

Parish Council Report for January 2020

Cllr Graham Bridgman (West Berkshire Council, Burghfield and Mortimer Ward)

West Berkshire Council

Council Meetings

Meetings on 9 January

We had two pretty full meetings on the 9th, first with the special meeting to recognise our new honorary aldermen and alderwomen, including Mollie Lock and Keith Chopping, followed by a full Council meeting with a number of papers, a petition, and motions debated.

As a result of the illness of one of our members, I am now back on the Eastern Area Planning Committee, and also now on the District Planning Committee, in each case as a substitute.

Meeting on 3 March

The March council meeting will focus entirely on setting the 2020/21 budget and can be anticipated to be a long affair.

Minerals and Waste Local Plan

The proposed Minerals and Waste Local Plan was due to be discussed at the main meeting on 9 January but one site (at Wasing) was withdrawn at the eleventh hour, so the plan has been put back.

Plastics and waste petition

As anticipated in last month's report a petition on plastics recycling was debated in the main council meeting. The report by officers recognised the thrust of the desire for more plastics recycling but commented that:

- WBC is currently one of the better performing local authorities in England for recycling;
- (as detailed in last month's report) it would cost WBC up to £1m for the necessary modifications at Padworth;
- (also as detailed last month) collecting the materials is one thing, finding a viable and environmentally sustainable destination for it quite another.

The report recommended, and council agreed, that there were no changes to the existing collection service for plastic waste until there is further clarity from HMG on emerging waste collection requirements, funding options and the development of established markets for such additional materials.

In the meantime, WBC will actively explore options for the separate collection of food waste at the kerbside. This will achieve considerably more environmental benefits and value for money for council tax payers.

Additionally, it is intended to improve on communications and education initiatives, so that residents are better informed on what WBC is doing to achieve greater recycling and how they can continue to support this.

Pavement parking motion

A motion recognising concerns about vehicle parking on pavements was passed, seeking (amongst other things) to look to parish councils to champion an awareness campaign for considerate parking in their parishes.

How the motion can be implemented and supported will be one of the discussion topics at the District Parish Conference in March (more below).

Community Conversations - Environment

As part of the consultation on the draft Environment Strategy I referred to last month, parishes should all have had the opportunity to put forward a representative to the conversations being held at Shaw House on either Monday 3 February at 18:00 or Tuesday 4 February at 09:30.

Additionally WBC will be holding brief drop-in sessions on Monday 10 and Tuesday 11 February across selected district libraries to raise awareness of the strategy with residents who may not be as highly engaged in environment matters.

Officers are also considering how best to hear the views of the district's young people and will be working closely with colleagues to engage with those pupils in education.

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)

The HELAA is the latest stage of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review to 2036.

All local planning authorities are required by national planning policy and guidance to maintain an up-to-date picture of the amount of land that is available for new development, including land for housing and economic development – this is the HELAA.

The HELAA will help in the preparation of the review of the Local Plan by identifying potential sites for new homes, employment and other land uses. It shows which sites are being promoted for development at a particular time (and will be updated regularly). The HELAA will replace the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment which identified potential sites for new homes as part of the current Local Plan (2006-26). The HELAA indicates a capacity to provide between 20,261 and 20,317 dwellings from 2019 to 2036 in the district – *“When considered against identified need, this means there is a no shortfall up to 2036.”*

The latest update includes an interactive map showing the various sites that have been put forward (whether under the current local plan or in anticipation of the new one) and how WBC views them.

The sites identified include Grazeley but nb *“It should be noted that as of January 2020, the notified safety zones (in this case called the Detailed Emergency Planning Zones) for AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield are being reviewed. The outcome of the review is expected in May 2020, and could impact on the suitability of some sites.”*

More information, including the HELAA itself and a link to the interactive map, can be found at info.westberks.gov.uk/helaa. We also have the upcoming parish workshop to discuss the local sites in detail on Monday 10 February (10:00 in the Calcot Centre) – I hope to see some of you there.

District Parish Conference

A reminder that the next conference is on 12 March. Come along to hear amongst other things me deliver remarks as Deputy Leader (Lynne Doherty has a date clash) and Cllr Tim Ansell (Chairman, Burghfield PC) speak to the assembled masses about not declaring a climate emergency.

Local Matters

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

The Trust has been assessed as Good by the Care Quality Commission, so congratulations to all the staff.

Thames Valley Police

Amongst other things, the latest bulletin from Matthew Barker, the Deputy Police & Crime Commissioner, includes an article about TVP bidding for 280 more Tasers from a new £10m ring-fenced fund set up by the Home Office (280 is the maximum available for Thames Valley under the scheme).

According to Matthew, TVP has seen a significant increase in the number of Taser trained officers in recent years and the planned uplift is a proportionate response to maintain the fundamental principle

of unarmed policing whilst ensuring that officers have the equipment they need to protect themselves and the public.

Parishes

Setting a precept and declarations of interest/dispensations

What follows is the joint view of Sarah Clarke, the WBC Monitoring Officer, and me.

Whilst not wishing to teach any grandparents to suck eggs, a reminder that most parish councillors involved in a budget meeting that seeks to agree a precept will have a declarable pecuniary interest (DPI) in the agenda item (usually because they are a council tax payer within the parish) in respect of which they will need a formal dispensation if they are to take part in the meeting and vote (indeed, if they are to even stay in the room for the debate) – there needs to be a written application to the Clerk for a dispensation by each affected parish councillor and formal agreement by the council whether to grant a block dispensation (eg because the PC believes that the number of members otherwise prohibited from taking part in the meeting would impede the transaction of the business) – see s.33(1) Localism Act 2011 (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/section/33/enacted).

Stratfield Mortimer

St John's School

Congratulations to the staff and pupils on being assessed again as a Good School by Ofsted.

Library

I chaired the Executive meeting recently at which the proposal to lease the library to the parish council was on the agenda. Rather frustratingly I had to leave the room for the item because I have an Other Registerable Interest as a parish councillor, but my fellow members agreed the proposal without me!

The Horse & Groom

On 7 January I posted this to Facebook: *"This morning I had the pleasure of being introduced by Craig to Emma and Dan who are taking over the pub, and are working towards an opening date of 17 January.*

They will no doubt post all their news shortly (I said I'd post something to let everyone know the pub will re-open shortly), but for the moment welcome to both of them!"

Within 18 minutes the post had 29 likes and this increased through the day. Everyone I have spoken to has commented about the good start Emma and Dan have made and I look forward to the refurbishment later in the year.

NDP - Land for Health Facility

Following conversations with Cllr Morsley (and a reminder from her!), I have chased up the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group about the proposals in the NDP and await further discussions.

Wokefield

WBC web site

Following up on the frustrations expressed by Cllr Thompson regarding the failings of the WBC web site's search engine I have been promised that the suppliers are looking to make improvements (for most search engines putting a search phrase in quotations gives an exact return – not with the WBC one where it makes no difference at all!).

Graham Bridgman

4 February 2020