%	20%	12%	14%	23%
Any of the above	88%	91%	98%	96%	99%	97%

22   Survey carried out by DJS Research on behalf of Reading Borough Council based on a representative sample of 739 residents living in the five West Berkshire wards.

23   Survey carried out by DJS Research on behalf of Reading Borough Council based on a representative sample of 1,012 residents in Reading.

58. These patterns of service use demonstrate that West Berkshire's service offer in the three wards is very limited and that Reading Borough Council is already funding and delivering a wide range of services used by West Berkshire residents. Residents are equally looking to Reading for their services, for the reasons previously outlined in terms of geography and economic area.

Improving service delivery

59. A revised boundary would recognise the natural pattern of where people seek services and enable more effective delivery, particularly for crucial services such as social care and homelessness. It would provide residents with a more cohesive, efficient set of public services aligned to the urban area, rather than services being fragmented across two Councils as at present, or designed around the rural communities of Ridgeway.

60. The key benefits for residents would be as follows:

- **Integrated service delivery:** Amending the boundary enables services to be planned and delivered based on the actual geography of the urban area. This improves operational efficiency, reduces duplication, and enhances service reliability. For example, refuse collection routes currently cross borough boundaries. This is highly inefficient, with multiple examples of small residential roads that cross between the two Council areas, resulting in both Councils collecting refuse from the same streets. A unified approach would be clearer and simpler for residents, reduce vehicle mileage, lowering emissions, and improving service resilience. Similarly, services close to the boundary (such as the examples of libraries and leisure centres already highlighted) already serve large numbers of West Berkshire residents but are not paid for by them.

- **Improved fairness and access:** A single authority across the area ensures that residents receive consistent service standards and equitable access to support. It removes disparities caused by administrative fragmentation and improves outcomes for vulnerable groups. For example, Reading's homelessness prevention model avoids placing children in shared B&B accommodation and offers more accessible temporary housing, while West Berkshire's approach results in higher use of B&Bs with shared areas for families with children. In SEND provision, Reading offers a proactive emotional wellbeing service in schools which West Berkshire currently lacks.

- **Economic alignment:** Aligning governance with the functional economic geography of Reading supports a more coherent approach to economic development, skills, employment support, planning, and investment in infrastructure. The proposed boundary change would allow for a coordinated approach to strategic planning across the Reading area. Planning of key transport corridors and associated infrastructure currently straddling the boundary would be better co-ordinated under a single authority. Employment and skills programmes would be better aligned with local employers, training providers, and the functional economic area.

- **Environmental and sustainability gains:** With an expanded boundary, Reading would be better placed to deliver cohesive strategies for climate resilience, air quality, and sustainable transport. This avoids fragmented approaches and supports delivery of net zero. Coordinated planning of active travel routes and public transport services would enhance connectivity, reduce congestion and improve air quality across West Reading and the town centre.

Opportunities for service improvement

61. The following section sets out specific examples of opportunities for service improvement with a revised boundary.

- **More efficient refuse collection:** Reading Borough Council currently operates a well-functioning system of refuse collection, designed to meet the needs of a dense urban environment. This expertise presents opportunities to expand the service model to cover the Tilehurst wards, where service boundaries do not currently align with the built-up footprint of the town. In practice, collection crews already attend streets immediately adjacent to the borough boundary and, in some instances, must leave the borough and re-enter to serve properties located on the edge of the administrative area.

  Expanding operations to include those neighbouring streets currently beyond the borough boundary would provide several clear benefits. Locating a closer operating base and adopting route patterns that reflect the geography of the urban area, rather than the current outdated administrative boundaries, could:

  - Reduce vehicle mileage and journey times, resulting in lower fuel consumption and associated greenhouse gas emissions.
  - Minimise wear and tear on vehicles and the road network, supporting both operational cost savings and highway maintenance objectives.
  - Improve efficiency of collection and cleansing operations, with more time available for frontline services rather than travel between fragmented collection points.
  - Enhance service reliability and resilience, by reducing unnecessary detours and creating opportunities for more coherent route planning

This would help to deliver economies of scale, more consistent service standards, and environmental improvements that support both improved health outcomes and wider sustainability objectives across the urban area.

- **Tackling homelessness:** Reading Borough Council is in a comparatively stronger position to deliver effective homelessness prevention owing to its direct control over a significant proportion of its housing stock.

  This provides Reading Borough Council with greater flexibility and autonomy in how it responds to housing pressures. As of the end of Quarter 4 24/25, 57% (230 households) of those in temporary accommodation in Reading were placed in local authority or housing association properties – many of which are directly owned by Reading Borough Council. By contrast, in West Berkshire the equivalent proportion was 48% (64 households).[24]

  Reading Borough Council also demonstrates best practice in tackling homelessness by ensuring that no children are placed in bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, including shared annexes.

  At the end of Quarter 4 24/25, only 15 households (3.7%) in Reading were placed in B&Bs, none of which included children. By contrast, West Berkshire placed 45 households (33.8%) in B&Bs during the same period, including 12 families with children.

  Accessing temporary accommodation services is also significantly easier within Reading, with the town centre just three miles from these wards and 10-15 minutes by bus, while Newbury is 18 miles and approximately 1 hour 15 minutes by public transport.

  Reading Borough Council's rough sleeping outreach teams are also better placed to operate effectively across the contiguous urban area, enabling faster and more consistent support for those in need.

- **Sustainable transport infrastructure:** There is significant potential for an expanded administration over the urban area to support investment in sustainable transport infrastructure, enabling the delivery of projects that promote modal shift, reduce congestion, and enhance connectivity.

  Opportunities exist to strengthen the co-ordination of public transport services, integrated ticketing, and active travel routes across the urban area, with a particular focus on journeys to and from Reading town centre and West Reading. This would improve accessibility, make sustainable travel options more attractive and user-friendly, and further reduce reliance on private vehicles.

  This proposal enables a consistent approach to concessionary travel and community transport offers across the urban area, including clarity on the times and services eligible for free travel with a concessionary pass. This would ensure greater fairness, transparency, and ease of use for passengers, while helping to support social inclusion, reduce isolation and access to essential services.

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24   Homelessness statistics' by MHCLG, available here

- **Technology enabled adult social care:** Reading Borough Council has transformed its Technology Enabled Care service from a small pilot into an integrated, preventative model supporting nearly 2,000 residents, including 950 with monitored Technology Enabled Care. Following a pilot in 2020, this programme has demonstrated effectiveness in supporting hospital discharges, preventing admissions, and reducing carer breakdowns – achieving £377k in savings and £872k in cost avoidance.

  Following this success, Reading Borough Council established a dedicated TEC Team in January 2022, embedding Technology Enabled Care within adult social care pathways, reablement services, and hospital discharge processes.

  Frontline staff now use technology to enhance residents' independence, safety, and wellbeing through tools such as fall detection, medication reminders, and social connection features. With the proportion of older adults in Reading expected to rise to 23.1% by 2043, Technology Enabled Care is central to future-proofing care delivery.

  Recognised nationally and internationally, Reading Borough Council's TEC service was shortlisted for the 2024 ITEC Awards and commended by the CQC for innovation in independence, dementia, and fall prevention.

  Extending Reading Borough Council's proven Technology Enabled Care infrastructure to the adjoining three wards would ensure equitable access to digital care, reduce duplication, and deliver more consistent, efficient, and responsive services across the greater Reading area.

- **Greater integration of leisure services:** Reading Borough Council is already contributing to the wellbeing of Tilehurst residents through their access to our leisure and sports facilities, with our leisure centres attracting significant usage from residents outside the borough.

  Around 10% of all visits to Reading Borough Council leisure centres come from West Berkshire residents, and at Meadway Sports Centre the proportion is significantly higher at 30% (see map below).

  This pattern highlights the strong pull of Reading's high-quality leisure offer and confirms that residents across the wider urban area look to Reading as their primary destination for sport, recreation, and community activities.
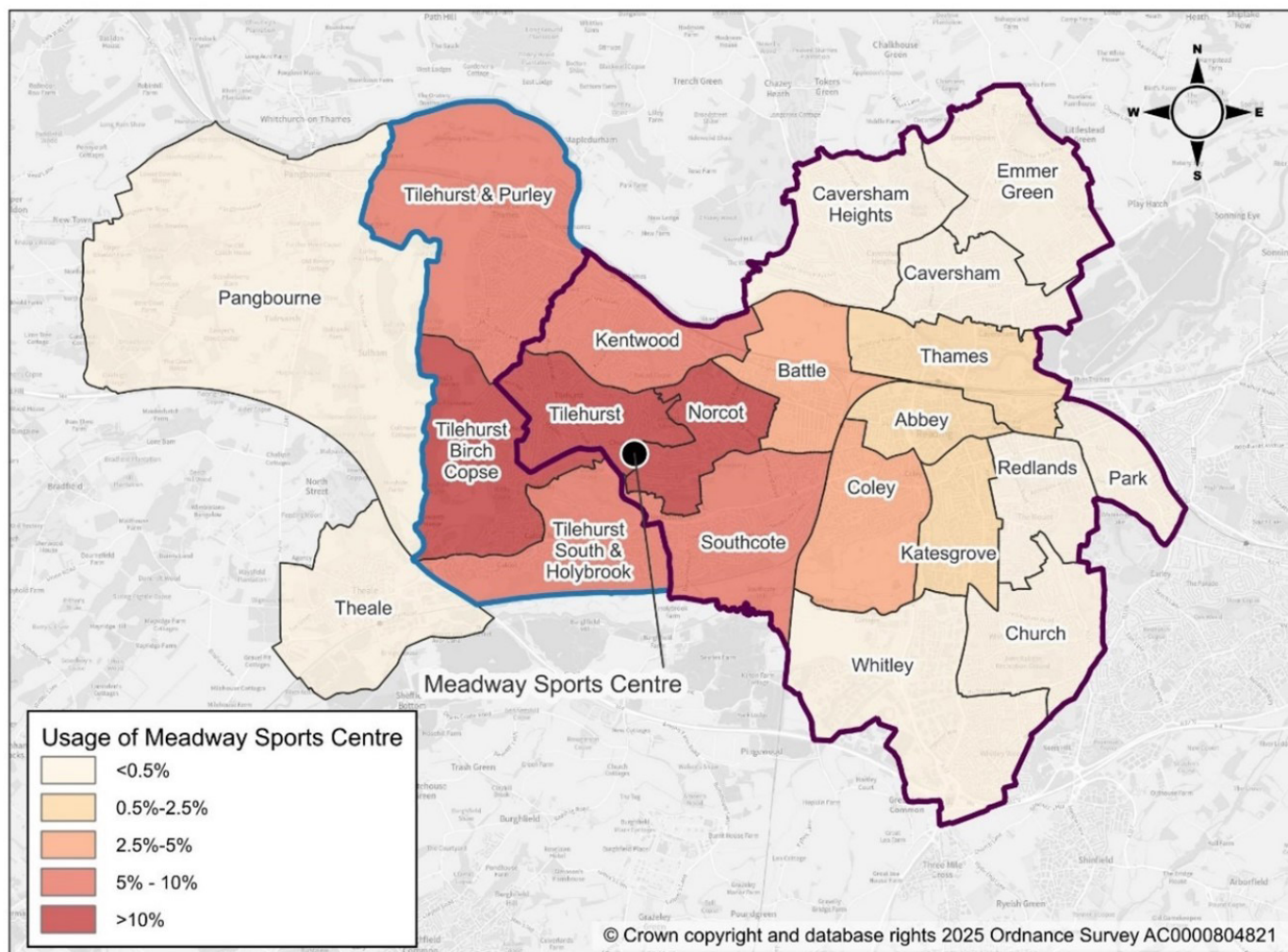
> " Around 10% of all visits to Reading Borough Council leisure centres come from West Berkshire residents, and at Meadway Sports Centre the proportion is significantly higher at 30%

Map 6: Use of Meadway Sports Centre by ward

Legend: Usage of Meadway Sports Centre
- <0.5%
- 0.5%-2.5%
- 2.5%-5%
- 5% - 10%
- >10%

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Expanding the boundaries over the greater Reading area would support service equity, as currently non-Reading Borough residents benefit directly from services that are primarily funded and maintained by Reading Borough Council.

In addition, greater integration could provide a platform for:

- Enhanced visibility and profile of leisure facilities across the urban area, reinforcing Reading's role as a hub for sport, culture, and wellbeing.
- Stronger promotion of community events and programmes, ensuring they reach a wider audience and achieve greater participation.
- Improved strategic planning, allowing leisure services to better align with patterns of demand across administrative boundaries.

Enhanced Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision:
Reading Borough Council delivers a comprehensive Educational Psychology service support offer for schools. This proactive model contributes directly to:

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- Reduced suspensions and exclusions
- Improved attendance and engagement
- Lower long-term costs to schools and the local authority, by working to identify and meet children's needs earlier

In contrast, West Berkshire Council has experienced challenges in delivering all of its Educational Psychology capacity. Children and young people in the three Tilehurst wards, if brought into Reading, would benefit from our well-established team of experienced Educational Psychologists and would be able to access this service.

Feedback from school leaders has been consistently positive, with strong demand for ongoing advisory and psychological support to sustain inclusive practices and safeguard pupil wellbeing.

There is also clear potential to develop a cluster of excellence for SEND, with the addition of Brookfields School (in Tilehurst), supported by our existing specialist teams. This would:

- Strengthen collaboration across settings
- Share best practice in SEND pedagogy and intervention
- Enhance capacity in emotional wellbeing and inclusion support
- Position Reading as a regional leader in inclusive education

2.4 Shows how Councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

LGR guidance:

a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.

b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.

c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.
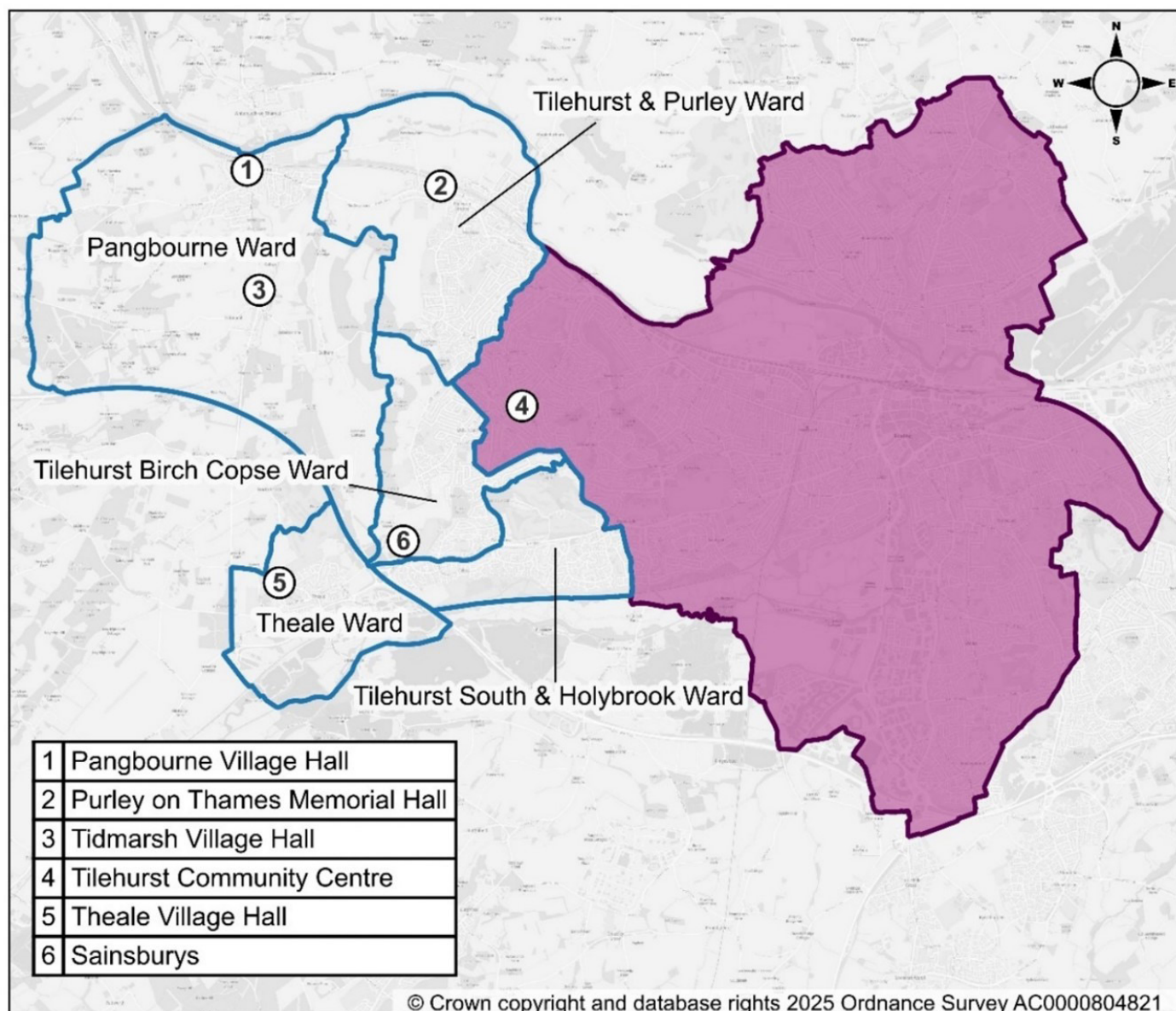
Engagement

62. Extensive engagement was undertaken with communities across the five wards within the original scope of the proposal, with careful consideration given to local identity, history, and cultural ties. The engagement programme comprised the following activities:

- Six in-person drop-in events at local community venues (detailed below), which collectively engaged approximately 300 residents.
- An online/paper survey, which received 1,111 responses from across Reading and West Berkshire, including 716 responses from residents of the three wards.
- An independent survey conducted by DJS Research based on a mixture of telephone and face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of 739 residents in the three wards.
- Targeted stakeholder sessions with key local groups, including Parish Councils, schools, and businesses.
- Dedicated communications campaign to engage stakeholders and residents across the three wards – aiming to raise awareness of the proposed boundary change, foster community pride, and promote hyper-local storytelling. This achieved over 900,000 impressions across multiple channels.

Map 7: Venues for in-person community engagement events

Tilehurst & Purley Ward

Pangbourne Ward

Tilehurst Birch Copse Ward

Theale Ward

Tilehurst South & Holybrook Ward

1	Pangbourne Village Hall
2	Purley on Thames Memorial Hall
3	Tidmarsh Village Hall
4	Tilehurst Community Centre
5	Theale Village Hall
6	Sainsburys

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63. For comparison, engagement activity undertaken in West Berkshire was more limited:

- An online survey was conducted (participation levels and results have not been published at the time of writing).
- No representative survey of residents was conducted.
- Only three in-person engagement events were held across the five wards.

## Results of the representative survey

64. We commissioned an independent survey conducted by DJS Research based on a mixture of telephone and face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of residents in the three wards. While the online/paper survey presented an opportunity for anyone with a view

to contribute, this commission ensured a representative sample of respondents – unlike the engagement undertaken by West Berkshire. It particularly targeted younger people who are typically underrepresented in consultation and engagement. The results of this survey therefore provide the most accurate representation available of the true views of residents.
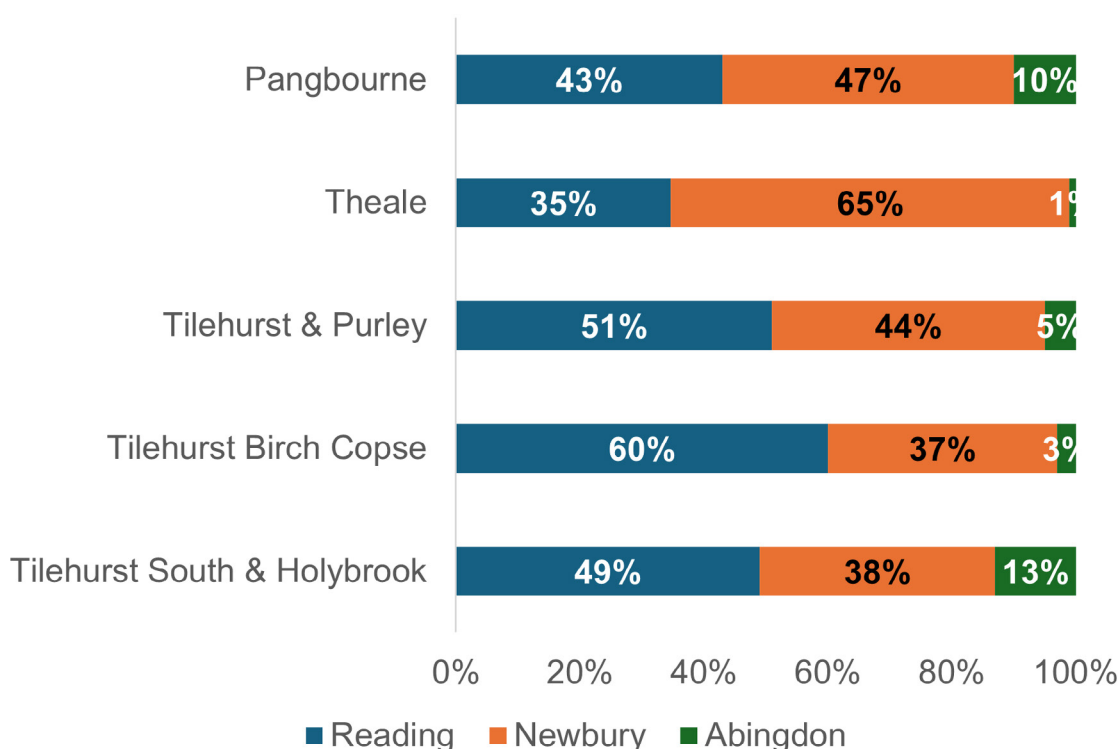
65. The key findings were as follows:

- **Awareness of the Ridgeway proposal and its implications is low:** Whilst around two-thirds of residents in every ward said that they know at least a little about the Ridgeway Council proposal, apart from Theale, where it dropped to around half (51%), knowledge was shallow, with no more than a third from each ward saying that they know a fair amount/great deal, indicating a need for greater resident engagement and awareness building, despite the Ridgeway proposal being a very early declared ambition in the LGR process.

Chart 3: To what extent are you aware of the proposal to create a new 'Ridgeway' Council? Resident responses by ward (%)
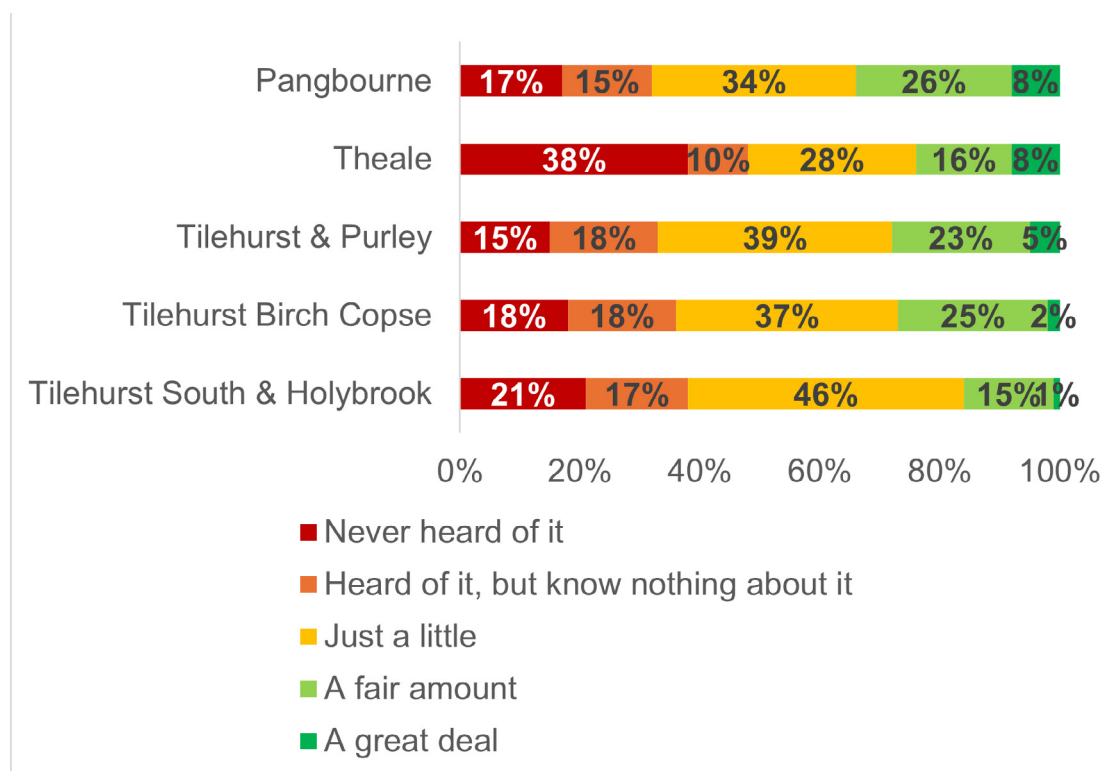
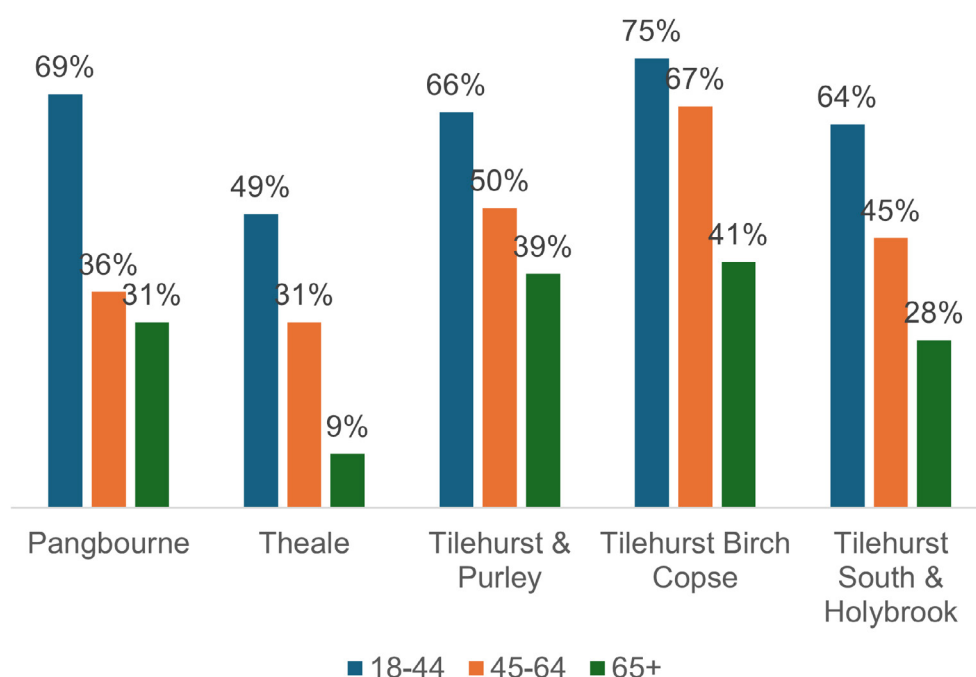- **There is strong support from residents in the three Tilehurst wards for decisions about local services to be made in Reading as shown in chart 4:** A decisive majority of residents in Tilehurst Birch Copse would prefer local decisions to be made in Reading (60%) rather than Newbury (37%) or Abingdon (3%). The other two Tilehurst areas also favour Reading, supported by around half of residents.

Chart 4: Where would you prefer decisions about services in your local area to be made? Resident responses by ward (%)

Ward	Reading	Newbury	Abingdon
Pangbourne	43%	47%	10%
Theale	35%	65%	1%
Tilehurst & Purley	51%	44%	5%
Tilehurst Birch Copse	60%	37%	3%
Tilehurst South & Holybrook	49%	38%	13%

- **People aged 18-44 are more supportive of decisions being made in Reading.** The desire for decisions to be made in Reading is even higher in the youngest age group in each of the West Berkshire wards. 75% of this age group express a preference for Reading in Tilehurst Birch Copse, falling to around 64% and 66% for the other two Tilehurst wards and 69% in Pangbourne.

Chart 5: Where would you prefer decisions about services in your local area to be made? % who prefer Reading, by age and ward

Ward	18-44	45-64	65+
Pangbourne	69%	36%	31%
Theale	49%	31%	9%
Tilehurst & Purley	66%	50%	39%
Tilehurst Birch Copse	75%	67%	41%
Tilehurst South & Holybrook	64%	45%	28%

Views of residents from the engagement events and online survey

Quotes from the online survey

"My house is 3 miles from Reading town centre, yet my taxes go to West Berkshire. I have no ties to West Berkshire apart from that. My whole life and I'm sure that of my neighbours is centered around our closest town, Reading". - *Calcot Resident*

"It makes sense that we become part of Reading as we would have nothing in common with the new authority that would be supporting rural areas." - *Tilehurst Resident*

"The fact I am not a Reading Borough Council taxpayer is lunacy. The idea that I could be in the same authority as my parents who have a Swindon postcode is beyond ridiculous. Calcot is firmly part of Reading, and there cannot possibly be any rational argument against Calcot (or Tilehurst for that matter) returning to Reading." - *Calcot Resident*

"I use Reading buses, I live in Tilehurst, use the local shops, doctors and dentist and library in Tilehurst. Our hospital is the Royal Berkshire. However, the boundary says our house is in West Berkshire! If there are to be boundary changes, making what once were separate villages, but have been suburbs of Reading for decades, makes sense financially and practically." - *Tilehurst Resident*

66. In addition to the representative survey, we undertook extensive engagement with residents both online and in person. Through this engagement activity, a number of themes consistently emerged.

67. **Engagement and collaboration:** The engagement events were positively received, providing a valuable forum to explain the rationale for the proposal, and gather feedback on local concerns and issues. Residents generally welcomed the opportunity to be heard and gave positive feedback on the process itself. The in-person events were largely self-selecting and reflected a limited demographic profile.

68. **Boundaries and identity:** There was broad agreement that the existing Tilehurst boundary is illogical with many in favour of its revision. Tilehurst, Purley, and Calcot – and to some extent Theale – were generally recognised as having natural and functional ties to Reading. There was stronger opposition in Pangbourne, and notable opposition in Tidmarsh (part of Pangbourne Ward), to inclusion within Reading, with residents emphasising their rural identity and the role of natural boundaries in distinguishing them from the urban area.

69. **Development and planning:** Many residents expressed concern about increased housing development if the proposed areas were to be absorbed into Reading. Many of the concerns raised included expressions of opposition to planned housing developments already included in West Berkshire's Local Plan.

Residents were especially concerned about development of green spaces and countryside.

70. **Neighbourhood governance:** Residents expressed concerns that Parish Councils might be abolished, emphasising their importance to local communities and the range of services they provide. This was expressed particularly strongly in Pangbourne where information had incorrectly been circulated claiming that Reading Borough Council was planning to abolish Parish Councils.

How we will address concerns raised

71. **Boundaries and identity:** Throughout the engagement sessions, it was reaffirmed that while administrative change is under consideration, there is no intention to alter the identity of local areas. Reading is a diverse borough comprising many communities, and the wards would retain their distinct character if they were to become part of Reading, in the same way that existing communities in different parts of Reading have proud local identities.

72. **Development and planning:** Likewise, it was explained that, like West Berkshire Council, Reading also has statutory housing targets. We have a strong track record of meeting these targets within the confines of an urban area and are confident in our ability to continue delivering housing while safeguarding green spaces. We have achieved this by building on previously developed land – 87% of new dwelling delivered over the Local Plan period so far (2013-2024) were on previously developed land, and we have a target to achieve 90% over the period of the Local Plan.[25]

73. **Neighbourhood governance:** Two targeted engagement sessions were held with parish clerks, chairs, and vice chairs (one in-person and one online). At these sessions, a clear commitment was made to recognise and respect the contribution made by the local Parish Councils and co-create a charter to guide future collaboration. This approach was generally well received and helped to constructively counter misinformation circulating within the community.

2.5 Supports devolution arrangements

LGR guidance:

a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.

b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.

c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

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74. Our LGR proposal is the essential first step towards unlocking the full potential of devolution across the Thames Valley. By streamlining governance and aligning local structures with the region's economic and social realities, we are laying the foundations for a coherent and effective strategic authority.

75. Earlier this year, Reading Borough Council resolved to support, in principle, the creation of a strategic authority in line with the English Devolution White Paper. This resolution also anticipated that the new authority would, in principle, include an elected mayor. Since then, we have moved decisively from commitment to delivery. Working collaboratively with Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, other Oxfordshire District Councils, Swindon Borough Council, and the remaining Berkshire authorities, we are shaping a shared vision for the region. Our intention to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to Government later this year underlines our determination to make this vision a reality. We are not just talking about change; we are driving it.

76. This LGR proposal demonstrates local leadership, provides robust evidence for reform, and signals a clear appetite for collaboration that will unlock strategic growth and supports Government agendas. It offers the clarity of governance required for an effective strategic authority.

77. Crucially, our proposal does not constrain Oxfordshire and West Berkshire's ambitions to create a larger, predominantly rural authority. The new Ridgeway Council remains compatible with the wider strategic direction and can progress in parallel with Reading's revised boundary. This flexibility ensures that local identity and governance are respected while contributing to a broader regional vision that delivers national economic growth.

78. Together, these developments position Reading at the heart of an emerging strategic authority, alongside other economic centres in Oxford, Swindon and Slough, ready to take on devolved responsibilities, drive inclusive growth, and deliver better outcomes for our communities.

2.6 Enables stronger community engagement and delivers genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

LGR guidance:

a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

Strengthening local democracy

79. Our proposal will fundamentally strengthen local democracy by aligning where people pay their Council Tax and where decisions are made, with local identity, local services and patterns of daily living.

80. As set out in section 2.3, West Berkshire provides very few services in the three wards, and many West Berkshire residents are already making extensive use of Reading Borough Council services. This illustrates the profound administrative anomaly: residents pay West Berkshire Council Tax but live in Reading's urban area. All natural service patterns are oriented towards Reading's substantially closer and better-invested facilities. In this regard, residents in these three wards suffer a democratic deficit which can be rectified by this proposal; they rely upon Reading Borough Council services but cannot vote to influence how they are delivered. By moving these three wards into Reading Borough Council, the residents and their elected members will be physically closer to where decisions are made and will be able to take part in those decisions.

Approach to working with Parish Councils

81. Reading has existing neighbourhood governance structures in place, including neighbourhood panels and ward surgeries. We are a compact borough and although we have differences between neighbourhoods such as Caversham, Tilehurst and Whitley, there is a unifying sense of place which provides a high degree of community cohesion. Our proposal would mean that people who already count themselves as Reading residents would now be within the scope of all Reading Borough Council services.

82. Existing parishes would remain, providing a strong voice for the former West Berkshire communities. Our engagement with parishes to inform this proposal found that they were largely overlooked by the Councils behind the Ridgeway plan in the formulation of their proposal. It was only Reading's engagement which triggered further activity in the area from West Berkshire.

83. Parish Councils play an important role in the delivery of local services to residents in these three wards. This would continue, were these parishes to come under Reading Borough Council.

84. Another anomaly created by the current boundary is that the area locally known as 'Tilehurst' is currently split between Reading and West Berkshire. The map below, showing the parish boundaries, illustrates this. The result is that the parts of Tilehurst in West Berkshire are represented by a parish, but not the wards of Tilehurst and Kentwood in Reading, which has entirely separate governance arrangements. This issue could be addressed by revising the boundary.

Map 8: Parish Councils in the proposal area
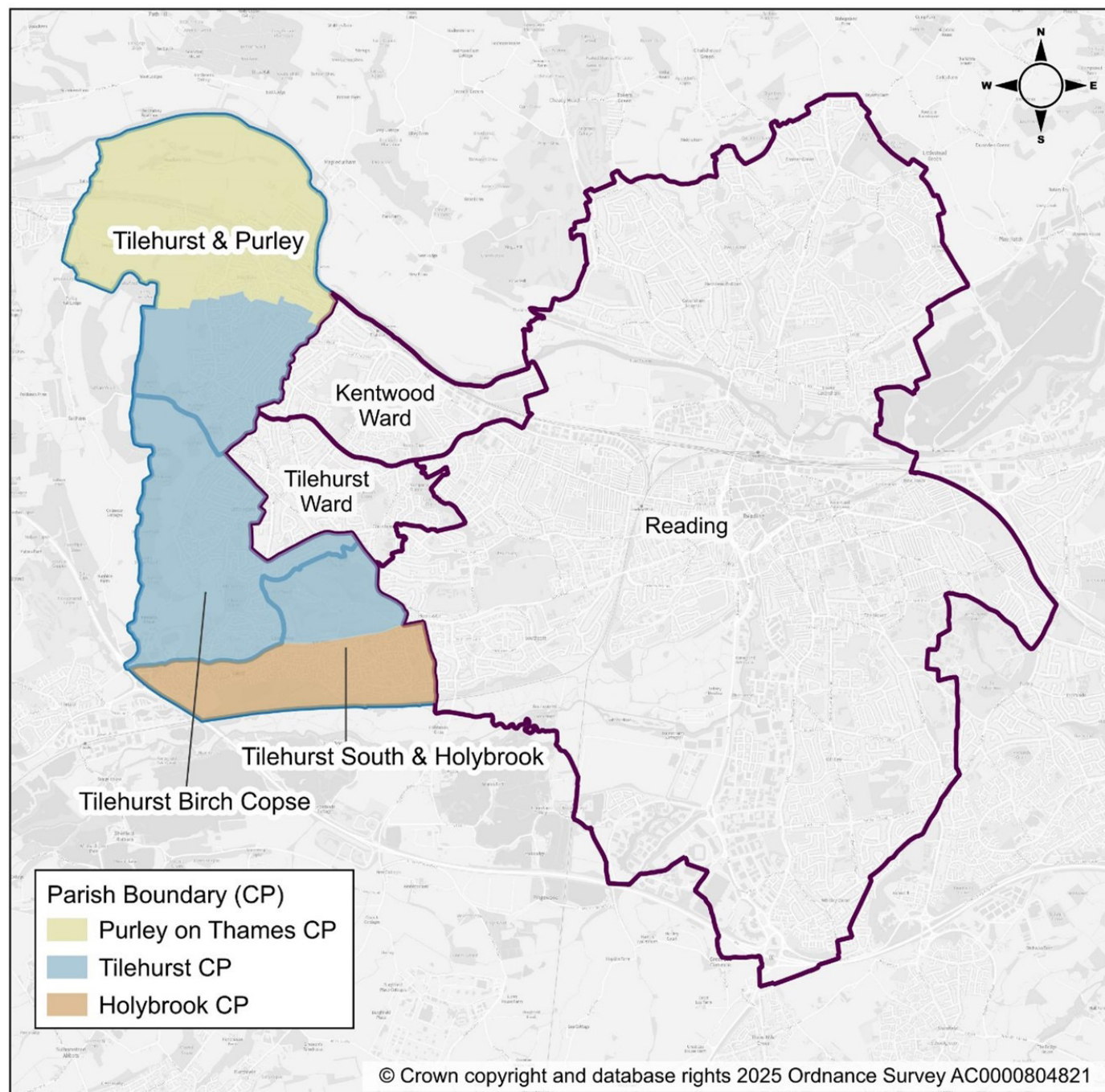
85. This presents a clear opportunity to improve neighbourhood engagement at the parish level by considering how Reading Borough Council's Tilehurst and Kentwood wards may be able to work more closely with the existing Parish Council which spans three West Berkshire wards. Residents may wish to consider how a future community governance review, or a neighbourhood governance review, gives a stronger voice to Tilehurst residents overall if all five Tilehurst wards sit under the jurisdiction of Reading Borough Council.

86. Tilehurst Parish Council is developing a Neighbourhood Plan. It will, as it is currently proceeding, only address the Tilehurst areas in West Berkshire. We believe that the impact of a Neighbourhood Plan for Tilehurst would be strengthened if it encompassed all of Tilehurst, including the wards in the Reading Borough Council area. There are three main reasons:

- **Population and housing coverage:** The current Neighbourhood Plan area (limited to West Berkshire) covers around half of the Tilehurst population. By excluding the Reading Borough Council wards, the plan risks addressing only part of the community's needs, leaving out a significant proportion of households, schools, and local services that function as part of the same area. A whole-Tilehurst plan would therefore have double the representational reach, giving it greater legitimacy.

- **Functional geography and infrastructure:** Tilehurst functions as a single housing market and travel-to-work area (TTWA), with residents crossing the West Berkshire/ Reading boundary daily for employment, education, shopping, and healthcare. Transport corridors (A4, rail stations, bus routes) and community facilities (schools, health centres, leisure facilities) serve the area as a whole, not by existing Council boundary. A plan that covers only part of the neighbourhood cannot fully address infrastructure pressures such as traffic, school places, or healthcare provision, which are shared across the boundary.

- **Policy weight and delivery:** Neighbourhood Plans carry weight in planning decisions. A plan covering the whole of Tilehurst would provide a coherent policy framework across the area, reducing the risk of piecemeal development and inconsistent standards. Developers and suppliers would have greater certainty if the plan is applied consistently across Tilehurst, improving its effectiveness.

87. This paper notes that there is a role for the Secretary of State to consult with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in consideration of these proposals. It is also noted that whilst Reading Borough Council has consulted with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England during the formulation of this proposal, we have not received any views on the advice it may offer the Secretary of State. We understand that detailed consideration of electoral administrative issues may be subject of later consultation. Our proposal would be that the Structural Change Order should retain the existing wards as they are when transferred to Reading, along with existing councillors due to be elected in 2027.

3. Options appraisal

Arthur Hill, Affordable Housing, East Reading

88. This section evaluates the original Ridgeway proposal and our amended version against the six criteria that have been set for evaluating proposals for LGR.

89. A score from 1-5 has been assigned for each of the criteria, reflecting the degree to which each proposal meets the criteria and aligns with the guidance the government has provided.

90. As the table below shows, across all six areas, our proposal to amend the boundary (an amended Ridgeway proposal) more clearly aligns with the criteria and is significantly stronger overall.

Table 3: Assessment of proposals against LGR criteria

Criteria	Option A: Oxfordshire/West Berkshire 'Ridgeway' proposal		Option B: With Reading's modification to 'Ridgeway' proposal	
	Assessment	Score (1-5)	Assessment	Score (1-5)
Achieves a single tier of local government	Delivers a single-tier structure but fails to align with functional economic geography, especially in the three wards which are integrated with Reading.	3	Delivers a single-tier structure and better aligns with the functional economic geography of Reading, improving coherence and service delivery.	5
Right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity, withstand financial shocks	Meets population threshold; however, includes areas with limited economic integration, reducing potential efficiencies.	3	Ridgeway still meets population threshold; better aligns services and economic areas, enabling modest efficiencies and future-proofing for Berkshire-wide reorganisation.	4
Enables high quality and sustainable public services	Fragmented service delivery across urban areas; residents in the three wards use Reading services but pay Council Tax to West Berkshire.	2	Enables integrated service delivery, improved access, fairness, and sustainability across the urban area.	5
Shows Councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views	Limited engagement in affected wards; lacks robust evidence of local support or collaboration with Reading.	2	Extensive engagement with residents and stakeholders; clear evidence of local support and of local views informing the proposal.	5
Supports devolution arrangements	Including parts of Reading in a rural authority artificially constrains the influence of the Reading urban area in any future Mayoral Strategic Authority.	3	Supports Reading's leadership in Thames Valley devolution; aligns with strategic authority plans and complements Ridgeway's rural focus.	5
Enables stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	Residents in three wards experience a democratic deficit; limited influence over services and decision-making.	2	Strengthens local democracy by aligning governance with service use; retains and enhances parish Councils; improves neighbourhood engagement.	5
Conclusion	While the Ridgeway proposal meets basic structural requirements, it fails to reflect the functional economic geography and local needs of the three wards.	15/30	The amended proposal better aligns with economic and service geographies, improves public service delivery, and supports future devolution and community empowerment.	29/30

4. Implementation

4.1 Financial implications

91. We commissioned LG Futures to undertake an independent assessment of the financial implications of the proposed change, modelling the share of resources and costs for the three wards to produce a forecast of the expected impact.

Funding

92. Projections for funding were made as follows:

- The 2025/26 baseline positions for West Berkshire, Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils were split out.
- These separated areas were re-run through LG Futures' Fair Funding Review model to estimate the impact on funding.
- Maximum use of Council Tax flexibilities of 4.99% were assumed across future years, in line with the Government's financial forecasts for local government funding.
- All grants outside core spending power were assumed to be cash flat after 2025/26.
- The resources of West Berkshire were apportioned to the wards.

Council Tax harmonisation

93. Both Ridgeway and an expanded Reading have different levels of Council Tax in 2027/28. Therefore, there will be a need to harmonise Council Tax rates so that all residents are ultimately paying the same Council Tax bill for the same Council Tax band.

94. Band D Council Tax bills in Reading are currently 10.2% higher than in West Berkshire. Council Tax levels in Oxfordshire districts are also higher than in West Berkshire. There is currently a gap of 7.9% between West Berkshire and Vale of White Horse.

95. When comparing Council Tax levels, it should be noted that Council Tax rates in West Berkshire are currently insufficient to meet the cost of running its services and that the Council is reliant on Exceptional Financial Support from the Government to fund day-to-day expenditure.

96. Council Tax harmonisation could be achieved in a single year or over multiple years. Carrying out harmonisation over a longer period of time will generate the same amount of Council Tax but would result in residents paying different amounts of Council Tax over a longer period.

    This is because in any scenario, the total amount of Council Tax income raised over the whole area can only increase by a maximum of 4.99% before reaching the referendum limit. If the Secretary of State were minded to agree to our proposal, further work would be undertaken to inform a decision by Reading Borough Council on the timeframe for harmonisation.

Expenditure

97. Budgeted cost data for 2025/26 was used to establish an estimate of service costs for the three wards.

98. Unit costs for many services in West Berkshire are generally lower than those in Reading. There are several reasons for this. West Berkshire's funding base is lower than Reading's. West Berkshire has significantly lower levels of deprivation than Reading, and deprivation is a strong predictor of higher unit costs in both adults and children's social care.[26][27] It should also be noted that West Berkshire is currently reliant on Exceptional Financial Support to fund its current level of service costs. West Berkshire Council currently has a General Fund Reserve of just over £10 million, which has been built utilising previously requested EFS from central government. Their Quarter 2 2025/26 forecast will reduce the General Fund Reserve by £6.8 million, taking the fund under the level recommended by their s.151 officer as being financially sustainable. West Berkshire Council's budgeted costs for 2025/26 used in this modelling may therefore not be an accurate reflection of the actual costs required to run their services.

99. The following tables forecast the projected surplus or deficit for the three wards using the West Berkshire cost base with the caveat that we know West Berkshire's actual spend is higher than the budgeted cost data used in this table. This shows that the estimated financial impact of the proposal is a deficit of £0.8 million. If we use unit cost data that is more in line with the demographic profile of Reading, rather than West Berkshire, then the £0.8m deficit shown in table 4 would be significantly higher, depending on the number of Children Looked After and their associated costs.

100. Insufficient data has been provided, despite multiple requests to West Berkshire, to have a detailed understanding of the West Berkshire expenditure profile and therefore produce any meaningful expenditure forecasts beyond 2025/26.

Table 4: Financial projection

Area 2025/26	Share of West Berkshire Resources	Share of West Berkshire Costs	(Surplus)/Deficit
	£m	£m	£m
Tilehurst wards	(29.8)	30.6	0.8

101. Given that a significant proportion of the costs in upper tier authorities relate to children's social care, a Freedom of Information request was submitted to West Berkshire Council regarding the number of Children Looked After (CLA) in each ward area. This has provided additional, albeit very limited, data to revise our estimates using average placement costs, as outlined in the revised tables below.

26   Explaining Variation in Spending – Adults' Services for Older People' by LGA, available here
27   Explaining Variation in Spending – Children's Services' by LGA, available here

Table 5: Financial projection with Revised CLA Figures

Area 2025/26	Share of West Berkshire Resources	Share of West Berkshire Costs	(Surplus)/Deficit
	£m	£m	£m
Tilehurst wards	(29.8)	28.5	(1.3)

4.2 Service transition

102.　This proposal is different to other proposals for LGR in that it does not seek to create a new authority, but to change the boundary between two authorities.

103.　As such, the costs and complexity of implementation are not of the same order of magnitude as full-scale reorganisation being delivered elsewhere. Our proposal therefore represents an excellent value for money reorganisation.

104.　Nevertheless, implementing the proposed change will require an extensive programme of work across multiple areas. Once the decision is taken to proceed, a Transition Management Programme will be established to guide the integration of the identified wards into Reading Borough Council. The programme will be designed to ensure a smooth and effective transition, minimising disruption to services, residents, and staff. This programme would sit alongside the statutory mechanism of a Structural Change Order which would specify the requirements for a new Ridgway Council.

105.　Key elements of the programme will include:

Table 6: Key areas of work in service transition

Workstream	Scope of Work
Programme Governance and Re-sourcing	• Dedicated transition management team established to oversee planning, risk mitigation, and delivery. • Clear reporting lines to senior leadership and elected members.
Communications & Public Engagement	• Stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure transparency and ongoing communication with residents, parish councils, and partner organisations.

Workstream	Scope of Work
Governance, Contracts and Commissioning	• Place-based contracts (e.g. waste collection, grounds maintenance, leisure centres) to be reviewed and novated or reprocured under Reading Borough Council. • People-based contracts (e.g. care placements, SEND services) to be carefully assessed for continuity and value before transfer, to ensure minimal disruption to residents. • Democratic and election planning
Assets and Infrastructure	• Agreement and transfer of physical assets and infrastructur from WBC to Reading Borough Council.
ICT Integration & Data Migration	• Integration and rationalisation of IT systems, licences, data migration, and records to ensure seamless service continuity and compliance with data protection requirements.
Service continuity and harmonisation,	• Detailed mapping of existing service users and caseloads to ensure no break in service delivery. • Risk management and contingency planning for high-need or high-cost cases. • Align policies (social care, planning, housing etc), procedures, training.
Finance & Council Tax Harmonisation	• Modelling, accounting and budget process, • System alignment and integration, billing system updates, com-munications, equalisation planning. • Council tax, CTRS and business rates planning and implementation.
Workforce and Organisational Change	• TUPE transfer and onboarding of staff from West Berkshire Council to Reading Borough Council, with clear HR and change management support. • Trade Union liaison • Workforce planning to align roles, responsibilities, and training with Reading Borough Council's operating model.

106.   This structured approach will enable a phased, well-communicated, and risk-managed transition, with clear accountability and measurable outcomes at each stage. It should be noted that Reading Borough Council has recently undertaken significant governance transition work with success, bringing in Children's Services from Brighter Futures for Children Ltd and in-housing property and asset management services from Reading Hampshire Property Partnership Ltd.

4.3 Indicative timeline

107.   Below is an indicative and high-level implementation timeline for delivering the proposed change to the boundary. This is based on the proposed timeline for the Ridgeway proposal and information provided by MHCLG.[28]

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28   Summary of the local government reorganisation process' by MHCLG, available here

Table 7: Indicative timeline

Phase	Dates	Activity
Submission of proposal	Nov 2025	• Proposal submitted to MHCLG by 28 November alongside other LGR proposals
Statutory consultation / data gathering and initial planning	Jul - Aug 2026	• MHCLG decision on Ridgeway and Reading Borough Council proposal subject to collective agreement across Government.
Ministerial decision on proposal	Jul - Aug 2026	• MHCLG decision on Ridgeway and Reading Borough Council proposal subject to collective agreement across Government.
Secondary legislation prepared and taken through Parliament	Sep 2026 - May 2027	• MHCLG prepare the Structural Changes Order (SCO) for Parliamentary approval, including specifying arrangements for elections, transition, and interim governance arrangements. • Detailed planning for service and resident transitions (including governance, staffing, assets, maintenance, contractual agreements, IT systems, council tax harmonisation, and budgets)
Elections to expanded Reading authority	May 2027 - March 2028	• Existing councils prepare to transfer assets, functions, and staff on go-live day. • Relevant transition body to focus on getting ready for go-live and responsible for taking decisions. • Provide implementation plan for MHCLG covering areas such as council tax harmonisation and aggregation of services.
Transition period	May 2027 - March 2028	• Existing councils prepare to transfer assets, functions, and staff on go-live day. • Relevant transition body to focus on getting ready for go-live and responsible for taking decisions. • Provide implementation plan for MHCLG covering areas such as council tax harmonisation and aggregation of services.
New Reading Borough Council Boundary	Apr 2028	• Ridgeway goes live as a new unitary authority. • Specified wards now become part of Reading Borough Council. • Continue to deliver transformation programme.

Appendix A: Profile of wards in scope

Tilehurst Birch Copse

- Two district councillors (one Conservative and one Labour).
- Electorate 5,939.
- Tilehurst Parish Council, with three wards, spans part of Tilehurst and Purley ward (the North ward of the Parish), all of Tilehurst Birch Copse ward (the Central ward of the Parish) and part of Tilehurst South and Holybrook (the Tilehurst Calcot ward of the Parish). There are 18 parish councillors in three wards, North (8), Central (9) and Calcot (1) with 4 vacancies (all in the North ward). Services include:
  ◊ Community Halls: The Calcot Centre with the Parish Council office; the Cornwell Centre; and Turnhams Farm Hall
  ◊ Three recreation grounds: Calcot (features full-sized and junior football pitches, car parking for 34 spaces, and newly installed outdoor gym equipment); Turnhams Farm; and Cornwell (with community facilities adjacent to the hall).
  ◊ Other services include bus shelters and benches, a small grants program, bins, street lighting, St Michael's Churchyard maintenance, and salt bins.

Tilehurst & Purley

- Three district councillors (two Conservative and one Liberal Democrat).
- Electorate 8,226.
- This ward contains all of Purley on Thames Parish Council and part of Tilehurst Parish Council (see above).
- Purley on Thames Parish Council has 13 Parish councillors. Services include:
  ◊ The Barn
  ◊ Community Centre at Goosecroft Recreation Ground (including tennis courts, bowling green, cricket pitch and football pitch)
  ◊ Bucknell's Meadow Recreation Ground
  ◊ Other services include a burial ground, play areas, bus shelters and benches, litter and dog litter bins, and grit bins.

Tilehurst South & Holybrook

- Two district councillors (two Conservative).
- Electorate 5,725.
- This ward benefits from the services of Tilehurst PC as set out above.
- Holybrook Parish Council has 15 parish councillors with 4 vacancies. Services include:
  ◊ Beansheaf Community Centre with Parish council office located within the centre
  ◊ Recreation Areas including Holybrook Linear Park featuring football pitches (managed by West Berkshire Council), playground areas and sports facilities
  ◊ Other facilities and services including bus shelters, notice boards, dog and litter bins, and a public defibrillator.

Table 8: Council Tax by Parish

Parish Name	WBC Ward Name	WBC Band D Council Tax	Parish Precept Band D	PCC Precept Band D	Fire Precept Band D	Total Band D Council Tax
Purley on Thames	Tilehurst & Purley	£1,921.41	£92.56	£283.28	£86.31	£2,383.56
Tilehurst	Tilehurst & Purley / Tilehurst Birch Copse / Tilehurst South & Holybrook	£1,921.41	£59.74	£283.28	£86.31	£2,350.74
Holybrook	Tilehurst South & Holybrook	£1,921.41	£52.11	£283.28	£86.31	£2,343.11