Making **Aylesbury Vale** the best possible place to live, work and visit

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You can find more information about the council on our website [www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk](http://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk)
Introduction from the Leader

The last year has been a big challenge, in terms of managing the continued cuts from central government. Together, AVDC staff have worked hard to not only make further efficiencies but to also come up with new ideas to generate income, which is being invested back into services.

In the last year we saved an incredible £1.3 million pounds. Below are some of the changes we have made.

- Planning has introduced the Home Extension LDO, which will cut the waiting time for planning permission from eight to two weeks, saving both officer time and money.
- Our Recycling and Waste system has saved £500,000 in a year.
- Our Tree officers are now undertaking work for other councils generating £10,000 a year.
- We’ve introduced an automated phone system, saving £40,000 a year.
- Around £100,000 has been generated in the last year by hiring out facilities at The Gateway for events and conferences. We have also launched a new website for the Gateway to build on this success.
- Investing in Aqua Vale and awarding a new contract to Everyone Active to manage both this centre and the Swan Pool in Buckingham is generating £450,000 a year.
- Combining contracts for horticulture and street cleansing is saving £280,000 a year.
- By reducing our energy costs and selling our professional services to other councils we’ve saved £208,000.

Another change we made was our 1.99% increase in council tax, taking the cost per week for an average household to £2.57. Given the financial challenges we’re facing, we felt this was the right option. The increase amounts to an extra 22p a month, for the average band D property, and the extra income will be used to support local businesses and create employment – something which remains a key priority.

As a council we have become much more business-like. Over the last year, dozens of services have been reviewed to see if there is a solid case to continue them and to ensure we are being as efficient as possible. This is a continuing process.

We’re not resting on our laurels; with another £7.5 million to save over the next four years, we know there is still a way to go, but I’m confident we can do it. We’re looking to the future and are constantly in the process of introducing more changes.

Our hard work was recognised earlier in the year when we won a national industry award for making efficiencies. Following this, we’ve had a number of other councils visit us to learn about what we’re doing.

It’s been a memorable year in many ways from the spectacular lighting of the first ever Heritage Flame at Stoke Mandeville Stadium, to start the Sochi Paralympics, to work starting on the Aylesbury Vale Education Centre.

We continue to do everything we can to keep our residents at the heart of what we do, in what is proving to be a tough time for local authorities country-wide. You can read, in more detail, about our achievements over the last year in the following pages.

Councillor Neil Blake
Leader of the Council
Priority one: We will protect and improve the living experience in the Vale

Did you know?

- During the year Aylesbury Vale was named as one of the best places to live in Great Britain. The Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey ranked the Aylesbury Vale district as the 21st best place to live out of 119 rural local authority areas.

- We worked with our partners to enable 314 affordable homes to be built in the district.

- Voluntary and community groups in Aylesbury Vale benefited from grants totalling £480,000. The Aylesbury Vale Community Chest fund, backed by Aylesbury Vale District Council and Vale of Aylesbury Housing, helps communities across the district, with the money recently awarded to be shared between 12 groups.

- The first peregrine falcon chick of the year for Aylesbury hatched in May 2013. The family of peregrine falcons, a protected species, resided on a nesting platform at the top of Buckinghamshire County Council’s County Hall. The peregrines were monitored by our biodiversity team via web cameras at the nesting platform.
What we achieved in 2013/14

Priority one: We will protect and improve the living experience in the Vale

- We led the introduction of the Safe Place scheme in the Vale with the help of more than 20 businesses. The scheme, developed in partnership with Thames Valley Police and local community groups, sees businesses displaying a sticker which can be identified as a ‘safe place’ for vulnerable people who feel unwell, scared or who are lost. Businesses can then signpost the person to the next place of safety by calling the person’s carer or support worker.

- We worked with partners to put on a special event celebrating the lighting of the first ever Heritage Flame at Stoke Mandeville Stadium. Arts Council England awarded us a £155,000 grant to fund this year’s stadium and theatre events. An iconic Armillary Sphere, designed by acclaimed theatre designer Jon Bausor, was used to light the flame at Stoke Mandeville Stadium. Entertainment was laid on at Aylesbury Waterside Theatre on 2 March, the day after the flame lighting.

- The Berryfields Farmland Grant Scheme sees AVDC and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) working together to protect wildlife, in the first off-setting project of its kind in the county. They are offering grants (funded by the developers) to landowners in the Berryfields, Oving and Waddesdon areas for projects that will help minimise the impact of development by creating spaces for wildlife to thrive. The first ambitious project has just got underway and will see the equivalent of 40 football pitches of species-rich grassland created on land set aside at a large country estate near Aylesbury.

- We provided increased play opportunities for youngsters in the Vale after four new or refurbished play areas were opened. The refurbished play areas are, The Coppice in Aylesbury, Bridge Street play area in Buckingham, The Paddock play area in Aylesbury and a newly developed play area at Narbeth Drive. The developments were made possible by developer contributions in the local area made through AVDC. The project in Buckingham was financed by WREN, a not for profit business that awards grants to community projects, the Bucks County Council Community Leaders’ Fund and developer contributions.
Priority two: We will grow the economy of the Vale.

Did you know?

- We awarded three business grants to local businesses totalling £13,000. In the 10 years that the grant scheme for small businesses has been running we have awarded £332,000 in grants to 88 businesses.

- The first ever Aylesbury Business Show was held at the Gateway with 40 exhibitors and nearly 500 delegates attending. We were a key sponsor and partner of this event.

- We produced ‘working with business, for business’; a leaflet setting out the services offered by business facing departments.

- We have developed Winslow market from 3 stalls to 8 making it sustainable and attracting more footfall in to the town. We plan on organising some small events in Winslow for the 2014 Love Your Local market campaign.

- We made a contribution of £10,000 to the Destination Buckingham Group, which is coordinating activity to raise awareness of the town as destination for visitors. Since 2010/11 we have contributed £40,000 to the group.
What we achieved in 2013/14

Priority two: We will grow the economy of the vale.

- Councillor Michael Rand, AVDC Chairman, officially opened the new Waitrose Aylesbury branch on Exchange Street in August 2013. Councillor Rand said: “I’m honoured to have been invited to open the Aylesbury Waitrose. I know there has been much anticipation from both within and outside the town about the store opening and at last it’s almost here. The 8th August will be a proud day for the council as we welcome Waitrose and hand over another building that we’ve been responsible for constructing.”

- We awarded four scholarships of £2,000 each to students attending Buckinghamshire University Technical College (UTC), in Aylesbury. The money offered by AVDC could help towards university fees or apprenticeship costs, or be used to help students progress their career after studying. Councillor Michael Edmonds said, “This is not only an investment in young people, but is also a step to ward off the damaging effects of the recession for a generation that needs to gain the skills, experience and resilience for the future workforce.”

- In partnership with local businesses we launched the Retail Lift Off initiative, where budding entrepreneurs could apply to get a range of business support, including being awarded six weeks of rent free trading and a further six weeks subsidised rent. After a thorough shortlisting and interviewing process, six applicants were accepted onto the scheme. The innovative scheme was inspired by the Mary Portas report which said towns need to attract new shoppers and compete with the internet by offering something different.

- Our economic development and planning teams worked closely with Arla to secure their investment in their world class dairy at Aston Clinton – which expects to produce a billion litres of milk a year and boasts the most technologically advanced and efficient processing. The dairy is expected to deliver a £20 million annual wages bill – great news for the local economy. The company is also supporting education and training opportunities. Aston Clinton was selected because it provides a great location between the farms from which Arla collects the raw milk and the retailers they deliver to.
Priority three: We will deliver efficient and economic services

Did you know?

- Our business rates collection service and benefits service are consistently amongst the top 10 best performing councils.

- On 1 April 2010 Band D Tax was £131.07, today it’s £133.69 a total increase of only £2.66 or 1.99%. Comparatively, inflation has risen by more than 13% and pensions have risen by more than £15 per week. Over the same timeframe Government Grant (the largest source of funding for statutory services) has halved. In this time we have identified £8.5 million of real savings, efficiencies and additional income (Over £12 million since 2008/09), whilst at the same time maintaining the majority of service provision.

- We started a Level 3 Management Apprenticeship programme for 7 Supervisors, beginning in June 2013 and finishing in June 2014.

- We have reduced staff sickness absence through targeted interventions and simplified procedures. Reduced levels of sickness since 2009/10 are producing savings of £224,000.

- A restructure and development of income generation streams for our planning services have been agreed. This will save over £500,000 a year from the council’s budget and include developing consultancy services to other authorities and private customers.
What we achieved in 2013/14

Priority three: We will deliver efficient and economic services

- We successfully applied to Sport England for a £500,000 grant to help modernise Buckingham’s Swan Pool and Leisure Centre. The scheme includes a remodelled entrance area with a two-storey climbing wall, an extended fitness suite, an enlarged crèche/multi-use room and an improved refreshment area. There are also plans to extend and completely refit the wet and dry changing areas. Building work is expected to be completed by summer 2015.

- Our Local Development Order for home extensions is now fully up and running. We are one of the first councils to introduce the order, which can be used for most extensions on detached and semi-detached houses. It is a great time saver, speeding up the planning process from eight weeks to around two weeks. The introduction of this efficiency measure means that less of our officers’ time is spent on the planning process, which saves the council money.

- We changed the way residents access face-to-face customer services, reflecting the significantly reduced demand for drop-in clinics as more residents use our website or contact staff by phone and email. The council closed its Customer Service Centre in January 2014, Customers are now encouraged to visit the AVDC website for 24 hour information about services or, for issues that can’t be addressed online, contact staff via telephone. If a query cannot be resolved by phone or email, the customer will be offered an appointment to see an officer at The Gateway.

- We have taken a step outside our comfort zone by looking to generate income through our purpose built state of the art conference and event facilities. Based within the district council offices, The Gateway provides a unique venue, which companies and members of the public can hire for conferences, management training, presentations, courses and social events. Since opening in May 2012, around 35,000 delegates have used the Gateway conference facilities generating income of around £200,000 through room hire.

- Parking services have taken advantage of mobile technology by giving drivers across Aylesbury Vale the choice of paying for their parking by mobile phone. It is hoped that this will give drivers more flexibility as they will no longer be so reliant on having the correct change. Visitors can also extend their parking session by phone and get text reminders before their parking expires. The council’s civil enforcement officers will know which motorists have paid by phone via a secure database.
Priority four: We will improve communication and interaction with our customers

Did you know?

- We have carried out 17 customer focussed consultations covering a variety of subjects including the following:
  - The Aylesbury Town Centre draft improvement Plan
  - Bucks Home Choice tenants and residents
  - Planning Local Development Orders
  - Several leisure activities (e.g. Theatre in the Villages & Jonathan Page Play Centre)

- We worked with other providers in the new estate of Berryfields to co-ordinate activities within the new community centre and engage with the new and growing community, which has now established a residents association.

- We have worked closely with the police to support the Independent Advisory Group which is made up of community representatives from across the district and aims to improve trust and confidence between the diverse communities of the district, the police and the council.
  [Link](http://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/community-living/independent-advisory-group-iag/)
What we achieved in 2013/14

Priority four: We will improve communication and interaction with our customers

- In November 2013 we held a community cohesion conference ‘Growing Together’ to which over 120 delegates from community groups and service providers attended. The aim of the event was to share learning and understanding between Aylesbury Vale’s diverse communities. We continue to publish a newsletter promoting activities and events which are helping to deliver our Cohesion and Integration Strategy objectives.

- We led a project in Buckingham called ‘ageing well’ which considered what it’s like to grow old in the area. Two events were held in July 2013 to bring together service providers and residents to discuss the issues facing older people locally. Monthly networking meetings are held in the Buckingham & Winslow district that enable staff and volunteers who support older people locally to share together good practice, joint working opportunities and developments of their own services. This is then cascaded to service users.

- As part of Aylesbury town’s Purple Flag accreditation, we consulted with users of the night time economy to inform our action plan to improve the night time economy of the town, and to inform the 2013 assessment of the town by the Association of Town Centre Managers. Questions included how often people visit the town centre, and their perceptions of the town (i.e. less or more appealing than 12 months ago).

- We worked closely with the police to raise awareness amongst residents of how to prevent crime. The 2013 summer road show focused on home burglary with 230 people being contacted during events in Buckingham, Pitstone, Bedgrove, Walton Court and Aylesbury town centre. The 2014 spring campaign focused on preventing theft from sheds and outbuildings. During March and April we visited Buckingham garden centre and market square, Wendover, Haddenham, and two garden centres in Aylesbury town.