

Parish Council Report for February 2020

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

West Berkshire Council

Council Meetings

The next full Council meeting will be on 3 March and is the annual budget meeting – more below.

Executive

At the meeting of the Executive on 13 February, we considered a number of financial papers, including the draft Revenue Budget (more below), the Investment and Borrowing Strategy, the Medium Term Financial Strategy, and the Capital Strategy, all of which will be considered by Council on 3 March (and, as is the convention, were passed for that discussion without any comment other than technical questions). We also received a Q3 Capital Financial Performance Report, a Q3 Revenue Financial Performance Report and a mid-year Treasury Management Report.

We also reviewed the Council Strategy Delivery Plan and its performance measures and targets, and a new Playing Pitch Strategy (more below).

All of the papers are available at <http://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=117&Mid=5123&Ver=4>.

Budget

The draft WBC revenue budget includes a council tax increase of 1.99% and a 2% rise in the Adult Social Care (ASC) precept (together raising around £4m in additional revenue), enabling the council to deliver the necessary spending with no cuts to services.

On the capital side, key investments include;

- Over £7.5m for new schools and expansion to existing schools (including Highwood Copse, Theale Primary and The Willink);
- £1.2m in large scale tree planting;
- Over £10m in improving roads and junctions around the district.

Council Strategy

The Council Strategy Delivery Plan was also adopted, setting out the key performance measures that the Executive will monitor against the priorities outlined in the Council Strategy 2019-23. The Strategy Delivery Plan is linked to the budget, with the latter papers identifying how these priorities will be financially supported either through our capital programme or revenue budget.

Playing Pitch Strategy

WBC has been working with Sport England and local sporting bodies to develop a document to guide the investment, development and improvement of playing pitches over the next ten years. The West Berkshire Playing Pitch Strategy covers football, rugby, cricket and hockey.

The council recognises that the local youth, ladies and adult teams require some facility improvements as they progress in their leagues. There is also an awareness that there is a need for more artificial playing surfaces, and better access to some pitches, particularly at schools. This strategy will help us support local high profile clubs with the most appropriate facilities.

Corporate Peer Challenge Review

I referred to the Peer Challenge Review in the November report and the feedback report has now been published - <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=48512&p=0>.

To recap, once in a while (the last one was in 2014), there is large-scale review of the council in its entirety, organised through the Local Government Association (LGA). In November, eight officers and councillors (from councils from Southend to Hull plus the LGA) assessed what WBC was doing, whether we are being ambitious enough for our residents, and whether we have the resources to deliver that ambition.

The highlights from the feedback report are:

- partners value the council for good quality delivery across a range of council services and for its track record in securing external funding for the district;
- WBC has sound financial management with a good track record of delivering savings and increasing income, a £131m capital programme and a £100m investment fund, together with a £1m transformation fund to help deliver change in the organisation;
- whilst there is much to celebrate, the council is too modest - more should be done to shout about what is delivered to enable people to enjoy what has been achieved;
- West Berkshire has very good transport links with the rest of the country and a strong and diverse local economy. Partners are keen for the council to help build on its 'place leadership' role by further raising the ambition, establishing a clarity of purpose and sharpening the focus of a clear direction for the district into the future;
- a changed Executive and managerial leadership team are having a positive impact;
- there should be an additional focus on hearing the voice of residents increasingly consistently, more directly and on a wider range of issues;
- the new Council Strategy should be embedded in all aspects of the council's business.

Veolia Respect Campaign

WBC has been raising the profile of our Veolia waste teams in the *#ExpectRespect* campaign through social media. This recognises that waste collection teams work in all-weather conditions and should be valued by our residents and treated with respect by highlighting some of the risks associated with their work.

District Parish Conference

A reminder that the next conference is on 12 March at 17:30 (refreshments, etc) for 18:30 with a main theme of the environment- there will be a host of stands with an environmental theme.

Environment Strategy Consultation concluded

The consultation on the draft strategy has closed and the responses will now be reviewed to inform the Environment Strategy going forward for adoption at the Executive meeting on 30 April. There has been considered feedback from our communities and this will be shared in further detail in due course. The next step (and arguably the more significant) will be the formulation of the delivery plan.

Thank you to all parishes and individuals who took part in the recent community conversations and drop-in sessions across the district libraries. Officers have learned a lot through the process and this is certainly a conversation we know our residents want us to keep open.

Planning Appeal dismissed

I was going to report on the *'Land at Junction with Clayhill Road and Sulhamstead Road, Burghfield'* planning appeal under Local Matters, but it is clear from conversations with planning officers that this has been a key decision for the whole of WBC in the desire to keep the council as a policy-led planning authority.

At a time when we are in the process of considering the HEELA (more below), the planning inspector's dismissal of an appeal against WBC's refusal of outline planning permission for the erection of 40 dwellings (24 market and 16 affordable) on land outside the Burghfield settlement boundary is to be

welcomed. The inspector upheld WBC's argument that its planning policies were up to date and that it had in excess of a five year housing land supply.

Twitter

I don't tweet, but for those who do here are a few of the WBC Twitter feeds:

<https://twitter.com/WestBerkshire> - the main Twitter feed, with information on news and consultations;

<https://twitter.com/WBerksLibraries> - news and information from the West Berkshire Libraries;

<https://twitter.com/WBerksRoads> - information about roadworks in West Berkshire;

https://twitter.com/wellbeing_wb - information about West Berkshire Wellbeing;

<https://twitter.com/WBCEcoDev> - news and information from the WBC Economic Development team;

<https://twitter.com/BCTWestBerks> - information about the Building Communities Together tea;

<https://twitter.com/WestBerksPH> - information about Public Health and Wellbeing in West Berkshire;

<https://twitter.com/WbHeritage> - news and developments from the West Berkshire Heritage service.

Local Matters

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)

I wrote at length about the HELAA last month, since when we have had the parish engagement event at Calcot. It was good to see the parishes/neighbourhood development plan groups in the Ward so well represented and I hope that everyone came away with a better understanding than before.

As Sinéad O Donoghue, the Planning Policy Team Leader, has said in a recent email, keep an eye on the 'Planning Policy News' page on the WBC website - <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/planningpolicy/news> - where updates will be published.

Wokingham Local Plan Consultation

Along with a number of West Berkshire residents, I attended the public exhibition/engagement event organised by Wokingham BC on Wednesday (26 February). For those who weren't able to attend (and there are other such events planned elsewhere within Wokingham) there is a lot of detail, including regarding Grazeley (from the Wokingham perspective), infrastructure, flooding, etc, at <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/planning-policy-information/draft-local-plan-consultation>.

Hidden Carers

I wrote back in June last year about this campaign and am pleased to see that the funding has been extended for a further six months. To remind you what this is all about, here is what I wrote last time:

Background

Across Berkshire, learning from safeguarding adult reviews has demonstrated a consistent theme - some of the adults who died were being looked after by a single family member, with the carer often being a male child of the deceased aged around 40-50. These carers had often lived with their parent or sibling from childhood and were socially isolated - the families were not well known to agencies and did not ask for help, so they had a history of coping on their own. During the course of the review, these family members did not define themselves as being a 'carer,' but rather 'a son or daughter.'

Investigations revealed that unregistered carers often have their own unrecognised needs and little or no knowledge of how to ask for and access help - this could leave their parent with increasing needs and deteriorating health.

Campaign

Following these findings, the East Berkshire and Berkshire West CCGs (Clinical Commissioning Groups), together with Signal4Carers, are piloting a campaign around hidden carers. The aim of the campaign is to ensure that people who are carrying out caring responsibilities recognise themselves as carers and get the help available to them - they may not see themselves as being in need of services and many may feel that they are simply carrying out ordinary responsibilities as part of a family.

There are messages on the back of local buses and on their interior screens, with the strapline, 'I'm her son/daughter, not her carer'. These will show a Freephone number: 0800 1337851, with calls being answered by Signal4Carers and people signposted to the relevant organisation or service who can help.

Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust (RBFT) - development

Following the Secretary of State for Health's recent announcement that the Trust will be included in the new hospital building programme, they have now received confirmation that the Department of Health will be supporting development of the scheme, with £2.25m seed funding to develop schemes to the Strategic Outline Business Case stage. The award also confirms that RBFT is assured that additional funding to progress to the Outline Business Case, and then Final Business Case, stages will be available in due course.

Coronavirus

The following is information from the WBC Public Health team.

2019-nCov

Novel coronavirus (2019-nCov) is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world.

Symptoms

Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough. In some individuals, this may progress to severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. However, the current evidence is that most cases appear to be mild.

Similar to the seasonal Flu, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

Response

There have been no cases of coronavirus in West Berkshire at the time of writing. Planning is underway for any eventuality.

Nationally, Public Health England are leading on the health response. They are updating their website daily with the latest information, please go to Wuhan coronavirus information for the public or visit the NHS website.

In the meantime the importance of usual winter illness prevention is to be stressed:

- wash your hands often - with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available) - this is particularly important after taking public transport;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands;
- avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- if you feel unwell, stay at home;
- cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin - Catch it, Bin it, Kill it;
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home and work environment;

- if you are worried about your symptoms, call NHS 111 - do not go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment.

Key Links

Latest Information and advice - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>.

Guidance for British people travelling and living overseas - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>.

AWE

From AWE's Media/PR team: *"On 25 February, HMG announced the replacement warhead programme in Parliament, reaffirming its commitment to maintaining the United Kingdom's minimum credible independent nuclear deterrent, which exists to deter the most extreme threats to the UK and our NATO allies.*

Follow the link for the full statement: <https://www.awe.co.uk/2020/02/uk-warhead-replacement-programme/>."

Parishes

Burghfield

Local Listing of Heritage Assets

Manor House/Little Manor, Burghfield (RG30 3TG) has been added to the list.

Graham Bridgman

29 February 2020