



Parish Council Report for January 2022

Councillors Hilary Cole & Garth Simpson, Chieveley & Cold Ash Ward

Introduction

A reminder that there was no report in December and that November's report covered matters up to the meeting of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board on 6 December - this report covers matters since then.

West Berkshire Council

Tilehurst South and Holybrook by-election result

Following the death of Cllr Peter Argyle, a poll for the election of a District Councillor for the Tilehurst South and Holybrook Ward took place on Thursday 16 December.



Nigel Lynn, Chief Executive and Returning Officer for West Berkshire Council, announced the result declaring Biyi Oloko (Conservative) as the successful candidate with 548 votes.

Speaking on his success, Councillor Oloko said: "I want to thank the residents of Tilehurst South and Holybrook for their confidence in voting for me and I will make their priorities my priorities. I look forward to being of service to the residents of Tilehurst South and Holybrook."

Council

As reported last time, the full Council Meeting on 2 December concluded after nearly three and a half hours without completing all of the agenda.

The remaining agenda items – various Motions - were dealt with in an Extraordinary Council Meeting on 18 January. Some were passed to the Executive or a Committee in accordance with the WBC Constitution, and two were debated – those regarding council integrity and pension fund investments. The debates can be viewed [here](#).

The next full meeting of the Council will be in relation to the WBC Budget on 3 March. Because the meeting will be devoted only to the Budget, and further to the decision reported in November, there will be a further meeting on 17 March to deal with all other matters.

Executive

The Executive met on 16 December and, as well as dealing with public and Members' questions:

- Awarded the contract for the provision of development management services (which includes construction) of the Newbury Sports Hub to Alliance Leisure Management Services;
- Agreed to grant a lease on the vacant parts of the property known as 4 The Sector Newbury, on the terms outlined in the report;
- Agreed additional expenditure following the Q2 Capital Financial Performance Report;
- Noted the Q2 Revenue Financial Performance Report.

- Noted the progress made in delivering the Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2019-2023

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

The meeting on 13 January was cancelled, and the next meeting is on 10 February.

WBC Budget

Revenue Budget and Capital Strategy

Proposals for the WBC Budget for 2022/23, to be decided at the Council Budget Meeting on 3 March, have been announced via the agenda pack for the meeting of the Executive on 10 February.

The Revenue Budget proposes a core Council Tax increase of 1% and Adult Social Care Precept of 3%, giving a total council tax increase of 4%, below the rate of inflation.

The Capital Strategy proposes an investment of £202m over the next five financial years, to deliver a range of projects including new and refurbished schools, road and transport improvements, leisure facility upgrades, environmental projects and more. Over the same period, the capital repayment costs in relation to the revenue budget will remain stable at between 10% and 11%.

Facebook Live

Cllr Ross Mackinnon, the WBC Executive Member for Finance, and Joseph Holmes, the WBC Executive Director (Resources), will be online on Monday 7 February from 18:30 to answer any questions about the budget, and to tell everyone joining more about how WBC has been spending residents money this year and the plans for 2022/23, including the Medium Term Financial Strategy (a rolling three-year strategy to ensure that the financial resources, both revenue and capital, are available to deliver the Council Strategy).

Any advance questions can be emailed to pr@westberks.gov.uk.

2021 WBC Community Champion Awards.

These awards, recognising people who have done something special for their local community over the past year, were recently announced - there are awards for Junior Citizen, Volunteer and Community Group of the Year as well as a special Lifetime Achievement Award.

The winners of the 2021 awards are:

- Junior Citizen of the Year: Cara Herman, Lillie Howe and Megan Dempsie;
- Volunteer of the Year: Susan Millington;
- Community Group of the Year: Young Carers' Project, Newbury Road Club, Mortimer Lunch Club;
- Lifetime Achievement Award: Trevor Goodall.

The judges were impressed with the quality of nominations and as well as crowning joint winners in two categories there were also two Highly Commended nominees in the Volunteer of the Year category.

Environment

Changes to recycling and rubbish bin collection days

Changes to bin collection days across the district for many residents take effect from Monday 7 February, and apply to rubbish (black bin), recycling, and food and garden waste (green bin) collections. WBC are making these changes to help enhance the efficiency of collection rounds and to improve resilience.

All households will have received information about their new collection day in the post - for most this will be in the form of a postcard including a calendar showing collection dates up until the end of July. Some will also have received a letter about an extra collection. Everyone can view their new collection date here: www.westberks.gov.uk/binday.

Please note that apart from the collection day revision, no other changes are being proposed at this time.

For more information please visit <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/bindaychanges>.

North and East Thatcham Flood Alleviation Scheme

Planning applications have been submitted for three more flood protection schemes in Thatcham near to Bowling Green Road, Heath Lane and Siege Cross off Floral Way.

These projects are part of an ongoing programme to protect Thatcham following the severe flooding that occurred in 2007. At that time, Thatcham suffered widespread surface water flooding affecting at least 1,100 houses, causing severe hardship and economic losses for both residents and local businesses.

The flood defences have been designed to provide a level of protection up to a 1 in 100 year storm, and a further 40% allowance has been added to take into account future climate change. Anyone wishing to comment on the proposals can do so via the WBC planning portal (application numbers 21/03079/COMIND, 21/03135/COMIND and 21/03154/FUL).

Education

Holiday Activities and Food Programme



The latest Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) was a great success.

During the first week of the Christmas school holidays, over 400 children aged 5 to 16 attended the thirteen HAF clubs across the district.

All were provided with a nutritious meal each day and a fun filled programme of activities including cooking, arts and crafts, games, football, wall climbing, pottery painting, yoga and much more.

The HAF programme is funded by the Department for Education to provide free holiday activities including a nutritious meal for eligible children.

2021 Summer Reading Challenge

Reading is a top leisure choice for people of all ages in West Berkshire and it was greatly encouraging that the 2021 WBC Summer Reading Challenge had the highest level of participation in the South East of England reaching 16% of all 4-12 year olds across the district.



Wellbeing Passports for Primary Schools

WBC have teamed up with The School Sports Network to deliver Wellbeing Passports to schools - all primary schools in West Berkshire received passports for their Year 5 and Year 6 pupils before Christmas.

The passports are full of fun activities and learning based around the Five Ways to Wellbeing and support the health education curriculum. They can be used to help deliver health education lessons and have interactive and reflective activities for children throughout the academic year, supporting national campaigns such as Children's Mental Health week in February.

Cycle Skills Training

With spring just around the corner, there are courses available to help children to get out and about on their bikes and build up their confidence.

Anyone in Year 7 or 9 who has completed Bikeability Level 2 and wants to develop their cycling skills even further can sign up to complete Level 3 this half term.

Another event, which starts in April, is Cyclomaniacs. This is ideal for children aged 9-12 to come and join the Cyclomaniacs for 3 hours of fun - find out more about the Cyclomaniacs scheme [here](#).

Places are limited, and for more information/to secure a place please email: activetravel@westberks.gov.uk.

Leisure

Former football ground opened as recreational space

The former Faraday Road football ground site in Newbury has been opened as a temporary public sport and recreation space (the site, which forms part of the London Road Industrial Estate, was vacated three years ago to allow plans to be brought forward for significant investment, including the creation of an attractive new mixed commercial and residential development).

Economy

New Business Grants available

Since November 2020, WBC have given over £5 million to businesses across West Berkshire through Additional Restriction Grants to help with the recovery from Covid.

A new Challenge Fund has now been announced, with grants of up to £25k for businesses that could use a new piece of equipment to expand and grow, or to fund full fibre access, etc. Businesses are encouraged to apply for grants to pay for projects to drive green growth and recovery.

Full details are [here](#).

Landlord's Forum

WBC are looking to develop and support working relationships with landlords and agents who own/manage/rent properties in the private rented sector. With this aim in mind, the Public Protection Partnership will be running a virtual landlord webinar as a means of providing regulatory updates and sharing best practice of improving standards within private rented accommodation.

The first webinar will take place on Thursday 10 February from 16:30 to 17:40 via Zoom, and will cover topics such as:

- Issues relating to Universal Credit claims and how to minimise rent arrears;
- West Berkshire Council in relation to homelessness legislation;
- West Berkshire Council's new landlord initiatives;
- Shaping the future of landlord engagement in the future for the area.

This webinar will be part of wider landlord engagement, which will provide resources to support landlords across West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest.

To read more/book a place, visit [Eventbrite](#).

Free business courses for West Berkshire start-ups

WBC's Economic Development team are sponsoring one of the Rebel Business School modules as part of the district's economic recovery goals to help potential business starters gain valuable skills such as making sales and marketing through social media and websites.

To encourage business start-ups, the Rebel Business School is offering a free 10 day course starting on 7 February (10:00 to 15:00).

Week One	Week Two
Monday How to Start a Business for Free	Monday Mastering Pitching and Keeping Customers
Tuesday Sales & Marketing	Tuesday Productivity & Networking Effectively
Wednesday How to Build a Website with No Money	Wednesday Getting Your Website on Google
Thursday Finding Customers on Social Media	Thursday Staying Motivated & Live Business Coaching
Friday The Rebel Guide to The Legal Stuff	Friday Negotiation & Graduation

From the WBC Communications Team: "*The Rebel Business School is free and available to all West Berkshire residents. It's perfect for anyone who wants to do what they love for a living, and is a great stepping stone for those wanting to start a business to build the confidence to do so.*"

To investigate, please visit <https://therebelschool.com/berkshire/>.

Meet the Buyer Event - Thursday 16 February 2022

WBC is holding a free Meet the Buyer event on Wednesday 16 February at 14:00 via Zoom, to engage with building contractors and tradesmen to work locally on projects that directly benefit local communities.

This event is an opportunity for potential contractors to meet WBC's Property Services team regarding possible work in relation to West Berkshire's Education Capital Maintenance programme which averages £2.5m pa over up to 60 individual projects, many of which are relatively small and would often need to be completed within school holiday periods.

Booking is via <https://tinyurl.com/Meet-the-Buyer-2022>.

Health

Recording Covid-19

From 31 January, the way Cov-19 cases are counted and reported in England changed. Previously there was no account taken of the number of times a person had Cov-19; they were only counted the first time they tested positive. The new data counts each time a person has Cov-19 (as long as there is at least 91 days between each infection). For example, if Mr Smith tested positive for Cov-19 on 1 September 2021, that was entered into the data collection as one episode of Cov-19. If he tested positive again on 31 December 2021 (more than 90 days later), this will now be counted as a second episode of Cov-19 infection.

This results in a large increase in the number of reported cases, and the [Berkshire Public Health dashboard](#) has been updated to show the new data (but for more information on the change, please see the 'what's new' information on GOV.UK website).

New guidance on positive LFT tests

On 11 January the guidance on what to do if you receive a positive lateral flow test changed. These are the new guidelines:

- If you have no symptoms → complete a positive lateral flow test → report your result, and self-isolate for 10 days – you will be contacted by NHS Test & Trace. You do not need to book a PCR test.
- You will still be asked to take a follow-up PCR test include if you:
 - are eligible for the Test & Trace Support Payment (TTSP);
 - are in a clinically vulnerable group who may need early access to treatment;
 - are participating in research or surveillance programmes;
 - get a positive Day 2 lateral flow result after arrival in England.

As previously announced, you can reduce the 10 days of self-isolation to seven days if you complete negative LFD results on Days 6 and 7, with the tests taken 24 hours apart. You must take the first test no earlier than Day 6 of the self-isolation period.

Those who leave self-isolation on or after Day 7 are strongly advised to limit close contact with other people in crowded or poorly ventilated spaces, work from home and minimise contact with anyone at higher risk of severe illness if infected with Cov-19.

If you experience any symptoms of Cov-19, you will still need to book a PCR test immediately.

Winter

With the weather taking a turn as the temperatures drop, WBC have implemented their Winter Plan to proactively minimise the adverse impact on rough sleepers this winter across West Berkshire.

Beds are set aside to ensure anyone who is verified as sleeping rough can have access to accommodation 24/7 and all accommodation will be Covid safe with self-contained facilities.

If you spot a rough sleeper, here is some information on what you can do:

Call Streetlink on: 0300 5000914 or via their website: www.streetlink.org.uk

Contact our Rough Sleeper Team: housing@westberks.gov.uk

If you think the person you are concerned about is in immediate danger or needs urgent care, please call 999

Donate to local homeless charities rather than directly to individuals



If you spot a rough sleeper, here is some information on what you can do:

- call Streetlink on 0300 5000914 or contact them via their website: <https://www.streetlink.org.uk>;
- contact the Rough Sleeper Team: housing@westberks.gov.uk;
- if you think the person you are concerned about is in immediate danger or needs urgent care, please call 999;
- donate to local homeless charities (rather than directly to individuals).

Alcohol and Drug Support Service contract awarded

WBC has awarded a contract for a new integrated drug and alcohol service, to be delivered by WDP, a leading drug and alcohol charity, from 1 April 2022.

The service will provide treatment and support to all adults and young people who live in West Berkshire and who require help with substance misuse of any kind. The service will be delivered from a fixed hub in Newbury, as well as in a variety of satellite settings across the district.

Awarding the delivery of the service to WDP will result in a single support service providing help seamlessly for both young people and adults – a flexible service which will meet the service users' needs most effectively.

All existing users of the current, separate, adult service and young people service (The Edge) will be transferred to the new provider without interruption to the service they receive.

Cllr Graham Bridgman, West Berkshire's Executive Member for Health & Wellbeing, said: "*Dependency on alcohol or drugs can be hard not only for the person themselves, but for the family and friends who support them. This is an important new service which will help them to get on the road to recovery – improving both their health and future prospects.*

"WDP have a strong track record in delivering these services in other parts of the country, and we're looking forward to working with them to inspire and support residents to improve their health and wellbeing."

Public Protection Partnership

Drink Spiking Awareness Campaign

The PPP and Thames Valley Police launched a campaign in December to raise awareness with the public regarding, and support local venues tackle, the issue of drinks spiking - whilst spiking incidents aren't common, there is a national increase in the number of people reporting cases. The campaign involved:

- #BeSpikeAware posters for venues to display;
- social media coverage of the #BeSpikeAware campaign;
- Licensing Liaison Officers going out and meeting licensees raising awareness of the campaign and giving out the posters.

What is drink spiking?

Drink spiking can be defined as adding a substance to someone's drink without their knowledge. The aim may be to incapacitate someone enough to rob or sexually assault them.

Campaign aims

To raise awareness:

- of venue staff on how to spot signs of drink spiking, how to identify when drinks have been spiked, what action to take and when to contact the Police;
- of the general public on how to protect themselves and their friends and spot the signs of drink spiking;
- of the seriousness of drink spiking and the possible penalty for a conviction, up to ten years in prison.

Statutory nuisance cases

Breaches of an abatement notice served in relation to the burning of various waste materials

The burning caused smoke resulting in a nuisance to residents in the nearby vicinity and two breaches of the abatement notice were witnessed by PPP Officers and a nearby resident. The defendant was found guilty in absence after a trial at Reading Magistrates Court and was fined £1,000 for each offence and ordered to pay the full costs of bringing the case.

Rogue trader

A two week trial at Reading Crown Court trial was listed to start on 17 January. On the first day, guilty pleas were entered to fraud offences and offences relating to aggressive practices under the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008.

The case involve a father and son cold calling and offering garden works. The works were either not fully completed or money was taken and no work was done. This case involved 15 consumers, some of whom were vulnerable. Both defendants will be sentenced in March 2022.

Rogue builder

Having entered guilty pleas at Reading Crown Court to three counts contrary to the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008, the convicted defendant received a sentence of 10 months imprisonment suspended for 12 months, 120 hours unpaid work and was ordered to pay compensation of £24,480 to the homeowner.

Specifically, the prosecution case alleged that the amount charged in relation to work carried out at the home of a vulnerable consumer that was excessive, was not to a professional standard, was charged twice in some circumstances, and in some cases was unnecessary.

Asylum Seekers

WBC was recently obliged to issue a media statement regarding the Regency Park Hotel in Thatcham, having been informed by the Home Office that it is now using the hotel to accommodate asylum seekers:

"This is a private arrangement between the Home Office and the hotel, and we were not involved in their negotiations. We are also not involved in the planning or day-to-day activities at the hotel. The Council and other agencies are only involved by way of the provision of any statutory duties.

"In recent days we've seen unkind comments on social media in relation to the asylum-seekers. This is not who we are in West Berkshire and to people making these hurtful comments we say; be kind. We are working in partnership with Thames Valley Police around the concerning comments being made. Thames Valley Police will investigate instances of hate reported to them. We encourage those who experience or witness hate to report offences by calling non-emergency 101 or reporting online. If a crime is taking place right now, dial 999.

"Fortunately the people making these comments are in the minority and we know that the vast majority of residents are welcoming to people in need and will help them to feel at home."

Consultations

Bus Strategy

The Government launched its new National Bus Strategy (Bus Back Better) in March 2021 and, in order to meet the requirements of this new strategy, WBC produced a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), and has been focussed on setting up an Enhanced Partnership with the bus companies as the means of implementing the sought after improvements set out in the BSIP.

The proposed West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (EPPS) has successfully progressed through the Bus Operator Objection Stage, receiving no qualifying objections from the bus operators – it can be seen [here](#).

WBC is now proceeding to a statutory Consultation Stage, in accordance with the published notice. To meet the requirements of this stage there is a [short survey](#) for interested parties to complete.

The closing date for the survey is 1700 on Monday 14 February 2022.

Other current consultations

School Streets Schemes – the Calcot Schools – closes 30/09/22.

Active Travel Schemes to help the people of West Berkshire walk and cycle more – closes 22/08/22.

Proposed School Term and Holiday Dates – closes 25/02/22.

Proposed changes to the capacity and designation of the Castle School to operate a satellite site at Theale – closes 06/02/22.

Proposed Admission Arrangements 2023/24 for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools – closes 30/01/22.

With best wishes

Hilary & Garth