



Parish Council Report for July 2020 Cllr Graham Bridgman (West Berkshire Council, Burghfield and Mortimer Ward)

West Berkshire Council

Webcasting of Council Meetings

All of our public meetings are broadcast live on YouTube and recorded so that they can be viewed later - see <https://www.youtube.com/c/westberkshire>.

Executive Meeting

The Executive met on 16 July via Zoom and covered a number of items:

Financial performance for 2019/20

West Berkshire Council has seen a strong financial performance for the 2019/20 financial year, including a net revenue budget underspend of £1.5m.

Papers discussed at Executive gave details of the outturn underspend, which has been delivered through a careful monitoring of the Council's financial position as well as a fall in demand for, and efficiencies in, Adult Social Care services. It represents just over 1% of the overall budget and, of course, will flow through to this year's budget.

The papers also contained details of some of the initial impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's finances, with a small impact on the revenue budget being reported as at the end of the last financial year. Unsurprisingly it is expected that Covid-19 will have a far greater effect on the budget for 2020/21.

Excluding the paused property investment portfolio, 70% of the Council's capital programme (including plans to invest in priority service areas including education, highways infrastructure and flood prevention works) was spent, with £14m of investment being carried over/re-profiled into the current financial year. This will allow the Council to continue to deliver key projects.

Recovery Strategy

West Berkshire Council has published its [Recovery Strategy](#), which outlines its priorities for the district's recovery from Covid-19.

The Strategy sets out the areas the Council will focus on to help the community recover as quickly as possible from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is structured around three core elements: health, education and the local economy, and gives details of how the council and its partners aim to improve the quality of life of all of those who live or work in the district. Further, in line with the council's commitment to enhanced community engagement, there is a strong emphasis on plans to inform, consult and involve local residents in the development and delivery of these local recovery plans.

The council has also published a Recovery Action Plan as an appendix to the Strategy, providing information about what has been done to date to support the local recovery in each of the three priority areas as well as further planned actions.



Environment Strategy

The Executive have approved the Council's [Environment Strategy 2020-2030](#) following a public consultation.

The Strategy outlines the steps the Council and its partners intend to take in order to reach the district's target of carbon neutrality by 2030, and its delivery has been accelerated as a result of the priorities outlined in the Council Strategy 2019-23.

As previously reported, in developing the strategy the Council held a series of public engagement events including the first ever Climate Conference in October 2019 at Newbury College, and a number of workshops where parish councils and public were invited to give their views. Drop in sessions were also held in district libraries.

The online public consultation received over 500 responses from town and parish councils, community groups and individuals across the district and all of these were considered during the drafting of the final strategy.

The strategy's vision is based on the five principles of mitigation, restoration, protection, partnership and integration. It contains a number of initiatives and projects that will contribute to the target of carbon neutrality by 2030; whether through infrastructure improvements, support for industry, investment in active lifestyle opportunities, or enhanced community engagement.

Among the proposed actions set out in the strategy are:

- The launch of a first of its kind Climate Bond to finance green infrastructure projects;
- A series of Solar PV projects, ultimately supplying a significant proportion of the District's electricity needs;
- Further investment in electric vehicle charging points;
- Natural carbon reduction measures;
- The establishment of wild flower verges;
- Support and incentives for new and existing green businesses.

West Berkshire Community Climate Bond

West Berkshire Council is the first in the country to launch a [Community Municipal Investment](#) offering residents and community groups a unique way to invest in West Berkshire, funding green projects to help the district become carbon neutral by 2030.

Investments start from as little as £5 and will earn a return of 1.2 percent over a five year term, with capital returned in instalments across the investment term.

Residents Survey Results

West Berkshire Council undertook a survey of residents in late May to understand how communities were feeling about the impact of Covid-19 on their health, finances, on the environment and on the wider community. Almost 3,300 residents from across the district responded and the council has already used the preliminary data collected to inform its Recovery Strategy, referred to above.

Questions ranged from the health and wellbeing, to the economic and social impact of Covid-19. The survey also asked respondents whether they had volunteered in their community as a result of the pandemic, as well as whether they intended to in the future.

Among the key findings were:

- Awareness of the Community Support Hub was high, at 72%;
- Almost all respondents who were able to work from home intend to continue to do so and even more in the future;
- Just under half (46.9%) of respondents expressed an intention to travel on foot more as a result of Covid-19;
- 28.7% of those surveyed felt that the Covid-19 pandemic would enable them to make a positive impact on the district's aspirations towards carbon neutrality;
- 70.8% said they have volunteered during the pandemic and 78.2% of these intend to continue doing so;

- 86.5% thought the council's response to Covid-19 was either excellent, good or fair as opposed to 4.7% who judged it to be poor (8.8% didn't answer);
- 31.9% reported a fall in household income;
- 63.7% indicated they intended to visit local high streets either the same as before, more or much more, when allowed to do so;
- 15.3% of respondents believe that someone in their household has been infected with Covid-19;
- 18% of respondents reported high or very high anxiety levels the days before they completed the survey.

This survey was the first of what will be a series of resident engagement exercises planned by the council as part of its Covid-19 recovery work.

As well as undertaking further surveys to track the ongoing impact of the current situation, the council intends to produce and implement a new Engagement Strategy aiming to involve the community in the development and delivery of recovery initiatives.

Education

Returning to school in September

All WBC schools are planning for a full opening for all pupils in September. There may be some staggered starts for year groups from 2 September, following an INSET day, but as things stand today all children will be in class from the following Monday. Primary schools have mainly chosen to use class bubbles, with many adopting a 'desks facing forward' approach and other measures such as staggering starts, lunches and breaks. Secondary schools are largely opting for year group bubbles and all schools will have extra hygiene measures and will apply limits on visitors.

Extra funding to provide laptops for disadvantaged students

West Berkshire's Virtual School had already purchased 30 laptops for looked after children using Pupil Premium funding and the DfE's money has allowed them to buy a further 34 laptops for this group. However, requests for laptops far exceeded the allocation.

West Berkshire Council has received funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to provide laptops for children and students with a social worker, and disadvantaged Year 10 students. This is part of a Government initiative announced in April called ['Get technology support for children and schools during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)'](#) that will help them with their studies during lockdown.



A particular request by the Hungerford Isolation Group, who made a strong case for support in their community, showed how strong the demand was for IT devices. In response, the Council has approved a further £20,000 from their Covid-19 Government grant to ensure that disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils whose needs were not covered by the DfE scheme can now be met.

Free summer school for disadvantaged pupils

Disadvantaged pupils in West Berkshire have access to a world-class online summer school this summer.

West Berkshire Council has teamed up with Brockhurst and Marlston House Schools in Hermitage to allow pupils to access their pioneering programme. The course is open to pupils in Year 2 (age 7) to Year 8 (age 14) and covers Years 3 to 8 in English, Maths, Science and Humanities with lessons available online and available from any device. There is also live support available each week for pupils who want to speak to a tutor.

Children eligible for free school meals can enrol for free on the [summer school website](#), and anyone not eligible is still able to access the programme at a cost of £50 per week.

Adult Social Care

Visiting care homes

I said last month that I hoped to be able to move re-establishing care home visiting forward and I am pleased to say that, having closed the WBC Care Homes to all but essential visitors in March, we are now taking steps to permit families to once again visit their loved ones safely and in accordance with current Government guidelines.

Visiting brings comfort both to those who are visited and to those visiting. Some Care Home residents are living with dementia and have a limited understanding of events, including the COVID-19 pandemic – they may experience distress and confusion, which can be modified by the presence of familiar faces. Visits can also have a positive effect on diet and nutrition, and is a fundamental part of the care of each resident.

We have published a [Visitor Protocol](#).

Covid response

Local outbreak control planning

As reported last month, local authorities have to develop Local Outbreak Control Plans (LOCP) to prevent and control local outbreaks of the Coronavirus and WBC has published its [LOCP](#), summarising how we will seek to protect our residents and communities by minimising further spread or recurrence of Covid-19 across West Berkshire.

The Local Outbreak Engagement Board has now held two meetings – one in private and one public (the intention is to intersperse public and private meetings) and the public meeting can be viewed via YouTube (see above).

Social Distancing

Whilst community transmission rates are comparatively low, as lockdown is eased and those in the shielded and vulnerable groups are able to leave their homes (if they so wish) it is as important as ever that social distancing is observed.

The Government is regularly updating its [advice](#).

Culture and Leisure

Summer Reading Challenge

West Berkshire Libraries are delighted to introduce this year's digital Summer Reading Challenge, **Silly Squad**; a celebration of funny books, happiness and laughter.



The Summer Reading Challenge, which launched in June runs into September, and is the biggest children's reading for pleasure programme in the UK. Last year over 700,000 children and their families took part. This year, while libraries across the country remain closed to the public in accordance with government guidelines, the Challenge has moved online and is launching earlier than usual.

You can take part [online](#) and unlock digital rewards, activities and video content as rewards for your reading – all for FREE.

Children can set their own reading goal (we recommend at least six books) and may read anything - from library to school books, including e-books and e-audio. A certificate is available to download for free when the Challenge has been completed.

Lido

Despite the Government announcing that outdoor pools could open from Saturday 11 July necessary repairs to the Newbury lido before it could reopen were delayed by Covid-19.

After a soggy winter, ground water levels needed to fall sufficiently to allow the pool to be emptied without risk to the structure but they didn't recede until June. Because of the Covid-19 lockdown, specialist contractors were not available to carry out the work until August. Given that the work would also take two to three weeks to complete and then a full ten days is required to fill the pool the Lido only contracted to remain open until the first weekend in September.

Guidance for swimming has been developed around social distancing, but natural bottlenecks will occur, for example, in changing rooms and at access points to the outdoor area.

The opportunity to open in 2020 was very limited and so after much deliberation, the council and Legacy Leisure have reluctantly agreed not to open the Lido this year but work to achieve maximum availability of the leisure centres as quickly and as safely possible and focus on the Lido being ready for the 2021 season.

Details of how [Legacy Leisure](#) will re-open the leisure centres and when new activity is available will be made available in due course and on their website.

Other WBC Matters

The West Berkshire Lottery celebrates one year since its first draw

With a global pandemic putting a stop to normality since March, charities have seen a significant increase in the number of volunteers coming forward to ensure the vulnerable and elderly are being looked after.

However, many good causes have also seen a decrease in funds to stay operational due to cancelled fundraising events or people donating less money.

To date, there are 118 local good causes signed up to the West Berkshire Lottery and over 1,000 players currently supporting the lottery each week.

So far, the lottery has paid out nearly £20,000 in winnings and has recently celebrated the third £2,000 winner!



Waste Services

Garden Waste Collection



Subscriptions for the 2020/21 garden waste service are now open for West Berkshire residents.

The 2020/21 garden waste service subscription period runs from 1 September 2020 to 27 August 2021. The subscription fees remain the same as last year with the service charge for the first bin costing £50.

A reminder email or letter is being sent out to all current subscribers inviting them to renew their existing subscription.

For more, visit www.westberks.gov.uk/gardenwaste.

Household Waste Recycling Centres

The booking system at the HWRCs seems to be proving popular amongst residents and the team at West Berkshire Council are currently seeking the views of visitors to the Newtown Road and Padworth as to whether to keep this arrangement permanently.

Rogue Trader sentenced to 66 weeks custody

Ruben William Reed, a Director of Warm Roof Group Ltd, Warm Systems Group Ltd and FDG Associates Ltd (at the relevant time of the offences with which he was charged) pleaded guilty to six offences under the Fraud

Act 2006 and Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations and was recently sentenced at Reading Crown Court to 66 weeks custody. He was also disqualified from being a director for a period of five years.

In addition, he has paid £44k+ to WBC, including £33k+ in compensation and £10k+ in costs.

The convictions followed an investigation conducted by [the Public Protection Partnership \(PPP\) Trading Standards Service](#) working with the PPP Joint Case Management Unit and West Berkshire Legal Services.

The investigation followed complaints from Berkshire residents who were cold called in their own homes. Mr Reed purported to offer professional property services at a competitive price, and persuaded the victims by offering additional services for free if they were to agree to building work, or by reducing the cost if they allowed him to use their property to advertise his company. However Mr Reed soon identified further 'remedial work' which was found by an expert to be of poor quality, with the victim significantly overcharged.

Local Matters

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust - a major modernisation of the entire estate

As a Governor I have now been involved in a couple of preliminary briefings regarding this exciting project.

In autumn 2019 the Department of Health & Social Care announced a new Health Infrastructure Plan providing funding for 40 new hospital building projects over the next 10 years.

RBFT has been chosen to receive seed funding to develop a masterplan and compile a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for the future development of a new hospital – this could be a completely new hospital or a combination of new build and refurbishment. All possibilities are to be considered including a new hospital on the Reading site and a new hospital on another site.

The SOC needs to be submitted to HMG later in 2020 – it won't seek to determine the outcome, but will rather analyse population data from ONS, the outcome of engagement with local communities, and feedback from staff and clinicians. The intention is to produce a *Long List* of realistic possible solutions.

The next steps will be: further engagement with key stakeholders including staff and Governors, members and MPs, patients and the public, as well as local partners including health and care partners, local authorities, local businesses and Reading University. It is also intended to produce a micro website – accessible from the main Trust website – where staff, patients and public can find information about the redevelopment project and where they can share their views.

I have suggested an all Members briefing/engagement (whether just WBC or Reading and Wokingham as well is to be decided) and we also need to advertise the public consultation.

Annual Canvass and Canvass Reform

The purpose of the canvass is to identify everyone who should be on the electoral register. This means identifying citizens and inviting those who should be registered but are currently not to join the register, as well as identifying electors who are no longer at a property and should therefore be removed from the register. A revised version of the electoral register must be published by 1 December each year, following the conclusion of the annual canvass. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments are looking to implement legislation that extends the deadline for publication of the register to 1 February 2021.

In West Berkshire, the canvass will commence in August, and will continue throughout the autumn with the aim to publish on 1 December (even though we shall to be allowed to move the date to February 2021).

More to follow...

Mortimer Station Car Parking

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council's planning application to construct an additional station car park for 150 vehicles will be considered by the Eastern Area Planning Committee tomorrow (Wednesday 5 August).

Parish Matters

Beech Hill

Members' Bid

I am very pleased to report that I submitted a successful bid, joint with Geoff Mayes, to construct a bus shelter in Beech Hill after discussions with Cllr Plank, who is now following the project up. We were awarded matched capital funding of up to £10,000.00 (dependent upon the eventual project cost) and I look forward to seeing the results!

Burghfield

Burghfield 3 Footpath

Following a fair amount of email traffic, WBC have agreed that this defunct short section of footpath which got cut off when the M4 was constructed (and leads nowhere other than a ditch) can cease to be registered – arrangements are in place with the landowners to ensure that WBC still has drainage access should it be needed.

Stratfield Mortimer

NDP Site – Public Open Space

Further to my report last month, we recently had a Zoom meeting with Arthur Cullen (WBC Team Leader for Grounds Maintenance) and he is going to get further details of the potential maintenance costs regarding the open space planned for the south of the NDP site, so that a conversation can then be had between WBC and SMPC about future responsibility for this new Public Open Space.

Commercial waste

I am pleased to report that the issue of commercial waste being stored in a garden (referred to last month) appears resolved after intervention by WBC Planning.

Graham Bridgman

4 August 2020