WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL – UPPER MEON VALLEY WARD

Updated, Parish update for June 2025

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation update.

Interim Feedback Overview

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has issued feedback on interim Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals across several counties (Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Hampshire, and West Sussex), aiming to highlight key themes for improving final submissions. Feedback consistently references six evaluation criteria (including population, governance, service impact, financial sustainability, and public engagement) which are all equally weighted in decision-making.

A population figure of 500,000 is a guiding benchmark, not a strict requirement; however, deviations must be well justified. MHCLG emphasises the importance of defined geographic proposals covering the full invitation area, ideally with minimal boundary changes unless strongly justified. Service impact, particularly for vulnerable groups (e.g. adult social care, SEND), must be addressed with clear risk mitigation strategies.

Financial viability is critical. Proposals should include high-level assessments of transition costs, efficiency savings, and debt management plans. The government will not cover transition costs but offers limited preparatory funding. Proposals must also show how they support broader public service transformation and align with devolution plans, including potential Mayoral Strategic Authorities.

Robust data, strong inter-council collaboration, and meaningful community engagement are vital. Councils are encouraged to use shared assumptions and datasets and to ensure transparency and accountability in their plans.

The Ministry feedback allowed for each of the 15 Councils covering the Hampshire-Solent area to submit their own proposals in September. Since the interim submission in March, Hampshire County Council has chosen to engage a second consultancy to develop, with East Hampshire DC, a plan reflecting its declared commitment to delivering simpler, stronger, and financially secure councils through LGR. This marks a first split from the initial stage where all 15 local authorities across Hampshire and the Solent were working together towards the interim submission. At present, the two teams (HCC with EHDC and, separately, the 13 other Unitaries and Districts together) are working on 6 different proposals, only one of which is common to both. Robust, transparent planning that balances financial and community needs, aiming to ensure future councils can withstand pressures and deliver lasting benefits for local communities, will be critical to an effective solution.

Project Gigabit and broadband rollout across UMV

Managed by Building Digital UK (BDUK), an executive agency of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), Project Gigabit aims to benefit mostly rural and remote communities across the UK. You can find out more on the Government's Building Digital UK GOV.UK page.

Back in June 2023 BDUK confirmed they had entered into a contract of £104m for 75,000 properties in the rest of Hampshire delivered by City Fibre

The Government decided that this next iteration of its digital connectivity programme, Project Gigabit, is to be run through a direct relationship between BDUK and commercial suppliers, rather than through local authorities and so Hampshire County Council is no longer involved in delivery of broadband.

There are still a number of hard-to-reach areas in the UMV for the delivery of broadband and we suggest that by registering your interest with CityFibre to be informed of their network roll out will help demonstrate the demand in our area. Use the postcode checker at the following link www.cityfibre.com.

Boomtown planning update

Following its Planning Committee meeting on 8 May 2025, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) agreed in principle to grant planning permission for the Boomtown Festival, but only subject to strict environmental conditions. The Committee delegated authority to the Director of Planning, in consultation with the Chair, to issue final approval once a Section 106 legal agreement is in place. This agreement must secure long-term biodiversity net gain (BNG) measures, water neutrality, and other environmental protections, with a legally binding monitoring and funding structure in place for at least 30 years.
The SDNPA acknowledged the cultural and economic value of the festival but stressed that these benefits must be balanced against the Authority's statutory duty to protect the landscape and biodiversity of the National Park. Members expressed concern that current BNG proposals were not yet strong enough and called for a detailed Biodiversity Enhancement and Landscape Management Plan (BLEMMP), which will undergo public consultation once finalised. If all legal and environmental requirements are not met within six months, the application may be refused.

It is quite possible that the event will go ahead this year without planning consent.

Kind Regards

Jerry Pett
Neil Bolton

Winchester City Council Ward Members for Upper Meon Valley