



## WBC Parish Report for March 2023

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

### Pre-Election Period

The pre-election period, previously known as purdah, describes the period of time immediately before elections or referendums when specific restrictions on communications activity are in place. The term 'heightened sensitivity' is also used.

During the period, Government and local authority resources cannot be used for party political campaigning at any time and (eg) Government departments and councils will normally observe discretion about making new announcements or decisions that could influence voters.

The four-year elections for the district and parish (including town) councils are of course on Thursday 4 May (more below). The notices of election (one for district and one for the parishes) were issued on 24 March and this was the date that the pre-election period commenced, and restrictions on the use of WBC resources came into force.

So, this report is being sent to you from a personal email account, not (as normal) a WBC account.

## West Berkshire Council

### Council

Council met on 16 March and, as well as dealing with public and Members' questions:

- approved the WBC Statutory Pay Policy Statement;
- approved updates to the Council's Constitution;
- agreed the Member Induction and Development Programme for 2023/24;
- approved the creation of two posts – an Executive Director (People) and a Transformation Service Director;
- approved the 2023/24 WBC Timetable of Public Meetings.

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

The next meeting will be on 25 May - the first Annual Meeting of the new Council following the elections on 4 May.

### Executive

The Executive met on 23 March and, as well as dealing with public and Members' questions:

- noted the Local Transport Plan Consultation;
- endorsed the Thatcham and Hungerford Town Centre Strategies (see more below);
- renewed the BBOWT (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) partnership for Countryside Management;

- responded to a number of referred Motions;
- noted an achievements and progress report in respect of the WBC Strategy 2019-23 (see more below);
- noted the WBC Strategy 2023-27 consultation feedback, summary report;
- noted the Q3 2022/23 performance report;
- agreed to put proposals for Hackney Carriage Tariff revisions out to statutory consultation;
- approved revised costs and a Development Management Agreement for the Newbury Sports Hub;
- awarded the Leisure Management Contract to the successful bidder;
- awarded the Building Maintenance Measured Term Contract to the successful bidder.

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

The next meeting (of the new WBC Executive) is on 8 June.

## Elections

This was reported last month, but bears repeating.

There is just one month until district, parish, and town council elections, so it is important that residents are aware of the following information.

### *Register to Vote*

Residents must be registered to vote by Monday 17 April. This can be done online at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote).

### *Voter ID*

For the first time, voters need to bring ID as well:

- Passport
- Driving licence (including provisional license)
- Blue badge
- Certain concessionary travel cards
- Identity card with PASS mark (Proof of Age Standards Scheme)
- Biometric Immigration document
- Defence identity card
- Certain national identity cards

Residents who don't already have an accepted form of photo ID, or not sure whether their photo ID still looks like them, can apply for a free voter ID document, known as a [Voter Authority Certificate](#).

### *Anonymous Voting*

Residents whose safety would be at risk if their name or address were listed on the electoral register can register to vote anonymously by downloading and completing an application form on the [electoral commission website](#).

Residents registered to vote anonymously, or who plan to register anonymously, will need to also apply for an [anonymous elector's document](#) (AED). Residents showing their AED will not be required to show an additional form of ID once voting. All applications for an AED will need to be submitted before 17:00 on Tuesday 25 April. When applying for an anonymous elector's document, voters will need to provide their name, date of birth, address and national insurance number. This information will remain confidential and not appear on the electoral register. If someone does not know their National Insurance number, or does not have one, they can still apply.

Once registered to vote anonymously, WBC will be in contact by post to explain the process and provide an application for an anonymous elector's document to be filled out and returned, should the individual wish to vote at a polling station.

## Planning

### *Local Plan Review*

Following a review of approximately 700 representations received during the recent Regulation 19 consultation on the Local Plan Review (LPR), no faults were found and it is expected that the LPR will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in the near future.

Since the consultation closed in early March, officers have been reviewing, categorising, and summarising these representations, containing approximately 1,700 individual comments on policies - all representations have now been published online. A final review of the representations and the collation of the submission documents to the Planning Inspectorate is now underway.

This announcement marks a major milestone and achievement, which is the result of years of detailed research and policy development. The LPR sets out an ambitious plan for the District's future development, including the delivery of approximately 9,000 new homes by 2039, including 3,000 affordable homes, supported by new local infrastructure. The LPR also establishes high standards for sustainability and environmental impact, ensuring that natural areas, such as the AONB, are protected.

## Community

### *Standing together during the Pandemic*



WBC has been recognised by the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum for the professionalism and selflessness staff showed during the pandemic.

The certificate (*shown here being held by Cllr Lynne Doherty, the Council Leader, and Carolyn Richardson, WBC's Service Manager for Public Protection and Culture*) highlights the scale of the task everyone faced and that the Council played a key role in the largest co-ordinated response within the Thames Valley to this extraordinary global event.

### *Thanks from the Ukraine Support Hub*

The Homes for Ukraine Hub hosted a 'Thank you' reception to acknowledge and recognise the generosity of the hosts who have helped with the scheme over the past year. They have accepted guests into their homes and supported them through challenging times.

A moving speech was given by WBC Chairman, Cllr Rick Jones and thank you certificates and gifts were handed out by WBC Leader, Cllr Lynne Doherty (*pictured*), and Chief Executive, Nigel Lynn.



An installation exhibiting thank-you comments created a heart-warming backdrop to the evening, with pictures and quotes from guests and others who have been involved in the scheme acknowledging the generosity and kindness of the hosts

### *Delivering the Council Strategy 2019-23*

With the end of the 2019-23 Council Strategy approaching, a new report has been published showing WBC's key achievements for residents over the past four years.

It details how the Council has performed against each of the aims, priorities and targets set in May 2019 when it was introduced. Since then WBC have been working hard to deliver the Strategy, whilst also adapting and responding to significant challenges including the Covid-19 pandemic, the Climate Emergency and the economic and social consequences of the conflicts in Ukraine, Afghanistan and Syria.

Achievements include:

- completing 95% of pothole and road edge repairs in a timely manner;
- superfast broadband made available to more than 97% of properties;
- 640 additional properties benefitting from flood prevention schemes;
- offering 98% of primary and secondary school starters one of their preferred school places;
- improvements in the time taken to determine planning applications;
- consideration of more than 13,700 requests for adult social care support for vulnerable residents.

### ***Household Support Fund***

Since receiving funding from HM Government for the Household Support Fund in October 2021 the scheme has seen funding of £1.9m distributed locally - with more to come in April.

Nearly 4,300 individual claims for support have been administered with an average of £263 provided per claim to help households with energy costs, food, clothing and essential household items. In addition it has enabled WBC to provide free school meals vouchers during school holidays to more than 23,000 children.

As well as distributing funding directly, WBC have also provided funding to Age Concern and Age UK to support older residents and to Greenham Trust to support their charitable activities.

A further allocation of £1.4m has been awarded to the Council for 2023/24 and will allow services to be developed in order to ensure these funds are utilised to support the most needy and vulnerable in the district.

### ***£6m project to provides homes for Ukrainian and Afghan families***

Seventeen residential properties will be made available by WBC as part of its ongoing support for Ukrainian and Afghan families settling in the district. The £6m scheme will see a mix of flats and houses purchased, utilising £2.5m allocated from the Government's Local Authority Housing Fund.

Within the district there are around 500 Ukrainians living with local hosts, but there is increasing pressure on housing displaced people, with other options such as a hotel being used. There are currently 30 families (161 people) living in a hotel. Over and above this, in the past couple of years, the district has also taken in a number of families as part of the Afghan resettlement scheme.

Recognising the impact of resettlement schemes on local authorities, the Government has allocated £500m to English councils facing the most significant housing pressures – this is intended to help address the immediate pressures as well as build a sustainable stock of affordable housing for the future. The funding allocation is capped at 40 to 50% of local authority costs.

Work is already underway to look at options for delivering this new housing within the next 18 months.

## **Children and Families**

### ***Easter Holiday Activities and Food Programme***



WBC's holiday activities and food programme is back for Easter and this year there is even more on offer.

Primarily for children who have free school meals, over 20 locations are offering exciting, enriching activities, from kayaking to cooking, and football to climbing. New this year (at selected clubs) are petting zoos and reptile visits.

Full details are available online [here](#).

Additionally, there will be free activities for children in all libraries over the Easter Holidays. Residents can ask in their local library to see what is available.

Events include: 'talk and touch' sessions, music and crafts, 'superhero' design workshops and more.

## Wild West Berkshire

An innovative pilot project to teach children that being healthy can also help the natural world has been launched. 'Wild West Berkshire' talks about eating healthier food, taking more exercise and how that helps wildlife and tackling climate change.



The pilot is a joint initiative with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), and the BBC recently ran an item about it on [South Today](#).

As well as befriending vegetables, the children play a host of games to help them join the dots on how their health connects to nature.

## Phonics Scheme adopted by Department for Education

The Department of Education has validated WBC's phonics scheme for national use.

The scheme, 'A Flying Start with Letters & Sounds' has been added to a list of approved schemes that can be used nationally in early years settings and schools.

This impressive piece of work is a systematic, synthetic phonics programme that enables children to develop good language skills and a wide vocabulary, acquire the skills to read independently, and foster a love of reading. It has been led by the Early Years Foundation Stage Improvement Adviser & Phonics Lead alongside The Parsons Down Partnership of Schools and Victoria Park Nursery and Family Hub.

The programme provides a wide range of teaching tools including a comprehensive teaching manual, daily teaching plans, and progression charts.

Ten pilot schools in West Berkshire have reported that children are enjoying the multisensory approach and making rapid progress.

## Youth Offending Team rated Outstanding

WBC's Youth Offending Team (YOT) is celebrating an overall rating of 'Outstanding' following an inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.

Chief Inspector of Probation Justin Russell said, *"The children supervised by West Berkshire Youth Offending Team are thriving. This much-deserved 'Outstanding' rating is the result of hard work, dedication, and determination to support each child equally and deter them from reoffending – the service is a credit to the local community."*

Inspectors commended the YOT for creating 'a culture where everyone feels they belong and have a part to play' – involving children and their parents/carers in every aspect of supervision, and continually looking for ways to improve.

## Environment

### Great British Spring Clean

Last week WBC Waste Officers headed to Calcot to take part in the Great British Spring Clean. In two hours they'd collected 12 bags of litter.

As part of this year's campaign, families, neighbours, friends and colleagues can join forces to clean up their communities.

Anyone organising a community clean-up event can be provided with litter-picking equipment. Please give WBC as much notice as possible when requesting equipment and wait for confirmation before you advertise your event as the equipment may not be available due to popular demand.

You can request equipment online at [westberks.gov.uk/article/38579/Community-Clean-ups](https://westberks.gov.uk/article/38579/Community-Clean-ups).



## Keen to stay Green



After being the first council in the United Kingdom to launch a climate change bond, Executive Members Cllrs Ross Mackinnon and Steve Ardagh-Walter (*pictured*) have signed a pledge to run a second one to help fund brilliant environmental projects and tackle climate change.

Local people will be able to invest directly in these projects which will move the district towards decarbonisation and net zero.

The first bond funded solar panels on council buildings and WBC are looking forward to planning more projects with the new one.

## Soil Conditioner give away s big success

500 residents came to the most recent soil conditioner give-away event on 11 and 12 March.

With thanks to WBC's partners Veolia UK for working to make this happen, 47 tonnes of soil conditioner, which is made from the food and garden waste collected from West Berkshire homes, was given away over the two days - residents are able to use this in getting their gardens and allotments ready for spring planting.



## Save time and money with new Liftshare pilot scheme



Liftshare, a car sharing platform, has been launched as a pilot scheme for local residents in East Garston, Chaddleworth, Great Shefford and Hungerford.

For residents who often travel alone and know how inefficient it is when others are probably doing similar journeys, or who need to be somewhere but don't have the means and could do with a lift, this new scheme may

help.

Sharing journeys using the 'Liftshare' scheme is flexible and users only share with people they choose to connect with. Only residents with West Berkshire postcodes can sign up to the scheme so it's very much a local initiative which will give them the confidence to try it out. This is a positive step for the community, the environment and the bank balance too!

## Potholes

WBC has fixed more than 800 potholes since Christmas 2022, four times as many as in the same period the previous year - a huge undertaking for the WBC Highway Maintenance team and its contractor, Volker Highways.

The last winter was particularly challenging with wet weather ahead of the Christmas break, followed by freezing weather in the New Year, accelerating the deterioration of many sections of road, causing a significant number of potholes.

In recognition of this issue, the Government has made an additional £200m available for pothole repairs in its spring statement, £950k of which is allocated to WBC. The Council has also committed an additional £7m over the next three years to highway maintenance - to ensure the resilience of the district's road network going forward.

On top of regular safety inspections throughout by highway inspectors, WBC relies upon reports from the public and is grateful for the vigilance of residents who use the problem reporting webpage to let Highway Maintenance know about potholes and other highway defects.

## Economy

### *Proposals for Thatcham and Hungerford town centres unveiled*

Following engagement with local communities earlier this year as part of the work to develop strategies for both town centres, proposals for Hungerford and Thatcham town centres have been approved. The key improvements being put forward for further development in collaboration with local communities include:

#### Hungerford

- creating a new 'town square' outside the Town Hall that could be used for markets and events;
- creating spill-out space for businesses on the High Street;
- improving pedestrian connections.

#### Thatcham

- full or partial pedestrianisation of The Broadway;
- the creation of a 'Community Hub', improvements to the gateways to the town centre;
- physical changes to the A4 to lower traffic speeds.



### *London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE) to be renamed Bond Riverside*

The London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE) in Newbury is to be renamed 'Bond Riverside' as part of a multi-million pound regeneration scheme.

Competition winners collected their prize at the Identity Project and Urban Design Careers event for their innovative entry of Bond Riverside

The LRIE Identity Project was a competition aimed at 16 to 18 year olds in which schools and colleges across West Berkshire were invited to put forward their visions for the rebranding of the London Road Industrial Estate.

The winning students, Molly, Xander and Toby from Newbury College, have not only won £1,000 cash for their college, but now also earn a historical prize of proudly having their name 'Bond Riverside' as the new name for the industrial estate.

### *£750,000 of funding secured for West Berkshire economy*

WBC has secured £0.75m towards two flagship projects which will help grow the local economy.

The money will be split between two key projects which are ready for delivery: improving and redesigning Newbury Wharf, and the newly renamed Bond Riverside (see above) regeneration programme.

This Government funding is managed by the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and has been allocated following a successful application to the LEP.

Of the £750,000 fund:

- £375,000 will be used to improve Newbury Wharf. This is an ongoing project first proposed in the Newbury Masterplan which received over 4,000 public responses, and the Council's aspiration is to create an attractive public space which can be used for events.
- The other £375,000 will support the Bond Riverside regeneration programme and go towards environmental improvements on the site, such as sustainable drainage systems (SUDS), tree planting, and other projects to improve the site and help meet key sustainability targets.

## Health and Social Care

### *New organisation to provide Domestic Abuse support in West Berkshire*

From 1 April, Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA) will offer services to anyone affected by Domestic Abuse in West Berkshire. The local organisation are taking over responsibility for the support which was previously provided by A2Dominion.

BWA will provide confidential, emotional and practical support to people of all genders who are experiencing or fleeing domestic abuse in West Berkshire.

Established over 40 years ago, BWA has a strong record of supporting survivors of domestic abuse and a wealth of experience. The organisation currently work in neighbouring areas of Berkshire; Bracknell, Reading and Wokingham, and benefit from experienced staff and strong local knowledge and relationships. Nationally they also have valuable connections, through their Safelives accreditation and affiliation to Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE).

### *World Social Work Day*

Social Workers from WBC's Adult Social Care and Children and Family Services joined together on Tuesday 21 March to celebrate World Social Work Day with colleagues and Council Members, taking time out to connect with each other and reflect on the work of the past year.

### *Step up to Social Work*



Step Up to Social Work is an intensive, 14-month, full-time programme for people who want to become social workers, but don't have a degree in social work.

WBC are inviting applications for the 8<sup>th</sup> cohort of Step Up, which starts in January 2024. The application window closes at noon on Monday 3 April.

Successful applicants will train through a combination of academic study and hands on social work experience in West Berkshire.

## Adult Social Care

### *Birchwood Care Home*

A Care Quality Commission (CQC) report, published on 22 March and following an inspection of Birchwood Care Home on 23 and 24 February noted the home as rated as 'Good' in three areas: effective, caring and responsive. Whilst the inspection found that many positive changes had been implemented since the last inspection, the CQC found that further improvements are required to ensure Birchwood is well-led and safe, and the overall rating remains as 'Requires Improvement'.

## Current Consultations

There are no current consultations – they will recommence after the election.

**With best wishes, Hilary & Gartg**