



Parish Council Report for August 2021

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

West Berkshire Council

The Council

Council

This month, Nick Carter, WBC's Chief Executive, retired after 16 years leading the organisation.

During his tenure as Chief Executive, Nick has been the driving force behind the Newbury Vision 2025 – which has included the successful delivery of the Parkway shopping centre, cinema and the town centre pedestrianisation. Nick has also steered the Council through significant events including the widespread flooding in 2007, budget challenges during the period of austerity, and most recently the local response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Nick also oversaw the effective delivery of around 400 different Council services to 165,000 people, and he leaves the Council in a strong position (with an external review shortly before the pandemic recognising the quality of local services, a good track record of delivering savings and increasing income, and much to celebrate about what WBC does).

Speaking about his time at WBC, Nick said:

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in West Berkshire. It a great place with great people and that's the reason I have stayed. It has not always been an easy journey but I hope I have been able to make a difference and play a part in making the District an even better place to live, work and visit. I will miss all of my colleagues but now feels like a good time to let someone with new ideas take the Council forward. My sincere thanks to all those that have worked with and supported me here in West Berkshire over the past 24 years and I wish everyone all the very best for the future."

Before leaving, Nick found time to write one final weeknote looking back over the past 24 years with the Council. You can read Nick's final weeknote [here](#).

A week is a long time in politics

On Thursday 12 August, Nick Carter's leaving celebration saw him depart the council with the best wishes of everyone ringing in his ears. The next day the Leader of Council, Cllr Lynne Doherty, began a well-deserved holiday, saying to me that August was generally a quiet month and there were only a few meetings the following week.

Over the weekend fire destroyed much of the empty Newbury Football clubhouse, and some individuals began constructing a travellers site on a field in Thatcham without planning permission, both incidents subsequently engaging the attention of the press, TV and radio (and expanded upon below). A third incident was the appalling rape on the A4 at Thatcham, again widely reported – whilst this is very much the province of Thames Valley Police, senior members and officers were briefed and have offered TVP all support.



So much, I reflect on having a nice quiet week! I should have seen the portents of Lynne going on holiday on Friday the 13th - one minute I'm asking fellow members of the Executive whether we really need to have our usual informal weekly meeting, the next I find myself being interviewed for BBC South Today outside the burnt down clubhouse, in meetings to discuss what legal action to pursue in respect of the Thatcham site, and then interviewed on that subject for BBC Radio Berkshire...

Faraday Road fire

As referred to above, a fire has destroyed the old football ground clubhouse at Faraday Road, suspected to have been arson. The Police, and Fire and Rescue Services, acted swiftly and WBC worked with them to ensure that the site was safe (and to seek to determine the cause).

WBC subsequently sought advice from the Health and Safety Executive, and the Building Control Service operated by Bracknell Forest BC, to ensure that the site was dealt with appropriately – that advice was that the buildings had to be demolished on safety grounds. This has since taken place.

Despite this, and in order to ensure that there is due process, WBC is continuing with its application for formal planning permission to demolish the buildings, and also to re-open the grass pitch for general community recreational sport (the application is due to be heard by the District Planning Committee on 8 September).

Lawrences Lane, Thatcham

Over the same weekend as the Faraday Road fire, a development started at Lawrences Lane without the benefit of planning permission (a planning application for "Change of use to 7 no. Gypsy/Traveller pitches comprising 7 no. static caravans, 7 no. day rooms, 7 no. touring caravans and associated works" having been lodged at 16:00 on the Friday).

On Tuesday 17 August, and following investigations by planning officers, WBC issued a temporary stop notice requiring any further development to cease, and the following evening - Wednesday 18 August – a High Court injunction was granted by Mrs Justice Stacey preventing any further unauthorised development activity taking place pending a full hearing. The order included a range of prohibitions including bringing onto the land any additional caravans and/or mobile homes for the purpose of human habitation or residential occupation or any other purpose in breach of planning control.

The full hearing was set down for 31 August before Mr Justice Chamberlain, and on that date it was adjourned to 27 September with various orders for the filing of evidence. The injunction continues in the meantime.

Local Plan

Late last month HM Government reviewed the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which WBC must follow when developing the Local Plan. The revisions made to the NPPF were extensive, made without warning, and included a requirement to provide a 30 year vision document when proposing any large scale development, including for urban extensions (such as the one WBC is proposing in North East Thatcham).

While it is frustrating that the changes to the NPPF mean that the work on the draft plan must pause until WBC has clarified with HM Government what their implications are, WBC remain committed to delivering a Local Plan that meets the needs of all who live in the district.

Annual Canvass

It's time for the annual electoral registration canvass to check who's eligible to vote at all properties in the district, so WBC can update the Electoral Register – it is a legal requirement to make sure these records are up to date.

The Council will be contacting householders by email if it currently holds an email address for them. The message is genuine and saves money on postage. Properties where WBC does not hold an email for a householder will receive a form by post during August and September.

Response can be made online using the link in the email, but any new residents at a property will still need to register to vote at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote).

Covid Recovery

More businesses benefitting from Welcome Back Fund

Another two independent businesses have benefitted from the Welcome Back Business Grants Scheme, in which £140k has been set aside for projects to support the district's high streets, shopping areas and visitor economy to re-open successfully this summer.



Weavers Coffee Shop, Newbury received £1k to purchase smart new tables, chairs, parasols and patio heaters for their outdoor seating area. The business estimates that the new purchases will result in up to 80 additional customers per day.

The Old London Apprentice pub in Newbury have received £4.8k to help upgrade their outdoor seating area, with additional picnic tables, lighting, raised planters and a brand new picket fence. They were able to welcome around 250 new and existing customers to their new-look outdoor space at their Beer and Cider Festival last month, which showcased local breweries and music.



Please continue to support these and all other small and independent businesses across West Berkshire.

Coronavirus

Vaccinations

Those 18 or over, or within 3 months of their 18th birthday ("the rising 18s") can get vaccinated by:

- [booking online](#) for an appointment at a vaccination centre or pharmacy (this booking platform is expected to accept bookings for 16 and 17 year olds soon);
- [finding a walk-in Covid-19 vaccination site](#) – no appointment needed;
- if they cannot book online, they can call 119 free of charge (and speak to a translator if they need to).

16 and 17 year olds can also now get the jab, so please keep an eye on WBC's social media channels for details of sessions as they are released (see below for one example).

All ages from 16+ can get the Covid jab at Falklands Cricket Club

Covid-19 vaccinations and lateral flow self-test kits (rapid Covid-19 home tests) will be offered at the Falklands Cricket Club on Sunday 5 September for people aged 16 and over. This will be alongside the One Community Cricket and Family Fun Day (see article below).

Anyone can get a first or second dose for the Pfizer vaccine from the NHS Health on the Move team (for those going for a second dose, the first dose must have been a Pfizer jab and administered at least eight weeks before).

No-one needs to have a GP or an NHS number to get the Covid-19 vaccine. The vaccine is available free of charge and without any immigration checks.

Anyone picking up free self-test kits from the Community Testing van can also be shown how to take the test by one of the trained team members.

Testing

Self-test kits

It's still vitally important that everyone keeps testing for Covid-19 if they don't have symptoms as they could be unknowingly transmitting the virus, even if they've been vaccinated, and especially before they visit with others or enter crowded places.

It is also essential to report the result (as instructed in the kit).

There are plenty of ways (see below) to get self-test kits:



Mobile Community Collect

Anyone can pick up free Covid-19 self-test kits (lateral flow testing) from Mobile Community Collect at the designated locations at the same time each week - the route timetable is [here](#).

Community testing sites

Self-test kits can also be picked up at [community sites](#) in Thatcham, Hungerford and Newbury.

Pharmacies and online ordering

Another way to get self-test kits is to visit a local participating [pharmacy](#) or to order the kits [online](#).

Education

A Level and GCSE Results

Congratulations to everyone who has received their A Level and GCSE results this month – and to everyone receiving vocational or technical qualifications this summer.

A thank you is owed to local schools, colleges and training providers who have worked tirelessly throughout this difficult year. West Berkshire's young people have shown great determination and we wish them well for the future.

You can [read about the district's GCSE results and some local reaction](#) on the WBC website.

Anyone unsure of what to do next can go to the [Berkshire Opportunities website](#).

Funding boost for holiday activity programme

A summer programme of activities for local children is off to a flying start this summer.

The Holiday Activities and Food Programme includes a variety of fun activities including sports, music and arts as well as a nutritious meal each day. It's open to children aged 5 to 16 who are eligible for free school meals.

Hundreds of children took part in a pilot programme at 15 schools during the Easter holidays, and additional funding from the Department for Education means the summer programme can be expanded to allow more children and young people to take part.

WBC are now working with schools across the district, as well as Berkshire Youth, Community Youth Project and selected holiday club providers to offer great activities to children who receive free school meals and many that don't.



Safer Streets pilot for Calcot

A Schools Streets pilot has begun in Calcot to improve children's journeys to and from school.



In order to reduce congestion, improve air quality and make it both easier and safer to walk to school, vehicles will be unable to drive near Calcot Infant and Junior school at either end of the school day. It's a pilot scheme which, if successful, could be rolled out to other schools across West Berkshire.

Elsewhere in the country Schools Streets projects have shown that traffic outside schools has reduced on average by 68%, children cycling to school has increased by 51% and harmful

vehicle pollution outside schools was down by almost three-quarters.

Vehicles are prohibited from driving down Curtis Road and Gatcombe Close, and Royal Avenue (Garston Avenue to 10m east of the Curtis Road junction) between 08:15 to 09:15 and 14:30 to 15:30 on weekdays.

Adult Social Care

Birchwood Care Home gets into the spirit of the Games

Birchwood Care Home got fully into the spirit of the Olympics last month with a number of activities.

Residents first created Olympic Bunting and an Olympic Torch, then a series of special events allowed participants to win points in the shotput, (turtle) swimming races, archery and egg and spoon.

Staff and residents from the five units in the care home had a blast competing against each other. The activities culminated in an awards ceremony with competitors receiving medals and certificates, and the overall prize awarded to the winning unit.



Housing

Afghanistan

Everybody has been watching the news from Afghanistan and the work to evacuate people from the country. WBC has made a commitment to work with HM Government in supporting the relocation of Afghanistan refugees to West Berkshire and work is currently underway to progress this – there will be an announcement in due course on how local residents and businesses can help during this fast moving situation.

Environment

Garden waste and food collections resume



Reflecting that fact that WBC was obliged to temporarily suspend (for one collection) the garden and food waste collection service twice over the last twelve months (most recently as reported last month), WBC has reduced the annual subscription for each garden waste bin by £4 for the upcoming 2021/22 season (which began on 30 August).

The reduced 2021/22 subscription rate will be available to all garden waste customers including those who will be renewing their direct debit from last year and any new subscribers this year.

The normal garden and food waste collection service was recommenced at the start of August and the Council has apologised to affected residents for the inconvenience caused and thanked them for their cooperation and understanding during this challenging time.

Leisure

Newbury Sports Hub

The new Newbury Sports Hub is planned to open next year and work to deliver the new facility, which will be located at Newbury Rugby Football Club, has reached an important step with the submission of planning application for the site.

The plans include a world-class artificial turf pitch alongside floodlights, seating and the club house with four changing rooms, a board room and a function room.



The new facility will help deliver WBC's Playing Pitch Strategy, and will provide a Step 4 facility – which means teams will have the facilities needed to play in higher leagues. It will also serve as a replacement for the Faraday Road Sports Ground, which closed ahead of the regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate.

Consultations and Strategies

[Draft Statement of Gambling Principles under S.349 of The Gambling Act 2005](#) – closes 27 September.

[Draft Local Flood Risk Management Strategy](#) – closes 3 October.

Other Matters

Could you lead a Walk for Health?

This was reported on last month but is worth repeating, particularly as I's my portfolio and I have fronted up some publicity on the subject.

Walking for Health is a national scheme to get everyone out walking. Walking is not only good exercise, it helps to combat loneliness and isolation – so it's good for everyone's physical health, and their mental health as well.

WBC want to expand the programme and need more walk leaders to help make this happen - if you like the outdoors and would like to help others enjoy it too, please [get in touch](#) (or contact me).



Don't forget that we run a number of walks from the Community Centre car park in Mortimer every Tuesday morning (the photos last month and this are of the Mortimer group) – contact me if you are interested in joining us.

One Community Cricket and Family Fun Day

The One Community Cricket and Family Fun Day will take place at the Falklands Cricket Club, Enborne Street, Newbury, RG14 6TW, on Sunday 5 September from 11:00 to 17:00.

More information about the event can be found [here](#).

Green waste (and food waste collection)

Further to the report above, I was contacted about the issue of direct debits and renewing garden waste subscriptions, and a suggestion to instead have a rolling subscription so that different people renewed at different times of the year. This was my response: *"I don't disagree whatsoever that this could/should have been handled better. There are very good reasons for wanting payments to be collected via direct debit and the vast majority of residents (99%+) who subscribe to the scheme either already paid by direct debit (I certainly did) or have signed up to do so - at the very least it avoids forgetting to subscribe and discovering that your green bin hasn't been collected, but that doesn't mean that we should ignore those who have reasons for not using DD - there may be a (very?) few people who don't have bank accounts (although the alternative methods of payment tend to require one anyway) and, as is made clear by the FAQs on the WBC website, there is a number for them to call - we (the Executive) have asked that this is made clearer."*

With regard to a rolling subscription process throughout the year, whilst this spreads out customer demand (rather than the current system which has a single annual peak) it is unpredictable for planning purposes - the current system has its challenges, but means that WBC can forecast the profile of customer demand and put in one-off resources to process applications/renewals. It also enables WBC to change the bin sticker colour each year - thus the crews can identify who is entitled to the service easily (and there are councils that started off with a rolling subscription approach, but have now changed to fixed subscription periods with coloured stickers just like WBC does). It will also mean, when weekly food collections are introduced (a Government imperative), that routes for the green waste vehicles can be better planned (at present they have to inspect non-subscribed green bins in case there is food waste to be collected).

In essence, having a predictable renewal process that can (at least in part) be automated is good for WBC's efficiency and, in turn, good for the council tax payer."

Parish Matters

Beech Hill

Planning applications

Following an email from Peter and David Simpson I have added them to the circulation list for the weekly planning applications and decisions so they can refer to local applications on the Beech Hill web site.

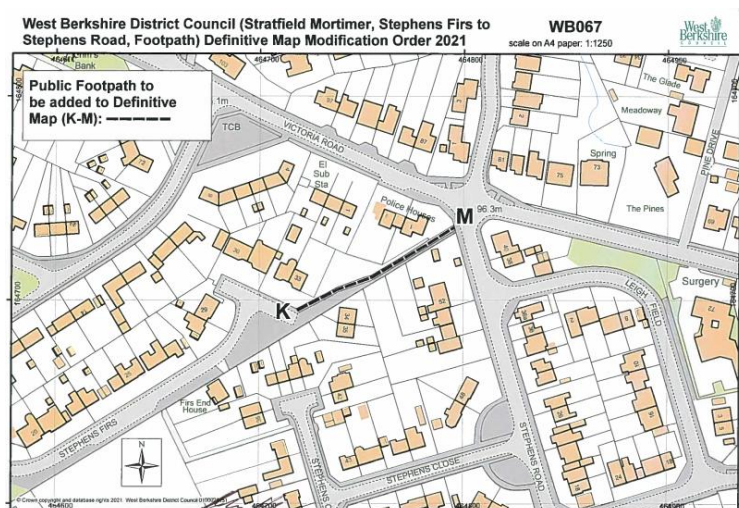
Footpath BEEC/5/2

From the same email, I have also asked WBC Rights of Way officers to look at the signage showing that the footpath through Priory Farm is closed and they are asking for it to be removed.

Stratfield Mortimer

New public footpaths

It is pleasing to finally see the confirmation of the new footpaths – including that between Stephens Firs and Stephens Road:



Wokefield

Goring Lane

Further to discussion at the last PC meeting and a subsequent email from the Chairman, I've asked WBC Highways to look again at traffic speed/volumes, etc and Gareth Dowding (WBC Principal Engineer, Traffic And Road Safety) has written to Cllr Faulkner.

Goodboys Lane

Councillors will be aware that WBC has published a notice regarding the stopping up permanently of the section of the Lane opposite the entrance to Wokefield Park, currently temporarily closed to traffic.

Graham Bridgman

Council Member for Burghfield and Mortimer
Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing

31 August 2021