



Parish Council Report for March 2021

Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

West Berkshire Council

Meetings

Council

The Annual Council Meeting is on 4 May, having been deliberately brought forward from 11 May so that it can be held remotely (more about remote meetings below).

The Annual Meeting will see the appointment of a new Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Council, and the appointment of committee memberships. During an adjournment in the main meeting there will be a series of very brief committee meetings to appoint Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen.

Executive

At the Executive meeting on 25 March, Cllr Lynne Doherty, the Leader of Council, announced portfolio holder changes to address the health agenda in the light of the Government White Paper *Integration and innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all* and the prospective enhanced role for local authorities in health provision. The Deputy Leader, Cllr Graham Bridgman, will become portfolio holder for Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Jo Stewart will move to Adult Social Care and Cllr Howard Woollaston will return to Internal Governance (but retain the Leisure and Culture portfolios).

A Motion was brought by the Leader to propose the creation of a Safer Streets Champion at the Annual Council Meeting, and accepted - this Member led role will listen to community concerns and work with Thames Valley Police and our town centre managers to address the issues that street harassment raises. The meeting also considered Motions that had commenced in Council regarding CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) and the demolition of the former Newbury Football Ground Clubhouse.

Other items on the agenda were capital financial performance and key accountable performance indicators, the adoption of the Housing Strategy and Delivery Plan, and the new Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Duty.

There were again a substantial number of public questions concentrated around the closed football ground and derelict changing rooms at Faraday Road.

The next meeting of the Executive will be on 29 April.

Remote Meetings

As reported last month, The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 cease to have effect on 7 May (hence the bringing forward of the Council's Annual Meeting) and the anticipated court application regarding what "place" means in Schedule 12, LGA 1972 (i.e. in respect of the place of meeting) has commenced (and WBC will be providing evidence in support).

There is also a [call for evidence](#) by the Government seeking to understand the experience of local authorities regarding remote meetings. WBC is providing evidence of the success (as we see it) of our holding meetings

remotely and, indeed, WBC has been singled out by the Local Government Association as an exemplar in the field.

WBC is continuing to review how hybrid meetings might be held, and how physical and/or hybrid meetings might be publically streamed.

As always, links to all agendas and public meeting papers are [here](#), and all WBC public meetings are broadcast live on YouTube and recorded so that they can be viewed at leisure - [West Berkshire Council YouTube Channel](#). Guidance for anyone attending a remote public meeting (e.g. a parish representative at a planning committee) is [here](#).

Covid-19

The Roadmap Out Of Lockdown

29 March saw the next step of the roadmap out of lockdown.

As the warmer weather arrives this will be welcome in supporting the return of the Rule of Six which allows up to six people or two households to meet outdoors in public and private spaces. It also brings an end to non-essential local travel restrictions. However, typical of a British Easter we have seen a dip in temperature over the weekend!

The next step – on 12 April, if the tests are met - will allow non-essential shops and businesses to open and pubs to open outdoors (and serving a substantial meal – whatever that means - alongside alcohol is no longer a requirement).

The Government has outlined the four tests of Pace, Efficacy, Pressure on the NHS, and Risk of Variants - further information about the easing of lockdown can be found in the [Four Step Plan](#).

Whilst there will be huge enthusiasm that our freedoms are gradually returning, everyone is reminded that social distancing rules still apply and that anyone testing positive for Covid-19 must self-isolate.

Local Infection Rates

Berkshire generally continues to see a reduction in Covid-19 infection rates although there remain a small number of new cases being reported daily. At the time of writing the rolling weekly rate in West Berkshire is around 30 cases per 100,000 and has been relatively static for the whole of March. This may reflect the opposing forces of a general reduction in incidence against an easing of restrictions, and we wait to see what happens as further easing measures come into force.

As previously referred to, Berkshire local Covid information about the daily reported cases in the district (and across Berkshire), and the weekly per 100,000 rate (one of the principal factors in any decision making) can be accessed from Berkshire Public Health [website](#).

Vaccinations – Local Position



The Covid vaccination centre operating from Newbury Racecourse has now delivered 35,000 vaccinations since it started in December. This is a huge achievement and well done to the medical staff and volunteers for all they have done. This is not to forget the huge contribution from Pangbourne Surgery in the east of the district, and the availability of vaccinations from the mass centres, in particular at the Madejski Stadium

Whilst the delivery of vaccine for first doses is anticipated to be reduced in April because of the supply chain, the second round of vaccinations for those who were in the early cohorts has commenced.

This includes older people in care homes, those over 80 years of age and front line workers.

Anyone in cohorts 1 – 9 who have not yet been invited to receive their first vaccine are encouraged to either contact or register with a GP or [book direct](#).



Further information regarding vaccination can be found on the [Berkshire Public Health website](#).

Vaccinations – National Position

Weekly reports on the vaccine rollout are being published by NHS [here](#), giving data at an Integrated Care System (ICS) level – in our case at the level of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (“BOB”) ICS. Additionally, Government data can be found [here](#).

Community Testing

Rapid widespread testing – also known as lateral flow testing or community testing - is a key tool in the fight against Coronavirus. Lateral flow testing can identify people who are asymptomatic and may be spreading the virus without knowing it.

With around a third of individuals with coronavirus showing no symptoms and potentially spreading it without knowing, regular testing will mean more positive cases within households are found and prevented from entering schools and colleges, helping to keep educational settings safe.

Lateral flow device testing finds cases quickly – in under 30 minutes – meaning positive cases can isolate straight away. This can be the difference between children being able to stay in school, or a class being sent home due to an outbreak.

Testing is only for those without any symptoms - anyone who does have symptoms should book a test [here](#), or by calling 119, or at [Lateral Flow Testing - West Berkshire Council](#).

West Berkshire Mobile Community Collect

WBC will be distributing lateral flow device testing home kits across the district from Monday 12 April.

Community Collect is a government programme to make lateral flow device testing home kits available to families and households with children and young people at Primary or Secondary School, or College, including childcare and support bubbles. Lateral flow device testing helps with the process of finding more Covid-19 cases and breaks the chain of transmission.

West Berkshire Mobile Community Collect will be in operation from Monday to Friday, with a different specified route around the district each day. The routes and timetable will be available on the council's website shortly.

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

The Local Outbreak Engagement Board meets on alternate weeks in private and in public. Thus, each fortnight, there is a live broadcast meeting to update residents of the current activities relating to Covid-19 in and around the district (and beyond). Public meetings are available on the Council's YouTube channel and further information about the Board can be found [here](#).

Covid Marshalls

WBC Covid Marshalls are working across the district undertaking a range of duties including advising and supporting members of the public and businesses to follow social distancing rules.

Travelling across the district, working in shifts to cover seven days a week, and using their local knowledge to cover priority areas such as supermarkets and other shops, markets, parks and open spaces they will be even more vital to support our communities and provide the confidence needed as more of us return to our high streets. The cost will be met by Covid-19 funding provided to the Council by central government.



Coronavirus Information on the WBC Website

The Council keeps up to date information for residents and businesses on the [website](#).

Community Support Hub

The WBC [support hub](#) can still be contacted on 01635 503579 if needed.

Local Economy

Shop Local

One of the upsides of the Covid restrictions for our small businesses has been more of us using local retailers and independent services. As part of WBC's Recovery Plan we are keen to continue to support our local economy and some suggestions about our local providers can be found [here](#).



Support for Businesses

WBC is continuing to administer a series of grant schemes to support local businesses that have been affected by the national coronavirus restrictions.

Information about eligibility, and how businesses who have not received support previously can apply, can be found [here](#).

Particular elements of the support on offer include:

- A £138k 'Welcome Back Fund' for events and initiatives to ensure the successful re-opening of high streets;
- Access to twice weekly rapid Covid testing for small business employees;
- The offer of site visits from Public Protection Partnership colleagues for advice on Covid-secure trading;
- Regular sector-based advice webinars for each phase of the unlocking;
- A one year complimentary extension to pavement licenses so that hospitality businesses can make use of all fresco dining areas;
- Printable resources including guidance posters for display in premises;
- Implementation of further business rate relief, as announced in the Government's Budget.

Restart Grants

The Government will provide 'Restart Grants' in England of up to £6k per premises for non-essential retail businesses, and up to £18k per premises for hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym businesses.

The grants will be paid to rate-paying businesses and will be distributed automatically, so there is no need for businesses to apply unless they have not received grant funding from the Council under previous schemes. WBC will commence processing these grants in April and eligible businesses will receive one of the following grants per premises, depending on rateable value:

Strand one - non-essential retail businesses:

- Businesses with a rateable value of £15k or under will receive a payment of £2,667;
- Businesses with a rateable value over £15k and less than £51k will receive a payment of £4k;
- Businesses with a rateable value of £51k or over will receive a payment of £6k.

Strand two - hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym businesses:

- Businesses with a rateable value of £15k or under will receive a payment of £8k;
- Businesses with a rateable value over £15k and less than £51k will receive a payment of £12k;
- Businesses with a rateable value of £51k or over will receive a payment of £18k,

Education

Secondary School Preferences

98% of Year 7 children in West Berkshire have been offered one of their secondary school preferences, with 89% allocated their first choice (the number of West Berkshire children applying for a secondary school place rose significantly in 2020, with another slight increase in 2021).

Activity Programme Trial

WBC is one of only 17 local authorities around the country taking part in this Department for Education funded trial. Children will be able to eat a healthy lunch over the Easter holidays as part of a special education and activity programme.

15 schools from across the district are taking part in the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme and pupils will go into their usual schools over the Easter break and enjoy a range of fun activities while learning about nutrition. The aim of the programme is to provide enriching, physical and nutritional activities to promote wellbeing. Children will learn about the benefits of 'eating a rainbow' of different foods and have the opportunity to take part in a Family Snack Challenge. There will also be some cookery demonstrations to provide practical knowledge around preparing and making food.

School holidays can be pressure points for some families because of increased costs and reduced incomes. Holiday clubs like the ones that will be held at our 15 schools are a response to this issue.

Free School Meals over Easter Holiday period

WBC has made arrangements to provide Free School Meal (FSM) vouchers to all eligible children during the Easter school holiday period (to 16 April 2021). The voucher scheme is being funded primarily through the allocation of just under £97k to the Council from the extended Covid winter grant allowance provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). WBC is topping up this allocation with an additional £12k+ to cover the full expected cost of implementation.

Details on how the vouchers will be implemented are being issued to schools and early year settings. Children in school not currently receiving FSM but considered by the school as vulnerable will be included and consideration will also be given to children aged between 16 and 18 years, and children in cross border education settings.

The FSM voucher provision over Easter is a special extension to the Council's Covid Winter Grant Scheme that ran to 31 March to support residents in Covid-19 related hardship. The scheme went live with a funding pot of £532k derived from a combination of Government Covid grant allocations, which the Council subsequently topped up with additional Covid funding due to the high level of demand.

The Scheme provided 7,660 FSM vouchers for the Christmas 2020 and February 2021 half term school holidays, and has so far supported more than 1,750 people with help to pay for food, utility bills, and essential supplies. To identify those most in need for the Covid Winter Grant Scheme, the Council worked closely with professionals, statutory partners, Parish Councils, Citizens Advice West Berkshire, Newbury Resource Centre and other community and voluntary groups. DWP Job Centre Plus has also been playing an active role to support those newly in financial hardship, such as through a recent job loss.

Environment

Increasing Plastic Recycling for West Berkshire

WBC, in partnership with its waste contractor Veolia, are trialling four new recycling banks to increase collection of plastic waste. The banks will be for the collection of plastic pots, tubs and trays and are now available for use.

The new plastic recycling banks will be tested at the following locations:

- Padworth and Newbury Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). Residents will need to [book an appointment online](#) as usual before visiting the sites and carry their HWRC permit.
- Station Road car park in Hungerford

- Kingsland Centre car park in Thatcham.

In addition, the site at Sainsbury's in Calcot already accepts a range of plastic recyclables.

Residents will be able to recycle a wider range of plastics in the [new recycling banks](#) including: yoghurt pots, margarine and butter tubs, biscuit trays, chocolate and sweet tubs, ice cream tubs, fruit punnets, meat trays and cosmetic pots. Plastics pots, tubs and trays need to be clean and all lids/films removed before recycling. Black plastic trays, plastic film, wrapping or plastic bags cannot be accepted. To check what you can recycle and for more information on recycling plastics go to [West Berkshire Council - Rubbish and Recycling - Information](#).



Currently West Berkshire residents are able to recycle plastic bottles in their green bags at the kerbside, as the materials used in making plastic bottles are easily recycled in UK markets. The plastic recycling banks will initially be operated on a trial basis to help the Council assess how well the public engage with this scheme and to look into the continued availability of markets for these materials going forward.

[HWRC Live Webcams](#)

WBC residents can now view the recycling centres through new live site webcams. These webcams will give residents the opportunity to have a look at real-time site conditions before they set off on their visits. View them online: [Newtown Road Recycling Centre](#) and [Padworth Recycling Centre](#).

[Environment Strategy draft Delivery Plan](#)

The Council has announced the [draft Delivery Plan](#) to complement the published [Environment Strategy 2020-2030](#).

The draft is subject to changes being made prior to a formal decision being made by the Executive in the summer. It lays out a framework of actions that will set us on our way to reaching carbon neutrality for the district by 2030 and picks up on the statements of intent made in the Environment Strategy.

Anyone wishing to comment can complete a [survey](#) which will be open until 23:59 on Monday 26 April 2021.

[The Public Sector Transformational Awards - Finalist](#)



WBC is a finalist in the Public Sector Transformational Awards Green Council category for the 2021 iESE Awards.

You can watch the 'virtual' event announcing the finalists [Public Sector Transformation Awards 2021 - iESE Local Government and Public Sector Consultants](#) with the Awards being announced later in the year.

[Transport and Countryside](#)

[Investment at Theale Railway Station](#)

A multi-million-pound upgrade to Theale Railway station is due to begin this year, with plans set to include:

- Improved accessibility across the station, with a footbridge and lifts to connect platforms on both sides of the tracks funded by the Department for Transport's (DfT) Access for All (AfA) programme. Plus step-free access to the new station building and both platforms which will allow the station to be fully accessible to all rail users for the first time.



- Replacing the existing ticket office with the building located closer to the new footbridge and designed to meet modern accessibility standards in full.
- Upgrading and opening new toilets.
- Expansion of the existing car park to include a new entrance, improved drop-off and turning facility from Brunel Road for taxis and rail replacement buses, electric vehicle charging points, improved facilities for cyclists, motorcycle parking, plus provision of a new car park deck which will increase parking capacity by more than 33% to 300 spaces.
- Overhauling the road and pavement for better accessibility to the station along Station Road and Brunel Road, including wayfinding signage and replacement of width restriction bollards.

Network Rail engineers will start work this summer preceding GWR who will commence their work in November. The project is expected to be completed by summer 2022.

In addition to Access for All this project has been made possible through a £4m grant from Local Growth Deal funding via the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership). This money was secured recently by WBC and GWR which will be put to use very soon when improvements to the cycle and pedestrian routes to the station start as the first phase of the wider scheme.

There will be disruption during this time but it will be kept to a minimum with access maintained to the platforms during the works. Work is scheduled to commence with the road works, pedestrian and cycle routes to the station. This is the first phase of the Theale Station upgrade project. Work on the station site itself will be happening later on this year.

Improvements to local train stations and the facilities they offer aim to encourage residents and commuters to choose more sustainable ways to travel, helping to reduce the district's carbon footprint.

Active Travel

WBC has launched a set of draft measures to help the public safely make walking or cycling part of their daily travel choices, and is inviting feedback from the community to help shape these plans. The public consultations can be found at [Active Travel Consultation](#).

Designed to encourage 'active travel' by introducing more walking and cycling opportunities throughout the district, the draft proposals include:

- West Berks Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). This emerging draft transport policy is about making streets work for everyone, thus helping to make West Berkshire a better place to live, work and visit.
- Crown Mead Cycleways. The emerging LCWIP has identified the A4 as a primary route with high potential for increased cycle trips if appropriate infrastructure were to be provided.
- Western Avenue Cycleways. The A4 Western Avenue in Speen, Newbury has been identified as a high priority corridor for cycling and walking routes. The plan proposes permanent measures to create and improve travel routes for cyclists and pedestrians.
- West Berks Active Streets. These are various smaller scheme draft plans to help improve facilities and grow walking and cycling opportunities in West Berkshire including proposals for restricted access on Lawrence's Lane and Deadman's Lane in Thatcham and Theale respectively. In addition, if any resident would like to submit a specific walking and cycling proposal of their own, or comment on a location which falls outside of the currently identified schemes, they can do so via the Active Travel Heat Map within the West Berks Active Streets section of consultation portal.
- Calcot Schools Streets. This pilot School Zone/School Street Scheme is designed to make the streets around the schools safer and suitable for more walking and cycling, as well as improve the air quality.

The Crown Mead Cycleways and Western Avenue Cycleways proposals are each open for consultation until Friday 9 April. The remainder are eight week consultations that will finish on Friday 23 April.

With the exception of the LWCIP, the implementation of the Active Travel proposals will be funded through the £495k award from the Department for Transport's Active Travel Fund, following the Council's bid to further develop a lasting, safe environment for walking and cycling.

With their emphasis on promoting health and wellbeing, maintaining a green district and enhancing sustainability, the proposals support the WBC Council Strategy, Environment Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Local Transport Plan and Covid-19 Recovery Strategy.

Wildflower Project

Work has started on a wildflower project to enhance roundabouts and verges at three West Berkshire locations.



The 'Tesco' roundabout on the A339 Sandford Link, the roundabout on the junction of the A4/B4000 Stockcross Road, and the verge at Cow Lane in East Ilsley will all benefit from the laying of specialist wildflower turf.

WBC has appointed experts [Wildflower Turf Ltd](#) to create the eye-catching wildflower displays, whose eco-friendly projects include supplying the London 2012 Olympics, The Hive at Kew Gardens and thousands of other small and large projects around the UK.

The turf that Council will be using is ready planted as a roll containing immature wildflower plants and a healthy root network, to create an almost instant meadow.

This will produce flowering plants from late spring to mid-autumn, creating a strong visual impact as well as helping to feed and shelter bees, butterflies, and all manner of other wildlife, with only limited maintenance throughout the year.

Wildflower turf has already been laid in East Ilsley. The A339 and B4000 roundabouts are also being completed shortly.

Adult Social Care

Care Home Visiting Policy

As anticipated last month, WBC Adult Social Care issued a revision of its care home visiting guidance following the announcement that every care home resident would be allowed one regular indoor visitor, permitted (subject to having a negative lateral flow test) to hold hands with the resident. The recent announcement that residents will shortly be allowed two regular indoor visitors will mean a further revision.

Leisure and Culture

Libraries

West Berkshire Libraries are anticipated to reopen on 12 April subject to the Governments lockdown easing tests being met.

The easiest way to continue to borrow titles is via the apps BorrowBox and Libby, which can be downloaded from the Apple app store and Google Play store, and anyone with a Kindle tablet can download the apps from Amazon. Anyone who has these apps can then search for West Berkshire Libraries and login using their library card number and PIN (members can reset their library PIN [here](#)). Customers who need help with this can drop an email to the library, where staff will be happy to help: library@westberks.gov.uk.

Customers who are not already members of the library can join online to get free, instant access to the e-library by [registering](#).

Residents are encouraged to check out the extensive programme of activities for children and adults, which will continue online, and follow the library Facebook, Twitter or Instagram pages (@WBerksLibraries).

Communities

'Surviving to Thriving' - £200k Covid-19 Mental Health Fund

The joint fund established by WBC and Greenham Trust detailed last month has continued to enable voluntary and community sector organisations in the district to apply for grants to fund projects aimed at helping

improve the mental health and wellbeing of local residents impacted by Covid-19.

This initiative enables not-for-profit organisations to carry out small, meaningful projects that can help mitigate the impact that Covid-19 has had on mental health and wellbeing in West Berkshire. Requests for grants can be made via The Good Exchange (Greenham Trust's online funding and fundraising platform) and are reviewed weekly.

West Berkshire Lottery

Since its launch in March 2019, West Berkshire Lottery has raised nearly £125k for the local community and nearly £39,000 has been given away in prize winnings. More than 131 local groups have signed up as part of a fun and effective way to raise funds for their valued services in the community. This support has been particularly valued by local charities raising funds during the pandemic.



Out of every £1 West Berkshire Lottery ticket purchased, 50p goes directly to the lottery player's chosen charity and 10p goes into the Council's good cause fund, used to further support the local community. Players can win weekly cash prizes up to the £25,000 jackpot for just £1 per ticket from the [West Berkshire Lottery website](#). In addition, tickets purchased by 24 April will be entered into a national prize draw for a chance to win a £1,000 Currys PC World Gift Voucher.

Communications Channels

As well as Twitter there are also a number of Facebook pages which the Council uses, for example:

- West Berkshire Council;
- West Berkshire Community Support Hub Group;
- West Berkshire Libraries.

The WBC website also contains more about the CSH and useful information for residents and businesses:

Residents <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-residents>

Business <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-business>

Community hub <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-communityhub>

Broadcast meetings [West Berkshire Council YouTube Channel](#)

Linked to all of these initiatives is the WBC Customer Service telephone line: 01635 551111.

Newsletters

WBC news direct to inboxes

WBC has launched a new email subscription service to make it easier for residents to receive news and information about council services.

Residents can [sign up](#) to receive information on a range of topics - from general news to specific updates on Covid-19, the environment, waste and recycling and business news.

It's easy to subscribe - simply fill in your email address and select the topics you would like to hear more about. You can manage your preferences at any time through the link above or by following links in the emails you receive.



Other Matters

May Elections

Elections for the Thames Valley PCC and for town and parish council vacancies are to be held (delayed due to Covid-19) on 6 May 2021:

- Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner;
- Lambourn Parish Council (one seat in the Lambourn Ward and one seat in the Upper Lambourn Ward);
- Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council (three seats);
- Newbury Town Council Clay Hill Ward (one seat).

Polling Stations will be subject to stringent Government Covid safety measures to ensure electors can vote safely.

However, WBC is aware that many people will prefer to vote by post, particularly if they are vulnerable or shielding. [Applications for postal votes](#) must be received at WBC's Market Street office in Newbury by **5pm on Tuesday 20 April**.

If residents haven't registered to vote (e.g. if they have recently moved to the district) they will need to do so [here](#).

Residents can ensure that their electoral details are up to date by emailing vote@westberks.gov.uk

West Berkshire Energy Switch

WBC has partnered with independent experts in group buying, iChoosr UK who will manage a 'reverse auction' and switching process to get the best possible energy deal.

People can register with the [West Berkshire Energy Switch Scheme](#) to obtain a free, no obligation, personal offer and to see how much money they could save by switching.

The Collective Energy Switch auctions are held each year in February, May, and October. The next West Berkshire Switch is open for registrations now and the reverse auction will be held on 18 May with participants starting to receive their personalised offers for consideration from 31 May 2021.

So far, over 10,000 households across West Berkshire have registered to the scheme, with those switching saving a total of £691,213 on their energy bill - in the last scheme, residents who signed up saved an average of £270 per year against standard tariffs by switching supplier.

Berkshire Healthcare Governor elections

Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust will be having elections for nine Public Governors later in the year, including for one seat representing West Berkshire. The Trust has produced a [short leaflet](#) on becoming a governor.

Potential governors need to be members of the Trust before they are eligible to stand in governor elections. It's quick and easy to become a member. The link to the online membership application form is [here](#).

Nominations will open on 12 April.

Clive Hooker

Councillor Downlands Ward