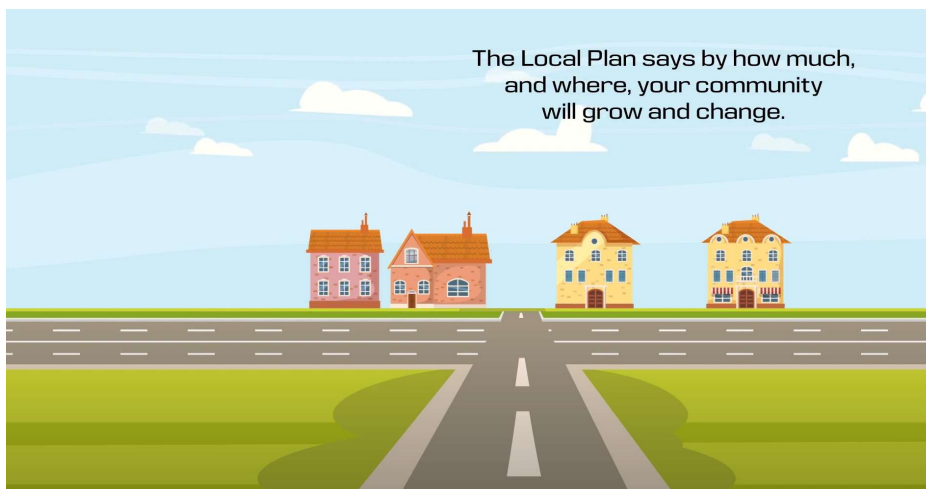


## Cllr Nick Newsletter (Issue 9) - Sept 2024



### Local Plan Review

Local Plans aim to define how communities will grow and change, and where any needed new housing and facilities should be built - and not built. In early 2023, the previous Conservative-led council submitted a proposed new Local Plan for West Berkshire, for review by a Planning Inspector. His role in the process is (only) to review a Plan's legal compliance, and decide if it can be approved, following any modifications that he thinks are needed. The Plan was intended, if approved, to run until 2039. In 2023, the LibDem councillors campaigned to, if elected, change and if need be restart the Plan, because it felt it was flawed in various aspects. In late 2023, the (by then elected) council was instructed by the then

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (Michael Gove) office to support the originally submitted Plan's passage through legal review. The appointed Inspector duly held hearings on it from 8 May and 26 June this year. These were attended by council staff, landowners/house builders, parish councils, AWE representatives and on occasion members of the public. A notable outcome from the hearings was the Inspector's asking the council, in [THIS](#) letter, to find additional sites to build [at](#) least 850 more homes within the Plan period (by 2039). The council's response is [HERE](#) accompanied by [THIS](#) statement from council leader Jeff Brooks' on the process generally. The duly revised Plan has no requirement for new houses in Burghfield & Mortimer etc. It's perhaps worth mentioning that whilst the Plan now proposes about 2500 new homes to be built on land near Thatcham (significantly more than suggested when the Plan was submitted, but of no real concern to us here perhaps), the inspector suggests that this higher number brings a "reasonable prospect that all the proposed physical, social and green infrastructure would be provided". From my limited research and prior experience in this area, I am not convinced they will be. As we have seen in Mortimer, setting land aside for facilities (in our case a new school and doctors') is one thing – there being adequate funding/buy-in to deliver them is quite another. But the question now seems to be whether/when the Plan will be approved. A separate but fairly imminent question will be, potentially confusingly, if/how the district will need to deal with the new Labour Government's proposal to significantly increase house building across the country, including here. It's proposal, currently under review by councils, seeks to increase future house building in West Berkshire. *If* the review outcome confirms this need to raise housing targets here – be it by the initial figure given or a different one - the location and numbers of houses would be defined and managed by a future Local Plan – one that followed on, rather than tries to revise, the one I've discussed above.

### Garth Club, Mortimer



*Garth Club, St John's Road, Mortimer*

The Royal British Legion recently wrote to the Mortimer Hobby Hall & Repair Café group, confirming it as their preferred future trustee to take on the land and building. The Legion set out its desired next steps, which included the group's confirming availability of funding to refurbish and run the building. I'm not convinced these requirements are entirely fair. The Hobby Hall & Repair Café group held a public meeting where they made clear that they saw this as a community project, with a broad appeal. They made clear their desire for people to come forward to help make it a success and outlined the areas in which they need most help in a survey [HERE](#). The meeting was well attended, with an open and generally productive exchange of views. I've pointed them to the council's grant pot (see page 5) and they are pitching to the parish council for money on 12 September. I expect to join a progress review between the group and the RBL in late September.

## Mini Recycling Banks



*A mini recycling bank at East Garston.*

I'm meeting one of the council's waste management team later this month to put our heads together on possible sites within the ward for mini recycling bins, that would allow residents to drop off items not currently collected via doorstep recycling. Notable items include plastic food trays and Tetra drink containers. As mentioned in previous newsletters, if you/your group has any ideas of where one could go, please get in touch.

## Battery Recycling



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You can now dispose of most commonly used household batteries at the kerbside. The council will collect batteries such as D, C, AA, AAA, AAAA, A23 (12-volt), PP3 (9-volt), CR2032, other 3v lithium cells, LR44 (1.5-volt) batteries and the like. Just place them in a clear bag, such as a freezer or sandwich bag, and leave on the top of your **black** wheelie bin on the relevant collection day. Unfortunately, the new service is not available to residents that have a communal bin store.

Please don't put batteries inside your wheelie bin and note that these batteries cannot be collected this way: car/moped batteries, lithium-ion (Li) power tool batteries and vapes. All the latter can be taken to the waste and recycling centres at Padworth (or Newtown Road, Newbury).

## Have Your Say On Bus Services



The council is keen to hear your views on recent bus route and ticketing changes – its recently restoring a Sunday Lime 2/2A service. The information will be used to create a Bus Service Improvement Plan. Given that Reading Buses are able to run loss-making services and following the recent government proposal to take bus services back into council control [HERE](#), I encourage you to take this chance to table **all** your requirements for bus services that you/your



family would use, if they existed. Examples requirements might include asking for new services, perhaps at commuter/school times:

- between Mortimer Common and the rail station via St Marys Junior School;
- between Beech Hill and Mortimer/Reading via Mortimer station;
- between Burghfield Common and Mortimer station via Mortimer centre.

The survey is open until 29 September [HERE](#). To request a paper copy, please call 01635 519394 or email [transport@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:transport@westberks.gov.uk). I don't promise we'll be able to meet your requirements, but, if we don't ask, we won't get. I will separately work with portfolio lead for the area, the tireless Stuart Gourlay, to seek a review by Reading Buses, in line with the council's commitment to environmentally friendly and active travel.

### Electronic Prescription Transfer - Mortimer



Further to my updates in previous newsletters, including [issue 7 page 5](#), and [issue 8 page 4](#), Mortimer Surgery is moving over to a new clinical system called EMIS later this month. A main benefit of this is that this is the system used widely across the country, and allows the option of electronic prescription transfer between Surgery and Pharmacy of choice. This should mean that, once the capability is activated, when a patient requests a prescription to be fulfilled at The Little Village Pharmacy, the relevant details will be transferred electronically between the two entities. As a result, the Little Village Pharmacy employee who currently walks twice daily to/from the surgery to deliver/collect paper prescriptions will no longer need to do so. I'd like to think this means the transfer will be quicker and more efficient. It will certainly allow that member of staff more time to do his other work, even if, he may get less fresh air while he is at it.

### Hawkesworth Road, Burghfield



The council recently completed improvements to the carriageway narrowing section of Hawkesworth Road. Council staff believe the work has met its aim of removing obstruction of the street lighting, and bringing the section up to modern standards. I'm sorry, on behalf of the team, for the lack of advanced notice of some parts of this work, caused in part by staff holiday. The team has taken the matter up with its contractor to avoid a repeat.

## Planning Appeal – Housing Near The Hollies, Burghfield Common

Following a High Court decision, the appeal against refusal of Planning permission for 32 homes, including affordable housing, parking and landscaping, to the rear of The Hollies, is being decided by a new/different Planning Inspector, Mr Cridland. More details [HERE](#)..

The appeal hearing will start at **10:00 on 17 September** at the council offices in Market Street, Newbury, RG14 5LD. It is scheduled for 6 days. If you wish to attend, please register your name, email address and status (e.g. interested party, local resident) with the council's Appeals team prior to the opening day. If you wish to speak at the inquiry please make yourself known to the Inspector on the day. The appeal documents are on the council's website [HERE](#) by selecting "**Search Using the application reference**" and entering reference **22/00244/FULEXT** into the search box. You can also view them at the council's Market Street office from 8.30 to 17.00 Monday-Thursday and 8.30 to 16.00 on Fridays. The decision will be published on both the council's website, and the Planning Inspectorate's website [HERE](#)

## Up To £100K Available For Community Projects



The district council recently announced a new round of grants to help community groups deliver local infrastructure projects. It previously awarded over £1 million in such grants ranging from £10k to £100k, for renovation of village halls and scout huts, and improvements to sports facilities and playgrounds.

It's now allocating a further £500k and invites bids from community groups, other infrastructure providers/partners, town and parish councils wishing to deliver infrastructure for residents and/or businesses in the area.

The funding comes from West Berkshire Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), money that the council charge housebuilders to support local infrastructure. The Council has decided to allocate some of it to community projects and looks forward to receiving applications for projects that will use of this funding.

To apply please complete the form [HERE](#) before 5pm on **16 September**.

## “Active Travel”, Parking & Road Safety



*Mike found space in Mortimer station car park in Dr Who's 'Planet Of The Spiders'*

A question came up recently on what plans exist(ed) to expand Mortimer station car park. Former parish councillor Neil Kiley led the charge to get Planning consent for a new car park to be located on the southern ('Basingstoke') side of the platform. He succeeded. Unfortunately, in 2023 at a meeting between the parish council, landowner (Englefield) and rail operator (GWR), GWR confirmed they had no foreseeable funding to build the car park. (It had been in their plan in the distant past). On that basis the parish council, concluded to do no more work/spend no more money on it for at least 2 years. Separately, but related, I understand the Mortimer schools Federation is exploring creating a parking/drop off for St Mary's school, to the east of

Church Lanen. I suggested they consider a shared community station/school car park, but they feel this would complicate the project further – I don't doubt it would – so aren't pursuing this. Separately, but also related, council Highways team staff have indicated to me that there seems no pressing need to add more parking restrictions outside St Mary's school and that this should best/only be considered as part of a 'joined-up' approach to parking – i.e. first work out where cars that park in that area at the moment would go before trying to remove them. There is also the fact that parked cars slow traffic speed. Finally, in 2022 the parish council strategy group, which I chaired, looked at using community funds to restore a mini bus to the station – more [HERE](#).

## Residents'/Other Issues

Some residents' issues I'm dealing with at present include: concerns raised at my "drop in" by residents affected by a planning application for new houses to the rear of Pristine Pups on King Street, Mortimer (fellow Cllr Geoff has also been supporting them); reported disruption to householders by internet providers' groundworks; concern at possible impact of planned groundworks at Tower Farm estate, Mortimer on trees owned by residents of St John's Road/St John's Close; and a request/suggestion on how to better deal with rubbish discarded at bus stops. I've also met with Wokefield Parish Council and discussed a Planning application that bothers them, with the council case officer. I hope the result will be acceptable. Separately I know Cllr Poole is supporting the continued concerns on the speed limit on Goring Lane. If you have a concern on a council related matter, be it one that affects you personally, or a general matter, please get in touch or come to my "drop in(s)".

## More Information/Getting In Touch

If you have a council issue, please get in touch. You can also meet me at my monthly "drop-in" at The Baobab, Mortimer from **10-11am** [each first Saturday](#) resuming on Sat Oct 5. Fellow Cllr [Vicky Poole](#) runs one at Burghfield library at similar times. Vicky, Geoff and I represent the whole ward of Burghfield, Mortimer, Wokefield and Beech Hill. Do follow my Social Media, below, where I share news as soon as I know it.



Meet Nick at The  
Baobab (10-11am) each  
first Saturday

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## Postlude (the, unrelated, musical ending)

News just in, local musician Andy Lavery has just released the charming Slow Summer, described in the notes as a jazzy little number – do take a listen to it [HERE](#). Meanwhile my son James was seen performing “from the breathtaking Reading countryside” [HERE](#). The set includes Bad Memories, as premiered on Mortimer Fairground at our late Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, and subsequently Platinum-certified in 7 countries (doubly so in Poland) and having just passed 500,000,000 streams. I’ve had cause to dipped my toes back into the water at Radio Caroline – the station that continued, as a point of principle, when the others threw in the towel. It marks 37 years since I first did it from 20 miles off the Kent coast. I’m on Saturdays from 8-10am – details [HERE](#) – from 21 September. It’s great to keep finding local loyal listeners to the station – not least Gavin & Rachel at The Baobab.

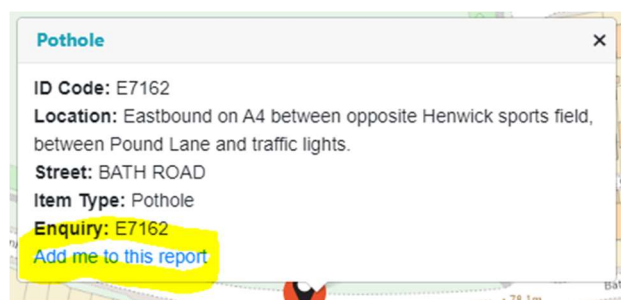
## Frequently Asked Questions

### Reporting 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.



The council doesn't currently support the use of third-party apps. to raise problems, nor phoned-in incidents, other than for out of hours emergencies. If you experience problems with the service, or an unusually poor response time, please let us know, forwarding the relevant incident email(s).

## Overgrown Hedges

When the council receives a "report-a-problem" enquiry (per the above process) it starts an (up to) three step process:

- 1: It writes to the landowner asking for the vegetation (or other nuisance/obstruction) to be removed within 14 days. It also informs the initial enquiry of its action and closes the incident. The council aims to check the issue at the end of the grace period.
- 2: If no action was taken, the council writes again, citing the Highways Act, asking for action to be taken within 14 days.
- 3: If action is still not taken the Council will take action to remove the nuisance and look to recover costs from the landowner.

Setting expectations: The council receives a *lot* of customer enquiries on various "highway" issues, and there are a number of vacancies within the team at present, so it must prioritise its workload. This can mean that follow up time of these nuisance and obstruction incidents is behind the target intervals shown above. I'm exploring with some of our parish councils – Burghfield Parish Council will consider, hopefully others too - the idea of their taking on the steps above, given their local knowledge and contacts, assuming they can be given access to the relevant incident management system.