



WBC Parish Report for March 2022

Cllr Graham Bridgman (West Berkshire Council, Burghfield and Mortimer Ward)

West Berkshire Council

Council

Meetings

There were two Council meetings this month. First, on 3 March, the annual budget meeting (see below), then, on 17 March, a regular Council meeting which, as well as dealing with public and Members' questions:

- passed a Motion to condemn the amount of sewage discharge by water companies into our rivers;
- passed a Motion with regard to Ukraine (see more below);
- approved the Statutory Pay Policy Statement for publication from 1 April 2022;
- considered (but rejected) a request by a Member of Council for access to information - seeking disclosure of an operational document setting out enforcement options in relation to a Community Infrastructure Levy liability.

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

The next scheduled meeting is the Annual Meeting on 10 May, when the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Council will be elected, the Executive membership announced by the Leader, committee memberships confirmed or changed, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees elected (in brief committee meetings taking place during an adjournment of the main meeting), etc.

Budget

At the Council Budget Meeting on 3 March the budget for 2022-23 was agreed, which will see significant investment in local services and infrastructure.

The plans contain a range of commitments to enhance and maintain the services on which residents rely, including new spending on schools, transport and other infrastructure to promote post-pandemic recovery and renewal.

These include £52 million of investment in new and improved educational facilities across the district, £12 million on leisure facilities and more than £80 million to improve local infrastructure – including a range of new schemes (longer opening times at Newbury Lido, investment in play and recreational facilities, the upgrade of Theale railway station, etc)..

As anticipated in previous reports, Council Tax will be rising by 1% and the precept for Adult Social Care will be 3%, making a total rise of 4% (almost 2% less than the maximum rise available), equating to an additional £1.22 per week for a Band D property.

Executive

The Executive met on 24 March and, as well as dealing with public and Members' questions:

- approved the West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme for Buses, in time for adoption from 1 April 2022 (and in accordance with the National Bus Strategy, 'Bus Back Better');

- authorised the award of a new contract for Pelham House – a Supported Living Service for Adults with a Learning Disability;
- approved the Leisure Strategy, 2022-32;
- awarded a contract to Alliance Leisure Services for the re-development of the Lido at the Northcroft Leisure Centre (more below);
- reviewed Q3 reports for Capital Financial Performance and Council Performance generally;
- agreed delegated authority for the Chief Executive to enter into a Collaboration Agreement to forward the objectives of the Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group (DIG).

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

The next meeting will be on 28 April.

Ukraine

The Motion proposed by Cllr Lynne Doherty, Leader of Council, and passed unanimously at the meeting on 17 March read:

“West Berkshire Council is united in its condemnation of the armed attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation and urges Vladimir Putin to immediately and unconditionally cease this unjust and evil war.

West Berkshire Council would encourage residents that wish to offer financial assistance to do so by donating to the Disasters Emergency Committee or the British Red Cross.

West Berkshire Council will welcome Ukraine Refugees and partake in resettling Ukraine Refugees in West Berkshire when we have details of the scheme through the South East Migration Partnership.

West Berkshire Council stands with the people of Ukraine and expresses its unwavering commitment to democracy, multilevel governance and human rights.”

WBC is proud of its history of supporting refugees in West Berkshire and stands ready to offer assistance again as and when required – we know that residents will support the local and national efforts to provide much-needed support for the people of Ukraine, in particular those who have fled the country and are seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

WBC are supporting the Government's initiative to offer homes to Ukrainians fleeing the conflict, given the harrowing situation they are facing and will be working proactively with the Government to see how we can best provide support.

Ukraine Support Hub

WBC has established a dedicated Ukraine Support Hub that will provide help for those coming in to the UK and to those who will host a family under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

The Support Hub is open five days a week – 08:30 to 17:00 Monday to Thursday and 08:30 to 16:30 on Fridays. To get in touch call 01635 503579 or email ukraine@westberks.gov.uk.

Appeal

Greenham Trust have set up an appeal on The Good Exchange to provide local funding to support those families arriving in West Berkshire. Together with the Greenham Trust, WBC have committed to contributing £25,000 each in match funding, ensuring public, corporate and trust/foundation donations to this appeal are matched £1 for £1 for the first £50,000 raised – see [here](#).

Leisure

Newbury Lido

Redevelopment of the Lido will see a brand new Olympic-sized swimming pool and other new and improved facilities for the popular leisure attraction. The changes will mean the facility can open for longer and accommodate twice as many visitors each year.



The £5m redevelopment was approved at the Executive meeting referred to above and followed consultation with local residents last year. As well as the new 50m pool, proposals for the site include an interactive splash-pad, racer slides and improved accessibility (all to be considered as the designs are finalised in the coming months).

The new 50m pool will be created with a depth between 1.2m and 1.5m which will allow for water-based exercise classes alongside lane swimming and club practice.

The new facility will be open for twice as long as it has been in the past, with a new six-month season running from Easter to September. This will see expected visitors increase from 20,000 people a year to an estimated 50,000 visits annually.

The lido will be closed through 2022 whilst the redevelopment work takes place with the new facility opening in summer 2023. The renovation will have a net zero carbon footprint and meet BREEAM excellence standards - a leading sustainability standard.

The lido redevelopment is part of the new Leisure Strategy, also approved at the Executive meeting.



Health

Healthy Living Kiosks in WBC Libraries



WBC has installed three 'Health Kiosks' - in the Hungerford, Thatcham and Newbury libraries.

The kiosks are free to use and can help individuals to get a better understanding of their general health and well-being in confidence. They measure the person's height, weight, BMI, blood pressure, heart age and cardiovascular risk and, if the kiosk readings reach specific markers, will direct the user to their doctor to book an appointment.

We know that GP access has been an issue, and these kiosks will hopefully help people to check their health for themselves and flag up any concerns that need to be raised elsewhere.

Should you be so inclined, you can see a Facebook video from me advertising the kiosks [here](#).

Education

National Award for Theale Green School

Theale Green Secondary school has picked up a prestigious national award at the Youth Sport Trust's 2022 Conference for helping its students to improve their wellbeing and achievement through focusing on physical and mental health.

They pledged to join the Well Schools Movement over a year ago, becoming part of a national community of professionals and stakeholders who believe that wellbeing should be at the heart of education.

The Award recognises a school which has harnessed the power of physical activity, PE and sport to transform the lives of young people and put wellbeing at its heart.

A total of nine awards were presented at a ceremony hosted by former Paralympic swimmer Kate Grey and broadcaster and retired sprinter Jeanette Kwakye MBE. All awards aligned to the theme of 'Inspire a Generation' linking to the 10th Anniversary of London hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Award was collected by Headteacher Joanna Halliday, Tony Blinco, Director of Sport and PE, and Maxine Smiles Cooke, School Games Organiser.



Secondary school places

This month, pupils across West Berkshire found out which secondary school they will be going to in September.

This year WBC received 1,919 applications from Year 6 pupils and were able to allocate 98% a place at one of their preferred secondary schools and able to match the majority of pupils (88%) with their first choice school.

School allocations remained broadly in line with previous years despite the number of Year 6 pupils rising to its highest level.

Environment

One Bag - Big Difference: Great British Spring Clean



Having taken part in the MVP Spring Clean a couple of Saturdays ago, I am very pleased to see WBC encouraging people to pledge to do their bit to clear up the litter that blights the natural environment during the Great British Spring Clean 2022 by backing Keep Britain Tidy #bigbagchallenge to help 'Spring Clean' Britain.

This year's mass campaign, from 25 March to 10 April, calls on families, neighbours, friends and colleagues to join forces and pledge to pick a bag of litter from local areas in order to protect our vibrant communities and precious wildlife habitats.

Anyone wanting to join in can find out more at www.keepbritaintidy.org/gbspringclean and WBC can provide litter-picking equipment to help (but please do give as much notice as possible when requesting equipment and wait for confirmation before you advertise your event as equipment may not be available due to popular demand).

Tree planting to mark HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee

WBC organised and led a special tree-planting ceremony to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee at Chapel Row Green in Bucklebury on Friday 11 March.

This civic tree planting ceremony was one of many taking place across the country as part of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative. The 11 March 2022 was significant as it is the seventieth day of the year in which HM The Queen marks the seventieth anniversary of her accession.

Waste

Opinions sought

WBC has launched a [survey](#) ahead of the roll out of a separate weekly food waste collection service, and is encouraging all residents to take part. The survey will close at midnight on 3 May.

As part of the new service, starting in autumn 2022, food waste will be collected weekly, on the usual collection day, via eight new purpose-built vehicles - replacing the service whereby it was collected fortnightly, alongside recycling and green waste (where subscribed to the service).

The majority of properties will be provided with a 23-litre kerbside caddy with a lockable lid, which can be stored outside with other existing recycling containers. Residents who share a bin store will receive a different sized bin to share with neighbours. All residents will also be supplied with a five litre kitchen caddy to collect food waste in before emptying it into their bigger kerbside caddy outside.

The new service is predicted to increase WBC's overall recycling rate from approximately 50% to nearly 60%.

Planning

Newbury Town Centre Masterplan adopted

The Newbury Town Centre Masterplan has been adopted. Developed by a multi-disciplinary team of consultants, it looks at futureproofing the town centre and transforming it into a 'multi-purpose' space that makes the most of the canal, the historic buildings, the quirky Lanes and Yards and the growing number of independent shops and cafes that help to attract more visitors who will then spend more time in the town.

In early 2021, over 4000 people responded to the first public survey to give their views Newbury's strengths and weaknesses and the vast majority of these were welcoming change. This led to the development of a draft Vision and Spatial Framework for the town centre, which places the concept of the 'Crossroads' at its heart, and aims to ensure that as Newbury responds to the need for change, it remembers its market town heritage, and remains a focus for social interaction, economic growth, civic engagement and community activities.

This vision was endorsed and further refined following a second online survey and public engagement session in July 2021, during which over 1,000 responses were received.

The Masterplan document includes baseline assessments, the vision, spatial masterplan and strategies for 'public realm and movement' and 'branding and events' as well as a delivery strategy which looks at short term wins including plans for the Wharf and shop fronts on the high street. It also includes long term plans for more green spaces in the town centre.

Transport

Carbon-neutral road resurfacing project

A road resurfacing scheme has improved local roads whilst remaining carbon neutral in one of the first projects of its kind in the district.

Working with contractor Volker Highways and Miles Macadam, the project used an innovative new surface which has a lower-carbon footprint than other surfaces. The overall carbon footprint of the project was reduced by 38%, which along with the planting of 152 to offset the remainder has delivered in a carbon-neutral way.



The roads resurfaced as part of the scheme were in Beedon Hill and Old Oxford Road in Beedon, Hose Hill and Reading Road in Burghfield, and Floral Way in Thatcham

Consultations

- [School Streets Schemes – the Calcot Schools](#) – closes 30/09/22
- [Active Travel Schemes to help the people of West Berkshire walk and cycle more](#) – closes 22/08/22
- [Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group](#) – closes 08/04/22

Other Matters

AWE Burghfield

On 31 March the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) announced that AWE had delivered 'significant and sustained' safety improvements at its Burghfield licensed site, resulting in its move from enhanced regulatory attention (in which it had been for approximately eight years) to routine regulatory attention.

The improvements at AWE Burghfield site followed a Structured Improvement Programme which enabled the delivery of a large range of improvement initiatives targeting aspects of organisational culture, practice, and capability.

Covid Guidance

I thought it might be of interest if I extract potentially relevant parts of the guidance just issued by Nigel Lynn (WBC CEO) to staff, in relation to attendance at meetings, etc:

- We no longer require staff to carry out routine LFTs before coming into the office or carrying out council business, unless they are Adult Social Care staff, who provide close personal care or are Care Home staff. But, it makes sense, particularly in relation to our Business Continuity, that if we are attending an office building, or visiting someone, we take an LFT test prior, if possible, even if we are not entitled to free LFTs. Taking an LFT will safeguard your colleagues and the public, and help prevent spreading the disease through the Council and the community in which we work.
- The wearing of face coverings is no longer mandatory. However, the Government suggests that we should continue to wear a face-covering in crowded and enclosed spaces where you may come into contact with people you do not normally. We recommend that staff continue to wear a face-covering when moving around the office. When visiting other settings, staff should be prepared to wear a face-covering if requested.
- Ventilation continues to be important, so please continue to ensure that your work area is well ventilated.
- Obviously, we ask that you do not attend work if you have any Covid symptoms (such as a high temperature, a new continuous cough, and/or a loss/change to your sense of smell, or taste).
- Please continue to use hand sanitiser, wash your hands regularly and use cleaning materials to clean frequently touched surfaces (desks, keyboards, mouse) at the start and end of each day.

The Government have released updated guidance on living safely with Covid-19 and other respiratory infections - <https://gov.uk/guidance/living-safely-with-respiratory-infections-including-covid-19>. We expect further detailed Government guidance in due course, and we will update this plan accordingly.

Parish Matters

Beech Hill

Footpath maintenance

It was pleasing to note that even before issues were raised at the last Parish Council meeting in relation to the standard of work in respect of recent footpath resurfacing, WBC Highways had assessed the work as below standard and had put steps on hand to address the issue. It is more concerning that the work was not carried out properly in the first place (and elsewhere in the district) and I have raised the issue with the Portfolio Holder.

Burghfield

Pavilion

Having been aware that there have been more than ten objections to the Parish Council's planning application, I therefore know that the application will go to the Eastern Area Planning Committee for determination if Officers advise approval.

Since there are also notices of support for the proposal, and it is an application by the Parish Council, I feel that the voices of support should also be heard and if Officers advise rejection it should also be debated by EAPC. I have therefore called the application in to committee.

Recreation Road

I became involved in concerns raised about the possible tenancy of a Sovereign Housing property in Recreation Road, but am pleased to say that Sovereign have confirmed that no tenancy is being offered (indeed, they propose to sell the property).

Stratfield Mortimer

Windmill Court

Having become aware of concerns raised about Sovereign Housing's plans for redeveloping Windmill Court, I have been (and am continuing to be) in discussions with Sovereign, WBD and Windmill Court residents. I know that residents who have contacted me were due to meet with Sovereign and I await the outcome of those meetings. I also know that, as well as attending the next Parish Council meeting, Sovereign will be undertaking some community engagement, so I await developments (and the planning application).

St Johns Road

At the recent meeting about Garth Hall, there were concerns raised by residents of St Johns Road about damage to the neck of the road nearest to the shops on West End Road. I have raised this with WBC (noting, of course, that St Johns Road is a Private Street, so it hasn't been adopted by WBC but there are pedestrian and vehicular rights of way over it) and will report further when I have received that advice.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graham Bridgman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Graham Bridgman

Council Member for Burghfield and Mortimer

Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing

5 April 2022