

Report for parish councils – June 2023

Election



I was honoured to be elected, alongside fellow councillors Geoff Mayes and Vicky Poole, to represent the Burghfield & Mortimer ward, which includes Beech Hill & Wokefield, for the next 4 years. At the count, I thanked Cllr Bridgman for his efforts supporting our community and the staff who worked tirelessly. I thank too those who took on the roles in our polling stations and coped well with the challenge of the introduction of Voter ID for the first time. Ours was quite a complex count, taking several hours to complete, after the various checks were done. A fascinating, and disarmingly crude-looking gadget was used to speed up counting the interesting cross-party selections made by some voters. The results are [HERE](#).

I heard both useful suggestions/requests and encouragement on the doorstep as well as on election day. The Lib Dem volunteers from other parts of the district gave excellent support here and our campaign took little for granted. Whilst we've acknowledged that sentiment about the national Government plays a part in local election result, I'm humbled by the personal support and hope to live up to expectation. As some residents told me over the Coronation weekend, after all that excitement, now the real work begins.

My reports will focus on ward matters, since I aim first and foremost to support and inform its parishioners and groups. That said, this first report will include a general element to set the context.

A Fresh Start

The new Leader of West Berks Council, Lee Dillon, and his Executive, were [confirmed on Thursday 25 May](#). The full council also met for its annual meeting, at which Jeremy Cottam, was elected chairman. He will represent the Council at ceremonial events. Members (district councillors) were appointed to

the various committees - I joined Licencing and Health Scrutiny. In the latter, I hope to raise concerns over appointment and blood test waiting times and discuss the use of connected IT to assist early diagnosis. In line with council leader Lee Dillon's pledge to focus on improving council services and standards and adopt a cross-party approach to this, Opposition councillors were appointed to chair some committees, notably including "Overview & Scrutiny".

Whilst on the face of it of little relevance to us in Burghfield & Mortimer (etc), one of the new Executives' first steps after taking office, was to begin ground works to return football to Faraday Road, Newbury. This pitch was the home of Newbury Football Club until they were evicted about 5 years ago. Whatever the rights and wrongs of that action, restoring that pitch, will free up about £10M, earmarked by the last administration for a Newbury "Sports Hub", for other purposes/services, hopefully ones that benefit Burghfield & Mortimer.

District Council Diary

Immediately after the election, I took a pre-planned holiday abroad between May 7 & 22. Since my return, I obtained access to the council IT system and emails and am catching up on various essential training for newbies. That said, I do have some matters to report:

Burghfield Common

Dog Poo etc

After the excitement of the election, I came down to earth quickly when reading, albeit from a safe distance of a foreign holiday, via Facebook, residents' concern over uncollected general and dog waste from bins in Burghfield Common and Wokefield. It was clear that many residents had reported the problem and that Burghfield Parish Council's clerk was chasing the relevant teams regularly. One resident had even emptied a Rec. bin himself and took the rubbish home. The reason for the delay emptying is that a member of staff left, and their replacement needed some time to get to grips with the rounds and all the bin locations. For the avoidance of doubt, the council knows where they are and has systems that track the emptying and monitor the web site for reports of full bins. Apparently in the district overall we make about 500 bin collections per week. Most of the Burghfield general and dog bins were belatedly emptied before the late May Bank Holiday but unfortunately those at the end of Bunces Lane (part of Wokefield), pictured, were missed. After I spoke with the Countryside team earlier this week, they met their contractor. I am assured those bins will be emptied imminently (by 1 June). To summarise the general advice:



Figure 1: Bunces Lane, Wokefield

- If you notice overfull general or dog waste bins in the ward, please log a "Report A Problem"/"Fill Or Empty Something"/"Open Space"/"Bin" via the West Berks Council website [HERE](#). You can also use that same page to report full bins that are beside the footway (please choose "Footway"/"Overflowing Litter Bin" for them).

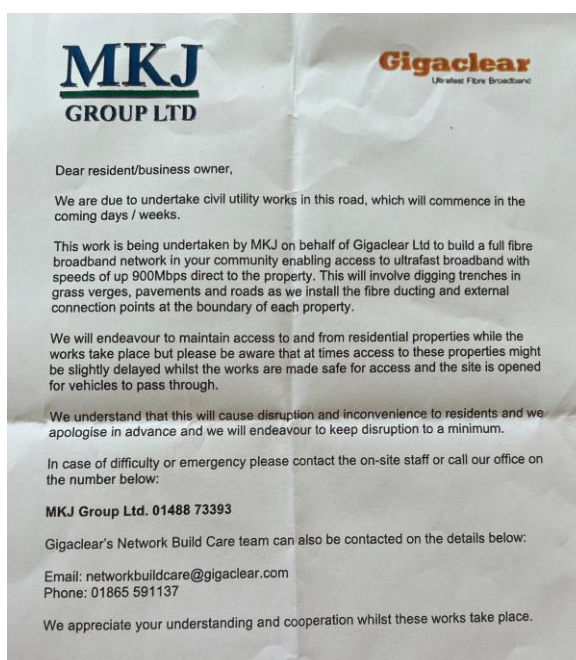
- If you take your own waste home, that will potentially reduce the cost of this service. Frustrating as it is if bins are full, please don't pile rubbish on or around a full one -aside from this being fly tipping, it will cause the problem to 'snowball' rapidly.

Resident Support - Housing

A Burghfield resident approached me for help via my Facebook page, about a personal housing issue. Although on holiday, it was clearly important to them and I took the opportunity to test our internal process, by messaging the Housing team. Fellow new councillor Vicky helped by calling the resident to hear their concerns. Whilst the specific need is ongoing, I think our housing department gave a good and supportive response – so the process worked.

Mortimer

Fibre To The Premises - Gigaclear



In 2022, I supported an Avenue resident, hoping to get Fibre to the Premises – a faster, higher capacity and potentially more reliable internet service – to their home. It's ideal for home workers and power users. This idea was soon expanded to other streets – you may recall the survey – and became Mortimer Community Fibre Partnership. It received parish council endorsement and I set up a company, as requested by BT Openreach. Whilst demand was healthy, at nearly 400 properties, sadly we did not reach the number needed, so it was wound up last year. Recently, perhaps because of our demand level, Gigaclear, who had installed Fibre to the Premises in parts of Mortimer, has returned, to fill in most of the gaps they missed in 2017. They are cabling in earnest right now. A Victoria Road resident reported losing access to their drive during the work. This shouldn't happen. If you face such difficulty, please call 01488 73393. If all else fails, please let me know and I'll report it to our Highways team.

Unrelated to the fact I live there, The Avenue residents now have the luxury of two choice for fast internet – Gigaclear and Mortimer Community Broadband- the latter being a mobile based alternative, via the provider "Zen". The mobile scheme is reportedly like one they operate in Sulhampstead and Ufton Nervet. Whilst I have a view on which I would choose, my role here is just to try to explain the options (where they exist) and address any problems that the council should know about. Meanwhile in Burghfield, I understand City Fibre is installing Fibre-To-The-Premises.

Fairground Security Cameras

The parish council continues to progress a planning application, and supporting papers, to permit the install of some CCTV cameras on the fairground, like those in use at Burghfield Rec. primarily to deter

against damage to council equipment. In line with Mortimer's 'dark village' preference, no floodlights are used for their operation.

Planning Application Relating to Homes Behind Tower Gardens

The parish council objected to a recent planning application by the developer (TA Fisher) relating to "reserved matters" for Phase 2B of the 110 new homes proposed by the 2017 Neighbourhood Plan. Reserved Matters refers to items excluded from the original outline planning application either because they will be determined later or have not yet been developed sufficiently. The parish council's [objection](#) raised concerns on the perceived appearance, a claimed (lack of) safety and future maintenance of a 5m high retaining wall. The parish council went on to suggest that the proposed wall contravened a Neighbourhood Development Plan policy SDB1 that stated that such new housing development should "Incorporate areas of useable, accessible open space, utilising the natural topography to create a 'soft' edge to the residential development with attractive views into and from the surrounding countryside." The application was referred by Cllr Bridgman, the then ward member, to the district council's Eastern Area Planning committee - because the West Berks Council officer had recommended approval, whilst the parish council objected. The committee's deliberations, which included a site visit, conclude with the application being [refused](#). Meanwhile TA Fisher has submitted a separate application for reserved matters relating to phase 3, the final phase of built. This is under consideration and was due to be discussed by the parish council on [May 30](#).



Mortimer Café Fume Extractor

I was asked by residents to investigate an application for a relocated/revised kitchen fume extractor at the new café opposite Co-Op. I see that Environmental Health has stated that whilst they in principal support a proposal for a 'full height' discharge of kitchen fumes to prevent odour nuisance, owing to the premises being in a mainly residential setting, they seek further information to establish whether the proposals have a detrimental impact on the amenity of the neighbours. The application was considered at the parish council's Planning committee meeting on [May 30](#). I will look into this one further.



Nick Carter

West Berks District Council Member for Burghfield and Mortimer

Tel: 07447 557557

Email: nick.carter2@westberks.gov.uk

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