

Strategic role for mayor under devolution plans

Council leaders see new opportunities ahead for investment and delivery

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LEADERS from across the Thames Valley, including West Berkshire, are progressing plans to pursue a mayoral strategic authority (MSA) for the region.

That would mean a new combined authority made up of a number of council areas, which would be led by a directly-elected mayor.

West Berkshire Council leader Jeff Brooks (Lib Dem, Thatcham West) said: "Nationally, the Government has set out its agenda to create strategic mayoral authorities and deliver new powers, decision making, and funding for regions.

"We can see the advantages of this devolution programme and how it could serve our communities.

"Together with other councils, we're looking to unlock these benefits and create a strategic authority for the Thames Valley.

"With new powers and funding, we'll be able to invest in improving our roads, public



Council leader Jeff Brooks

transport and affordable homes – making life better for families and businesses.

"Together, we can make sure the Thames Valley continues to grow, creating new jobs and opportunities for everyone."

Through an expression of interest letter to government, leaders will set out a shared ambition to secure new powers and funding.

This would enable local councils to plan and deliver more integrated and effective transport, infrastructure, the right type of housing – with an emphasis on social housing – creating the conditions for faster, more inclusive growth

across the region.

The MSA will make decisions closer to the communities and businesses affected, with local councils continuing to deliver critical and wider public services.

If agreed by government, devolution has the potential to unlock up to £18.7bn for the Thames Valley economy by 2040, generating £7bn in additional annual tax revenue.

It will also support coordinated investment of housing, roads and public transport, expand skills and training, and ensure research and innovation translate into jobs and growth across every part of the region.

Reading Borough Council leader Liz Terry added: "While each and every local authority from across the Thames Valley helps to drive the region's economy in their own right, the opportunities offered through devolution and a common purpose promise to unlock enormous benefits for residents who live here.

"Together, we are convinced that a Thames Valley MSA will present a compelling case to government for sustained

investment in the region, helping to deliver the essential transport infrastructure, housing and skills required for the Thames Valley to reach its full potential."

It is hoped the Thames Valley MSA will be designed to speed up delivery, attract investment and strengthen "one of the UK's most productive and innovative regional economies".

The ambition is for a strategic growth partner for neighbouring authorities where joint working will be beneficial, for example relating to things such as the Oxford-Cambridge corridor.

Discussions on a Thames Valley MSA have included local authorities in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Swindon – although no final decisions have yet been made.

Following council decisions on the submission of the expression of interest, and subject to ongoing discussions with government, detailed proposals will then be developed in the coming months for consideration by local councils and partners.



Ian Martinez, mayor Petra Pemberton, Stuart Gourlay and Justin Pemberton at the launch of the new charger

Car charger another step towards electric future

DRIVERS of electric cars visiting Kennet Leisure Centre in Thatcham can now enjoy electric charging through a new installation by the council.

A charger has been installed in the centre car park and offers two bays to recharge electric vehicles.

The charger was officially launched by West Berkshire Council's executive member for environment and highways Stuart Gourley, Thatcham mayor Petra Pemberton and councillor Justin Pemberton, who are both strong advocates for electric vehicles, alongside the man-

ager of West Berkshire Council's car parking team, Ian Martinez.

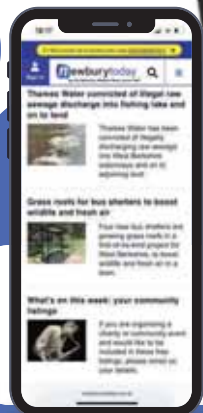
Mr Gourley said: "We're delighted to see another step forward in West Berkshire's journey towards a cleaner, greener transport future.

"Expanding our EV charging network helps make it easier for residents and visitors to make sustainable travel choices."

West Berkshire Council has put in the charger as part of its mission to expand the district's electric vehicle infrastructure and promote sustainable travel.

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What's on

THURSDAY

Vintage Adventure, Thatcham Methodist Church, 2.30pm-4pm. A time of fun, making friends, singing, informal Christian worship, activities, drinks and cakes. For the young at heart in the community, inclusive and dementia friendly. Book your place, contact Karen Frost 07444 851606, email karen.f@bbhcircuit.org.uk

Newbury Yacht Club, Bowlers Arms, Wash Common, talk by Nick Cook on Jason and the Argonauts, 7pm for 7.30pm. Members free, visitors £5, refundable against £25 membership. newburyyachtclub.com

SATURDAY

Scottish evening to raise much-needed funds for charity Noreen's Kids supporting children with severe disabilities in one of the poorest parts of Romania. 7pm at Herongate Leisure Centre, Hungerford, RG170YU. Tickets £20 include a buffet supper, quiz, live band and Scottish dancing. Contact Anna Dunn on anna@noreenskids.org or website www.noreenskids.org

Headley Village Community Shop, Thornford Road, A Taste of Christmas, launch of the Christmas stock, providing opportunity to sample, purchase or order products including local crafts of



Santa Run, see Sunday

jewellery, wreaths and wood-crafted items, 10am to 12.30pm. Run entirely by locals serving the surrounding area, www.headleyshop.org.uk

Audley Inglewood retirement village, Kintbury, annual Christmas Fair, 11am to 2pm. Open to property owners, friends and family, and those living in the community, festive delights include mulled wine and mince pies, while browsing stalls selling local produce and handmade gifts.

Arts for Hungerford, Good food and music: Candlelit Supper and Serenade with Adam & Aret's Musical Journey of the American Songbook, Croft Hall, 7.30pm-10pm. Doors open at 7pm. Tickets £65. Sit back and enjoy a superb supper by the Funghi Club while listening to Adam and Aret, supported by world-class musicians, who will take you on a journey

through those classic songs we all know and love, with a few more recent tunes that are set to become modern classics too. Please see the website for menu choices, including vegetarian options.

SUNDAY

Beenham Wind Orchestra Spectacular Celebration of 25 Years of Music and Community, St Mary's Church, Thatcham, 4.30pm. An afternoon of joy, nostalgia and music, the culmination of 25th anniversary year of celebration featuring some all-time favourites – including *Riverdance*, *John Williams Swings*, *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*, and *When the Saints Go Marching In*. Plus talented local saxophonist Joe Pollard who will perform *Riverdance* with the band.

The Newbury Santa Fun Run, check-in from 9.30am at the Waterside Centre for an 11am start from the Market Place. 1km or 5km circuit, each runner will have the option of a free Santa suit. A special prize for the best-dressed participating pet. Registration and event details are at www.newburyrotary.org

■ If you are organising a charity or community event and would like to be included in these free listings, please email details – type of event, time, venue, date and contact – to report@newburynews.co.uk