

Cllr Nick's Newsletter – Edition 6, Feb 2024



Pavement 2.0

Work to reinstate a pavement outside Mortimer Café/David Cliff in Victoria Road, started on 19 February. It aims to tackle the long-standing hazard to pedestrians, notably disabled or those with pushchairs, caused by parked cars, who understandably think it was a layby. I gained agreement from colleagues Vicky and Geoff and Mortimer parish council to joint fund it, using Community Infrastructure Levy money that's given to the community by housebuilders. The total cost is just over £10K. Craig at David Cliff was particularly supportive. Cars will still be able to park on the street once the pavement is restored, but it will be a traffic offence to bump up onto it. Although this latest attempt has moved quickly, it's not the first time this idea was put forward. I'm grateful to the council officers for their work turning the need into a reality. We already have a partially sighted volunteer keen to try it out – they'd been avoiding Victoria Road because of the hazards.



Parked cars obstruct footway



Remedial work starts

Council Budget

West Berks Council is not alone in facing severe financial pressures, through funding shortage coupled with a rising cost in essential services, notably Adult Social Care and Childrens' Service, which make up the lion's share of spending. It recently ran a public consultation on a range of possible savings – as described [HERE](#). Each suggested cut, not surprisingly, met with varying levels of concern or objection. The Executive took as much of these into account as possible, in concluding on what reductions to make and not make. For example the proposals relating to litter and dog waste bin collections, gully emptying, weed spraying and community transport payments are unlikely to go ahead. The budget is described [here](#), was considered by the council Executive on [8 February](#) and will be presented to full council on [29 February at 17.30](#). It will be streamed on YouTube as usual [here](#).



Change Of Council Leader

Lee Dillon recently stepped down as leader of West Berkshire Council, because he is standing as MP in the forthcoming General Election. He's passed the baton to Jeff Brooks, as Acting Leader, with Denise Gaines becoming acting Deputy Leader. There more about this [here](#). I suspect the impact of this change on Burghfield & Mortimer is low, with Jeff Brooks the acting leading being an experienced and tenacious councillor. My short personal experience with Lee is that he is open, knowledgeable, and committed to serve.

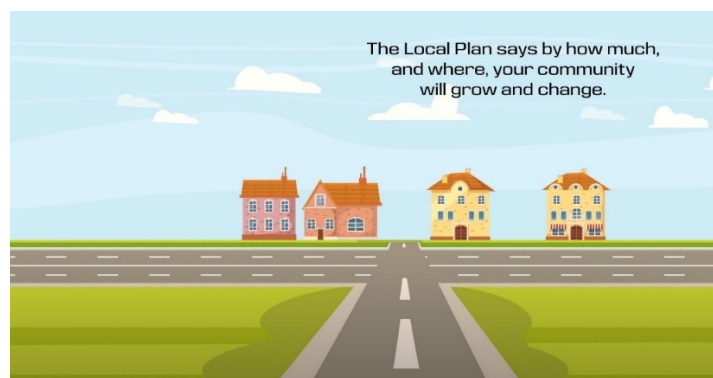


Lee Dillon



Acting Leader Jeff Brooks

The Local Plan



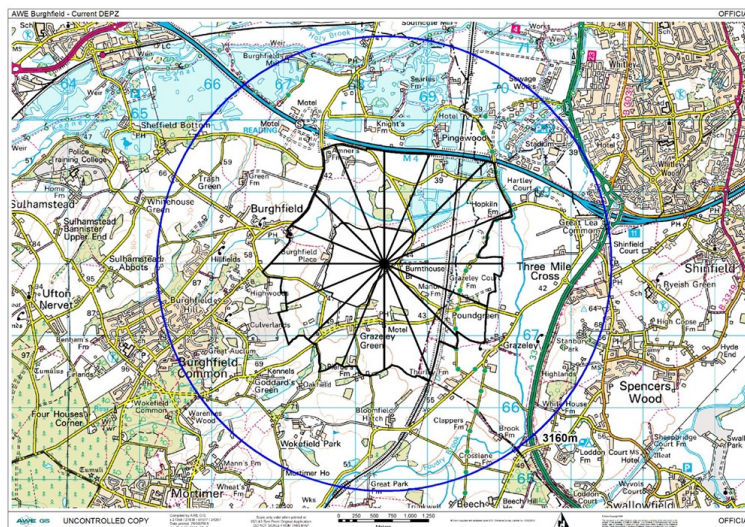
Local Plans, prepared by local planning authorities such as West Berks Council, aim to set out a vision for the future development of an area. They must be reviewed every 5 years. The current Plan runs until 2026. The previous administration created a new Local Plan, intending to run until 2039, and submitted it to the Secretary of State (Michael Gove) on 31 March 2023, for its review/approval process. The new administration [had promised](#) that, if elected, it would “*take all available action to change*” what it felt was a flawed Plan, if necessary by creating a new one. Particular concerns related to proposals to build houses on green spaces in Northeast Thatcham and Theale, without what it felt was sufficient supporting infrastructure. In December, it concluded that the Plan as submitted should be cancelled with a replacement created focussing on developing the district’s villages. Shortly before the council was due to vote on this, Michael Gove’s office instructed it that it cannot cancel the Plan and must support it through Planning Inspector review. That’s what’s happening now. The status of that review is covered [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

As you may know, the submitted Local Plan includes **100 new homes** in **Clayhill Road, Burghfield Common** for which outline planning permission was granted in 2018, *before* the AWE Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) was extended, in 2019, to include the site and most of Burghfield Common. As a result the Local Plan policy (CS8) that states “*residential development in the inner land use planning consultation zones of AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield is likely to be refused planning permission by the Council when the Office for Nuclear Regulation(ONR) has advised against that development*” would not have applied, because the site was outside the DEPZ when approved. When detailed Planning consent (known as “reserved matters”) was granted in 2022 - details [HERE](#) - a single condition was applied, relating to AWE, that “a telephone land line” must be “fixed in each house” and “maintained...in a working order”. It seems AWE and the Environment Agency have recently objected to housing on the site, but, as suggested, this seems too late, given Planning permission was granted and homes are being built there.



Pondhouse Farm/Clayhill Road site

Burghfield Parish Council (via the Clerk) appears of the same opinion on this and does Mortimer parish council's Planning committee, per these [minutes](#).



Pre-2019 (jagged) versus larger 2019 (circular) DEPZ

House Building - Tower Gardens, Mortimer

The house builder TA Fisher is appealing against the refusal of [THIS](#) Planning application for a retaining wall for new homes to be built on the southern perimeter of land set aside for the purpose in 2017. It was declined by the previous administration's Planning committee, primarily because it felt the wall's height did not comply with the Neighbourhood Plan. If you wish to comment on the appeal please do so by 29 February via [this Planning Inspectorate web site](#) using 327705 as the reference. Because of the refusal TA Fisher created revised designs, of split-level properties, with 3 storey rear elevations, and a lower wall, as an alternative way of dealing with the land contour. There is more on this [HERE](#). The houses have been approved but not yet the associated lower wall. TA Fisher is pressing on with Phase 3 meanwhile, which contains most of the [affordable homes](#).



An approved split level design (Drawing: DWC Architecture)

Planning Appeal - Pitchkettle Farm, Grazeley Green

There's an appeal about two modular buildings and associated change of use, on Pitchkettle Farm, by house builder TA Fisher against the refusal of planning permission for them. The original (refused) application is [HERE](#). The appeal reference for use on the [Appeal site](#) is 3329567.

Biodiversity Net Gain



Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. Under the [Environment Act 2021](#), all planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) except for small sites must deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain from 12 February 2024. Small sites will need to comply from 2 April 2024. BNG is measured using Defra's biodiversity metric. There's more about BNG [here](#)

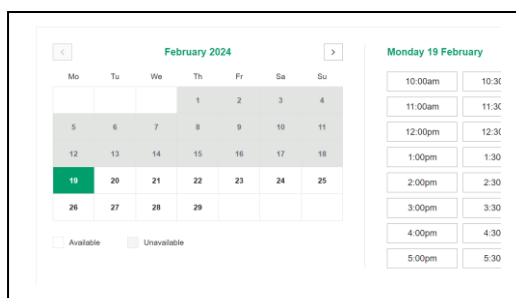
Garth Club, Mortimer



Figure 1: Garth Club, St John's Road, Mortimer

Further to the report [HERE](#), and prior newsletters, two applications went in to the Royal British Legion from parties interested in taking over the land and building – Mens' Shed/Repair Café and Berkshire Boxing. Submissions closed on 30 November and as at 19 Feb neither applicant had been contacted by the RBL, beyond an acknowledgment. The RBL has however called a meeting with the parish council's working party on 29 February. I'm in that group and will update you in the next newsletter.

Flexible 'Dump' Booking



You can book/amend slot 1 hour (or less) ahead

You can now make and change same-day bookings at the Padworth (and Newtown Road) Waste and Recycling centres, one hour (or less) in advance. This change came about after a resident (Jeremy Sharp of [Kennet Radio](#)) asked why he couldn't make impulse bookings – simply deciding to go to the dump, if it has capacity. Or indeed, upon realising you are not ready to go, push the booking out (or bring it forward) that day. I discussed the requirement with our Waste team (I wrote it in 'User Stories' form). They agreed that if capacity exists, there's every reason to allow short notice bookings and changes. They changed the [online booking system](#) to work this way.

Don't forget to register for and use the "online permit" method to book– the "one-day" permit is, as the name suggests, only suited for one-off bookings per car.

School Parking - Mortimer St Mary's

St Mary's school governors and headteacher are looking at if/how a school car park can be created. The latest idea would use land to the east of the church byway. I'm currently supporting them with a cost estimate, and they pitched their idea to the parish council earlier this month, in the hope of receiving some financial support.



Proposed site of school drop-off/car park

Four Houses Corner – Mortimer

The [public consultation](#), comprising an invitation for comments on and a public meeting about the Planning application for the site, finished in January. The planned review of the Planning application at January's [Eastern Area Planning](#) meeting was postponed after a late police objection. It will now be considered in March. Some residents queried the number of pitches and their occupancy level. There are 17 pitches (one less than when the site was last in use), each allowing for two caravans, one of which has a foul drainage connection. A tenancy agreement between pitch holder/family and West Berks Council would define and manage occupancy and other conditions. The Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan's requirement for a "Site Design Brief" does not apply here, since this would be a redevelopment of an *existing* site. Whilst several people, notably including the late PC Harper's mother Mrs Adlam have objected to the re-opening of the site owing to its proximity to the place of PC Harper's manslaughter. I understand that the former residents have a legal right to return, which seems to rule out finding/purchasing another site in Mortimer, at unknown cost. The [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) lead for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, said "there seems to be a deep-seated and accepted prejudice that demonises people from the community. You wouldn't call any other ethnicity inherently criminal. There is no evidence to suggest we have a disproportionately high crime rate around Traveller sites".

School drop-off/collection – Burghfield Common

Following a public/parish councillor request, to ask Burghfield Co-Op to change their delivery times, to avoid school morning drop off, the Neighbourhood Police Sergeant Andy Murray visited the branch, and the local Constable has put the request to Co Op Head office for a change of schedule.

I spotted a separate concern, on a local [Facebook group](#), about parents parking on the marked "no wait" area outside The Willink. The supplier of Burghfield Rec's CCTV said that cameras are often used to deter this, but it's unclear who would monitor such a system. I therefore asked the Neighbourhood Police to carry out a spot check and understand they will pay a visit to do some "education" soon.



Figure 2 Signage outside The Willink



Figure 3 No wait markings outside The Willink

Gigaclear Gripes



Gigaclear reworks a drive reinstatement after resident complains of earlier jo.

As mentioned in previously newsletters, Gigaclear's installations in Mortimer and Burghfield Common, have come with some problems, ranging from poor reinstatement of the ground afterwards to installation delays and just not turning up to install. Whilst only the first of these falls under our remit, I have written to the supplier to support resident complaints. There was a joint inspection between Gigaclear, a West Berks Council officer and fellow councillor Vicky Poole in Burghfield and a similar inspection in Mortimer. I understand most defects have been fixed. On the installation delays and no shows, I received this candid looking reply from Gigaclear *"We are getting great take up in Mortimer and have already connected a high number of customers, however as we scale the business we are having challenges in scaling our IT system and our processes. We have also been failing our customers. We are taking steps to address these and improve our installation journey and I can only apologise to those who have wasted their day waiting for our engineers to arrive. If you could provide the address or Customer number, I will personally investigate and come back to you"*.

If you live in a property where you feel the quality of reinstating the street is poor, please raise a problem on line, in the usual way [HERE](#). If you don't get a satisfactory response within 10 days, feel free to forward me your incident email. Similarly, if you have a "no show" problem, I recommend you [write to their CEO](#), but feel free to contact me too/instead if you wish.

Windmill Court - Mortimer



You can comment on the Planning application [HERE](#). Details on how to do so anonymously are [HERE](#).

Further to [Newsletter 2](#), the council Executive will soon be asked to lift restrictions that exist on Windmill Court site, to allow it to be demolished and redeveloped in line with [THIS](#) Planning application. I understand 5 residents, who wish to return, remain and still seek suitable temporary accommodation locally. I understand they have been told they must leave soon, and must consider living outside Mortimer, to allow the building work to start. As petition organiser (and councillor) I'm raising their claim/concern with the housing association, before deciding if I, on behalf of the petition signatories, should support demolition.

Electric Vehicle Charging

I continue to work with our "EV team" to provide roadside electric vehicle charge points for residents that have no off-street parking. The council has installed 57 such chargers so far in the district and expects to add about 40 per year for the next 4 years. In January 560kWhrs were pumped into electric vehicle through these chargers. The council hopes to let further contracts for more on street chargers as well as off street fast charging for car parks.



The trial of the product that allows residents without a driveway to charge their vehicle from their home via a through-pavement channel with a self-closing lid is nearly over. The results should be reviewed by April after which we'll hopefully publish details of how you can buy the product.

Trial of pavement cable channel, in Hungerford

Heathcare – New Hospital



**Modernising our hospitals
and health services**

You may have read of plans to create two acute hospitals – by refurbishing the Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester, and by building a new facility on either the existing Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital site, or at a new location near Junction 7 of the M3. There's a public consultation open until 17 March – more information [HERE](#)

Heathcare – Transforming Services

On Weds 21 Feb, at 6pm, there a webinar hosted by the Bucks Oxon and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (for Blackadder fans, often referred to as 'BOB'). It'll describe their plans to transform primary care services, general practice community pharmacy, eye care and dentistry. Register in advance [HERE](#).

Meeting You/"Surgeries"

I'll be back at the Baobab, after their/my break, for my regular first Saturday "surgery" on **2 March** from **10-11am** if you want to catch up. As a reminder, fellow ward member Vicky Poole runs her drop-in each first Saturday too also from 10-11am, in **Burghfield library**



Figure 4:Meet
Councillor Nick

To receive future newsletters directly, let me know (you can unsubscribe at any time). Back issues are here:

[Edition 1](#) June 2023

[Edition 2](#) July 2023

[Edition 3](#) September 2023

[Edition 4](#) November 2023

[Edition 5](#) December 2023

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Issue Tracker

Some issues raised by residents and their status (for closed issues see older newsletters):

Topic	Raised	Action	Status
Alleged encroachment/planning infringements/other	27 June	Heard concerns over alleged encroachment/Planning/other issues and residents understanding of what the council has/is doing about it.	6 Oct: Residents were updated. 10 Nov: follow up meeting within council. 20 Feb: review meeting.
Flooding	Nov '23	Concerns raised by Burghfield residents.	The matter is being primarily supported with by the Highways team but I and Vicky are closely engaged in the dialogue.
Windmill Court	Oct' 22	Understanding residents' requirement and engaging with housing association. Communicating plan and summarising the changes versus what existed before.	Nov '23: Invited public comment on plan. Jan '24: informed residents of Housing Association's moving costs reply.
Housing association repairs	23 Dec' 23	Alerted to concern on apparently poorly organised refurbishments to housing association properties,	Jan '24: emailed and raised case raised with council's Housing Association team
The Little Village Pharmacy's (formerly JHoots) has asked me to help them gain electronic access to prescriptions, to replace the old school method, in which an employee has to walk regularly to the dispensary, at the surgery, to get them. This arrangement is very unusual within West Berkshire.			19/2/24: tabled it for inclusion in Feb Healthcare Scrutiny meeting, with the Integrated Care Board.

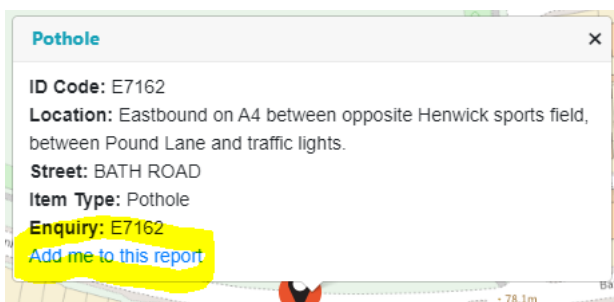
Frequently Asked Questions

Below summarises commonly raised council related questions and how to get them answered.

How Do I Report Highways and Countryside Problems?

The [online problem reporting system](#) allows residents (and parish councils) to report problems relating to Highways (potholes, dirty road signs, unemptied pavement bins and non-working street lights) and Countryside (unemptied bins in parks and footpaths). You can access the system [HERE](#) from a PC or mobile device.

You select the problem category from a list and mark the incident location on a map. You can (and ideally should) upload photos for pothole cases but should not try to measure their depth. You'll receive an email acknowledgement, giving an indicative response time. The incident is then reviewed and assigned a priority. A non-working pelican crossing, or a serious pothole for example, should be dealt with within a few hours of reporting, whilst a less serious pothole may take 28 days. You'll receive email updates as the incident progresses. If it is deemed a duplicate of a problem reported by others or dealt with already, you will be informed. You can nominate other people to receive notifications of the incident's progress.



We don't currently support the use of third-party apps. to raise problems, nor phoned in incidents, other than for out of hours emergencies.

Further streamlining of the systems and improvements to user interface are expected by the Autumn.

Meanwhile if you experience problems using the service, or an unusually poor response time, please let us know, ideally forwarding the relevant incident email(s).

Party Time

As a volunteer at Kennet Community Radio, I invite you to join us for our second Listeners Party on **6 March** at Newbury's [Shaw Social Club](#) from 7pm till midnight (bar till 11pm). It's a chance to be entertained by the station's presenters, with floor filling tunes from the '60s to today. Early bird tickets just £10 [HERE](#).

