

Holybrook Parish Council

Local Government Reorganisation: Reading Q&A

Question	Reading comments
We would like to know what is being done with the likely pressures on Theale Medical Centre as a result of the new housing developments in Theale, as well as the additional development sites that have been allocated by West Berkshire Council in Theale and Calcot as part of the local plan?	Ultimately this would be a matter for the NHS, not local government. GP Practices are private businesses with GP contracts with the NHS. However, Reading Borough Council has had success in securing financial contributions for new health facilities through CIL and S106 agreements. West Berkshire Council would need to comment on how they are using these same powers to support provision in the short term.
What is being done to protect the non-statutory services that are currently provided by West Berkshire Council?	It is unlikely that any local government reorganisation will happen before 2028, so in the short term this is a matter for West Berkshire Council to comment on. However, Reading Borough Council is proud of the investment we have made in non-statutory services in recent years. We also see opportunities to deliver these more efficiently in Holybrook, given the proximity to Reading and our services.
Reading Borough is like an inner-city council; how does Reading think it will be able to manage a semi-rural area?	Reading is a diverse place and we have a wide range of communities that we deliver services for. Our teams include staff with a wide range of experience who have worked for a number of different councils, including rural and semi-rural areas.
What amenities would current West Berkshire Council residents gain/lose by coming under the umbrella of 'Greater Reading'?	This would be subject to negotiation between the Councils once the Secretary of State makes a final decision.

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West Berkshire Council has experience of dealing with Parish Council's and offers additional financial support such as Members' Bids. How does Reading Borough Council view working with the existing Parish Council's and does it propose to create new Parish Council's?	No changes to Parish Councils are proposed. Reading would seek to agree a partnership governance structure with Parish Councils to ensure that there is effective support and communication in place. Many council staff have experience of working with Parish Councils in previous roles. Reading Borough Council is not intending to include proposals for new Parish Councils in the local government reorganisation proposal. This is mainly because it would be wrong to bring forward plans without further details of the neighbourhood governance elements within the English Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill currently before Parliament.
Holybrook Parish Council is in the process of registering local assets with the West Berkshire Council Heritage Forum; what equivalent service does Reading Borough Council have to ensure that local, historical assets are protected?	Reading Borough Council has processes in place to register local heritage assets and assets of community value.
West Berkshire and Reading Borough Council's are already Unitary Authorities. And, the Government has stated that the figure of 500k people is only an 'aim' and not a set standard. So, why are proposals for this area even being discussed?	West Berkshire Council have opted to join Oxfordshire and propose reorganisation. Criteria set by Government for reorganisation includes a sensible geography and sensible economic area. Reading Borough Council believes this can only be achieved by amending the boundary between Reading and West Berkshire.

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How will warding and councillor numbers change for Holybrook Residents (i.e. polling stations, number of District Councillors per area) under these proposals?	Reading Borough Council will propose no changes to the existing warding and councillor numbers for any parts of West Berkshire within its proposal. However, this will be a matter for the Secretary of State when making the final decision.
What would happen to any S106/Community Infrastructure Levy monies that was raised by development in Holybrook when the transfers take place?	This would be subject to detailed work at the next stage, if Government is minded to support Reading's proposed amendment. However, Reading Borough Council would seek for any unspent S106/CIL monies that West Berkshire have received from development in Holybrook to transfer to Reading, so that it can continue to support the local community.
What happens to long-term contracts, such as grass cutting and bin emptying, if the proposal is accepted?	This would be subject to detailed work at the next stage. Initially contracts would be transferred to Reading. Options then include retaining the contracts as is, negotiating amended contracts with suppliers, or seeking to end the contracts and commissioning a new contract or delivering services directly where Reading has that provision in place.
Will school catchment areas /admission policies etc change for Holybrook Pupils?	No, Local Government Reorganisation has no impact on school catchment areas.
The cost of being a Reading resident is typically higher than that of being a West Berkshire resident. And, being a resident of the Vale of White Horse is typically higher than that of being a West Berkshire resident. What formal guarantees on council tax rises, for example, will be written into any boundary change?	Council Tax harmonisation will be required in any reorganisation proposal. It is correct to say that Council Tax levels are lower in West Berkshire. However, the Council is currently relying on exceptional financial support from Government which is unsustainable. Secondly, local government funding forecasts assume Council Tax increases to maintain essential local services.

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What does your authority gain from your proposals?	Reading's approach is not about what the Council gains, but about bringing forward the best option against the Government criteria for reorganisation. An amendment boundary would be a more sensible geographic area for the local council, and would offer opportunities for efficient service delivery.
Is your council able to provide a full financial model and impact assessment for Holybrook, including council tax modelling?	Reading has not created a financial model solely for Holybrook.
It has been claimed, on media platforms, that the residents, of areas such as Holybrook, want to be part of Reading, where is the evidence of this?	We cannot comment on all social media messages, and Reading's own messages have not made this statement. However, we have undertaken significant public engagement and a representative market research survey. These indicate that the Holybrook area has a connection to Reading, including access to services, travel to work and a desire for locally based decision making.

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Why, when there was no directive from the Government for any changes within the entire county of Berkshire, has WBC sought out local authorities within Oxfordshire to create a new unitary authority thus allowing (Labour run) RBC to put forward a counter proposal to the (Labour) government which has only served to completely jeopardise the future of the affected outlying areas & their residents - why? For what direct benefits to residents? There was absolutely no directive necessitating this proposal! What “rewards” are WBC gaining to justify the “risks” to residents that will be directly impacted should the change be awarded in the favour of RBC?	This is a question for West Berkshire.
If we go under Ridgeway, what will happen with the bus services?	This is a question for Ridgeway / West Berkshire. However, it is important to note that Ridgeway does not exist yet (and is subject to a final decision by the Secretary of State). Any policy decisions will be for councillors of Ridgeway, once elected.
We would like to know what is being done with the likely pressures on Theale Medical Centre as a result of the new housing developments in Theale, as well as the additional development sites that have been allocated by West Berkshire Council in Theale and Calcot as part of the local plan.	Please see above answer.

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Waste collection and recycling issues: What will happen about the Padworth Household Recycling Centre, whatever happens about the council boundaries? Will the Veolia contract continue and who would collect our rubbish?	The Padworth Recycling Centre would remain in West Berkshire. It may be possible to negotiate for cross border access and Reading Borough Council would be keen to consider this. Under any reorganisation option, contracts would be transferred to the new Council(s). It would then be for those councils to determine whether to continue, amend or exit those contracts subject to the terms within the contracts.
Where would the centre of power be within Ridgeway? Won't it be more Oxfordshire-related? As the other two councils are not unitary authorities, won't Ridgeway have to pay for expensive consultants? This happened in the 1990s when Berkshire County Council was split up.	This is a question for West Berkshire.
What will happen about wood burning stoves? Reading Borough Council is currently opposed to them, but West Berkshire allows them.	Reading Borough Council is not opposed to wood burning stoves, but has introduced a Smoke Control Area to help improve air quality, for which all councils have a statutory duty. Within the Smoke Control Area only smokeless fuels are permitted. However, there are over 3000 exemptions to this restriction, which can be found on the DEFRA website: https://smokecontrol.defra.gov.uk/appliances-php/appliances-phpcountryengland/