



Connecting Communities
in Berkshire

2025-26 Impact Report

Helping Berkshire communities thrive

Welcome

Dear Friends,

As we reflect on our impact in 2025–2026, we are proud to share the continued progress of Connecting Communities in Berkshire (CCB) and the difference we are making across our county. Our vision remains clear: strong, resilient and sustainable communities, empowered to shape their own futures.

Over the past year, our projects and services have delivered vital advice, support and training that enables local people to continue their work for the benefit of all people living in, working in or visiting communities in Berkshire.

Much of what we do, led by our constitution, addresses hardship and disadvantage, while recognising that this extends beyond financial hardship and includes access to all the services necessary to sustain a reasonable quality of life. Our work focuses on inspiring and enabling community-led action and encouraging service providers to increase outreach service provision, ensuring that nobody is disadvantaged by where they live.

Central to our approach is Asset-Based Community Development, working alongside communities to identify and build on their existing strengths, skills and knowledge. By supporting local infrastructure and encouraging community ownership and leadership, we are helping to create lasting, sustainable change.

Our members remain at the heart of everything we do, providing invaluable insights and ensuring that the voices of communities across Berkshire continue to shape our direction and priorities.

Looking ahead, our new **Strategy 2026–2030** sets out our ambitions to increase engagement with communities, deliver more in partnership with other agencies, improve all current areas of work and develop new projects and services to further our support for vibrant and sustainable communities.



Tim Parry,
Chief Executive Officer



Mark Nevitt,
Chair

OUR MISSION & VALUES

Vision: For all communities in Berkshire to be strong, resilient, sustainable, and able to take control of their own futures.

Belief: Most communities already know what they need - our job is to help them recognise it, mobilise it, and use it to ensure that no-one is disadvantaged because of where they live.

Results: When communities thrive, everybody thrives: better health, stronger connections, safer homes, and real opportunities for everyone.





Year at a Glance

- 682 families supported
- 135 community buildings supported
- 89 village halls in membership
- 73 people trained
- £60k+ funding secured for halls
- 174,350 litres of heating oil purchased collectively
- £8,353 household savings generated
- £216,834 invested in Berkshire communities





Supporting Families to Reduce Energy and Water Costs

This project provides advice and guidance to low income families across Berkshire on reducing home energy and water costs, in both urban and rural areas. It also delivers training to the professionals and volunteers who support these families.

Through group sessions, bespoke telephone advice, and training for frontline workers, the project supported **682 families**.

What we delivered

16 advice sessions were delivered at family groups, foodbanks and a community larder, providing tailored advice to 107 families.

33 referrals were received for telephone consultations. Families were supported to reduce utility bills and manage debt, often through ongoing advice over multiple calls.

2 training sessions were delivered to 38 frontline workers. These workers reported they could cascade advice to an estimated 542 families and share learning with 49 colleagues over the following six months.

The Difference we Made

Many families continue to face financial pressure due to the rising cost of living and increasing energy and water bills. This project supports families to manage these challenges and build long-term resilience.

The project has:

- Helped families reduce their expenditure by accessing water discount schemes, many of which they were previously unaware of
- Supported behaviour changes that reduce energy and water use, showing how small savings can make a meaningful difference
- Built confidence and skills so families can understand bills, resolve issues with suppliers, and manage costs independently
- Enabled families to agree realistic and affordable repayment plans for utility debt
- Improved mental wellbeing by reducing anxiety linked to energy costs and debt
- Equipped frontline workers with the knowledge to provide trusted advice to hard to reach and vulnerable families





What families and professionals said:

Advice at groups

"It was so helpful. I did not know what I could do to save on costs at home or about the water discount."

"Great advice on simple steps I can take to reduce our bills."

Telephone advice

"Before the advice I was unsure what support was available to me. It was really useful to get information that was hard to find otherwise. I feel more supported now and I have saved money on my bills. I have applied for a water discount. The advice was very clear and direct."

Training

"This was brilliant, powerful, concise and extremely informative."

"Very helpful, lots of information and good to pass on to families we support."



Supporting Rural Community Buildings

Our Community Buildings Advice Service (CBAS) provides advice, guidance and practical support to village halls and community buildings across Berkshire. It helps trustees and committees manage their buildings effectively, improve sustainability, and strengthen their role within local communities.

Over the year, the service responded to **135 requests for support** through email, phone and in person.

What we delivered

- 135 enquiries supported, providing tailored advice to trustees and community building managers
- Support delivered through site visits, phone and email advice, and ongoing casework
- Guidance on governance, safety, funding, and building management

Targeted support included:

- Charity registration
- Fire safety and risk management
- Energy efficiency and audits
- Insurance and structural damage issues
- Community consultation

The Difference we Made

Village halls are vital community spaces that often face challenges around funding, maintenance and governance. This project helps ensure they remain safe, sustainable and accessible.

The project has:

- Strengthened governance and decision-making for trustees
- Improved safety and resilience of community buildings
- Provided practical solutions to complex challenges
- Increased access to specialist advice and resources
- Supported long-term sustainability and efficiency

Responding to challenges

The service supported several complex cases during the year.

Two village halls were forced to close temporarily following vehicle collisions, requiring support with structural assessments, insurance, and reopening.

Support was also provided to committees managing ongoing disputes, including community concerns and shared utility issues.





Funding and Improvements

The project supported three village halls to secure funding through the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Fund:

- **Midgham Village Hall** awarded £8,740 to replace an asbestos roof
- **Arborfield Village Hall** received £10,805 to improve accessibility and install solar panels
- **Bradfield Village Hall** received £40,834 for roof replacement and solar installation

This work resulted in:

- Increased investment in community buildings
- Improved safety standards
- Greater environmental sustainability

Building Stronger Networks

The project strengthened partnerships and representation across the sector through regional and national engagement.

This has:

- Improved knowledge sharing
- Strengthened sector relationships
- Raised the profile of community building support

In the last year membership expanded to **89 halls** - including a wider range of community venues, increasing access to support.



21st Century Community Halls

Funded through the National Lottery Community Fund, this five-year project supports village halls and community buildings to modernise, improve sustainability, and strengthen governance. It provides tailored advice, builds partnerships, and supports long-term development so that community spaces can better meet local needs.

To date, 68 consultations have been delivered over four years, including **12 completed this year**, alongside 12 follow up visits to review progress and support ongoing improvements.

What we delivered

- 12 onsite consultations to identify and prioritise improvements
- 12 follow up visits to review progress, address challenges, and support next steps
- Tailored advice to help halls plan upgrades and improve facilities
- Development of partnerships to support sustainability and future investment
- Creation and sharing of case studies to promote learning and good practice

Consultations were delivered to a wide range of community buildings across Berkshire, supporting halls to assess their needs and plan for the future.

The Difference we Made

Village halls are important community assets but often need support to modernise and remain sustainable. This project helps committees move forward with confidence and clear plans.

The project has:

- Enabled community buildings to identify and prioritise improvements
- Supported trustees to plan changes that meet modern user needs
- Helped committees overcome barriers and continue making progress
- Strengthened long term sustainability of buildings and organisations
- Encouraged shared learning across the sector

Supporting ongoing progress

Follow up visits ensured continued support for committees as their projects developed.

These visits:

- Reviewed progress and achievements
- Identified new priorities and any barriers
- Provided additional advice and guidance





Developing Partnerships

The project has built and strengthened relationships with key organisations to provide added value and specialist support to village halls.

Partnerships include:

- Local authorities
- Environmental and energy specialists
- Sector organisations and research partners

This work has:

- Increased access to expertise and resources
- Supported opportunities for funding and collaboration
- Strengthened the long term sustainability of community buildings



Connecting communities to
health and wellbeing
Village Halls Week • 16-22 March 2026



Community Learning: Building Knowledge; Strengthening Communities

Our community learning programme provides practical, skills-based training to support village hall trustees, volunteers, and the wider community across Berkshire. These sessions are closely aligned with our project work, ensuring learning is relevant, accessible, and immediately useful.

We are grateful to the Adult Community Learning team at West Berkshire Council for their continued support, enabling us to deliver high quality training that strengthens local organisations and communities.

What we delivered

A series of targeted training sessions were delivered to support governance, compliance, and building management:

- Hallmark 1: focusing on charity management and administration
- Hallmark 2: focusing on health, safety, security and licensing
- Additional Hallmark 1 session in response to high demand
- 21st Century Halls case study learning event
- Legionella and asbestos risk management session

In total, **73 learners** took part in training over the year. Training has been consistently well received with **69%** of attendees rating the teaching and content as **excellent** and a further **29%** rating them as **good**.

The Difference we Made

This training has strengthened the knowledge and confidence of trustees and volunteers responsible for managing community buildings.

The programme has:

- Improved understanding of Charity Commission requirements and legal responsibilities
- Strengthened governance and decision making
- Reduced risk through better awareness of safety and compliance
- Supported trustees to maintain and develop community facilities
- Enabled committees to work towards Hallmark accreditation

The 21st Century Halls case study event was developed in direct response to feedback, providing practical examples and real life insights from other community buildings.

What learners said



"I liked the pace of the course and it was very easy to follow."

"Very good resources shared in a friendly and supportive way."

"Delivered at an easy pace, with useful discussion and interaction."

"My favourite part was sharing ideas with other trustees."

"An important session to help us remain legally compliant."





Rural Housing

Our work this year has strengthened the evidence-base for rural housing need across Berkshire and supported community-led solutions that ensure affordable homes remain available for local people.

Understanding rural housing need

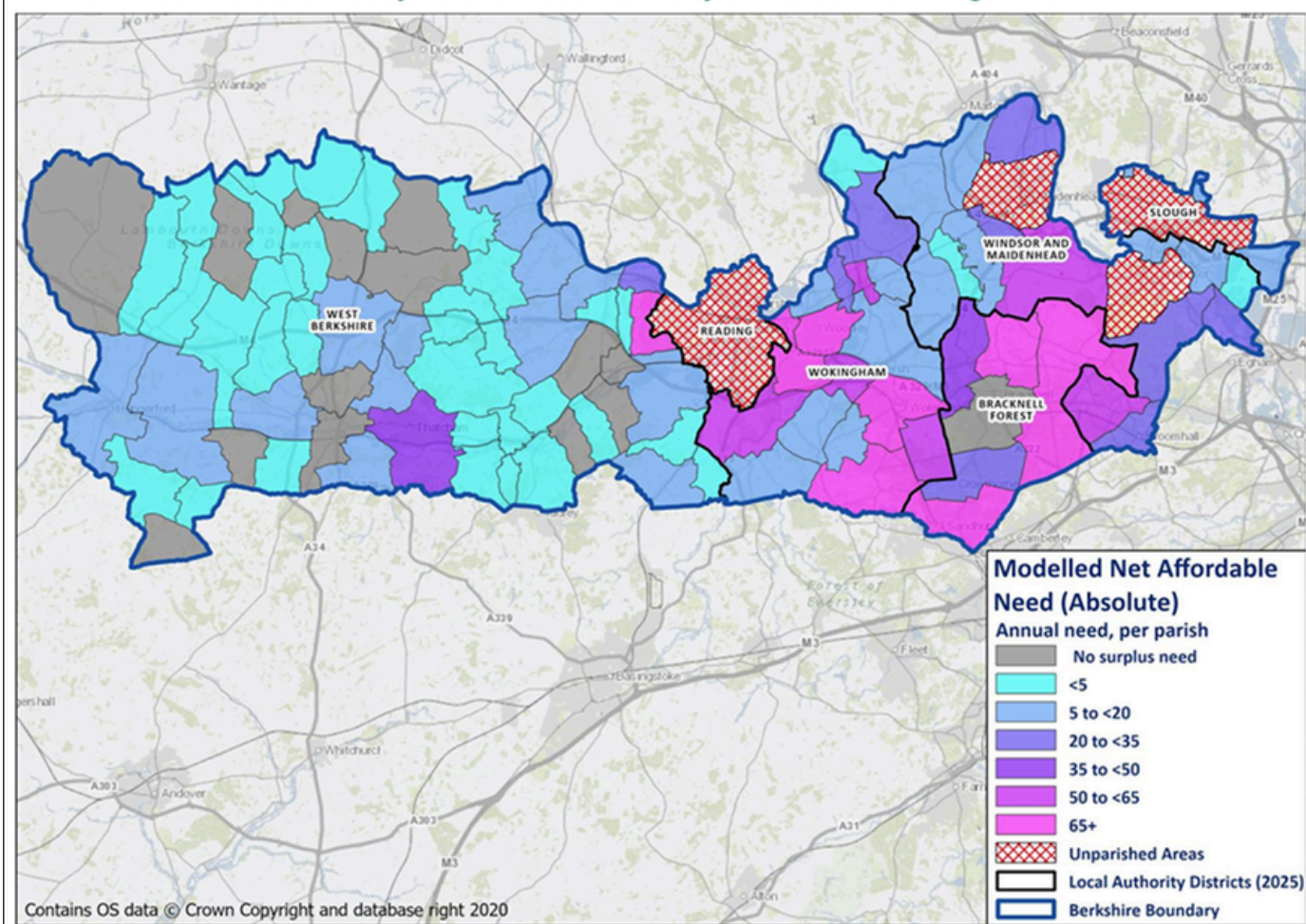
We completed the Rural Affordable Housing Needs Model for Berkshire, identifying areas of greatest need at parish level and providing indicative annual affordable housing requirements.

While not a replacement for housing needs surveys, the model highlights often overlooked rural need and provides a strong foundation for further housing enabling work. It draws on census, housing market and local authority housing register data, creating a strategic picture of need across the county and supporting the development of detailed parish profiles.

Using insights from the model, we have strengthened our evidence on the loss of affordable rural homes through market sales.

Many housing associations, particularly those managing older properties, face significant retrofit costs to meet energy efficiency standards. This is a key driver of sales and an issue of growing concern for rural communities.

Through resident surveys and data from housing providers and the ACRE network, we are building a clearer national picture and engaging decision-makers at a national level.



Supporting Community Land Trusts

In autumn 2025, we supported Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead Community Land Trust (WAMCLT) to secure ownership of a community space and eight social-rented flats within the Windsor Arch development. With our support, WAMCLT secured the freehold in line with the original Section 106 agreement. A registered provider will manage the homes while the CLT retains long-term ownership.

These assets will remain in community ownership permanently, ensuring they cannot be sold and continue to benefit local people.

We have also begun exploring how to strengthen the CLT movement in Berkshire, drawing on lessons from established networks in Oxfordshire.



The Difference we Made

Rural housing challenges are often hidden, but have a significant impact on community sustainability. This work has helped bring these issues into focus and support long-term solutions.

The project has:

- Increased the visibility of rural housing need through robust local evidence
- Strengthened the case for targeted rural housing investment
- Raised awareness of the impact of affordable home sales
- Influenced wider conversations through national engagement
- Supported community ownership models that protect homes for future generations
- Enabled communities to play a leading role in shaping housing solutions.

What we delivered

- Completed a county-wide Rural Affordable Housing Needs Model
- Identified parish-level housing need across Berkshire
- Strengthened evidence on the loss of affordable rural homes
- Gathered insights from residents, housing providers and national partners
- Supported a Community Land Trust to secure long-term community ownership of homes and assets
- Began development work to grow a Berkshire Community Land Trust network





Understanding Community Need: Building the Case for Action

This new project development work has been focused on understanding the needs of rural communities across West Berkshire and identifying how best to support them. Through in-depth research, engagement and analysis, we are building a clearer picture of the challenges people face and the opportunities to strengthen local communities.

Initial research was conducted in Shaw-cum-Donnington, Chieveley and Speen.

What we have learned

Our research highlights a strong sense of community, alongside clear challenges that limit progress.

- 93% of residents value village life, but many feel left behind by modern services
- Around half of those consulted feel held back by complex legal processes and funding systems
- There is strong potential to connect local projects with corporate partners who want to support communities
- Successful local initiatives, such as community cafés and pop up services, show what can be achieved with the right support

Building the Evidence-base

To strengthen future recognition of need and ensure support is targeted effectively, further research is underway. This includes:

- Expanding engagement to other communities to build a wider evidence base
- Gathering data on housing need to support funding applications
- Identifying specific improvement needs within village halls and community spaces
- Demonstrating the link between community activity, wellbeing and health outcomes

This work would ensure future projects are based on robust evidence and reflect the real experiences of local people.

What this means

This research has highlighted a clear need for additional community development support to help turn ideas into action.

A dedicated role will help to:

- Support communities to navigate funding and regulatory challenges
- Strengthen the voice of rural communities in local decision-making
- Connect people to activities and services that reduce isolation
- Link businesses, funders and local groups to unlock new opportunities





Rural Energy Club

Our Oil Club continues to help households across Berkshire reduce the cost of heating their homes through collective purchasing of heating oil.

During the year, our 73 members placed collective orders totalling **174,350 litres of heating oil**, generating combined savings of **£8,353**. By pooling demand, members were able to access more competitive prices and reduce household energy costs at a time when many rural residents continue to face financial pressures.

Alongside delivering savings, we explored how rural households view the transition to low-carbon heating. A survey of Oil Club members and other oil-heated households found that while many residents are interested in greener alternatives, the cost of switching remains a significant barrier.

In response, we developed new resources to help rural households better understand their options. A dedicated **Rural Energy Club webpage** now provides practical information on low-carbon alternatives to heating oil, available grants, and ways to reduce energy consumption and costs. These resources are designed to help households make informed choices and plan any future transition at a pace that works for them.

Digital Reach

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Throughout the year, we kept communities informed and connected through our newsletters, website and social media channels.

We produced 12 monthly e-bulletins, reaching over 1,000 subscribers with project updates, training opportunities, funding news and stories from communities across Berkshire.

Our website, **www.ccberks.org.uk**, attracted more than 9,500 page views from over 5,200 visitors seeking advice, resources and information about our work.

Our social media channels continued to grow, with 32,000+ Facebook visitors, a 28% increase in followers, and almost 3,000 Instagram views during the year.

Follow us:

 www.ccberks.org.uk

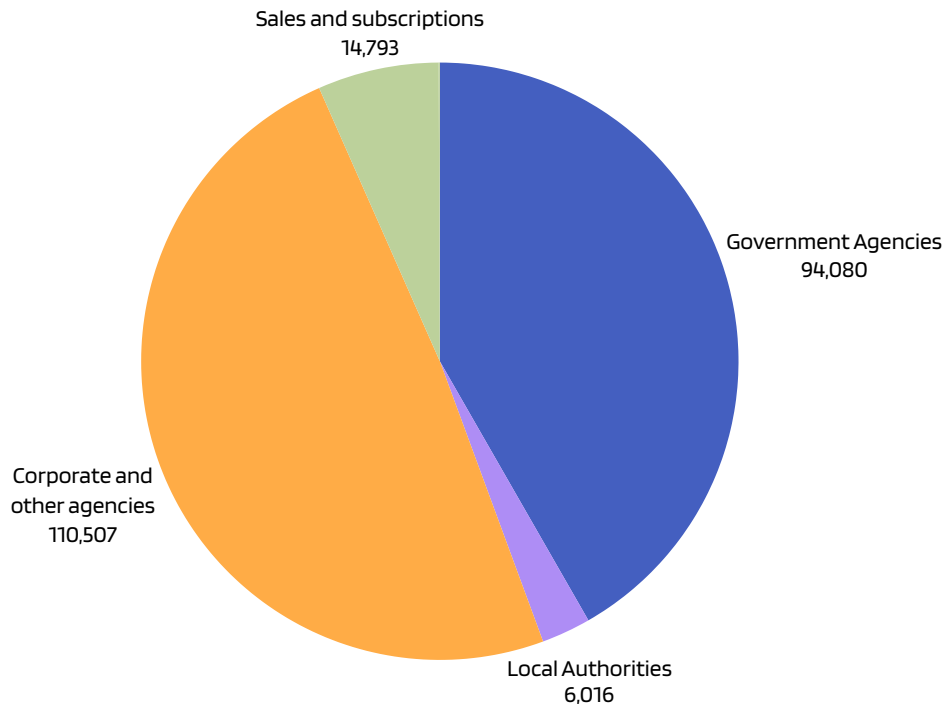
 Facebook: @CCBerks

 Instagram: @ccberks

 LinkedIn: Connecting Communities in Berkshire (CCB)

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Income 2025-2026



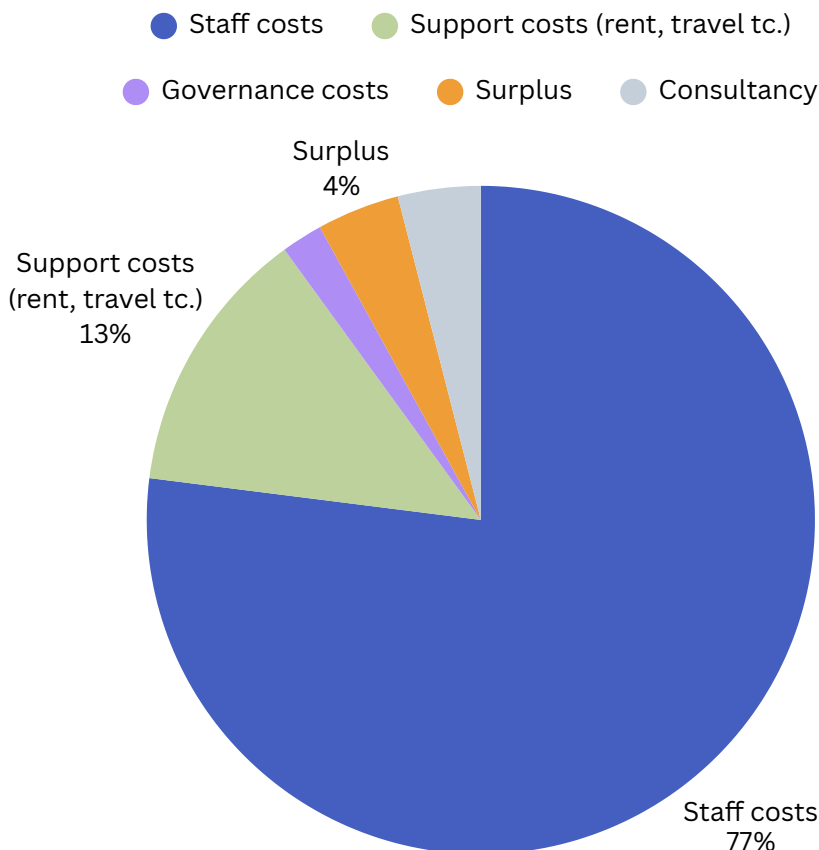
£225,536
Total Income

£216,834
Invested in Communities

£8,702
Year-End Surplus

£88,776
Reserves Carried Forward

Expenditure



CCB remains in a strong and stable financial position, enabling us to continue supporting communities across Berkshire and invest in future opportunities

Action with Communities in Rural England

Junkers LTD

Allied Westminster

Hallmaster Online

Jem Energy

Arc Thermal

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
(DEFRA)

Creative Sparks Services Ltd

Oil Fuel Poverty Solutions

West Berkshire Council

The National Lottery Community Fund

Berkshire Community Foundation

Yattendon and Frilsham Fete

CCB Membership

Community Buildings Advice Service members

Thank you to other supporters:

Alex Hedges at Curious Connections

Newbury Community Furniture Project

Terraguard Technologies

T H A N K Y O U

OUR TEAM

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CCB President, Lord Richard Benyon

2025-2026 Trustees

Alison Taylor
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Catherine Salzedo, Hon. Treasurer
David Oram
Libby Herbert
Mark Nevitt, Chair
Pam Beddoes
Peter Thorn
Sarah Morland (retired January 2026)

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Andrea Malcolm, Project Development Officer
David Jennings, Project Development Officer (until December 2025)
Gemma Matthews, Office & Communications Manager
Helen Dean, Energy Advice Project Manager
Kate Meads, Community Buildings Advisor
Maria Kelly, Rural Housing Enabler
Tim Parry, Chief Executive Officer