

CLlr Nick's Newsletter – Edition 4, Nov 2023



New Projects (Members' Bids)

Vicky, Geoff and I considered the various proposals put to us by parish councils and residents for the “Members Bid” scheme. As a result, we’re putting these proposals to the district council’s review panel to hopefully approve on 28 November:

- Beech Hill: *equipment for a major playground refurbishment comprising extending its area and adding an all-weather surface.*
- Burghfield Common: *“Skate Park 2.0” – seeking to replace the 18-year-old park and add features that encourage all ages and abilities to engage in outdoor wheeled sport, and to meet latest Health & Safety and RoSPA (accident prevention) requirements.*
- Mortimer: *Reinstate a pavement on Victoria Road outside Mortimer Café/David Cliff estate agents to remove the danger posed to pedestrians by the current parking in that area.*

“On The (Electric) Buses”



Figure 1: (L-R) Nick, Robert, Owen, Denise

Cllrs Owen Jeffrey (ward member for Thatcham Colthrop & Crookham), Denise Gaines (member for Hungerford & Kintbury and portfolio lead for highways, housing and sustainable travel) and I visited Reading Buses on 18 Oct to meet CEO Robert Williams. He gave us an excellent understanding of their operation, a tour of the site, taking in the operations room and workshop, and a spin in a trial electric double decker. Whilst its interior looks truly high tech. and top quality, Robert pointed out the reduced seating capacity and explained that this coupled with the lower range, limits the usability of today’s electric buses designs in West Berkshire. As a result, the newest fleet is either gas or diesel powered (more [HERE](#)), depending on route. It was clear though that the company is keen to meet the zero emission goal if possible, through future use of electric buses as parts of the fleet comes up for renewal.



Figure 2: wireless/USB charging & phone holder

I was captivated by Robert’s description of how the team decide requirements for replacement buses, his citing examples of more attractive and car like interiors in newer models.

Along with comfier seats with more stylish colour coordination, the latest designs include USB and wireless charging too and a natty phone holder that allows the phone to be used in landscape orientation.

Co-incidentally a No 2 bus, which I’d spotted coming off the worse against a telegraph pole, days earlier, was in for repair. My Tweet about it was on show in the control room!

Cllr Gaines, who meets Reading buses regularly agreed to explore with them the possibility of extending the No 2 bus route to Mortimer St Mary’s and the rail station. Robert’s team considers the viability, or not of any such propose route

extension(s) and lets us know. Separately I was pleased to learn of the new Basingstoke to Heathrow service which is expected to see high demand.



Figure 3:top floor of EV bus



Figure 4:tables in latest design buses



Figure 5: CEO Robert Williams drives the EV bus



Figure 6:the No 2 bus in for repair after its altercation with a pole.

Doctors' Surgeries Performance

I'm on the Health Scrutiny committee that meets senior healthcare officers and others to hear and question news about various healthcare matters. I was able to raise some local residents' concerns there on appointment wait times and obtaining blood tests. I also asked why doctor appointments are not all shown on the online system and who are the claimed staff who support the patient's healthcare "journey" separately from the GPs. The answers were:

GP services for residents of Burghfield and Mortimer villages are in the main covered by two GP practices. Burghfield Health Centre, which is run as a branch site of Russell Street Surgery that has its main site in Reading, and Mortimer Surgery that has a practice boundary covering both Burghfield and Mortimer villages. A third practice, Theale Medical Centre, has a practice boundary that partially covers Burghfield. Mortimer and Theale are members of West Reading Villages Primary Care Network (PCN). Russell Street is a member of New Reading PCN.

Performance levels

Performance figures for May 2023 are shown below. These show practices to be below the Integrated Care Board average on appointment waiting time measures (although work to improve data capture is still ongoing). "Berkshire West" refers to Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham.

Practice	% patients seen in 2 weeks	% patients seen on the day
Mortimer Surgery	75.4	39.1
Russell Street Surgery	63.8	35.3
Theale Medical Centre	78.7	36
<i>Berkshire West average</i>	<i>81.2</i>	<i>44.1</i>
<i>Bucks, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) average</i>	<i>83.3</i>	<i>45.3</i>
<i>National Average</i>	<i>82.5</i>	<i>43.9</i>

The PCNs have each recently completed a Capacity and Access Improvement Plan which as well as working to improve patient feedback mechanisms in conjunction with their Patient Participation Groups, sets out how practices will review demand and adjust capacity accordingly and promote and support patients to access services online or be directed to community pharmacies where appropriate. The ICB will be working with practices to support them to implement their improvement plans over the coming year. All three practices already have digital telephony in place which supports practices to better match staffing to call levels and to offer patients call back options. Both PCNs have built capacity through the recruitment of new staff under the Additional Roles Reimbursement (ARRS) scheme, spending their funding allocation in full and recruiting 44.18 whole-time equivalent staff including clinical pharmacists, paramedics, physiotherapists, care co-ordinators, social prescribers and nursing associates. These skilled staff are actively delivering front-line services to our residents on a daily basis. We have taken on board feedback that our residents aren't always aware of these roles, or how they contribute to the provision of general practice services, and as a result Healthwatch are currently supporting us with a targeted piece of work regarding

access to general practice and awareness of the different roles available locally. PCN Capacity and Access plans will feed into a wider Access Improvement Plan to be developed in response to the national *Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care*. This will be considered by the ICB Board in the Autumn and will set out how the ICB will work with practices to maximise capacity, address variation and support patients to use a range of routes for accessing care.

Blood tests

Currently, blood tests (phlebotomy services) are delivered by a range of providers in Berkshire West including in some GP surgeries, at West Berkshire Community Hospital, at the Royal Berkshire Hospital site and at Bracknell Healthspace. We are aware that there is variation in waiting times for blood tests at these different locations ranging from 2 weeks in most of the settings, to up to 6 weeks at WBCH specifically (due to a number of causes including staff vacancies at this location). Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust provide the service at WBCH and they are taking active steps to reduce the waiting times at this location, including increasing staffing levels and sending text messages to remind residents of their appointments (currently c.11% of patients do not attend for their pre-booked appointments which adds pressure to the busy service). Furthermore, the ICB is undertaking a focused review of these phlebotomy services across Berkshire West during Q3 and Q4 of the 23/24 financial year to identify any opportunities to further improve these services on behalf of our residents, within the funding levels available.

Recycling News



Figure 7: food waste recyclables

The government has announced plans ([HERE](#)) to streamline recycling collections across the country to ensure that all residents have the same level of service and move forward with a deposit return scheme for drink containers. West Berkshire is aligned with these recycling proposals which cover the recyclable waste types of paper and card, plastic, glass, metal, food waste, and garden waste. Separately on 1 October new rules came in to reduce plastic waste (details [HERE](#))

Four Houses Corner

I was briefed, along with Vicky and Geoff, by council officers on the plans to rebuild the static traveller site located at the junctions of Padworth, Burghfield and Island Farm Road. The work to get to this stage has gone on for several years, with a major re-costing done in 2022, after which the previous administration signed off a budget of £3.5M for the work. The affected parish councils (Mortimer, Burghfield and Sulhampstead & Ufton Nervet) were given advance notice of the associated planning application. I published details and responded to some questions on it (see also Newsletter 3 [HERE](#)). Vicky reports having discussed it with residents at her monthly surgery too (Burghfield Common library, first Saturdays 10-11.30am).

Although those convicted of PC Harper's manslaughter didn't live at the site, several residents, including his mother, pleaded for a different site to be chosen. Whilst government guidance suggests permanent gypsy/traveller/Romany sites should be closer to Mortimer/Burghfield than the current site is, the consideration seems to be the legal right of residents to return to the current site. The council is also behind target in its legal obligation to supply such accommodation in the district. The Eastern Area Planning committee considered the matter on 5 Oct and following strong calls from parish councils for a promised 'consultation', and concerns over drainage management, the committee decided to defer its decision. The cost of the delay, comprising the staffing the site until it is refurbished, is significant.

Gigaclear Fibre To The Premises – Making a Mess in Mortimer



Figure 8: Stanmore Gardens/Drury Lane, Mortimer

As Gigaclear completes its network extensions in Mortimer and Burghfield Common, and newly connected consumer report delight at the service, the quality of reinstatement of land is poor. The relevant council officer told me that Gigaclear is currently failing about 8 of 10 times when its reinstatement work is checked. The officer visited Mortimer on 9 October to view and agree remedial action with them. Meanwhile if you live in a property where you feel the quality of remedial work outside is poor, please log it on line, in the usual way [HERE](#). If you don't get a convincing response within 10 days please feel free to forward me your incident email. Please note that the council's powers to insist that Gigaclear make good unmade roads is negligible.

Windmill Court - Mortimer



Last year's petition ([HERE](#)) called on the council not to allow restrictions that prevent the site to be demolished to be lifted unless/until suitable alternative accommodation has been identified. As mentioned in Issue 2 [HERE](#), plans for the site's redevelopment have been submitted to West Berks Council [HERE](#).

Significant discussions went on between the housing association and the parish council to get the association to rethink the original plan. Whilst the new proposal aligns with calls made in the 2017 Neighbourhood Plan for more affordable accommodation for local people, there are some concerns to note: 1) the plan's shift towards families/under 55s, removes the over-55 specific nature of the site. Over 55s who live there in future would be in the minority and may just not find the place suitable 2) there is no community room, which was said to be an important element by current/former residents 3) existing residents who elect to sit out the redevelopment and move back when its finished, expect the housing association to pay their moving out/back costs (the latter including carpets). When the association asks the council Executive to agree to lift the restrictions to allow redevelopment to go ahead, as a petition organiser I expect to be asked to comment on whether the plan should be approved. If you signed the petition, I'd be keen to hear your views on the latest plans – you can also make your views known directly on the Planning web site if you prefer [HERE](#). Details on how to do so anonymously please follow the steps described [HERE](#).

Overgrown Hedges

Although I encourage you to report overgrown hedges directly to the council online [HERE](#), if you know the land owner you might first be able to have a friendly word. I've raised the need to cut hedges alongside Mortimer's The Street a) between Kiln Lane and Mortimer Hall and b) east of the St Mary's church byway, with their tenants. The first has hopefully been done already and I'm told the second will be done by December.

Garth Club, Mortimer



Figure 9: Garth Club, St John's Road, Mortimer

As reported [HERE](#), the Royal British Legion (London branch) recently announced its intent to relinquish its role as trustee of the Garth Club, that was used in earnest for diverse events from 1915 to 2011. The RBL called for anyone interested in taking it over to come forward by 30 November. I've become deeply involved in this long-running matter since joining the parish council in 2015. I felt/said, and later formal and informal legal advice

confirmed, that the RBL must explore whether new trustees existed before it could pursue attempts to sell the premises. In the absence of anyone else doing so, I conducted my own door-to-door and online survey and held an open meeting to establish whether possible new trustees exist. They do. Perhaps surprisingly too, it showed there is widespread support for restoring it where it is, rather than try to rebuild it elsewhere (as the RBL are obliged to attempt before trying to sell it). If and only if no new trustees come forward can, the RBL could sell it. In that event there would I think be a debate to be had on whether the community actually gets the proceeds and whether the RBL can claim its costs. But it may not come to this. At a Zoom call I ran on 2 Nov to introduce potentially interested parties to each other, we left feeling confident that at least one group will express interest in taking the Club on and with help from likeminded folks who met on the call.

Meeting You/"Surgeries"

I'm in **Baobab** each **first Saturday** from **10-11.30**, starting **December**, if you want to raise any issue face to face. Meanwhile fellow ward member Vicky Poole is in **Burghfield library** at the same times/dates monthly. Long serving councillor Mollie Lock is at the Mortimer Methodist church "Warm Space" on Friday afternoons, helping residents with council issues.



Figure 10: Meet Councillor Nick

To receive future newsletters directly, just let me know (you can unsubscribe at any time). Back issues are here [Edition 1](#) June 2023, [Edition 2](#) July 2023 and [Edition 3](#) September 2023

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Issue Tracker

Some issues raised by residents and their status:

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.
Alleged encroachment/planning infringements/other	27 June	Heard concerns over alleged encroachment/Planning/other issues and residents understanding of what the council has/is doing about it.	Residents were updated on 6 October. Follow up meeting within council on 10 Nov.
Grass verge Dury Lane/Stammore Gardens	4 Sept	Discussed with Highways who added to action list to follow up with Gigaclear who are currently failing 80% of the time when the council samples their reinstatement	Officer met Gigaclear w/c 9 Oct to review multiple issues.
Windmill Court	Oct' 22	Understanding residents' requirement and engaging with housing association. Communicating plan and summarising the changes versus what existed before.	Invited public comment on plan
Caravan on the highway	1 Oct	Responded to residents' concerns over a large caravan on a residential street.	Discussed with Highways and Housing officers, the various aspects of this. Caravan moved on 16 Oct. I don't know exactly why but everyone seems happy.
Food waste recycling stickers		See last report	closed
Resident concern over planning application.	June '23	Discussed with resident & case/other officers to understand environmental issues and link to planning.	Concerns covered at Eastern Area Planning. Resident aware on how to deal with recurrence of issues.

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are commonly raised council related questions and how to (hopefully) get them answered.

How Do I Report Highways and Countryside Problems?

The [online problem reporting system](#) allows 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, ideally forwarding the relevant incident email(s).

Late News

The word on the street is that Mortimer's planning application for security cameras for Mortimer fairground will be approved by 15 November, allowing the equipment, part funded by last year's members bid to be purchased.

Tune Of The Times

There was something quite surreal about pausing just after 2pm today to hear The Beatles final single [Now And Then](#), with its crystal clear John Lennon vocal and Paul McCartney guitar solo.