



Parish Council Report for October 2021

Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

West Berkshire Council

Peter Argyle

Members were saddened to hear of the death of Cllr Peter Argyle, a long-serving WBC Councillor and former Chairman of the Council.



Peter was a committed public servant who served for 24 years as a councillor, having been first elected as ward member for Theale in 1997 before representing the Calcot ward from 2003 and latterly Tilehurst and Holybrook from 2019. He also served two terms as the Chairman of the Council in 2011-12 and 2015-16, was Chairman of the Personnel Committee and was an active member of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Peter is sadly missed.

Council

Full Council did not meet during October – the next meeting will be on 2 December.

Executive

Executive met on 14 October to discuss/decide upon:

- an update on the exit of Wokingham BC from the Public Protection Partnership;
- support for the Voluntary and Community Sector;
- the transfer of the former primary school site in Theale to WBC from the Oxford Diocese Trustees, and the long term future use of the site as the location of a provision for secondary aged children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) needs;
- the award of a contract for the Public Health Nursing Service 0-19 (up to 25 years for young people with special educational needs and disabilities);

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#). The Executive will next meet on 18 November.

Leader shortlisted for award

The WBC Leader, Cllr Lynne Doherty, has been shortlisted for the Local Government Information Unit's (LGIU) award for Leader of the Year. Lynne is one of six nominated.

Every year the LGIU – the country's largest local authority membership organisation whose members include councils, trade unions, charities and private sector partners – recognises local councillors who have made a positive impact on their communities and who have been nominated by residents or their peers. Competition for this year's awards was particularly tight, with over 400 nominations (a record number) received across seven categories that celebrate the varied work of councillors.

Residents' Survey

Five thousand households across West Berkshire have been randomly chosen to take part in the latest WBC Residents' Survey and will have received a copy of the survey through the post – it will take around 10-15 minutes to complete.

WBC is asking those residents who receive one to complete it as fully as possible to ensure that views from a diverse range of residents are reflected in the results – the survey is being conducted to understand residents' views about the local area and the services WBC provides. The information gathered will help to inform decisions about the services provided.

Economy

Budget Simulator

Last year, WBC gave residents the opportunity to understand the pressures faced when drafting the annual budget and asked them to create their own budget using an online simulator.

There was a great response and lots of good ideas on how to balance the budget, so the 'Budget Challenge' is being run this year too. For the year ahead (2022/23), there is around £147 million to spend.

Local people can decide how to divide the budget between core services, such as education and libraries, rubbish and recycling, and social care, while closing a gap of £9 million between income and spending. Can you do it? Why not [take part](#) and find out!

Kickstart Scheme

Kickstart is a Government scheme which offers a grant to pay the wages of a young person if a business can create a six month job placement for them, and WBC are hosting a free webinar at 16:00 on Thursday 18 November to offer detailed advice to local businesses who would like to apply for the scheme.

New applications must be submitted by 17 December, but successful applicants will then have until 31 March 2022 to recruit through the scheme.

After submitting a number of successful bids themselves and guiding local businesses through the process, WBC wanted to offer a structured session to cover:

- scheme requirements and eligibility criteria;
- the questions asked of applicants, effective responses and common pitfalls to be avoided.

All local businesses and organisations are welcome to come along by [registering](#).

WBC have recruited 13 people within the Council using Kickstart, along with a further 12 externally, and could not recommend the scheme enough for small businesses who could use extra capacity to expand and grow.

Full Fibre Infrastructure

WBC have awarded a major contract which will deliver full fibre infrastructure to schools, doctors' surgeries and public libraries across Berkshire by March 2022.

The contract has been awarded to Virgin Media Business and will see the £1.7m project upgrade connectivity at more than 80 locations – with more than 26,000 school pupils able to benefit from future-proof full fibre connections.

Covid-19 has led to schools dramatically accelerating their digital learning programmes, which has caused challenges in harder to reach rural areas. Full fibre infrastructure will support digital learning and can power the next-generation of connected services. For schools and other public sites, it offers the potential for them to benefit from gigabit speeds, and can support connections of more than 1,000 Mbps.

Household Support Fund

WBC has been awarded funding of £695k out of £500m nationally, for the new Household Support Fund. The Fund will support those households across the district that need it most this winter to meet daily needs such as utilities, food and other essential costs.

WBC will:

- provide a fund of £450k to support those most in need with household costs such as energy bills, food, clothing and housing costs in exceptional circumstances; and
- help families over the Christmas period by providing free school meal vouchers for the 16 days of holidays, recognising the additional financial pressure the festive period can bring.

The funding available will be subject to review in January 2022 to decide any potential support that might be needed in the future.

Health and Wellbeing

Issues with PCR tests conducted at Newbury Showground

After receiving reports from local residents that there were concerns about the accuracy of test results from the Showground site, WBC passed those concerns onto the Department for Health and Social Care for further investigation, and received confirmation that a number of sites nationally may have been affected by the issue, including the Showground.

In advance of national announcements, WBC issued a press release on 14 October strongly recommending those who had taken a PCR test between 3 and 12 October which was reported to be negative (and their close contacts), to take a retest.

This then provoked a flood of media enquiries, and was followed by national announcements by the UK Health Security Agency about issues with Immensa Health laboratory in Wolverhampton.

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

Following a surge in Cov19 numbers locally (at one point we were 9th worst in the country) the LOEB was stood back up, and has now met twice since 8 November (and is due to meet again). The PCR testing issues emanating from the Racecourse were high on the agenda and the meetings can be seen on the YouTube channel.

Flu and Covid-19 booster jabs

This winter there are two essential vaccines available to protect everyone, and this is the first year that flu will co-circulate alongside Covid-19. It's easy to pass on Covid-19 or flu viruses without knowing, so (if you're eligible) it's advisable to get both jabs.

How do I book my flu jab?

You can book your free flu jab at your GP surgery or local Pharmacy subject to eligibility. More information on who is eligible can be found [here](#)

How do I book my Covid-19 booster jab?

If you've been contacted by the NHS and you are either:

- aged 50 and over;
- aged 16 and over with a health condition that puts you at risk of Covid-19;

you will be able to book an appointment for a booster dose if it's been at least six months (180 days) since your second dose of the vaccine. If you meet this criteria you can book your booster jab [here](#), otherwise please wait to be contacted by the NHS.

NHS Covid-19 App

It has been one year since the launch of the NHS Covid-19 app, which has played an enormous role in helping to stop the spread of coronavirus.

The NHS Covid-19 app is the fastest way to see if you're at risk from coronavirus. The faster you know, the quicker you can alert and protect your loved ones and community, helping to stop the spread of coronavirus.

The app has a number of tools to protect you, including contact tracing, information on local area restrictions and venue check-in. It uses proven technology from Apple and Google, designed to protect every user's privacy:

- between September and December 2020, before the successful rollout of the vaccine programme, the app prevented an estimated 600,000 cases of coronavirus;
- at the peak of the 'pingdemic' in July, the app was proven to avert 2,000 infections each day meaning that an estimated 1,600 hospitalisations were prevented;
- it reduces the spread of Covid-19 by around 4.3% each week, and for every 200 to 250 tests entered and shared in the app one person is prevented from being hospitalised from the virus;
- for every 1% increase in app users, the number of coronavirus cases in the population can be reduced by 2.3%.

Surviving to Thriving Fund

To date over £198k has been awarded across 24 different applications (average grant award = £8,263.09). New successful applications include; Volunteer Centre West Berkshire, Charlie Waller Trust and Berkshire Youth.

WBC and Greenham Trust have each agreed to provide an additional £50k to further the Funds aims.

Let's Get Active Fund

LGAF is a £33k fund to promote physical activity that has enabled a number of exciting projects across West Berkshire – it provides funding for community groups to deliver initiatives which help residents to become more active.

One of the initiatives is a new ten-week programme of free activities run by the Educafe Community Café in Newbury. The fund has contributed towards a new ten-week Chair Yoga programme, which runs every Wednesday from 14:15 and 15:00 at The Globe Indoor Garden (until 15 December).

Environment

Recycling Pringles (and similar)

A new recycling service has been introduced for paper containers with metal ends, such as Pringles tubes, packaging used for hot chocolate, nuts and other products.

These containers can be recycled alongside food and drink cartons at specialist banks at the Council's Newbury and Padworth Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) and Mini Recycling Centres (MRCs):

- Newbury – Waitrose, Sainsbury's
- Hungerford – Station Car Park
- Thatcham – Kingsland Centre
- Hermitage – Hillier Garden Centre
- Burghfield – Willink Leisure Centre

The introduction of the new service follows a number of other improvements made together with Veolia UK in the past year. These include the introduction of plastic pots, tubs and trays from selected recycling centres along with the expansion of the small waste electronic equipment and carton recycling banks at MRCs.

Queen's Green Canopy

WBC are working with Greenham Trust to help celebrate its 25th anniversary during 2022. During this time the organisation has awarded an amazing £64m in charitable grants to local charities, community projects and voluntary organisations both large and small across West Berkshire and north Hampshire.

As part of the upcoming 25th anniversary celebrations and in support of the Queen's Green Canopy (marking Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee) WBC and the Greenham Trust are offering local schools, councils and

community groups the opportunity to plant one or more trees to enhance the local environment for years to come.

The Trust plans to provide up to 25,000 trees to be planted throughout the region over the next planting seasons. An initial order has been placed for trees to be planted this Autumn and the Trust is now accepting applications for free trees. You can read about this initiative [here](#).

Air Quality

Local authorities are required to submit an Annual Status Report (ASR) on Air Quality to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) each year – to report on progress in achieving reductions in concentrations of emissions relating to relevant pollutants below air quality objective levels, and to identify new or changing sources of emissions.

WBC recently submitted its ASR and DEFRA have commented that:

- WBC has completed a detailed and thorough report that satisfies the relevant criteria, with trends clearly presented and discussed, and a robust comparison with air quality objectives provided (and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic during 2020 duly noted);
- WBC has included a detailed discussion relating to measure to bring about emissions reductions, which is commendable and welcomed;
- WBC has provided a good summary of the impacts from Covid-19 on air quality, clearly showing the benefits of reduced traffic flows on NO2 concentrations in particular, and highlighting the challenges to local air quality management as well as opportunities for behavioural change and potential positive impacts from these.

Transport

WBC is regularly contacted by residents concerned about unsafe parking (generally, but in particular near schools and in residential areas).

It is trite to say that parking on a pavement that blocks access for pedestrians to use or to homeowners' driveways is not only inconsiderate but dangerous, and can cause permanent damage to pavements as they are not built to withstand the weight of vehicles. Damage caused to the pavement from vehicles parking or driving on it also cause a danger for pedestrians making the surface uneven or broken which could cause someone to fall over and injure themselves.

Pavements are for people



More information about parking is available [here](#), including advice about how to report problems and the powers the police and local authorities have to deal with these issues.

Consultations

[Domestic Abuse Public Consultation](#), closes 10 November.

[Library Review 2021](#), closes 15 November.