

CLlr Nick's Newsletter – Sept 2023



Bins Revisited

There have been more reports of unemptied/overflowing bins, notably one in Bunces Lane Burghfield, at the entrance to Wokefield Common. It's clear that residents had already reported it via the report-a-problem web site [HERE](#). I chased our Countryside team on 22 August, who arranged a same day emptying. The council's Countryside team apologise for these repeated incidents and don't expect residents to repeatedly act as 'bin monitors', reporting when they are over full. The problem is not unique to Burghfield & Mortimer – [THIS](#) Newbury-based Facebook group features the issue prominently. The amount of dog waste has almost doubled within a year. The waste contractor has recently added an extra member of staff to try to deal with the demand across the district's 580 dog bins. Recruitment and staff turnover has been difficult since January and it takes a while for new staff to locate the bins using the council's mobile mapping system.

Thanks go to a resident who both made running repairs to the Bunces Lane bin lid and extinguished a fire caused by a disposable barbecue placed on a bin at Burghfield Rec. Whilst the council tries to improve service, please continue to report unemptied bins that you notice via the web site [HERE](#) - phoning in only applies to emergencies. You can also reduce the demand on our operatives, and ultimately the cost of the service, by taking dog waste home and putting it in your black bin.

Poor Drainage

A Burghfield Common resident raised concerns at claimed flooding said to be caused by blocked drains in multiple locations, including Clayhill Road. I and fellow councillors Vicky and Geoff are following this up with the Highways team.

Members Bids

The deadline approaches for submission of proposals from parish councils and community groups, for projects to be considered under the Members Bid scheme. The scheme offers a matched funding of £5,000 per ward member for suitable projects. This means that, for example, 3 projects each costing £10,000, or one costing £30,000 could in principle be funded. So far there's been an interesting application from Beech Hill and an indicative proposal from Burghfield Common. I'll suggest one to Mortimer parish council, for their consideration.

Groups should please get in touch with any ideas as soon as possible – the application form and guidance note, which was sent to the various parish councils, is available on request.

Food Waste

Further to the item on Food Waste in the last newsletter [here](#), a Mortimer parish councillor raised his concern that the “don't put food waste in here” stickers recently applied to residents' black bins, were made of plastic, which he felt flew in the face of the council's desire to reduce plastic usage. I raised this with the officers who had issued the stickers (without councillors' involvement). They responded that plastic was chosen for this campaign, to ensure the labels were durable/weather-resistant, to reliably convey the message. They take the point though and will try to use paper or compostable materials in future for similar uses, whilst ensuring an effective and cost effective communication.

The sticker campaign itself came about after similar campaigns run by other councils had succeeded in raising the level of residential food waste collection. I'm pleased to report that the West Berks campaign resulted in a 18% increase in food collection, representing about 10 extra tonnes of food waste per week being directed to our composting facility at Padworth.

- The council is keen to hear your ideas on how best to further improve food recycling take up. Would, for example, communicating its environmental benefit; making food bags more easily available or free; or reducing the frequency of black wheelie bin collection help perhaps? Please get in touch with any suggestions.
- If you are a green waste subscriber, please put your food waste in the food caddy only – not the green bin - because it is important to separate food from garden waste.

Garden Waste

The council administration's manifesto commits to phase out the garden waste charge as soon as funding allows, starting with those in most financial need. Meanwhile subscribers will have noticed a rise in the collection price. This rise, set by the previous administration soon before the new subscription period started, will be offset by a rebate in next year's charges. The council will confirm the rebate level later this year. Separately, the government is consulting on whether garden waste collection should be made free of charge across all local authorities. We'll keep you posted on this – it seems some council's think it unfair on residents that have no garden so I'm not convinced it will happen.

It's now possible to book same day appointments, about 90 mins ahead, at the Padworth (and Newbury) Waste & Recycling Centres. The district councillors are discussing further booking enhancements with the council's waste team.

Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan

Following public consultation, the land set aside in 2017 for a new infant school and doctors' surgery, is intended to be re-assigned for school sports and play facilities, a dental practice and parking for each, with the remainder kept reserved for a possible (but seemingly unlikely) doctors' surgery. I've supported the Steering Group by discussing how this plan can best be ratified with council officers and the landowner. As a result, I expect the landowner (TA Fisher) to submit a planning application for the proposal. They indicate that they'll do this once the separate matter of planning consent for Phase '2c' of the 110-home housebuilding programme behind the Horse & Groom has been resolved, the original application having been rejected by the parish council and ultimately by West Berks Council too, some months back.

Catapults

There have been a number of reports from residents about damage and injury caused by youths with catapults in Mortimer. I raised my concerns with the police in June and again recently after several residents told me of their first hand experiences. The local Seargeant reports that: the police will (if not already) allocate all reports to an officer to investigate; Mortimer is on his team's patrol plan during daytime and evening, when not deployed to other matters across the area; they carried out a leaflet drop and engaged with a group of youths during week of 4 Sept. He advises that CCTV/doorbell cam footage can be used to assist, as one piece of evidence, for a possible prosecution. He added that the Police follow all reasonable lines of enquiry and once completed, assess whether the available evidence meets the threshold to progress a prosecution. There is more information about this at www.CPS.gov.uk

Birch Lane, Mortimer

Residents approached Geoff and I for support relating to various concerns including one of claimed encroachment on the highway. The Planning Enforcement team conducted a site visit some weeks ago. I've chased for and been promised an update after a meeting set between the relevant officers on 14 September and will update the residents thereafter.

'Four Houses Corner' Redevelopment

A planning application has been submitted to re-develop the Four Houses Corner permanent Gypsy/Traveller/Romany site on Padworth Road, to meet the council's statutory duty/obligations. The costs were reviewed in 2022 and the budget of £3.5M approved by the previous administration. The main elements within that budget and their approximate relative amounts are:

- Construction 75%
- Security (until completion) 12%
- Consultants 6%

- Abnormals/contingency 8%

The cost and the completion date are subject to contractors' responses to a proposed tender, to be let if the application is approved. The council estimates that if approved, the site would be occupied in about two years' time.

Foot/Cycle/Bridleway Between Mortimer and Burghfield Common

Further to [THIS](#) planning application for a foot/cycle/bridleway between Mortimer and Burghfield Common, the parish councils appointed project management company has provided an estimate construction cost of about £950K. This pretty much matches an informal estimate given to the council by a Quantity Surveyor who came to a council meeting some months ago, but far exceeds the [initial estimate](#). I expect that the near-term focus will be on looking for sources of funding that would allow the project to be delivered. It seems to me to need cross-community support/effort to reach the level needed.

Speed Management in Mortimer



I took part in a recent deployment of Mortimer parish council's speed camera, outside the Alfred Palmer Memorial Field. I quite "liked" that spot because speeding motorists are warned beforehand by a speed indicator device outside the Turners Arms. Despite this in the hour or so we were active, I'd estimate about 70% of drivers exceeded the 30mph limit. The camera is part of the [Community Speedwatch scheme](#) and is staffed by parish councillors and other volunteers. The camera records details of speeding motorists (only) who are then contacted by the Police.

EV charging

I've tabled a range of candidates for roadside charging, for use by residents with no off-street parking, to our EV team for consideration. Most of the sites put forward came from public responses to my all for interest – thanks if you were one of those who came forward.

Issue Tracker

Here are some of the issues raised by residents that I have dealt with/am dealing with:

Topic	Raised	Action	Status
Replace zebra crossing outside St John's school Mortimer, with a button-controlled crossing, owing to claimed near misses	7 July	Sought parish council support on 16 July meeting.	Proposal turned down; residents informed. Closed.
Various concerns by Birch Lane residents.	27 June	Heard concerns over alleged encroachment/Planning/other issues in Birch Lane and residents understanding of what the council has/is doing about it.	Chased officers. Update expected w/e 22 Sept.
Grass verge Dury Lane/Stanmore Gardens	4 Sept	Showed and discussed with Highways.	Council Highways team asked Gigaclear to address.
Windmill Court	Oct' 22	Understanding residents' requirement and engaging with housing association	Communicating plan and summarising the changes versus what existed before.
Food waste recycling stickers		See report	
Resident concern over planning application.	June '23	Discussed with resident and case officer.	Discussing with case officer

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