



Parish Council Report for October 2020

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

West Berkshire Council

Covid

At the point this report was drafted we were in Tier 1, but from 5 November we will be in national lockdown. Some of what follows will be affected by the new restrictions, so please continue to look out for announcements and, if you haven't already done so, sign up to receive updates from WBC on information, advice and support relating to coronavirus [here](#).

Even though some of the content will be out of date from the 5th, it is included because the intention is to return to Tiers after the national lockdown, so it should come back into play.

Council Meetings

Links to all agendas and public meeting papers are [here](#), and all WBC public meetings are broadcast live on YouTube and recorded so that they can be viewed at leisure - [West Berkshire Council YouTube Channel](#). Guidance for anyone attending a remote public meeting (eg a parish representative at a planning committee) is [here](#).

Executive

The Executive met on 15 October (a recording of the meeting can be viewed on the YouTube channel referenced above) and considered a number of papers including the Communications and Engagement Strategy and proposals for Community Infrastructure Levy spending (more below). As has become the new norm there were a plenitude of public and member questions (to the extent that not all of the member questions could be answered verbally in the time available), but this time with those members of the public asking questions able to attend the virtual meeting to hear the answer and to ask a supplementary question if desired.

The next meeting of the Executive is scheduled for 19 November, to include a paper on the possible closure of the Walnut Close Care Home.

Council

The next meeting of Council is on 3 December and papers will include the draft Minerals and Waste Local Plan among others.

The Local Economy

Community Infrastructure Levy Spending

The three recommendations accepted at the Executive meeting on 15 October were:

- to approve the continued focus on the adopted Local Plan and Infrastructure Delivery plan, and schemes highlighted in the Council Strategy (2019-23) & Recovery Strategy that support this to be included in the Capital Strategy 2021 onwards;
- to approve a continued profiling of CIL funds of 35% for education, 35% to transport, 10% for other services, with 15% (capped) to parishes (or 25% (uncapped) if they have a neighbourhood development plan) and 5% for administration;

- to approve a one off sum of up to £500k to be used to “ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships” by allocating funding for community groups to bid to support the Local Plan and Infrastructure Delivery Plan Implications and Impact Assessment*.

New Community Fund

*Following the decision referred to above, a bidding process will be put in place to encourage communities to come forward and set out opportunities for the £500k set aside from CIL to be spent on local infrastructure (on top of the 15%/25%. The intention is to provide a wide range of infrastructure to supports the specific needs of communities across the district, encouraging more local schemes to support.

West Berkshire Community Climate Bond

The UK's first ever local government green bond has closed after reaching its £1m target five days early. 22% of the funds raised came from West Berkshire residents, who each invested an average of £3,500. The Community Municipal Investment (CMI) attracted 640 investors in total.

The innovative CMI structure, has been developed by ethical investment platform Abundance to offer an accessible, low-risk, way for local people to support green infrastructure in their area by investing directly with their council.



WBC declared a Climate Emergency last year, following this up with an [Environment Strategy](#) with a target of making the district net zero by 2030. The green bond is one of the first deliverables of its strategy. The district is already reaping the benefits, with solar panels installed on five buildings across the district, including schools, leisure and care facilities and the council's own offices, funded by the CMI.

Money raised from the bond will also go towards funding projects with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to protect and enhance the natural environment; updating traffic signals to LED; and constructing cycleways to promote sustainable transport.

Kickstart

WBC and the Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company have launched a service to help local employers to sign up to the Government’s Kickstart Scheme.

The scheme, which was launched on 2 September, forms part of the Government’s recovery plans and will offer employers a bonus for every new job created for under 25s. For each job created that pays the minimum wage and lasts at least six months for a minimum of 25 hours per week, employers will receive 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage for 25 hours a week, plus associated employer National Insurance contributions and minimum pension costs. They will also receive a further £1,500 per role for setup costs, support and training.

The Scheme has a minimum job threshold of 30 roles and employers are able to apply directly if they meet this. Where smaller local businesses cannot meet the criteria, the Council and EDC will act to bring together a group of employers looking to recruit to smaller numbers of roles in order to create a joint application. The Council also hopes to create Kickstart roles internally.

Education

Free School Meals

The subject of free school meals has had a lot of coverage both nationally and locally in the lead up to half term. There is no need for any child to go hungry in West Berkshire and our Community Support Hub is available to provide support directly, as well as to refer people to other local groups and organisations who might be able to help. Anyone who needs help can phone the Hub on 01635 503579 or email westberksbct@westberks.gov.uk.

Online reading project

WBC is providing a special online reading project to address learning deficits caused by the lockdown. In total, 21 schools have signed up to the £53,000 project which the Council will fund for the next 15 months. The package to accelerate reading progress includes remote access to an online library of 1,000+ books.

All West Berkshire schools have made a successful return following lockdown and attendance levels are high, at around 95%. All schools are now teaching using their 'recovery' curriculum which aims to address any gaps in children's learning that may have built up during the absence of specific skills teaching. The main deficits are in reading and writing.

This new project builds on the success of the remote learning plans that worked well for families during lockdown and there is confidence that it will help to provide the necessary boost to bring children back up to speed with this essential learning.

Transport and Countryside

Green Flag Award

Northcroft & Goldwell Park in Newbury and Holybrook Linear Park in Calcot have received the Green Flag Award for the 12th and 11th year respectively.

They are among the 2,000 parks and green spaces across the UK currently raising their Green Flag Award with pride in a year when millions of people have seen the value of having great quality green spaces on their doorstep.



The Green Flag Award scheme, managed by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for their management across the United Kingdom and around the world.

Waste Services

Green Recycling Centre Permits still valid

West Berkshire green recycling permits with an expiry date of 30 September 2020 are still valid at the Council's recycling centres in Padworth and Newbury. Residents do not need to order a new permit as the green permits will continue to be accepted until further notice. The permit needs to be displayed to allow entry into our recycling centres.

Those that have lost their permit or just moved to the district can apply for a recycling centre permit online [here](#). The centres can be visited by [appointment only](#) and are open 09:00 – 18:00, seven days a week. A full list of materials accepted at the sites is available [here](#).

Culture and Leisure

Draft Leisure Strategy

The [Leisure Strategy](#) out for public consultation until Thursday 19 November sets out an ambitious set of targets to completely overhaul the way West Berkshire sport and leisure services operate for the next 10 years. WBC is interested in hearing what the community thinks about their opportunities to play sport, enjoy the outdoors and generally get more active. Much of our work will be focussed on sustainable services that can be accessed across the district by people of different abilities and backgrounds.

Central to our services will be the leisure centres we run. It is vital to keep up with modern demands and operate in a way that minimises their carbon footprint. We want to hear what people think about how we intend to invest money across the district and if we have the right focus on things like outdoor space and leisure education.

Remembrance Sunday



Parish Councils have received [advice](#) from the Public Protection Partnership on marking Remembrance Sunday.

At the point of publication, further national guidance is awaited.

Community Champions

Volunteer Centre West Berkshire and Greenham Trust have joined the Council to launch the Community Champion scheme and are each supporting an award.

Nominations can be made online [here](#) and are due by Friday 20 November 2020 (physical nomination forms can be obtained by calling 01635 519458).

Community Champion



Do you know someone who lives within the West Berkshire district and deserves an award for their work in the community?

The awards will honour those individuals and community groups who have gone above and beyond to support residents throughout West Berkshire this year. To recognise the fantastic contributions by locals throughout the pandemic, four new Covid-specific awards have been added to the usual roster of honours. All of the awards will be judged by an independent panel.

The Community Champion Award categories for 2020 are:

- The Pat Eastop MBE Junior Citizen of the Year
- Volunteer of the Year – supported by Volunteer Centre West Berkshire
- Community Group of the Year
- Lifetime Achievement Award (non Covid response)
- Covid Response Pat Eastop MBE Junior Citizen of the Year Award
- Covid Response Volunteer of the Year
- Covid Response Community Group of the Year - supported by Greenham Trust
- The 'Big Thank You' Award - created to recognise those people who may not meet the criteria of one of the awards above or who would appreciate more low key recognition

The winners will be presented with their award at a virtual ceremony to be held in January 2021. Their details will also be recorded in an exclusive book called the "Roll of Civic Awards" which will be available for future generations to review.

Giving Tree / Community Santa Christmas Appeals

In addition to the annual Giving Tree Appeal for victims of domestic abuse, this year the Council will also be running Community Santa to recognise those in our communities who have had a particularly difficult time, perhaps through isolation or bereavement.

Nominations are currently being sought through our A2 Dominion partners for Giving Tree and Community Groups, and Adult Social Care for Community Santa.



This year the 'gift tags' can be selected electronically via our website and the parallel schemes will launch on 16 November and run to 11 December. A variety of 'drop off' points will be available across the district. More information will be available on our website shortly at www.westberks.gov.uk/Christmas.

Covid-19

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

The Local Outbreak Engagement Board meets on alternate weeks in private and in public. Effectively each fortnight there is a live broadcast meeting to update residents of the current activities relating to Covid-19 in and around our locality. Public meetings are available on the Council's YouTube channel and further information about the Board can be found [here](#).

Covid Marshall Funding (drafted pre lockdown announcement, but retained for information)

West Berkshire Council is to implement a support plan that will help residents and businesses to contain the spread of Covid-19.

The plan will be funded by the Government's Covid Marshall Grant and continues the support the Council has already been providing to the local economy throughout Covid. The Covid Marshall scheme has been implemented in a number of ways around the country. In tourist areas, cities and large urban town centres the Marshall role has been met with the presence of highly visible wardens.

Within West Berkshire, a less visible but highly targeted plan will be used to deliver the aims of the scheme, namely effective social distancing to reduce risk and infection rates in public and business settings.

Therefore, members of the Public Protection Partnership, Public Health and the Council's Economic Development team will be using the funding to provide the following support and enforcement where necessary:

- working with businesses to increase and maintain compliance;
- events to raise awareness and highlight the approach that West Berkshire is taking;
- working with the Newbury Business Improvement District (BID), towns and parishes to raise awareness in local communities;
- following up concerns raised by the public, police, businesses and employees;
- ensuring that residents are aware of their obligations in risk areas (such as shopping areas and events) and within business settings;
- appropriate enforcement against businesses that fall short of compliance or who choose not to comply;
- re-enforcement of messages regarding social distancing/ rule of six and any other prevailing Tier based rule;
- increase / adjust messaging / surveillance and enforcement should Tier levels change;
- policing of events in conjunction with Thames Valley Police where appropriate.

Test and Trace £500 Support Payment

The Council is enabling the processing and payment of applications for a £500 support payment after the government announced a Test and Trace Support Payment scheme, designed to financially support people on low incomes, who are required to self-isolate when they receive a positive test result.

Anyone who meets the eligibility criteria and has been asked to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020 will be entitled to make a claim and payments will be backdated to this date. A claim can be made once every 14 days, for each period of self-isolation required. All eligibility criteria must be met and supporting evidence provided. The scheme will run until 31 January 2021.

Individuals who are required to self-isolate and who meet the benefits-linked eligibility criteria will be entitled to £500. This will be payable as a lump sum. These payments will be subject to income tax. They will not be subject to National Insurance contributions.

In order to be eligible for this new £500 payment an applicant:

- must have been asked to self-isolate by the NHS Test and Trace Service;
- must either be employed or self-employed;
- cannot work from home and will lose income as a result;
- is claiming at least one of the following benefits: Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, income-based jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Pension Credit or Housing Benefit.

Other Matters

Mortimer Station Car Park

As Parish Councillors across the Ward may be aware, and following the deferral of the planning application at the Eastern Area Planning Committee Meeting in August, permission was granted for the SMPC/Englefield/GWR scheme at the remote meeting held last week (28 October), despite there being an officer's recommendation to refuse. This was one of the first meetings to include public participation and it was good to see that facility taken up, including by opponents of the proposal.

This is just the start of a process, and I wait to see if the anticipated alternative scheme from M&G comes forward because that will (as I said in the meeting) be deserving of consideration.

Local conveyancing searches

I have been approached by residents regarding delays in conveyancing due to outstanding local searches from WBC. I was aware of an issue and, indeed, we recently agreed extra funding to add temporarily to the team. I trust that delays will now reduce as the backlog is cleared.

Parishes

Burghfield

Burghfield 3 Public Footpath

As anticipated in previous reports, the Order to extinguish this footpath beside Moatlands Cottages, Mill Road, has been confirmed.

Stratfield Mortimer

Tree Preservation Order 201/21/0999 – Pine Tree on land at Hasenbach, The Bevers

Various issues have been raised by the landowner and neighbours about this TPO. I have suggested that the WBC Trees Officer contacts SMPC for views.



Graham Bridgman
Council Member for Burghfield and Mortimer
Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Member for Adult Social Care

2 November 2020