

District Councillor Report

September 2026

Councillor Ben Hurdman

District Councillor for Inkberrow, Cookhill and The Villages

This report summarises key district council matters and local issues relevant to residents during August 2026. It is intended for circulation to parish councils, community groups and local residents across Inkberrow, Cookhill and The Villages.

1. Local Government Reorganisation

The Government has paused Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Worcestershire and other areas while it reviews the programme following updated legal advice. The review will consider whether the process is robust, lawful and aligned with the Government's wider priorities for devolution and public sector reform.

The pause means the timetable for reorganisation is now uncertain. The Government has confirmed that local elections planned for May 2027 will proceed on existing council boundaries while the review is carried out. Councils will continue delivering services as normal and further updates will be shared when the implications for Worcestershire are clearer.

2. Planning and Local Democracy

National Scheme of Delegation

The Government is introducing a new National Scheme of Delegation for planning decisions. These changes will require councils to amend local governance arrangements, committee structures and planning schemes of delegation to comply with new statutory requirements.

Further reports will come before Wychavon District Council during the autumn as officers bring forward recommendations on how these changes should be implemented locally. Many councillors continue to emphasise the importance of maintaining local democratic involvement in planning decisions that affect our communities.

Wychavon Section 62A Designation

Residents may recall the Government's decision earlier this year to designate Wychavon under Section 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act. Discussions continue regarding the implications of that designation and the future role of locally elected councillors in determining major planning applications.

3. Strategic Planning and Housing

Wychavon Town

The proposed Wychavon Town development centred around Worcestershire Parkway remains one of the most significant strategic planning projects in the county.

Recent discussions at the Rural Matters Advisory Panel considered the opportunities and challenges associated with the proposal, which could ultimately deliver up to 10,000 homes together with employment land, schools, healthcare facilities and a town centre over the next 25 to 30 years.

Whilst the development has the potential to provide homes, jobs and infrastructure investment, members also raised concerns regarding pressure on existing roads, healthcare services, education provision and the need to protect the character of surrounding villages and rural areas. Infrastructure planning continues alongside the scheme.

4. We Are Wychavon Support Fund

The £5 million We Are Wychavon Support Fund continues to develop and support residents, businesses and community organisations across the district.

A dedicated webpage has now been launched bringing together details of approved schemes, eligibility criteria and future opportunities. The fund is becoming an important source of support for communities as local government arrangements evolve.

Ward Budgets

One of the most significant announcements for local communities is the creation of Ward Budgets. Each district councillor will receive access to a one-off £10,000 allocation which can be used to support projects within their ward that benefit local residents and contribute towards the priorities of the We Are Wychavon Plan.

Further details regarding eligibility and the application process are expected shortly. The scheme presents a valuable opportunity to help support local initiatives across Inkberrow, Cookhill and neighbouring villages.

Free Swimming Initiative

The first schemes funded through the We Are Wychavon programme are already being delivered. From 1 August, free swimming sessions and swimming lessons became available, helping reduce cost barriers and encourage healthy lifestyles across the district.

5. Community Funding Opportunities

Wychavon Resilience Grants

Applications remain open for the new Wychavon Resilience Grants programme, which provides £500,000 of funding across three key areas: community resilience, community-building energy resilience, and biodiversity improvements.

Parish councils are eligible to apply for energy resilience and biodiversity funding, whilst voluntary and community organisations can access the broader resilience programme.

The first application round closes in August, with further rounds planned during 2027. Community organisations across Inkberrow, Cookhill and The Villages are encouraged to explore the opportunities available.

Apprenticeship Support

Local businesses can now access apprenticeship grants of £1,500 per apprentice, whilst bursaries of up to £500 are available to help apprentices with travel and equipment costs.

These schemes are intended to encourage skills development, support local employers and remove barriers for young people entering employment and training.

6. Environment and Community Safety

Fly-Tipping and WasteGuard

Fly-tipping remains a challenge across rural communities. To help tackle the issue, Wychavon has launched WasteGuard, a free online service allowing residents to locate licensed waste carriers and reduce the risk of illegal waste disposal.

Residents are reminded to only use licensed waste carriers, obtain receipts or waste transfer notes, report fly-tipping promptly and never hand waste to unverified operators. The Council's WasteGuard service can help residents identify reputable local businesses that were checked for a valid licence and responsible disposal practices at the time of listing.

Fire Safety During Dry Weather

Following a significant fire in Pershore during August, residents are being encouraged to exercise additional caution during periods of hot and dry weather.

Barbecues and open fires are not permitted within council parks and open spaces. Residents should ensure litter is disposed of responsibly, fully extinguish smoking materials and report fires immediately by calling 999.

Air Quality Monitoring

Wychavon's latest Annual Air Quality Status Report has now been completed and provides updated monitoring data across the district. The report forms part of the Council's continuing commitment to understanding and improving local environmental quality.

7. Health and Community Wellbeing

Big Conversation on Care

The Independent Commission on Adult Social Care has launched a national engagement programme known as the Big Conversation on Care.

The initiative seeks views from residents, carers, service users and community organisations to help shape future adult social care provision. Those with experience of the care system are encouraged to participate and ensure local perspectives are represented.

Support for Young People

Wychavon has invested £25,000 in the Be You Training programme, supporting ten six-week programmes in middle and high schools across the district. The programme uses teamwork, outdoor learning, STEM and community projects to help young people build confidence, resilience and skills for the future.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Wychavon's Wellbeing in Wychavon Community scheme is supporting work to develop locally led mental health and wellbeing support. This includes engagement in Honeybourne to explore a safe, welcoming and non-judgemental local Men's Club.

Community Swimming Opportunities

The new free swimming and swimming lessons programme forms part of a wider effort to support public health, physical activity and wellbeing across Wychavon.

8. Infrastructure and Transport

Hampton Bridge

The Hampton Bridge project continues to make progress. Members have recently been invited to attend a site visit to view construction activity and receive an update on progress from Worcestershire County Council.

The bridge remains an important strategic infrastructure scheme and is expected to improve connectivity within the county upon completion.

9. Local Matters: Inkberrow, Cookhill and The Villages

Throughout August I have continued working with residents, parish councils and local organisations across Inkberrow, Cookhill and neighbouring villages on a range of local issues.

Particular areas of focus continue to include planning matters affecting rural communities, highway and transport concerns, community funding opportunities, environmental issues including fly-tipping and rural waste management, supporting parish councils as preparations continue for local government reorganisation, and identifying projects that may benefit from the forthcoming Ward Budget scheme.

The introduction of the £10,000 Ward Budget for each district councillor offers a significant opportunity to support local priorities and community projects. I look forward to working closely with parish councils, voluntary groups and residents to identify suitable initiatives that can deliver lasting benefits within our villages.

Residents with concerns regarding district council services, planning matters or local issues are always welcome to get in touch.

10. Community Recognition

Green Flag Success

Wychavon has achieved a record seven Green Flag Awards for parks and green spaces across the district.

The awards recognise high standards of maintenance, biodiversity, accessibility and community value. This achievement reflects the dedication of council staff, volunteers and community organisations who help maintain these important public spaces.

Social Mobility Recognition

Wychavon has also been shortlisted for a UK Social Mobility Award in recognition of its work supporting children, young people and families through partnership projects and community initiatives.

Keeping in Touch

If you have any concerns, suggestions or local issues affecting Inkberrow, Cookhill or the surrounding villages, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Councillor Ben Hurdman

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