

## District Councillors report – July 2023



### Overgrown Hedges

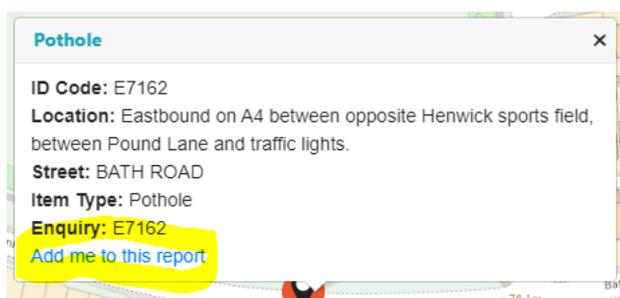
After dealing with reports of overflowing general and dog waste bins in May, June brought concerns over overgrown hedges in the ward. Nick visited some parts to see them first-hand and, in one case, obtained tenant details from a landowner. He also discussed the reporting process/response times with the council's Highways team, both to document it and to understand why some incidents reported by a resident had apparently not been acknowledged. We think that most of the cases are now logged and under investigation. When an overgrown hedge is reported online to West Berks Council, assuming it is a valid/clear cut/not a duplicate, the landowner is generally asked to cut back the hedge. If they don't, the council arranges the work and charges the cost to the landowner/tenant. Sometimes residents/parish councillors help by asking hedge owners directly to take steps, to reduce West Berks Council's need to get involved/charge anybody. We cover the problem reporting process below.

### Online Problem Reporting

In October 2022, West Berkshire Council introduced this new [online problem reporting system](#) to allow residents (and parish councils) to report problems relating to Highways (potholes, dirty road signs, unemptied pavement bins and non-working street lights) and

Countryside (unemptied bins in parks and footpaths). You can access the system [HERE](#) from a PC or mobile device.

You select the problem category from a list and mark the incident location on a map. You can (and ideally should) upload photos for pothole cases but should not try to measure their depth. You'll receive an email acknowledgement, giving an indicative response time. The incident is then reviewed and assigned a priority. A non-working pelican crossing, or a serious pothole for example, should be dealt with within a few hours of reporting, whilst a less serious pothole may take 28 days. You'll receive email updates as the incident progresses. If it is deemed a duplicate of a problem reported by others or dealt with already, you will be informed. You can nominate other people to receive notifications of the incident's progress.



We don't currently support the use of third-party apps. to raise problems, nor phoned in incidents, other than for out of hours emergencies.

Further streamlining of the systems and improvements to user interface are expected by the Autumn.

Meanwhile if you experience problems using the service, or an unusually poor response time, please let us know – we have already supported a couple of residents who have used the system to report both hedges and a non-working pelican crossing and who have helpfully shared their experiences with us.

## Food Waste

If food waste is placed in black general waste bins, instead of the supplied food caddy, it enters land fill and emits methane that is harmful to the environment. This is why the government mandated unity authorities such as West Berkshire to collect and process food waste.

Since introduction of food caddies (or shared stores), under 50% of residents use them. Whilst this represents an increase compared to the previous food waste arrangement, clearly it is still a low take up.

The waste team fixed "put food waste in the caddy" stickers to the black general waste bins, to try to encourage take up of food recycling. Other council's experiences suggest this to be effective. Whilst we think (and have told the waste team) that the stickers' wording was not the best, its appearing to suggest residents had committed a misdemeanour, we support the rationale behind the action.

We are keen to hear your views on how best to increase the level of food waste recycling in Burghfield, Mortimer, Beech Hill and Wokefield. Is it, perhaps, communication of the environmental benefit; making it easier to get food bags; or reducing the frequency of black wheelie bin collection from 2 to 3 weeks that might help best? Please do let us know your or your group's view.

Meanwhile if you are a green waste subscriber, please use *only* your food caddy for food waste because it is important to maintain the segregation of food and garden waste.

## Recycling News

The Government is investigating possible enhancements to waste collection, in three areas: [Extended Producer Responsibility](#), in which producers would contribute to the cost of collecting their packaging waste, [Deposit Return Scheme](#), a cash incentive system, that adds a refundable deposit to drinks bottles and cans and [consistent collections](#). Of these, the first two look set to be introduced in 2024 and 2025 respectively, whilst the third is delayed partly because some councils object to the suggestion of free garden waste collection. We understand that the current 5 levels of roadside recycling separation that exist today here (garden, food, plastic/cans, bottles and paper/card) will suffice if/when additional items are collected at the roadside.

## Meeting Us

How would you like to contact us to raise issues/share your views? Would you come to a “surgery” on a Saturday morning at a local library, would you visit us in a pub one evening, or should we (as our Theale colleague does) be in a branded T shirt? Or do you prefer to call/WhatsApp or email? Please let us know.

## Members Bids

We invite parish councils, and community groups, to put forward suitable projects for funding under our Members Bid scheme. This Dragons Den style scheme offers a matched funding of up to £15,000, each financial year. Whilst we prefer to support projects that benefit wide sections of the community, we also like proposals to be clearly costed and ones that can be, if approved, delivered no later than April 2024. We will consider supporting multiple lower cost projects – for example 3 costing up to £10,000 each of which we provided half the funding. Thanks to those who have submitted proposals already. If you have an idea, please get your pitches to us in writing as soon as possible and no later than 15 September. If you are a community group, with an idea, please seek your parish council’s support, but ultimately please do not miss the boat if you have a proposal.

## Windmill Court, Mortimer

Last year’s petition, created by Nick at residents’ request, with support from a council colleague, and signed by nearly 1100 people, sought to protect Windmill residents from eviction unless and until suitable new accommodation exists. Since then, parish councillors met Sovereign Housing Association, who in turn has produced a revised proposal.

Under the new proposal, the main building would be replaced by 24 new affordable homes, of which 13 would be for social rent and 11 for shared ownership. Stafford House would remain.

Of the 13 social rent homes, 6 would be one-bed maisonettes aimed at over 55s and offered to current/former residents. If those people do not take them up, the maisonettes

would be offered to over 55s from Mortimer or with a clear local connection. Any remaining unfilled places would be offered to those on the West Berkshire social housing register. When one such maisonettes comes up for re-let, we understand it to be offered on the same basis as the original let. Sovereign believe that the quantity of six matches long-term predicted demand based on research.

We understand that, whilst there is a practical upheaval, those current residents who wish to return to the new premises once completed, can do so. We've asked Sovereign to confirm whether it will pay those residents' moving out/back and new carpet costs. At the time of writing, we understand there are six current residents who have yet to be found suitable alternative accommodation to live in whilst the site is redeveloped.

Sovereign hope to find those residents alternative accommodation by the start of 2024. They hope to submit a planning application this month. They estimate that demolition/rebuild would complete by autumn 2024 with practical completion by Spring 2025.

We think that the new proposal represents a clear improvement compared to the original plan, in better serving both the needs of the original residents and others in the village. We should make clear though that although the new premises will be built to modern standards it will differ from what existed, through the absence of the popular communal room and it no longer being over 55-specific premises. It does however seem clear that the current building could not practically be brought up to current standards and would ultimately otherwise be closed. We will keep you posted when we get an answer on the moving/carpet costs and any news of planning application submission and progress.

## Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan

Some months ago, Nick chased West Berks Council for feedback on the proposed update to the Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan. This update, relating to land set aside in 2017 for a new infant school and doctors' surgery, proposed that the area be re-assigned for school sports and play facilities, a dental practice and parking, with the remainder kept reserved for a possible (but seemingly unlikely) new doctors' surgery. Since becoming district councillor, Nick has been promised feedback from council staff and is expecting this imminently. On a related note we should clarify some points raised in the recent Mortimer parish council newsletter in relation to the Neighbourhood Plan:

- A Neighbourhood Plan cannot control (limit) whether a town or village needs to take a new house allocation – this is managed by a [Local Plan Review](#). If a Local Plan Review dictates that a town or village need to take an allocation, whilst a Neighbourhood Plan cannot stop it, it can let the community choose where needed homes are built, their types and design. It can also, to an extent, specify what supporting facilities are needed to support such houses. For the avoidance of doubt the [next Local Plan](#), intended to be valid until 2039, does not make any demands for Mortimer or Burghfield Common to take new housing.
- A town/village will only have one approved Neighbourhood Plan at any given time. In Mortimer's case, the current Neighbourhood Plan was the one approved in 2017. . When that Plan is update relating to school/dentist/doctors' is approved, that update will become the Plan version. When the wider update to the Plan, that seeks to

reflect new government policies and community needs, is approved, estimated by Autumn 2024, that will become the Plan version.

- The terms Neighbourhood Development Plan and Neighbourhood Plan are equivalent – both are valid although the trend is to use the latter. “Development” in town planning terms, means “the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any building or other land”. Development need not include house building.

## Neighbourhood Action Group

Officers in the Highways team informed us that members of the Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG), a police led crime-focussed problem solving group, had approached them asking to support additional parking restrictions (yellow lines):

1. outside St Mary’s junior school, because of a perceived danger to motorists as they pass parked cars during school drop off/pick up.
2. opposite Mortimer Lane, because of a perceived danger to road users turning left (eastwards) onto the lower Street.
3. on the Grazeley Road verge to the east of the roundabout at the bottom of The Street, that is used by rail users, because the proposed station car park is reportedly not going ahead.

These proposal seem not to address where cars currently parked in those locations would park, if restrictions were introduced. It seems also to overlook the fact that parked cars provided a form of traffic calming – we quite often hear reports of speeding along the St Mary’s school stretch. Motorists who obey the Highway Code and look both directions before exiting a junction are unlikely to have an accident at Mortimer Lane and those who do not look will probably just get a “wake-up call” if someone is coming up the hill. We welcome your views on this.

## Mortimer Zebra Crossing

Nick was approached by two concerned residents, that they had been the victims of a near miss on the zebra crossing opposite St John’s church. The incidents were said to be in morning daylight busy hours. They had obeyed the Highway Code and waited until no car was passing before alighting on the crossing, after which a subsequent vehicle did not stop. They fear risk of injury of themselves or others and suggest that the crossing be converted to/replaced by a button-controlled Pelican crossing. It appears that, unlike the current arrangement, a Pelican crossing would not require street lighting (and thereby satisfy Mortimer’s “dark village” status) and be more suited to blind/partially sighted pedestrians. We ask that Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council consider and advise us their position on this request so we can report back to those who raised it.

## **Mortimer Fairground Security**

The planning application has been submitted and Nick has provided technical advice on the Data Protection and usage specification. Meanwhile we understand that the system on the Burghfield Rec continues to be helpful in deterring/following up on incidents.

## **Beech Hill Parish Plan**

The council's planning team recently sent us, as new councillors, the Beech Hill Parish Plan to review. Vic has reviewed and Nick plans to by 7 July.

## **Reading Gospel Hall Trust – Planning Appeal**

The appeal against refusal of planning permission for a new church hall and burial ground with associated parking at the junction of Hollybush Land and Shortheath Lane, Burghfield Common ( RG7 3JS) has been turned down, If you'd like details of the application and grounds for refusal please get in touch,

## **Foot/Cycle/Bridleway Between Mortimer and Burghfield Common**

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council, has submitted a planning application for its proposed combined foot/cycle/bridleway between Mortimer and Burghfield Common. The application details are [HERE](#) which details the proposed route and construction. Assuming planning permission is granted, we suggest that Mortimer and Burghfield parish councils get together sooner rather than later to establish the source(s) of funding for construction and ongoing maintenance, and perhaps confirm the likely usage levels as part of the business planning. We'd also suggest the separate public feedback about the use of uncontrolled versus Pelican crossings be considered in implementing the proposal.

## **Vicky Pool, Nick Carter & Geoff Mayes**

West Berks District Council Members for Burghfield and Mortimer

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