



## Parish Council Report for July 2021

Councillors Hilary Cole & Garth Simpson

### West Berkshire Council

#### The Council

##### *Council*

The first full WBC meeting since the regulations permitting virtual meetings expired took place on 8 July. Because of the covid restrictions on physical meetings it took place in a hybrid format with a politically proportionate 14 Members (eight Conservative, five Liberal Democrat and one Green) in the Council Chamber and the remaining members of council able to attend via Zoom and have their views considered (although only those in the Chamber could take part in the substantive vote on any item, hence the need for political proportionality).

The main item on the agenda was to agree the appointment of new Chief Executive, along with a new pay structure for the role. This was resolved unanimously.

At the time of the meeting, the name of the successful candidate could not be publically revealed because, until Council agreed, no job offer could be made, let alone accepted. It can now be said that the new Chief Executive, chosen from what was described in the meeting by the appointments panel (which had been comprised wholly of elected members) as a very strong field, will be Nigel Lynn – more about him below.

The debate on the appointment followed plaudits from the leaders of the main political groups to Nick Carter, the outgoing Chief Executive. Nick retires in mid-August after spending 23 years at West Berkshire Council – including 16 years as Chief Executive.

The meeting also agreed that Susan Halliwell, the WBC Executive Director (Place), should be appointed as the interim Chief Executive, taking up the role on Nick's retirement and holding the fort until Nigel arrives.

As well as these very important matters. there were a large number of motions presented, some of which could not be debated because they related to Executive functions (ie matters that, by law, could only be decided upon by the Executive) and others that were sent to different committees or task groups (etc) to consider. A motion to support staff employed by British armed forces in Afghanistan who relocated to the UK was passed unanimously, as was a motion to facilitate hybrid meetings.

The recording of the meeting can be viewed [here](#).

##### *New Chief Executive*



As detailed above, Nigel Lynn has been appointed as the new WBC Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service).

Nigel has a strong track record of leadership in local government having worked at eight local authorities and spending the last 18 years in senior leadership roles. He will arrive from Arun District Council where he has been Chief Executive for the last decade.

In his career Nigel has gained a wide experience of local government in both urban and rural areas, and with varying levels of affluence. As well as ten years as a Chief Executive and eight years as a Deputy Chief Executive, Nigel is also part of the Local

Government Association assessment team to review other councils and currently sits on the Executive Board of the District Council Network.

### Executive

The Executive met on 15 July, with all voting Members who were able to attend present in the Council Chamber (along with some opposition Members in the Chamber and other Members attending virtually).

A number of items were considered, including the approval of a new Environment Strategy Delivery Plan and of a new West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership - the meeting recording can be viewed [here](#).

### Covid Recovery

#### Welcome Back Business Grants agreed



WBC's Economic Development Team has signed off agreements to fund 26 local businesses with a total of £112k+ through the Welcome Back Business Grant scheme.

The funding will support temporary changes, events and innovative measures that will allow these businesses to drive footfall to the streets as West Berkshire re-opens fully this summer. There was a huge variety of proposals, including Little Yum Factory's new presence at Newbury Market (see below), a series of workshops across Hungerford, a new seating area at Crepe O'Clock, and a re-opening event for two businesses on Thatcham Broadway.

It will be exciting to see all 26 proposals take shape over the next few months, and to see the impact they have locally.

#### Little Yum Factory



Little Yum Factory, which offers artisan food products, met the criteria for the grant because it was an innovative proposal that offered something new to bring in visitors in the run up to fully re-opening this summer.

Dean Raybould, owner of Little Yum Factory, said, "I am so very grateful to West Berkshire Council and the Economic Development Team for their 'Welcome Back Scheme'.

"This support is invaluable to local businesses like myself, following Covid to encourage new growth within the local community. This timely and meaningful initiative will encourage extra footfall within the community whilst assisting local businesses to adapt in the current climate."

If you are in Newbury and wish to visit Little Yum Factory's market stall it is open in Newbury Market from 09:00 to 16:00 every Saturday.



#### Free School Meals programme this summer



WBC's Free School Meal voucher scheme is being extended into the school summer holiday period for eligible children.

The programme will provide vouchers for nearly 4,000 children across the district and support families in need as the district recovers from the pandemic.

The programme is being funded through West Berkshire's allocation of over £260k from the national COVID Local Grant Support Scheme that the government is extending for a third and final time up until September, along with a top up of £31.5k from a separate Covid fund that WBC manage.

#### Long Covid

WBC are looking for residents who have (or had) long COVID and are happy to talk about their experience. If this is you, and you're happy to tell your story to encourage others to have their Covid vaccinations, please email [pr@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:pr@westberks.gov.uk).

## Let's Get Active Fund

The Let's Get Active Fund to improve access to physical activities in West Berkshire is still open for applications.

WBC has partnered with Greenham Trust to offer the fund as part of the district's recovery from Covid-19.



## Waste Collection

### Temporary Suspension of Garden Waste Collections

As a result of a rapidly-escalating nationwide issue with an HGV driver shortage, together with the impacts of the track and track notifications (pingdemic) that have been causing disruptions for all sorts of businesses across the country, WBC suspended green bin garden and food waste collection service at the end of July for two weeks, to ensure that rubbish (black bin) and recycling (green boxes and bag) continued to be collected as scheduled (the green bin lorries being capable of collecting black bin waste, but the recycling lorries not).

Green waste subscribers should now have received notification the subscription rate for each garden waste bin will be reduced by £4.00 to £46.00 on a one-off basis for the upcoming 2021/22 season, which commences on 30 August.

## Leisure

### Northcroft Lido



WBC wants to make one of West Berkshire's most loved leisure facilities, the Lido at Northcroft Leisure Centre in Newbury, even better - and is seeking comments from the district.

Improvements to the facility are being proposed which will allow it to open for longer each year, alongside a review of the facilities at the site. The image (left) provides a concept of what it could look like with potential new features such as a children's interactive splash pad, changing cubicles and lockers by the pool, and a sun-terrace and relaxation space.

There are plenty of ideas already, and opinions on these and any other ideas to make the lido somewhere that can be enjoyed in the years to come are being sought.

There is also a public webinar at 17:00 on Tuesday (3 August) to discuss the options and answer questions. If you would like to join the webinar you need to [register in advance](#) and you can also follow it live on the WBC [YouTube channel](#).

### Summer at Shaw House

Shaw House in Newbury will be open on weekdays in the school summer holidays.



Visitors can explore the history of the House through the new costume exhibition 'Dressed for Shaw' and admire the recognisable ruffs of Elizabethan England, the flamboyant frills of the Georgian gentleman and the weathered wool of the Edwardian era. Along with the 'Dressed for Battle' civil war exhibition with displays of arms and armour from the Littlecote House collection, which is currently on loan from the Royal Armouries Museum. There are free interactive activities for younger visitors and detailed information booklets to purchase for those who want to learn more about local heritage.

Free children's trails are available from reception and visitors are welcome to bring a picnic and enjoy the Grade II listed grounds - dogs on leads can come along too!

You can find opening hours for Shaw House and information about events and activities [online](#).

Please help us to keep communities safe by continuing to wear a face covering whilst inside Shaw House, use the hand sanitiser on arrival and keep a reasonable distance from other customers.

### Summer activities in West Berkshire



WBC has been working hard to bring as much summer fun to West Berkshire as possible while keeping socially distanced and safe.

There are many activities and great ways to keep children, young people and families happy and active through the summer holidays. Click on the [link](#) to get a copy of the Summer Fun brochure.

### Wild World Heroes Summer Reading Challenge



Felicity Harrison, the WBC Libraries Manager, and Cllr Howard Woollaston, the WBC Executive Member for Leisure and Culture, recently launched the [Wild World Heroes](#) Summer Reading Challenge 2021. They are pictured in Hungerford Library, one of the eight West Berkshire Libraries, all of which are running the Challenge this summer.

West Berkshire Libraries is challenging children to read up to six library books between now and 15 September and to collect free incentives from their local library for their achievements as they read. There will be medals and certificates for everyone who completes the challenge.

The Wild World Heroes theme is a celebration of books, nature and action for the environment, and was developed in partnership with WWF, the world's leading independent conservation organisation.



### Summer Reading Challenge for adults: 'Grown-ups2!'



Adults and older children are invited to take the Grown-ups2! Summer Reading Challenge and to read three library books before 15 September to be entered into a prize draw to win a Wi-Fi tablet.

Please sign up in your local West Berkshire library with your own library card to get started.

For more information about the Summer Reading Challenges for all ages, [read the special Summer Reading edition of the Libraries newsletter](#).

### Hungerford exhibition

West Berkshire Museum is continuing its series of exhibitions focusing on each of the parishes in the area by looking at Hungerford, a town with a very interesting history.

Although there are many items from Hungerford in the collection, the Museum staff are always keen to fill any gaps, and if anyone has any items connected to the town's early history that they would be willing to loan for the exhibition, the staff would love to hear from them before the end of September. The Museum can be contacted via [collections@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:collections@westberks.gov.uk) or on 01635 519562 during opening hours (currently Wednesday to Saturday, 10:00 to 16:00).



## Walking For Health



Now we can get together again, and that the summer is here, many people will be thinking about how they can get a little fitter. For some of us that might mean working out in the gym, but given that West Berkshire is blessed with so much lovely countryside a walk can be just as effective and more social.

Walking for Health - WfH - 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.

West Berkshire Council organises WfH locally and currently has 12 walking groups dotted around the district, each led by a team of enthusiastic volunteers. We want to expand the programme and need more walk leaders to help us make this happen.

If you like the outdoors and would like to help others enjoy it too, please [get in touch](#).

## Education

### A thank you to parents and teachers

As we come to the end of an exceptional school year, WBC has thanked parents, teachers and school staff for their hard work and support - remote learning and home schooling have been a huge challenge, requiring everyone involved to balance their own work, health and family needs while supporting learning.



Councillor Dominic Boeck, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education, has written a [letter of thanks](#) to parents to acknowledge the support shown for home learning this year.

## Public Protection Partnership

### Meet the Animal Wardens

Animal Warden Officers from the Public Protection Partnership will be out and about in West Berkshire this summer to talk to residents about the role the wardens play in the community.

The wardens can also check that a dog's microchip details are correct and that the microchip is still in place. The wardens will be giving away free dog 'poop' bags and would be happy to talk to anyone about the welfare of a dog or dogs they might be concerned about. Dates and locations are [here](#).



## Environment

### Climate Emergency



It's been two years since WBC declared a Climate Emergency. Since then WBC have been busy on planning a route towards carbon neutrality for the district.

WBC launched its Environment Strategy in 2020 and this year released its

Environment Strategy draft Delivery Plan which outlines the actions to be taken between now and 2030 - details can be found [here](#).

## Consultations and Strategies

### *Vision for Newbury*



## NEWBURY VISION SURVEY

Views are being sought make sure that Newbury continues to be a successful, modern market town, with the publication of a [short survey](#) for those interested to give WBC their thoughts on the draft 'Vision for Newbury Town Centre.'

This proposal takes into account feedback from meetings and workshops with a range of businesses, residents' groups, students, and other stakeholders, as well as the initial public survey that received more than 4,000 responses.

### *Refreshed Economic Development Strategy*

WBC have reviewed and refreshed the [Economic Development Strategy 2020-2023](#) to take account of the challenges posed to local economic recovery and renewal by the Covid-19 pandemic.



The refreshed strategy looks at what WBC have achieved so far, such as: town centre master planning, welcome back business grants, employment support for young adults, and applying for additional funding for the Lido.

WBC have developed actions in the following four areas believed to have the most relevance locally:

- People - good jobs and greater earning power for all in West Berkshire;
- Places - creating prosperous communities across West Berkshire;
- Infrastructure - future-proofing West Berkshire's infrastructure;
- Business Environment - making West Berkshire the best place to start a grow a business.

### *Draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy*

A reminder that residents are invited to review and provide feedback on the draft Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2030, which aims to drive positive change to tackle the underlying causes of poor health and wellbeing, reduce health inequalities, and help the district to recover from Covid-19

Cllr Graham Bridgman, Deputy Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Health and Wellbeing Board, has produced a [video](#) encouraging everyone to engage with the consultation - please note that the [consultation](#) ends on 4 August.

### *Other consultations*

[Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement](#) – closes 8 August.

[Bus service survey](#) – closes 30 August.

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

## Other Matters

### **Queen's Award for Voluntary Service 2022**

The Berkshire Lord Lieutenant's office is inviting nominations for The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS) - nominations for the 2022 Awards need to be submitted by midnight on Wednesday 15 September.

Any group of three or more people doing volunteering work can be nominated for the Award. To be eligible to be nominated they should do work that provides a service that meets a need of people living in the local community, is supported, recognised and respected by the local community and the people who benefit from it. All nominations can be completed online via the QAVS [website](#).

## **Police & Crime Bulletin**

The latest from Matthew Barber, the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner.

### ***Over 250 more police officers for TVP***

269 police officers have been recruited to the Thames Valley Force since September 2019, bringing the total number of officers up to 4,519 - more police officers than ever before as numbers have passed the previous high reached in 2010.

Nearly 10,000 new officers have been recruited across all 43 police forces in England and Wales, including more than 6,000 new female officers recruited since April 2020, and more black, Asian and other ethnic minorities employed as officers across forces than at any other time in the country's history.

### ***Funding to support Thames Valley victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence***

Victims and survivors of sexual violence and domestic abuse will benefit from extra support as a result of £980k of Ministry of Justice funding awarded by the PCC to third sector organisations, charitable and social enterprises and public bodies providing support services to help victims of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence.

### ***Tougher rules on offensive weapons***

Changes to legislation as a result of the Offensive Weapons Act 2019, mean that it is now an offence to possess certain items such as knuckledusters, throwing stars and zombie knives, even in private.

Other sections of the Act include an updated definition of flick knives to reflect changes in weapon designs, and the banning of private possession of flick knives and gravity knives. The rest of the act will commence later in the year, and will bring in new provisions for the control of goods sold online, as well as placing responsibility onto delivery companies to conduct age verification at delivery stage.

***With Best wishes Hilary & Garth***