



## Parish Council Report for December 2020

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

### West Berkshire Council

#### Annual Review

Alongside this month's report is a review of 2020 from a WBC perspective by Lynne Doherty, the Leader of Council.

#### Meetings

##### Council

The next meeting of Council is scheduled for 2 March 2021 which will see the setting of the Council's budget for 2021/22 (more about this below).

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 for the final time in 2020 on 17 December (a recording of the meeting can be viewed on the YouTube channel referenced above) and considered a number of papers including the London Road redevelopment, a revised Housing Allocations Policy, and financial and general performance.

The next meeting of the Executive is scheduled for 14 January 2021. Items coming forward are expected to include new draft Leisure and Cultural & Heritage Strategies.

#### Covid-19

##### Tier 4

Last month's report noted a general disappointment that West Berkshire had not returned to Tier 1. To quote the March report *"A month is a very short time in a pandemic"* (and let's also recall February's report: *"There have been no cases of coronavirus in West Berkshire at the time of writing. Planning is underway for any eventuality"*)!



As everyone will know, we are now in Tier 4 and a new strain of the virus has emerged in the South East, thought to be up to 70% more infectious than the previous strain. All of the indicators have been on an upward trajectory for some while – for example (with the caveat that all snapshots are only that), the West Berkshire rolling weekly rate of confirmed cases per 100,000 population was 68.2 on 24 November and 335.8 on 24 December.

The guidance is [here](#), but in general terms the move to Tier 4 means:

- Residents must stay at home, apart from limited exemptions (but support and childcare bubbles can still continue);

- Non-essential retail, indoor gyms and leisure facilities, and personal care services must close;
- People must work from home if they can, but may travel to work if this is not possible (for example in the construction and manufacturing sectors);
- People should not enter or leave Tier 4 areas, and Tier 4 residents must not stay overnight away from home;
- Individuals can only meet one person from another household in an outdoor public space;
- Those in Tier 4 areas will not be permitted to travel abroad apart from limited exceptions, such as for work purposes.

### ***Vaccinations***

It will be appreciated that the mechanics of Coronavirus vaccination are in the hands of the NHS, whether via hospitals and acute settings, Primary Care Networks, or individual surgeries (more about the Pfizer vaccine below). Care Home staff in West Berkshire are being prioritised for vaccinations, which started before Christmas - WBC's Adult Social Care team is working with relevant partners, including colleagues in the NHS and Public Health, to ensure that prioritised employees from council and private care homes are vaccinated as quickly as possible.

### ***Local data***

Local information about the daily reported cases in the district (and across Berkshire) can be accessed from Berkshire Public Health [website](#).

### ***Community Support Hub***

The [support hub](#) can be contacted on 01635 503579 if needed.

### ***Local Outbreak Engagement Board***

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

### ***Coronavirus information on the WBC website***

The Council keeps up to date information for residents and businesses on the [website](#).

### ***Winter Hardship Grant Scheme***

A reminder that support continues to be available for residents who are in need of help with food, utility bills and other essentials. The £279k Covid Winter Grant Scheme offers one-off payments and has already paid out 525 grants totalling £136k. The scheme also includes Free School Meal vouchers to eligible five to 16 year-olds for both the Christmas and February half-term holidays. For more information and to apply to the scheme go [here](#).

### ***Financial Support for Businesses***

WBC is distributing a series of Government grants to hospitality businesses which have been still limited in how they may operate (and WBC has developed a new streamlined application process to ensure that businesses are more easily able to understand which grants they are eligible for and so that the Business Rates Team can process payments as quickly as possible):

- The Additional Restrictions Grant to eligible businesses which may or may not have had to close but which can demonstrate significant hardship as a result of local or national restrictions;
- The Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) for businesses which were forced to close as part of the national restrictions from 5 November to 1 December;
- The Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) for hospitality and leisure businesses which were able to open from 2 to 19 December but whose income is likely to be significantly impacted by the current restrictions;

- The Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) for businesses which were required to close under Tier 2 restrictions from 2 to 19 December - this category will include pubs which do not serve food;
- The Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) for businesses which have been forced to close as a result of West Berkshire's move to Tier 3 on 19 December;
- A flat rate Christmas Support Grant of £1k to pubs that can demonstrate that 50% or more of their income derives from the sale of alcoholic beverages. This grant will be match funded by WBC with a further £1k from council Covid funds to provide additional targeted support.

This funding is in addition to (i) the almost £30m of funding distributed to almost 2,200 local businesses earlier this year, (ii) the application of £38.4m worth business rate relief to 1,200 local premises, and (iii) a universal rates holiday to every local business, regardless of industry, in March and April.

## 2021/22 Budget

### *Local Government Financial Settlement*

The draft 2021/22 announcements were delivered in a [speech](#) by the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP in the Commons on 17 December. We have yet to find out exactly what this means for West Berkshire, but budget preparation is underway (which must inevitably be based on a number of assumptions until final confirmation is received on the financial settlement post consultation).

The consultation upon the draft settlement runs until 16 January 2021.

### *Council Budget Simulator*

The Council has to balance its budget and save a further £7.3m. If you fancy having a go at the Budget Challenge you can find the link to the budget simulator [here](#).

### *£500k Community Infrastructure Levy fund open for bids (closes 10 January)*

WBC has opened the application process for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) grants of between £10k and £100k for use towards local infrastructure projects to be implemented by 31 March 2022. The guidance and application form are available [here](#) and the bid application closing date is 17:00 on 10 January 2021.

The successful bids will be funded from £500k set aside for this purpose from CIL received by WBC and will be on top of the 15% (or 25% if there is an NDP) of CIL that already goes to parish and town councils.

The bidding process is open to community groups and other infrastructure providers/partners in West Berkshire, ward members, town and parish councils, and organisations that wish to deliver infrastructure that will benefit the residents and businesses of the area.

The proposed schemes must deliver the infrastructure requirements of the West Berkshire Infrastructure Delivery Plan and meet the needs of the adopted Local Plan. In addition the proposals must demonstrate how the projects will fit with the Council Strategy and the Covid-19 Recovery Strategy. The final bids will be proposed to Executive to be included as part of the 2021-22 budget.

## Draft Local Plan Review 2020 - 2037

Members of the public are invited to have their say on the emerging draft version of the Local Plan Review 2020-37. The eight week public consultation period commenced on 11 December will close on Friday 5 February 2021. Residents, partners and other key stakeholders can read the draft Local Plan Review and provide feedback on the Council's [Local Plan Consultation Portal](#).

The emerging draft Local Plan Review sets out the vision that West Berkshire will be a welcoming place for business, provide residents with sufficient housing, and facilitate well-designed and sustainable development.

The draft plan looks at future levels of need for new homes, employment and other land uses along with the associated infrastructure requirements. In line with published government policy, the Local Plan Review includes the requirements for new market, affordable and specialist housing, as well as Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

The draft proposal extends the existing Local Plan from 2026 to 2037 to accommodate new housing needs as well as adopt environmentally-friendly development measures. This includes new policies for contributing to

the health and wellbeing of residents, minimising the demand for energy, and protecting the water environment.

The draft plan also takes into account the Council's declaration of a climate emergency in July 2019, and seeks to have the majority of development in places that reduce car dependency. In addition, the plan proposes policies that seek to make the fullest contribution towards transitioning to a low carbon society.

The plan also proposes working with partners to conserve and enhance the district's heritage, local distinctive character of towns and villages, and the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The draft supports the council's 2019-23 strategies for developing local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy, as well as to maintain a green district. The plan also incorporates findings from reviews and consultations held since 2018.

One particular aspect of the draft that has changed since the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) is that the Grazeley Garden Settlement does not form part of the draft Local Plan - it did form part of the HELAA, but that did not translate into inclusion as a site within the draft Plan (more about this below). Indeed the draft makes explicit reference to the adverse impact of the AWE Aldermaston and (revised) AWE Burghfield Detailed Emergency Planning Zones (DEPZs) on development generally: *"In the interests of public safety, residential development in the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) of AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield is likely to be refused planning permission by the Council, especially when the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) has advised against that development"*.

Locally, neither Burghfield nor Mortimer are allocated any fresh housing requirement (more about this below under Parishes).

## Leisure and Culture

### Libraries

The new Tier 4 restrictions for managing Covid-19 mean that West Berkshire Libraries buildings will have to close again except for allowing limited computer use by appointment only.

Although library members will not be allowed to visit a library to choose books, they will still be able to reserve books via the online library catalogue and pick them up from any West Berkshire library, including the Mobile Library.

The libraries will also continue to offer the popular Order & Collect service where members who are not sure which book they would like to read can request that library staff select up to five books for them, possibly introducing them to new authors. Customers can telephone their local library to let staff know what sort of books they enjoy or visit the [library catalogue](#) online to place their order.

Library members are advised to please check library opening times before making a trip to collect the books they have ordered. Details of all current library opening hours, together with the Mobile Library timetable and closures for the Christmas / New Year period, can be found on the [website](#).

Customers who need access to library computers for essential use will be able to do so for up to 30 minutes per day by appointment only.

### Christmas Appeals

A big thank you to the people of West Berkshire for helping WBC to wrap up Christmas for those in need. Due to Covid, the campaign which has often been Council staff-centric went online. This enabled even more of our residents to get involved and show their care and compassion for those in our communities who have had an especially difficult year.

We were delighted by the generosity, variety and thoughtful Christmas presents gifted for our Community Santa and Giving Tree recipients - several hundred gifts were received, sorted, wrapped and distributed across the district.

## Health & Wellbeing Strategy Consultation

WBC works in close partnership with the NHS, voluntary sector and others to form the health 'system' in the district. Working together with the neighbouring local authorities of Reading and Wokingham a joint health

and wellbeing strategy has been formulated for the next five to ten years, and the partnership is now engaging with residents to ensure that the strategy and subsequent plans fully encompass their needs and wishes, and begin to address inequalities in health and life-expectancy.

An engagement campaign has been launched, including an online survey supported by many focus group consultations. All local councils and community groups are invited to participate [here](#) - the survey is live until mid-January.

## Other Matters

### Grazeley Garden Settlement

As mentioned above, the Grazeley project is not part of the draft WBC Local Plan currently out to consultation (*“Though Grazeley has been identified as a possible location for a new garden settlement, there are uncertainties regarding the proximity to AWE Burghfield, funding for infrastructure and delivery timescales. No strategic allocation is therefore made in this spatial area”*).

The garden settlement is still within the Wokingham Borough draft Local Plan but quite recently the Defence Nuclear Organisation (part of the MoD) has formally objected to its inclusion given that the site is wholly within the revised AWE Burghfield DEPZ.

The Leader of Wokingham Borough Council and the Portfolio Holder dealing with their draft Local Plan have thus recently gone on record as follows:

*“Earlier this year we consulted on a draft local plan strategy which proposed a garden town at Grazeley at its heart which included upfront infrastructure, strong public transport links and a truly long term contribution to meeting development requirements.*

*“Since then a legislative change has caused emergency planning requirements around the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Burghfield to be extended so that they for the first time include the Grazeley area. The Defence Nuclear Organisation, part of the Ministry of Defence, is now objecting to the Grazeley garden town proposal and is requesting its removal from the local plan.*

*“In light of the changed circumstances, we have started the process of looking at alternatives as the Grazeley garden town may no longer be achievable. We will consult on these matters when we know more.”*

More recently, this from the Wokingham Portfolio Holder in response to a question raised:

*“A recommendation on an alternative planning strategy will be reported to a meeting of the council’s Executive where approval to hold a consultation will be requested. Formal consultation will then be undertaken. Given the evidential requirements, it is anticipated that the report will be considered by Executive in the summer 2021. A formal change to the Local Development Scheme will be made in due course.”*

### The Pfizer Vaccine

The issues with the storage and handling of the Pfizer vaccine have been widely reported and the following - extracted from a note by a fellow Governor of the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust - might be of interest in highlighting quite what a rigmarole it is.

*“While volunteering at our local surgery during the first three days of Covid vaccinations, I became aware of the considerable complexity of the preparation of the Pfizer vaccine preparation and the time constraints that this imposes on the throughput rates. It is far more complex and time consuming than the current flu jabs.*

*“In essence, the preparation process has a number of stages which need to take into account that each vial contains enough vaccine for five doses, that each dose then needs to be diluted with saline and most importantly that the vaccine is fragile and can be degraded by light, by time and by rough handling.*

*“It typically takes a well-trained team three minutes of very careful and precise work in aseptic conditions to produce five doses resulting in a maximum rate of administration of 60 doses per hour per team. The*

*failure to handle the vaccine very gently during preparation and to keep it in the dark whilst being brought up to room temperature may well render the dose only partially effective. In three days we managed to do nearly 1000 vaccinations in about 17 hours largely between 11 am and 5pm whilst still keeping morning surgery in operation. The second booster vaccination will similarly take another 17 hours for the same cohort from Jan 5th to 7th. At any given time, in addition to traffic management, there were approximately 20 volunteers (involving nearly all PPG members) and staff working to register patients from 4 different practices (outside in gazebos) and to conduct them, in groups of 5 at a time, though the vaccination process and into the 15 minute observation area as well as a team of some 10 to 12 nurses doctors and pharmacists working inside the surgery preparing and administering the vaccine.*

*“This has major implications for care home residents as the vaccine needs to be administered very close to the aseptic room where it is prepared in order to minimise degradation arising from handling and time duration during transportation. Rightly or wrongly, I am concerned that political pressure to speed up the process or to deskill it will backfire and end up wasting huge sums of money if it results in vaccine being injected in sub-optimal condition. I believe that the Pfizer vaccine costs the NHS about £15 per dose compared to the Oxford vaccine at about £3 and is in limited supply. We can’t afford to waste it.*

*“As a footnote, the requirement to observe patients for 15 minutes added an additional layer of complexity and significantly limits the choice of sites where the vaccine can be delivered. A very large room in an adjacent sheltered living facility with 15 socially distanced disinfected chairs just about allowed us to cope with 60 patients per hour. By filtering out all patients with significant allergies we did not experience a single reaction from any of the nearly 1000 frail elderly patients that we vaccinated during this observation period.”*

The AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine is awaited with interest!

## **Latest police officer recruitment figures**

According to a recent Thames Valley Police bulletin, by the end of September TVP had recruited a total of 260 new police officers (against a target of 183 by the end of March 2021).

## **Parish Matters**

### **Burghfield**

#### ***Neighbourhood Development Plan***

Given the removal of any housing requirement for Burghfield in the emerging draft Local Plan (see above) because of the expansion of the AWE Burghfield DEPZ (“*The DEPZ for Burghfield has recently been extended and is a major factor in the assessment of sites in this location*”), I note the question as to whether there is a need (or an advantage) to continue to push forward with the Burghfield NDP project.

I know that this is being considered and wait the result with interest.

#### ***Hillfields (Guide Dogs for the Blind)***

There is an interesting proposal under planning application 20/02787/PASOL to install 62 x 350W photovoltaic modules onto the roof, with an estimated annual output of over 19.5k kWh.

### **Stratfield Mortimer**

#### ***Housing***

As for Burghfield, but for different reasons, the emerging Local Plan does not allocate any new housing in the period to 2037 for Mortimer – because the Stratfield Mortimer NDP allocates 110 houses and the plan periods overlap (“*110 already allocated up to 2026*”).

#### ***Brunel House, Station Road***

WBC’s Traffic and Road Safety Team have objected to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner (West of England) regarding an application by CTS (GB) Ltd to change the location of an existing Vehicle Operator Licence to

Unit 1, Brunel House for 20 vehicles and trailers on public safety and road safety grounds. I understand that the team are talking to the business to bottom out exactly what is intended and to see what can be achieved.

### ***Footway to St Mary's School widening***

I have arranged a site visit with officers and parish councillors etc to review what is needed and how it might be achieved. I am also supporting a bid to the CIL Fund detailed above. There will be more at the SMPC Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting tomorrow (5 January) no doubt.

### **Wokefield**

#### ***Goring Lane***

As discussed at the last parish council meeting, I have now got some tentative dates for a site visit to look at the options/possibilities about a footway.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graham Bridgman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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

4 January 2021