

West Berkshire Council Report to Theale Parish Council

9th February 2026

Council Finances

From the Section 151 Officer's conclusion to his assessment of the 2026/27 budget:

The Council's financial position is precarious. Funding is constrained and growth in the Council's tax base has not kept pace with increasing revenue costs. The 2026/27 net revenue budget has been subject to realignment of the council tax base and historic savings, which alongside annual standard growth (pay inflation, contractual inflation, social care demand), has created a funding gap, proposed to be supported by EFS. Should central government not support the revised 2025/26 (£20million) and 2026/27 (£30million) EFS requests this would put the council into a s114 position. In the medium term the Council remains under considerable financial pressure, with compromised financial indicators, highlighting a sustainability and s114 risk. The finances will remain under tight scrutiny, with monthly monitoring and reporting of the 2026/27 budget to be implemented.

EFS is Exceptional Financial Support. This is permission from the government to fund revenue expenditure from either or both asset disposals or borrowing. It is NOT extra funding from the government. 30 unitary councils have been granted EFS.

"S114 position" means that a council has insufficient funds to fulfil its legal responsibilities. Often called "bankruptcy".

Budget

The council is proposing to increase council tax by the maximum allowed: 2.99% plus 2.0% for Adult Social Care.

It has agreed to make 19 people, mainly middle managers, redundant. This is projected to save £460,000 per year.

A range of fee increases are proposed. Those most likely to affect Theale residents are:

Car parking fees will be increased by 10p per hour. The evening fee will also be increased from £1.00 to £1.10. Season tickets for the Theale Main Car Park will increase by 6.7%.

Residents' Permit parking fees in Theale will be increased from £40 to £43 per year. Second permits will increase from £60 to £64.50.

Garden Waste Scheme (green bins) fee to increase by £5 per year (£3 for additional bins).

Warehouse Plan

I received an email from a consultant who had been engaged to provide communications about the start of construction of the pair of warehouses to be accessed off Hoad Way (permitted at appeal). He said that construction was planned to start in March. I replied saying I thought this was premature given that several condition discharge planning applications had not yet been made, let alone approved. These include those for the Construction Management Plan (CMP) and the Construction

Traffic Management Plan (CMTP). The latter was submitted late last week (26/00186/COND) and gives me several concerns:

- It is proposing a temporary access for construction traffic off the High Street (just beyond the industrial buildings).
- It gives a route of M4 and A4 for construction vehicles and makes no allowance for materials coming from the Wigmore Lane depots. Neither does it mention a route for waste materials.
- It does not contain a prohibition preventing construction traffic using roads through the village.
- There is not sufficient room at the accesses for an HGV to pull off the road.
- It gives working hours starting at 07:30.

I will be submitting an objection.

Horseman's Site

It appears that concerns that the site is being used for distribution are justified. I have submitted a complaint to Planning Enforcement.

Local Government Reorganisation

The government are consulting on the reorganisation proposals for Oxfordshire, including the Ridgeway proposal. The consultation can be found at <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/local-government-reorganisation/oxfordshire/consultation/>

Lakeside Development

The first dwelling has now been occupied. Street nameplates have been erected on some of the streets.

“Sub-standard” trees at the southeast corner are to be felled this week. This is preliminary preparation for the construction of the pedestrian and cycle link to Station Road.

Alan Macro

Councillor for Theale

8th Feb 2026