



Parish Council Report for June 2021

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

West Berkshire Council

Meetings and Media

Council

The next meeting of the full Council will be on 8 July at 19:00. This will be the first physical full council meeting held since March 2020 (but see more below about its hybrid format) and items expected to be on the agenda include consideration of the public consultation plan for the Local Plan Review to 2036.

Executive

Amongst other things, the WBC [refreshed Recovery and Renewal Strategy](#) was considered by the Executive when it met on 10 June – [available to watch again on YouTube](#)

Ask Lynne

Council Leader Lynne Doherty ran another Facebook Live on the theme of West Berkshire's recovery and renewal from the coronavirus pandemic. Lynne spoke about her plans and answered questions on 15 June on [WBC's Facebook Page](#) – follow WBC to know when the next of these sessions is scheduled.

Hybrid Meetings

With the delay to the lifting of Covid restrictions, more meetings have been held with some Members in the Council Chamber and others, officers, members of the public, etc, joining virtually. Given the restriction on the number of individuals able to meet in the Chamber in a Covid-safe manner, the Council meeting on 8 July will be held in a hybrid format.

Transport news

Handybus

The recent launch of two new Handybuses marked 35 years of Newbury and Thatcham Handybus' partnership with WBC.

Handybus is one of the district's community transport services supporting older people and those with disabilities who would otherwise struggle to get out and do their own shopping. The service enables people to maintain their independence and engage in social interaction, helping to reduce isolation.



The service started in 1986, with Newbury District Council (forerunner of WBC) first investing in community transport and establishing a partnership with what was then the local charity Newbury Volunteer Bureau, and is now Volunteer Centre West Berkshire (VCWB).

The Handybus service now undertakes around 10,000 passenger trips each year, with the mini-buses being driven by volunteers from VCWB.

Cllr Clive Hooker, Chairman of the Council, recently met passengers, a volunteer driver, and the council officer (since retired) who instigated the programme. Click on the [video link](#) to see what they all had to say about Handybus and its 35 year anniversary.

Culture news

Let's get active

WBC has partnered with Greenham Trust to offer the Let's Get Active Fund (LGAF) to improve access to physical activities in West Berkshire. [Applications](#) are now open as part of the district's recovery from Covid-19.

The £33k+ pot is available to community groups, organisations, social enterprises, charities, profit-with-purpose businesses and schools in West Berkshire.

Lido

Berkshire's largest open air pool, the Lido at the Northcroft Leisure Centre in Newbury, opened for the season on 21 June.

As many will know, significant work is needed on the Lido and consultations will be running very soon so that the community can help us decide the future of the pool.



Enjoy water safely



WBC have supported Drowning Prevention Week (19-26 June) launched by the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK).

RLSS UK fears that with lockdown restrictions lifting, families will flock to beaches and inland water locations this summer without considering the potential dangers, putting themselves and others at risk.

Residents are encouraged to access the charity's [free online resources](#) to ensure their children have the skills to enjoy a lifetime of fun in the water.

Libraries

Don't forget that it's FREE to join and borrow books from West Berkshire Libraries and to use library computers. WBC also have a great range of online study resources available for members and you can download and read e-newspapers and e-magazines as well as e-books and e-audiobooks – which are all available for free.

WBC make some charges for services such as borrowing DVDs, for printing and photocopying, and for the late return of items or for borrowing books from outside West Berkshire - you can pay for these with a bank card or by mobile phone app in any of WBC's libraries.

Shaw House

Theatre

WBC are celebrating the return of open air theatre with a bumper programme for all of the family - on Sunday 11 July Kennet Opera will perform a sure to be stunning outdoor concert of arias and choruses 'Opera Unlocked'.

Multi-award nominated Immersion Theatre presents an unforgettable adaptation of William Shakespeare's iconic 'Romeo & Juliet' on Sunday 25 July, and for the summer's grand finale, they bring their trademark energy to their wildest show yet, a brand-new musical adaptation of the Rudyard Kipling family favourite, 'The Jungle Book' on Monday 9 August.

West Berkshire Historic Environment Record (HER)

WBC's HER was audited by Historic England for 2020-21 and has obtained the highest and second highest ratings in all four of its service areas. Historic England's final report stated that the West Berkshire HER shows strengths in every area of the audit assessment, and the record is of good quality and incorporates a wide variety of data.

The HER is the primary source of information about the physical remains of past human activity in West Berkshire. The HER is a register of all known archaeological and historical sites in West Berkshire. Some of the buildings, monuments and places are designated as being nationally important or locally significant, but all elements make an important contribution to the story of WBC's past.

Digital Innovation award

WBC is proud to have won a national award for Digital Innovation and Technology at the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Places and Transport (ADEPT) President's Awards.

WBC and partners received the accolade at the virtual ceremony in recognition of the success of the Thames Valley Berkshire Smart City Cluster project. The project's new developments included an app to tackle social isolation, a device to monitor and minimise electricity consumption, a chatbot which answers frequent resident website enquiries, and sensors to prevent falls among elderly people living in supported accommodation.

West Berkshire Directory

The West Berkshire Directory is the one-stop shop for services and help for local residents. The directory provides information on services from local community groups and leisure activities to mental health services, financial guidance and help for unpaid carers. You can search the directory alphabetically or see the information under the categories of adults, families or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

As services restart after lockdown restrictions ease, WBC are keen to ensure that all the information in the directory is up to date and local groups are not missing, particularly any services which may have started up during the pandemic.

If you belong to a local organisation please check that the information included on the directory for your service is up to date - both contact information and details of any services and activities you offer. See: <https://directory.westberks.gov.uk>.

If any updates are required please email directory@westberks.gov.uk.

Environment news

Environment News Bulletin

WBC recently announced new electric vehicle charge points, an air quality and anti-idling campaign, an update on WBC's wildlife projects, and more. For details, please check out [WBC's latest environment news bulletin](#), and sign up on the page to receive future monthly updates.

Respect our Parks and Open Spaces campaign

Since the first lockdown in March 2020, more visitors than ever have been using West Berkshire's parks, town centres, and other open spaces for recreation. This is a good thing - but it has led to an increase in the amount of waste being left behind.

WBC has launched a new campaign to encourage everyone to enjoy WBC's open spaces, respect other users, and take their rubbish home rather than leave it by an overflowing bin (the same goes for dog poo - if there aren't any dog waste bins or if they are full, please bag it and either put it in a litter bin or take it home and bin it).

You'll see more about this campaign on WBC's [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) channels. Also keep a lookout for the colourful banners coming soon to parks and playgrounds near you.

Composting



If you have the space, home composting is the most eco-friendly way to dispose of kitchen and garden waste. It produces excellent, nutrient-rich compost which helps reduce the need for fertilisers, as well as helping you save money. [See information about home composters.](#)

To receive more environment-related ideas and updates please sign up for WBC's [monthly Environment News Bulletin](#).

Big Community Switch

West Berkshire residents are being invited to sign up for the West Berkshire Collective Energy Switch and save on their energy bills.

The scheme runs in partnership with Big Community Switch and offers a no-obligation collective energy switching scheme giving people the opportunity to group together and pay less for their energy. All energy will be 100% renewable and will be available for both electric and dual fuel tariffs.

Overall, over £690k has collectively been saved for West Berkshire residents since the scheme began. New figures published by Energy UK's Energy Switch Guarantee at the end of May also revealed that customers in West Berkshire were in the top ten for energy switching in Great Britain during 2020.

You have until 6 July to register and/or accept your personal offer.



Covid Support

Help for people who are struggling to pay Business Rates or Council Tax

Now that Covid-19 restrictions are easing, businesses have reopened, and people are able to get back to work, WBC will be issuing letters requesting payment of outstanding Council Tax and Business Rates.

WBC recognise that some people are still being affected by loss of income due to the pandemic and may struggle to make payments, and plans have been put in place to help people manage this debt. For example, they could be entitled to apply for benefits or reduced payments for a period of time.

If you are approached for advice, please ensure there is no delay – anyone in arrears and struggling to pay should contact the Council Tax or Business Rates Teams as soon as possible – by phone: 01635 519520 or email: counciltax@westberks.gov.uk or businessrates@westberks.gov.uk.

Housing

WBC's Housing Team have been proactive in preparation for the lifting of the eviction ban by working with landlords and lettings agents to seek to prevent homelessness.

The Team can provide advice and support to access financial support depending on individual circumstances and if anyone is concerned or has been affected by the lifting of the eviction ban or is experiencing financial hardship, there are a range of Government financial packages available. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will continue until 30 September as well as the uplift of £20 per week for Universal Credit to support those who have been financially impacted.

To obtain advice this affected and email housing@westberks.gov.uk or contact the Duty Housing Team (01635 519530, option 2, or option 1 for a general housing enquiry).

Education news

Language courses

The Educafe Job Support Club is offering a free, six week course for non-native speakers looking to start or return to work, or volunteer in West Berkshire. The sessions will include work skills workshops and language

support for job hunting, writing CVs and practicing interviews. The sessions will run from 10.00 to 13:00 every Friday until 16 July at Newbury Town Hall. [See information and register](#).

Childcare support



HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is reminding working families in the South East that they can use Tax-Free Childcare to help pay for their childcare costs over the summer.

Tax-Free Childcare – a childcare top-up for working parents – can be used to help pay for accredited holiday clubs, childminders or sports activities. This gives parents and carers that extra peace of mind that their child is having fun during the school summer holidays and it can save them money.

Tax-Free Childcare is available for children aged up to 11, or 17 if the child has a disability. Parents and carers can check their eligibility and register for Tax-Free Childcare via GOV.UK on: gov.uk/tax-free-childcare.

They can apply for an account at any time and start using it straight away. By depositing money into their accounts, families can benefit from the 20% top-up and use the money to pay for childcare costs when they need to, for example, during the summer holidays.

School cycle storage upgrades

WBC has allocated £140k from its capital budget to upgrade storage for cycles at some of the district's schools.

The Willink, The Downs, Denefield, Kennet, Little Heath, Westwood Farm, Calcot, and Hungerford will all benefit from the new secure and covered cycle storage units.



Cycling is a great way to start the day, boosts wellbeing and helps the environment too. WBC hope the new storage will make this active travel choice easier.

All upgrades are expected to be completed by September in time for the new school term.

Summer Reading Challenge

West Berkshire Libraries will be again working with national charity The Reading Agency during the school summer holidays to bring children a Summer Reading Challenge.

Primary age children will be challenged to read up to six library books between now and 15 September, and to collect incentives from their local library for their achievements as they read. Invitations to take part in this year's challenge are being sent out to schools.

There will also be challenges for adults to join in the fun as well.

Stay up to date on the Summer Reading Challenge news by signing up for WBC's monthly West Berkshire Libraries newsletter (if you aren't already a subscriber). You can also visit WBC's West Berkshire Libraries [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages.

Health and Social Care news

Birchwood Care Home rated as 'Good' after recent CQC inspection

A report issued by the Care Quality Commission on 4 June, following an inspection at the Birchwood Care Home in Newbury, has rated the home as 'Good.' The report also provides positive feedback on the high standard of care provided by experienced and knowledgeable staff at the home. Birchwood is one of three care homes that WBC run.

As the WBC Executive Member for Adult Social Care until March, and having been frustrated at waiting for the CQC to re-inspect when I knew how much effort had been put in to improve the care home, I wholeheartedly endorse the current Executive Member, Cllr Jo Stewart, has said: *"I am thrilled to see the report from this*

inspection and hope that this reassures residents and families of our commitment to the highest standards of care. I would like to thank all the staff for the efforts they put in day to day to provide excellent care for all our residents, particularly given the challenging circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Review the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Residents of West Berkshire are being invited to review the [draft Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2030](#).

As the WBC Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing Portfolio, this is the main strategy that I will be looking to deliver. It seeks to drive positive change to tackle the underlying causes of poor health and wellbeing, and sets out how health and social care professionals, together with other partners, will work to improve the health of people living in West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading over the next ten years.

The proposals focus on addressing the top five priorities identified by respondents from a previous public consultation that ended in February 2021, namely:

- Reducing the differences in health between different groups of people;
- Supporting individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives;
- Helping children and families in early years;
- Promoting good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people; and
- Promoting good mental health and wellbeing for all adults

The survey is open until midnight, 4 August.

Carers' Week

Between 7 and 13 June WBC celebrated the work unpaid carers do in West Berkshire and sought to raise awareness of the support available. WBC also asked people who spend time looking after family members or friends, and who may not think of themselves as a 'carer', to consider if they are getting the help they need and to get in touch to find out what support is available. See: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/carersinfo>.

TuVida www.tuvida.org/berkshirehub also provides free, confidential and personalised information and support to unpaid carers in West Berkshire. West Berkshire Young Carers now have a newsletter to help you stay up-to-date with everything that is happening with young carers in the district. [See latest edition and subscribe to the newsletter.](#)

Events

Cycling & Wellbeing Festival



This free event will be taking place in Holybrook Linear Park between 10:00 and 15:00 on Saturday 10 July for people to explore ways to be more active – there will be something for everyone, whether they are interested in cycling, walking or just generally getting active.

There will be a BMX stunt display team, opportunities to have your bike 'MOT'd', to enjoy a guided ride, or have bikes security marked - plus lots more to get everyone active.

Covid guidance will be followed to ensure the safety of all - staff, exhibitors and volunteers will have undertaken a lateral flow test (rapid Covid-19 test) and visitors are also encouraged to take a lateral flow test before arriving (more information on WBC's [lateral flow testing webpage](#)).

Community Cafes

Educafe is launching weekly free cafes that will be taking place at different places across West Berkshire, starting with Newbury on 7 July.

The purpose of the Community Cafes is to bring people together in safe, friendly spaces to eat, learn and make new friends.

The Community Cafes will feature:

- an opportunity to meet the Educafe team
- a chance to find out more about services from local providers
- confidential help desks
- ethnic market stalls for ethnic enterprises
- weekly activities and learning opportunities, including English conversation practise

Educafe is extending a warm invitation to its first Community Cafe on Wednesday, 7 July from 11:00 to 15:00 at the Global Indoor Garden in Newbury. There will be free tea and cake for all.

Consultations and Plans

Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan



Last month WBC ran a consultation to find out what matters most to residents for West Berkshire's Public Rights of Way – the paths that anyone has the legal right to walk on, and sometimes can also be used by cyclists, horse riders or motorists.

The survey has now closed and feedback will help WBC to [plan how to improve the district's Public Rights of Way](#) so that they can be fully enjoyed by all.

Walking and cycling plan for West Berkshire

The [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#) for West Berkshire has now been approved, following public consultations. The overall aim is to improve facilities and opportunities for active travel and increase the amount of people walking and cycling as part of their daily routine.

This plan will provide a long term, strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements for the district.

WBC thank all members of the public who took part in the consultations; their local knowledge provided valuable feedback to enhance the plan.

Local Flood Risk Management Plan (LFRMS)

Just to note that Stuart Clark, WBC's Principal Engineer in the Environment Department, wrote to all Parish Clerks at the end of June regarding the updated LFRMS for West Berkshire.

The LFRMS establishes a set of updated objectives and corresponding actions, and provides a single reference point against which WBC can develop and monitor flood risk management. The draft document, produced in consultation with WBC's professional partners, outlines how the risk of flooding to property and infrastructure will be managed and reduced over the next five years, to 2026.

The document also details the responsibilities of other flood risk management agencies and sets out how the Council will work with these agencies and the public to understand local issues and communicate and manage the risk of flooding. The consultation is open to 30 July.

Other Matters

Proposals for changes to parliamentary constituencies

'[Initial proposals for the 2023 Boundary Review](#)' published by The Boundary Commission for England proposes a new 'Mid Berkshire' Constituency, including parts of the current Newbury, Reading West and Wokingham constituencies, and in turn including the Burghfield and Mortimer Ward.

"[The BCE] has published its initial proposals for new constituency boundaries. We invite the public to view and provide feedback on the proposed boundaries as part of an eight-week consultation process."

“The 2023 Review of Parliamentary constituencies was formally launched in January this year. The Commission is required to ensure that the number of electors in each constituency is more equal; in doing so, the number of constituencies in England will increase from 533 to 543. The Commission is undertaking an independent review of all constituency boundaries in England and will present our final recommendations to Parliament by July 2023.

“In West Berkshire, we propose dividing the Downlands ward. We propose that the civil parish of Beedon is included in the Mid Berkshire constituency, in order to bring the constituency’s electorate within the permitted range, and that the rest of the ward is included in the Newbury constituency. The division of this ward would have the additional benefit of allowing for a more compact Newbury constituency, which still includes the town of Thatcham, while also eliminating the need for the Mid Berkshire constituency to stretch the length of the West Berkshire local authority.

“Although both current Reading constituencies can remain unchanged, we propose both are reconfigured to account for the increased electorates of surrounding constituencies, which also better reflects local ties in the surrounding communities. This includes a Wokingham constituency that is contained entirely within the Borough of Wokingham, and an Earley and Woodley constituency that consists of a number of suburban wards to the south and east of the town of Reading, including the Whitley and Church wards of the Borough of Reading. With three other wards, centred around Tilehurst, included in the Mid Berkshire constituency, this leaves the remainder of the Borough of Reading to be configured in a constituency that we propose be simply named Reading, as changes elsewhere would mean that there would no longer be a constituency that could appropriately be called Reading West.”

For the proposals in the South East, see [here](#).

Emergency Alerts

HM Government’s new Emergency Alerts system will enable people to be contacted via their mobile phone when lives are in danger. It will be used to warn of emergencies such as severe flooding or terror attacks.

Emergency Alerts are sent to all compatible mobile phones within an area of risk. They don’t track location, need your phone number, or collect personal data. Only HM Government and the emergency services will be able to send them. If you don’t have a mobile phone, you’ll still be kept informed through other channels.

If you get an Emergency Alert on your phone, you’ll hear a loud, siren-like sound. A message on your screen will tell you about the emergency and how best to respond. You’ll be able to check an alert is genuine at gov.uk/alerts.



To ensure the system works effectively, the government and mobile phone operators be carrying out a series of tests – the first local one was in Reading on 29 June.

If you received a test alert last week, please complete the user survey at gov.uk/alerts so the Government can gather and respond to feedback and make improvements to Emergency Alerts.

To find out more about Emergency Alerts, visit gov.uk/alerts.

Newbury Town Centre Vision

WBC has been working with HemingwayDesign, NEW Masterplanning, UrbanMovement and GL Hearn to prepare the new Vision, and since December 2020 meetings and workshops have been held with a range of businesses, residents’ groups, students, and other stakeholders. The initial public survey received over 4,000 responses, and there are now proposals which reflect those responses.

A new has commenced to get further thoughts and feedback on the draft 'Vision for Newbury Town Centre' available to view in full [here](#).

AWE plc

As from 1 July AWE plc became an arm’s length Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) wholly owned by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The MOD owns the AWE sites, including the assets and liabilities and AWE plc is

responsible under a contract with the MOD for operating the sites safely and securely as well as delivering a safe, effective and efficient nuclear warhead programme - AWE plc employs the workforce, holds the nuclear site licences, environmental permits and other regulatory permissions.

The new AWE plc Board has been announced and includes Sir John Manzoni as Chair and Alison Atkinson as AWE Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director (as she had been with AWE plc).

Covid-19 Vaccine effectiveness

A recent report (*"Effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines against hospital admission with the Delta (B.1.617.2) variant"*) has indicated that the Pfizer vaccine is 96% effective, and AstraZeneca 92% effective, against hospitalisation with the Delta variant of Coronavirus.

Parish Matters

Fresh £500k pot available for CIL Community Group Bids

WBC has announced a second round of grants for local infrastructure projects proposed by community groups for the benefit of their residents and businesses.

In March, WBC approved a total of £495.5k in community grants ranging from £10k to £100k. Successful bids included the renovation of village halls, clubs, and scout halls and improvements to sports and playground facilities.

The new funding pot will come from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds set aside for the 2022-23 element of the three-year capital programme established by the 2021-22 WBC budget. [Bids](#) are now invited from community groups – to be received by Tuesday 31 August. Final decisions will be made as part of the 2022-23 budget debate next year.

Four Houses Corner

A brief update that, following vacant possession of the site obtained in February 2021, the refurbishment project has commenced. The project plan timeline is 22 months (but dependent on planning permission, site investigation and clearance work).

There is on site security to ensure that the site remains safe and secure and that any criminal activity, arson, fly-tipping or trespassing is prevented or dealt with promptly.

Members' Bids

Thank you to all who submitted bids.

I joined with Royce Longton to create the principal bid we applied for - Solar Panels and Battery Storage for The Scout Hut on Hollybush Lane (1st Burghfield & Sulhamstead Scouts) - and was very pleased to see it succeed (I sit on the Bids Panel but took no part in this discussion). The total project comes in at just over £16,830 and our joint bid has produced £8,415.00 towards this.

That left me with a little under £800.00 which I succeeded in getting as a contribution to an SMPC project for adult outdoor exercise kit.

Burghfield

Hose Hill

Hose Hill and Theale Road will be closed as above between 08:00 and 17:00 each day until 14 July, between Deans Copse Road and Reading Road – the closure is to enable Volker Highways to carry out highway improvements on the behalf of WBC. The actual work will take place on Hose Hill, but Theale Road will be closed to through traffic – access to properties on Theale Road, Folly Lane and Bennetts Hill (officially "Bennetts Lane") will be possible via Theale Road from Burghfield, but not via Hose Hill.

A plan of the closure and diversion route can be found [here](#) and for all enquiries: please contact WBC on 01635 519080.

Stratfield Mortimer

Public footpath

I am pleased to be able to report that WBC has made an order to record a public footpath running between Stephens Firs and Stephens Road/Victoria Road – the culmination of, and reward for, a lot of effort by SMPC.

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

Graham Bridgman

Council Member for Burghfield and Mortimer

Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing

30 June 2021