

Local Matters

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England proposals for West Berkshire Council were published on (16 January), setting out the new warding arrangements for the May 2019 elections (subject to approval in Parliament).

Locally, for Mortimer and Burghfield, the Commission has accepted the representations that your four local Conservative councillors (Graham Bridgman, West Berkshire Member for Mortimer; Keith Chopping, Member for Sulhamstead; Carol Jackson Doerge, Member for Burghfield and Ian Morrin, Member for Burghfield) made, supporting the West Berkshire Council response - agreeing the Commission's proposal for a new three member Burghfield & Mortimer Ward, but (importantly) to exclude the southern part of Sulhamstead that the Commission originally proposed as part of the new ward.

The new ward will be comprised of the parishes of Beech Hill, Burghfield, Stratfield Mortimer and Wokefield and will have an anticipated variance from the predicted average number of electors per councillor in 2023 (3,028) of -1%.

The other local changes are that the Commission has accepted the criticism (which we joined in with) of its proposed vast new Aldermaston, Bradfield and Bucklebury ward and instead there will be three new one member wards: Aldermaston (Aldermaston, Beenham, Brimpton, Padworth and Wasing parishes; +4% variance from the predicted average number of electors per councillor in 2023), Bradfield (Bradfield, Englefield, Sulhamstead and Ufton Nervet; +2%), and Bucklebury (Bucklebury, Midgham, Stanford Dingley and Woolhampton; -1%).

For the report, maps, summary, etc, visit <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/current-reviews/south-east/berkshire/west-berkshire>.

NOTICE OF CONFIRMATION OF AN ORDER

HIGHWAYS ACT 1980

West Berkshire District Council

(Public Footpaths Burghfield 2 (part) & Burghfield 22)

Public Path Extinguishment Order 2017

On 25th October 2017, West Berkshire Council confirmed the above order, made under section 118 of the Highways Act 1980.

It extinguishes the full width of the two lengths of public footpath in the parish of Burghfield

Public Footpath Burghfield 2 (part): The public footpath running from Grid Reference 468676 170339, south-west of Searle's Farm Cottages RG30 3XB, in a generally northerly direction for approximately 167 metres to Grid Reference 468694 170504 at Searle's Farm

Public Footpath Burghfield 22: The public footpath running from Grid Reference 469297 170349 on the western edge of Cottage Lane in a north-westerly direction for approximately 506 metres, predominantly across open water, to point Grid Reference 468932 170696

The Order and map may be seen at WBC offices below during normal office hours. Please call the Public Rights of Way Team on 01635 503251 or email stuart.higgins@westberks.gov.uk for further information/copies.

Budget

WBC have established a Budget Review Task Group to review, scrutiny and monitor the quarterly financial outturns of service units, informing the executive of perceived effectiveness of mitigation measures which have been put in place by services to reduce any overspend in the year.

Theale Parish Council unable to take decision on new school

A project to build a new school in Theale was halted earlier last month following continuing delays by Theale Parish Council (TPC) in making any decision on whether it would relinquish its lease on vital land without which the school cannot go ahead. Just one day ahead of the decision deadline, TPC called a meeting to discuss the possibility of holding a Parish Meeting in order to call a Parish Poll.

TPC voted to hold Parish Meeting, however, no date was agreed for the meeting and although requested by a TPC Councillor, there was no agreement that they would adhere to outcomes of the Poll, which is not legally binding.

WBC are frustrated and saddened by Theale Parish Council's inability to take a decision, as are those within the village who are concerned that their children will not be able to be educated locally in the future. However, due process must be followed and once the result of the Poll is known, the council will contact TPC to establish when they will make a formal decision on whether to relinquish the lease or not.

"The education needs of all children in Theale can no longer be met by the current provision. As it stands, Theale School will drop down to admission of 30 for Sept 19 intake unless TPC provide a written agreement by end of February, which would mean TPC actually taking a vote to do so. This has clear implications for residents wanting to place their children at their local school."

Rising costs force savings proposals for High Needs Education

Rising costs have forced the West Berkshire Schools Forum to reluctantly agree a set of proposals to make savings in order to address an over spend for High Needs Education.

Local Education Authorities receive funding for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) via a formula allocation from the Department for Education (DfE) the Dedicated Schools' Grant – High Needs Block.

This formula has been revised recently to West Berkshire's disadvantage, mainly due to the district's low deprivation and other proxy factors.

The Heads' Funding Group has therefore, reviewed all SEND expenditure in detail and reluctantly put forward a set of proposals to make savings in the 2018/19 High Needs Block budget. These will not bring it into balance next year, so there will still be an agreed deficit profile. **However, for 2018/19 and 2019/20 the funding is protected at the current level plus 0.5%.** The West Berkshire Schools Forum intend to carry out a further root and branch review, in partnership with schools and other stakeholders, to determine what can be done differently to bring expenditure down without diminishing provision.

Setting a balanced budget for the High needs Block (HNB) continues to be a challenge as the funding for this has only seen minimal increases for several years.

Since implementation of SEND reform under the Children and Families Act 2014, **West Berkshire has seen a 14% increase in the number of children with a Statement or EHC Plan. This is mainly as a result of the eligible age range extending to 25.**

Up until 2016/17 West Berkshire was setting a balanced high needs budget which included a healthy contingency. However, in 2015/2016, the budget was spent and the contingency had to be used in order to provide the level of service needed. With the number of DfE funded places not increasing, despite rising numbers (**West Berkshire has 736 pupils in specialist provision, but are only funded for 675**, a shortfall of 71 unfunded places) balancing this dwindling budget has become an even greater challenge.

Highways

Resurfacing of the A34 northbound from Donnington to Beedon Monday 12 to Wednesday 21 February (eight nights)

Full overnight closure of the A339 northbound carriageway from the Vodafone roundabout to the M4, and of the exit from the A34 northbound to the M4.

Two clearly signed diversions will be in place:

Thursday 22 February to Tuesday 6 March (nine nights)

Full overnight closure of the A34 northbound carriageway from the A4 Speen junction to Chieveley, and a lane closure on the A339 northbound carriageway. Traffic will be diverted from Speen,

Community

A Member Development Session on **Building Communities Together** is scheduled for

Monday 5th March at 2:00pm and Monday 12th March at 6:30pm

- What's changed?
- Why isn't the Council providing that service anymore?
- Who's going to help with the real problems in our community?

Love Your Library

WBC are on a mission to increase library usage. It would be good to build up a head of steam with the local media that libraries are open and are safe and trusted places full of wonderful things which are free for residents of all ages.

Therefore they have begun a press campaign which will take place over the next few weeks to promote all aspects of the library service.

West Berkshire council win £1.5m for Sterling Cable site infrastructure

West Berkshire Council has been awarded £1.5 million to be used towards infrastructure for the Sterling Cables development in Newbury.

The cash came from the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund and will help to fund key roads projects as part of the development such as the Kings Road Link Road, and the widening of Boundary Road to accommodate the two way flow of traffic.

Some will also be used to cover the high cost of decontaminating the site, which is recognised by the Environment Agency as one of the most contaminated sites in the south east.

Pay less for your electricity and gas bills.

The West Berkshire Energy Switch Winter Auction, bought to you by West Berkshire Council, is now open for registration. Since the first switch in May 2016, switchers have saved over £93,000. Residents registering and switching in the October 2017 auction saved an average of £220.52 on their annual energy bills.

According to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, at the end of September 2017, 64% of electricity customers and 62% of gas customers were on variable energy tariffs. These customers are paying an average of £113 more for their electricity and £110 more for their gas, annually than those on fixed tariffs.

Free to join, the West Berkshire Energy Switch is a scheme which gives residents the chance to see if they can make savings on their fuel bills by registering to take part. **A one day reverse auction will be held on Tuesday 13 February**, where suppliers compete with their best offers, the winning supplier/s then send registrants their personalised offer for consideration.

Registration is open to all but you must register by midnight on Monday 12 February to be sure of taking part.

Research & Development Funding Workshop for local businesses - 2 March.

Research & Development Funding Workshop at West Berkshire Council, Market Street, Newbury RG14 5LD on Friday 2 March 2018 from 9:15am to 12:30pm.

Newbury based [United Konsultants](#) has teamed up with West Berkshire Council to offer a FREE workshop for local businesses.

Grants of up to 70% are available for commercial research and development, separately from Research & Development (R&D) tax credits or other tax allowances. Nevertheless many proposals fail because applicants don't understand what is needed for the application.

This workshop will equip you to present your proposal in the best light.

So, if you, or someone you know has a technically innovative idea

(Whether it's a new type of children's shoe or cutting edge cryptography for banks) the government could fund the technical development of your idea.

Grants are allocated in open competitions and assessed to rigorous and transparent standards.

To book your place, please email Janet Duffield, Lead for Economic Development at janet.duffield@westberks.gov.uk or call (01635) 519475.