

MEON VALLEY WARD – WINCHESTER DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' UPDATE

DECEMBER 2025

Local Government Reorganisation – The saga of LGR continues. The Minister has now accepted all the submitted options for future unitary authorities as meeting the criteria set and has now put all of them out for consultation. Whilst every individual is welcome to take part in the consultation it has been made clear that significantly greater weight will be placed on submissions by those on its list of 'named consultees', such as the present county, district and unitary authorities, the health, education and emergency authorities. Nonetheless each Parish Council should actively consider whether they wish to make their own representation.

As a reminder, there are essentially two alternative proposals, one submitted by Hampshire County Council together with East Hampshire District Council, the others developed jointly by 12 of the District and Unitary authorities, including Winchester City Council. The fundamental discriminator is whether, aside from expanded Portsmouth and Southampton based authorities, there should be one or two other mainland unitary bodies. The HCC/EHDC submission proposes Winchester being linked with the present district authorities of Basingstoke & Deane, East Hampshire, Rushmoor (ie Aldershot and Farnborough) and Hart (ie Hartley Wintney and Fleet); the consortium's submission proposes Winchester being linked with Test Valley, East Hampshire and possibly New Forest District. The consultation is open until 11 Jan 26 and can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-government-reorganisation-in-hampshire-isle-of-wight-portsmouth-and-southampton>

Finally on this, you will have read that the current Government has decided to abolish the posts of Police & Crime Commissioners from the end of incumbents' current term in 2028. In our area, the role of the PCC will instead become part of the remit of the future Mayor.

Buses in Winchester District – In an attempt to mitigate its decision to withdraw funding from the majority of its contracted rural bus services and on-demand 'shared taxi' schemes, the County Council has contracted a new service named 'Connect Winchester'. Residents will likely have seen a Royal Mail-delivered leaflet promoting the service. It seems a little ambitious that on Wednesdays it is dedicated to meeting the travel needs of both the Upper Meon Valley and Alresford & Itchen Valley Wards for travel to Winchester between 0915 and 1445 that day, using a single vehicle. Given the support we have recently been giving to promotion of the Meon Valley Community Bus, reliant on its team of wholly volunteer drivers, it is also a little galling that Connect is delivered by a non-for-profit charity that nonetheless pays its staff. While welcoming any new service, we will be questioning the efficacy and value of this one.

Meanwhile, the software to enable you and your parishioners to upload their ideal public transport needs is still awaited, but promised to be delivered by the end of the year. This will enable us to gather useful data to inform the debate on how the future Hampshire/Solent Mayor might use their devolved powers in designing a more effective public transport plan for the region.

Speed Nuisance - The Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner appears to have a similar noise nuisance problem on the roads around the edge of the City of St Albans. The solution currently being trialled there uses Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 covering "vehicles used in manner causing alarm, distress or annoyance". This gives police the power to seize an offender's vehicle if they persist in causing 'nuisance' after a first warning. A scheme, using acoustic cameras, went live at the end of the summer with the aim of reducing noise nuisance on parts of the A405 and A414 dual carriageways where there have been repeated incidents of cars and bikes gathering at a coffee shop then 'racing' along those roads at night – a scenario we recognise! The Hertfordshire Constabulary website states that:

"Drivers caught exceeding [the legal] noise limits will receive educational warning letters, with repeat offenders facing Section 59 warnings, which could result in their vehicles being seized if caught for a second time."

The Hertfordshire PCC has committed up to £23 825 to the scheme, a bargain compared to the £677 000 committed to the A32/A272 schemes back in 2022/23. We will be encouraging our own PCC, who has previously expressed willingness to use acoustic technology if proven, to learn from the trial and take a view on the potential for a similar scheme here.

Finally – As the ground rush towards the seasonal festivities gathers pace, our sincere thanks to all of you for welcoming us into your communities through the past year. May we both wish you, your families and all of your parishioners a very happy and peaceful Christmas and a successful 2026!

Neil Bolton
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