



Winchester Councillors' Report August 2026

Electric vehicle charging in city council car parks reaches record high

Drivers of electric vehicles across the Winchester district will see a new charging operator take over part of Winchester City Council's network, as demand for public Electric Vehicle (EV) charging reaches its highest level since they were introduced.

The city council's network of electric vehicle chargers supplied 479,382kWh of electricity between April 2025 and March 2026, marking the highest annual usage since the council began installing chargers in its public car parks. For an average EV, that's enough power to travel twice around the moon and back.

The record figures highlight the growing uptake of electric vehicles across the district and the increasing use of public charging points. Since 2021, Winchester City Council has installed 82 charging points in public car parks across the district. The network includes a mix of fast and rapid chargers, as well as single and dual charging units, helping to support residents and visitors make the transition to electric transport.

Mer, one of the council's charging partners, has been taken over by charging network operator Be.EV. Over the coming months, users of Mer charge points will begin to see Be.EV branding, pricing structures, payment systems and customer support services introduced across the network. Be.EV says its pricing will remain highly competitive, with lower off-peak charging rates available. Drivers will also have the option of taking out a monthly subscription to access further discounts.

£9,000 Grants for Households using Heating Oil

A new government grant is available for households that are heated using oil as part of the government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme.

Through the grant, eligible homes could receive £9,000 to upgrade to a heat pump. More information is available on the government's clean energy website.

Help Protect the Itchen and Test from Chemical Pollution

There is a great deal in the news on the poor management (a mild description!) of our rivers by many of the water authorities. Many are failing in their duty of care and of their responsibility for the declining state of our rivers, particularly our very precious local chalk streams.

But the water companies are not the only culprits: Recent research by Dr Ros Robinson at the University of Portsmouth found 121 chemicals in the Test and Itchen rivers. Of these 61 were from pharmaceuticals and personal care products and 60 from plant protection products. Thus, just over 50% of all the chemicals detected originated from households, with a significant proportion coming from household cleaning products including soap, shampoo, washing-up liquid, dishwasher tablets, laundry detergent, fabric softeners, surface cleaners, oven cleaners, drain cleaners and the like. Some of these products are actually labelled as being "HARMFUL TO THE AQUATIC ENVIRONMENT WITH LONG LASTING EFFECTS"

How do household chemicals get into our rives and groundwater?

Wastewater from houses, either from baths, showers, toilet, washing machines, dishwashers or sinks goes down the house drain, either to a septic tank in rural areas or to where there is mains drainage, to a wastewater treatment works. The treatment process in all these systems are broadly similar with the treated wastewater being discharged to a river, watercourse or a drainage field. The end result is that our chalk rivers might look 'gin clear', but they are polluted with a wide range of chemicals, a large percentage of which came from households. There is no specific treatment of the many household chemicals, pharmaceuticals or personal care products which pass through the system largely untreated.

Which Cleaning Products should I use?

We can start by avoiding or reducing the use of products that carry certain river toxic chemicals, especially those that carry the environmental hazard logo or **state that they are harmful to aquatic life**. Read on to learn more.

It is difficult to be definitive on which products to use but those **least likely** to be harmful to our aquatic environments, and to ourselves, are products made from natural ingredients. Manufacturers that use natural ingredients include **Ecover**, **Method**, **Bio-D**, **Smol**, **Muck Munchers**, Miniml, **Ecozone**, **Tru Earth**, **Almat** (ALDI) and **The Green Co**. Waitrose sell their own range of ECOlogical range products which are labelled as safe for septic tanks. See Which? articles by Karne Lawrence - "How to buy water friendly products, 18th April 2024 Olivia Howes – Green brands, 29th October 2024.

Avoid products with phosphate, parabens (anti-fungal and preservative agents), triclosan (anti-bacterial agent), synthetic fragrances, PFAS, ammonia, phthalates, stilbenes (whiteners), liquid polymers, chlorine or bleach, and those much-advertised products which actually state that they are harmful to the aquatic environment.

The outcome is that our chalk rivers are in a poor state, with a 60% decline in the fly life since 1960. The larval stage of this fly life is in the water and is the building block of the aquatic food chain; they are the basic food for young salmon and trout. Together with other fly life they are also important for many birds, including swallows, swifts, and for bats.

Upper Itchen Restoration Community Interest Company |
www.upperitchenrestoration.org.uk/home

Small Businesses offered a Digital Boost via new City Council Programme

A new Winchester City Council programme will offer free opportunities for local small businesses to enhance their digital capabilities. The Digital Boost for Business programme is open to all local small businesses. It will offer comprehensive digital assessment and personalised support, evolving into a tailored action plan and one-to-one assistance as they implement any recommendations. It will be delivered on the council's behalf by IncuHive, a business support provider with extensive experience helping small and medium businesses to adopt new technologies, improve business performance and achieve sustainable growth.

Places on the programme are limited, so businesses are encouraged to secure their place early. To apply, fill in the application form via https://tinyurl.com/3fzh4r32

Businesses interested in the programme can also contact Sector Project Officer Emily Reason with any queries: email ecodev@winchester.gov.uk

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