

UPPER MEON VALLEY WARD – PARISH UPDATE OCTOBER 2025

Local Government Reorganisation

The deadline for formal proposals for future unitary authorities passed on 26 September 2025. Whilst each of the 15 Unitary, District and County authorities was required to make their own submissions there were two business cases that were passed into the Ministry. Hampshire County and East Hampshire District both supported a case for three mainland unitaries, with Winchester District proposed to be combined with East Hampshire, Rushmoor, Hart, Basingstoke & Deane. Winchester City Council, together with ten other authorities, submitted a case for four mainland authorities, with two principle options: the first links Winchester with East Hampshire, Test Valley and New Forest Districts, the second links the New Forest with an expanded Southampton-based authority rather than the mid-Hampshire districts. Each of those 11 authorities expressed its preference for one of these options, with Winchester promoting the second, ie Winchester + Test Valley + East Hampshire.

Meanwhile, Gosport Borough Council withdrew from the optioneering process and Portsmouth City Council also submitted a letter stating the preference that its city should remain within its present boundaries, although supporting the 11-authority business case if the Government insisted on pursuing the reorganisation. Both the submissions promoted the Isle of Wight as a special case for retaining its existing unitary status; unfortunately, the Isle of Wight Council itself, whilst agreeing that the island is indeed a special case, could not agree on which option to support for the mainland authorities and therefore failed to make a submission by the deadline and has consequently lost its say in the process.

The Government response to the proposals for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight is not expected before early in the spring of next year.

On devolution, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Green Party candidates have been formally selected for the 2026 Hampshire Solent Mayoral contest, with Labour and Reform Party, and any other, candidates yet to be announced.

Finally, Winchester City Council is about to consult on possible options for ‘parishing’ Winchester City to form a City Council that would be the successor to the current Winchester Town Forum. If life were simple, this would result in the un-parished areas of the city being combined into a new authority that would sit on a level with rural parishes and New Alresford Town Council. Since the urban footprint of Winchester has, in recent years, expanded into four of the neighbouring parishes the consultation will seek views on whether communities in those parishes wish to join with the City. This is not without controversy. All Winchester parishes will be formally part of the consultation although none in Upper Meon Valley would be directly affected by the options currently under consideration.

Places of Sanctuary

Winchester City Council started a 'Places of Sanctuary' scheme back in 2022, prompted in part by the Ukraine crisis but with the intent of addressing a far wider issue. In essence, this is a trawl for communities to identify places where those who may not have ready access to a local support network of their own can find security and feel welcome. To quote from the original start-up document: "The Safe Spaces project has been developed to support people who are at their most vulnerable and need a quiet space and a friendly face to help them feel safe, listened to and valued". Recent events both at home and abroad have made this perhaps even more relevant now than it was a few years ago. Parish Councils may wish to consider if they can identify any 'places of sanctuary' in their own communities that could be put forward for the scheme. The WCC project lead is Jane Chuhan (jchuhan@winchester.gov.uk) and there is more information on the WCC website [here](#).

Rural Transport

The effect of Hampshire County Council's review of subsidised rural bus services is now being felt, although the very few services in Upper Meon Valley have largely survived. The future of service 67, through Cheriton, Bramdean and West Meon seems reasonably assured but, since its timetable has to be focused on statutory school transport needs for Perins and The Petersfield School, it no longer provides a viable commuting option for either Petersfield or Winchester. Service 63 to Owslebury and Morestead hangs by a thread with a single return journey on Mondays and Thursdays. Service 69, through Upham, is our only commercially-run service. In response to requests to reduce its journey time to Winchester it has now been diverted to run along the M3 between Hockley and Bar End, rather than through St Cross. The unanticipated consequence of that change is that the bus no longer runs close to Winchester station, so severing a valued connection; similarly, at its opposite end, the service has been withdrawn between the Bus Station and the Rail Station in Fareham.

Meon Valley parishes have stepped in to support their Community Bus as it has now lost its HCC contract. Its timetable has been rationalised to provide a single shoppers' journey to Fareham, Petersfield and Winchester on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays respectively. It is encouraging that its passenger numbers have climbed back up to pre-Covid levels but it is totally reliant on volunteer drivers. The bus has the potential to deliver more but needs more drivers. Parish Councils directly served are particularly urged to encourage more volunteers to come forward. We are also working with the bureaucracy to see if it's possible to include more UMV villages on its Winchester run.

As more communities become affected by the loss of rural buses it is hoped to raise visibility of this issue in the Mayoral campaign, not least as taking the strategic lead on public transport is one of the powers proposed to be devolved.

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