

Two Councils

Oxford and Shires | Ridgeway

A once-in-a-generation opportunity
Two new councils. One better future.

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A proposal for two new unitary councils

Change is coming to the way councils work across the country, and we are taking the opportunity to make sure it's done in a way that truly benefits our communities.

The government has invited proposals for **new unitary councils** in areas like Oxfordshire where there are currently two tiers of local government (district and county councils). It has also indicated that smaller existing unitary councils like West Berkshire should reorganise so they cover areas of around **500,000** people.

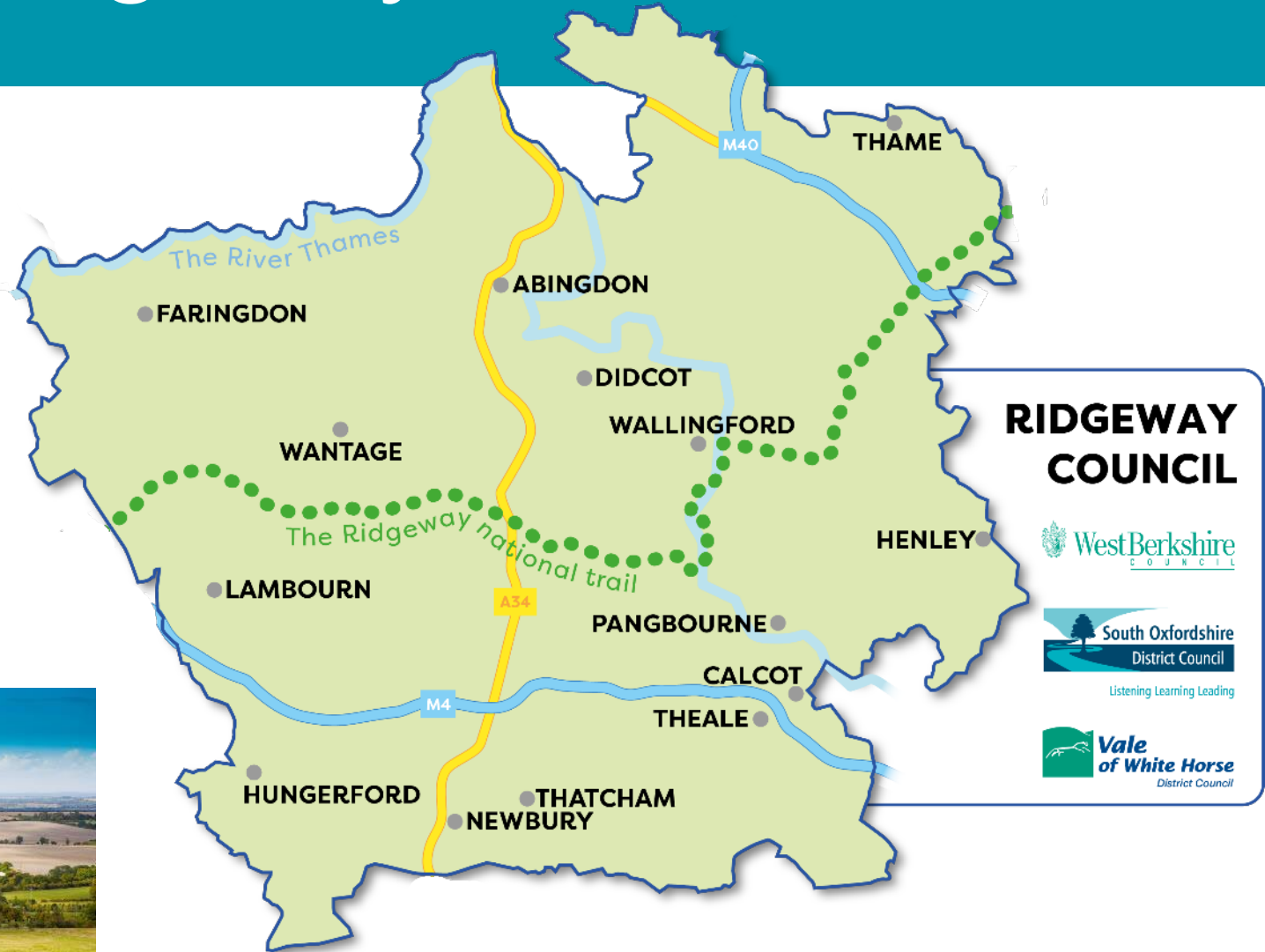


Creating a new Ridgeway

What is the geography?

We are proposing merging the boundary between South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Berkshire Council to create a new Ridgeway Council. The new council will be well-placed to maintain and enhance the unique character of our market towns and rural areas.

West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire, and the Vale of White Horse already share deep historical, economic, and geographic ties, symbolised by the working title of our proposed new council, named after the famous 5,000-year-old footpath that travels through the heart of our council areas.



Economy and finance

Economy

Our areas are already linked by innovative businesses and ambitions for thriving towns and villages. The new Ridgeway Council has the potential to bring real economic growth to the area, enhance financial sustainability, provide value for money services and lay a strong and effective foundation for the future.

The new council will be well-placed to do all of this while maintaining and enhancing the unique character of our market towns and rural areas - a key driver for our local economy.



Your services

How we'd deliver better services for residents

We want to put people and communities at the heart of strong, healthy and robust local government. We want to support future housing and infrastructure needs and ensure lasting benefits for all those who call our area home.

Bringing all services under two unitary councils (as is proposed with Oxford and Shires Council and Ridgeway Council) would mean a simpler, more joined-up experience for residents. For example, the same council would manage your bins, roads, schools, and social care, leading to clearer accountability and easier access.

By combining two districts with an existing unitary council, our proposal won't need us to create new social care, highways, schools and education services – we will just need to rejig how these services currently work.



West Berkshire vs Reading - Performance

Measure	Reading Council	West Berkshire Council
Band D Council Tax – Annual Payment	£2,367	£2,350
Kerbside glass recycling?	No	Yes
% of roads that should be considered for maintenance	7%	3%
% secondary schools good or outstanding	80%	92.3%
% primary schools good or outstanding	89%	93.6%
Amount of council tax collected	95.7%	97.5%

West Berkshire vs Reading - Performance

Measure	Reading Council	West Berkshire Council
Active businesses	7,365	8440
Household Waste Recycling Centre sites	1	2
Children's Services Ofsted Judgement	Requires improvement	Good
Sports facilities per 100k population	14.2	29.4

A new strategic authority

What is the proposed strategic authority

The government has also asked for areas to propose a large regional mayoral strategic authority, covering populations of at least 1.5 million, overseen by an elected mayor.

These new regional authorities will provide services like planning policy, strategic housing, health, nature recovery and economic development. A few already exist in places like the West Midlands and Greater Manchester. The remaining services will be provided by unitary councils.

Our preference is for a strategic authority that includes Oxfordshire and the Berkshire authorities, or a wider area incorporating Buckinghamshire, as these mirror the boundaries already used by the police and health authorities.

