



WBC Parish Report for February 2022

Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

West Berkshire Council

My apologies to you all for my recent absence at Parish Council meetings and the various other local Committee meetings which I usually attend as I have been recuperating following surgery, however, I intend to return to my normal duties during the last week of March. I have been monitoring my emails and responding to your questions and enquiries as best I can, but if you are still awaiting a reply, please drop me an email and I will respond. I look forward to getting out and about again shortly.

Council

There was no Council meeting in February – the next meeting is on Thursday (3 March) and will deal only with the WBC Budget for 2022/23 (see below). There will be another full Council meeting on Thursday 17 March to deal with non-Budget matters.

Executive

The Executive met on 10 February and, as well as dealing with public and Members' questions:

- Approved the West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23;
- Endorsed the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan;
- Approved the West Berkshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2022-2027;
- Noted the 2021/22 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter Three

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

The next meeting is on 24 March.

WBC Budget

(What follows is an edited repeat of the item from last month's report.)

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

A number of parish and town councillors recently had a presentation on the draft Budget from Joseph Holmes, the WBC Executive Director (Resources) (and s.151 [chief financial] officer). In addition, Cllr Ross Mackinnon, the WBC Executive Member for Finance, together with Joseph, were online in early February to answer any questions from residents 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). The session can be watched [here](#).

Transport



2022 Updates to the Highway Code

At the end of January the Highway Code changed, with changes implemented to improve safety for people walking, cycling and horse riding. Every road user still has a responsibility to keep themselves and each other safe, and the changes mean being ready to give priority, leave space and be considerate of others.

In summary, irrespective of your method of transport, a new hierarchy of road users has been introduced to ensure those who can do the greatest harm have the greatest responsibility to reduce the danger or threat they may pose to others.

This means:

- Giving people crossing and waiting to cross, and cyclists going straight ahead priority when turning in and out of junctions
- Giving plenty of space when passing people cycling and horse riders
- And making sure drivers are acting with responsibility and respect to all road users

The changes can be viewed by visiting: www.gov.uk/dft/highway-code-changes.

Environment

Changes to Waste and Recycling Collections

New bin days were introduced this month. To check bin days online go to: www.westberks.gov.uk/binday for more information, and to access collection day changes FAQs, visit: www.westberks.gov.uk/bindaychanges.

Leisure

Premier League footballer opens new 3G pitch



A new full size 3G playing pitch at Denefield School in Tilehurst was officially opened last week by Shandon Baptiste, a first team regular for Premier League side Brentford and an alumni of the school.

The Third Generation (3G) synthetic pitch cost £730k and has been up and running since November. As well as being used daily by the school it has also become home to two partner football clubs, Westwood Wanderers and Barton Rovers at evenings and weekends.

The project was supported financially by a number of organisations, including £150k from WBC using CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funds.

Health and Wellbeing

New Alcohol and Drug Support Service

As reported last month, a new integrated drug and alcohol service will be coming to West Berkshire soon. The newly commissioned service will be delivered by WDP, a leading drug and alcohol charity, and begins on 1 April.

Replacing the current separate services, it will provide treatment and support to all adults and young people who live in the district 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.

Health and Wellbeing Conference

More than 100 people recently attended the annual Health and Wellbeing Conference. The conference acts as a forum for WBC to speak with residents and to gather relevant information, so that local needs can be understood, now and into the future.

The principal theme was the new ten-year Health and Wellbeing Strategy (reported upon previously) and its five core themes, each of which was the basis for a breakout session for interested participants.

If you couldn't attend the conference (which was held virtually), you can watch the introductory video [here](#).

Health and Wellbeing Board

The Board met on 17 February and discussed a number of items, including the winter plan for the Royal Berks and the latest regarding the BOB ICS (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System) – both important local issues. The meeting can be viewed again [here](#).

Appeal for return of unused equipment

Anyone with equipment on-loan from the NHS or Adult Social Care that is no longer needed (beds, hoists, commodes, etc) is asked to get in touch to arrange a collection.

Returned items are cleaned and re-issued, which helps to reuse and recycle – saving money, and ensuring that necessary equipment is available to more patients so they can be discharged from hospital safely.

Anyone wishing to return an item needs to look for the NRS sticker or label which includes a bar code, and contact NRS Healthcare: either by telephone on 0344 893 6960 during opening hours (08:30 to 16:30, Monday to Friday), or by email to enquiries@berkshire.nrs-uk.net.

Covid

Living with Covid

Following the announcement made by the Prime Minister, the key points from the Living with Covid Plan are now available to view on the [Government](#) website.

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

There was a meeting of the Board on 14 February to review the latest news about the pandemic – it can be viewed [here](#). It is possible (hoped?) that this may be the last meeting needed.

Vaccines

It's never too late to start the vaccination journey. Most locations offering vaccines can administer all vaccinations, and many can also provide the jab for 12 to 15 year olds. Please visit the main [NHS](#) site to find the nearest walk-in or bookable site.

Remember that you need to wait 28 days after having Cov-19 before receiving any of the vaccinations, including the Booster.

'Blossom into Spring' creates memorial for Covid-19



Over the past year, WBC have been working on a new initiative to provide a memorial to allow residents in the district to remember and reflect on the loss of those who have died as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Through the 'Blossom into Spring' initiative, white flowering ornamental cherry blossom trees ('Prunus Tai Haku') have been offered to all town and parish councils in the district. So far, 30 councils have planted 113 cherry trees, with more trees to be planted soon.

The trees will provide a lasting memorial for residents to remember their loved ones, they will improve the district visually, and they will contribute to carbon sequestration. Combining the beneficial elements of tree planting with the visual spectacle of spring blossoming, the trees will create a living natural memorial and a point of reflection at a scale that echoes the loss of residents across the district.

A special thank you to everyone who took part in the planting, and to Continental Landscapes Ltd and Volker Highways for their delivery services.

Communities

Newbury Town Centre Masterplan

Whether it's to work, learn, shop, relax or simply somewhere to call home, Newbury is a beautiful place, with a rich and colourful heritage.

That's the driving force behind the Newbury Masterplan which was unveiled this month. It's a shared vision for future development of the town centre – ensuring it remains one of the most vibrant places in the south-east. You can read more about the Newbury Masterplan and what the future holds for the town centre [here](#).



Awards to projects supporting residents through Covid-19

Charities and good causes across West Berkshire have been awarded more than £17k from the West Berkshire Community Fund this year – with several of the awards supporting charities in responding to the impact of Cov-19 on local residents.

The West Berkshire Community Fund is one of the good causes supported by the West Berkshire Lottery. The fund is allocated annually by WBC with good causes able to bid for additional funding to support specific projects.



This year eight projects have been supported with funding totalling £17,135. This included:

- £4,500 to Swings and Smiles - a contribution towards the cost of a wheelchair-accessible roundabout for its outdoor play area;
- £3,000 to Time to Talk - a contribution towards a counselling course which over six months will provide free counselling for up to 18 parents;
- £3,000 to the 3rd Newbury Scout Group - to help make its @TheDen building more accessible to disabled members through installing new wheelchair-friendly paths;
- £2,500 to The Downs School - funding to purchase a high jump bed to support its PE activities;
- £1,635 to St Mark's Church of England Schools Association - to buy recycled plastic benches so that pupils can eat lunch outside;
- £1,000 to Citizens Advice West Berkshire - funding towards the cost of its Spending Diaries and Financial Capability support provided to clients on low incomes;

- £1,000 to City Arts Newbury - funding for two ten-week art courses for mums and carers with young children, and one to bring together elderly and vulnerable residents together;
- £500 to The Friends of Chilton Foliat Primary School - a contribution towards the non-statutory provision of a forest school in the outdoor area providing activities such as den building, outdoor cooking and mini-beast hunts.

Players can win prizes ranging from free plays up to a top prize of £25k. Tickets cost £1, with 60p going back into the community. From each ticket sold, 50p goes to a good cause chosen by the player, and another 10p goes into a community fund (players can also select the Community Fund as their charity if they have no particular allegiance to a specific good cause).

To view a list of the charities, you can support and buy tickets, visit www.westberkshirelottery.co.uk and you can also buy tickets over the phone by calling 01635 597111.

Education

Engaging Potential – Supporting Success

The district's Engaging Potential School has been rated Good by Ofsted. The school's ethos is best summed up by their name.

The independent school looks after a small number of boys and girls aged from 13-19 who have struggled in traditional education settings - all the pupils have specific social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, with some having been out of education for long periods of time, and many having struggled to manage their emotions in more traditional schools.

Under the careful and caring eyes of the staff at Engaging Potential, these pupils' behaviour has, according to the latest Ofsted report, greatly improved - staff at the school have been praised by Ofsted for their calm approach and the individual attention they give to each pupil, offering them the best chance of success as they move into adulthood.

The school was highly praised by grateful parents with one saying *"The school gives pupils the opportunity to succeed, when I know they don't always see that in themselves."*

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

[2023 Review of Parliamentary constituencies](#) – closes 04/04/2022

[Proposal to introduce a Public Spaces Protection Order in Thatcham Town Centre](#) – closes 03/04/22

[Variation of the West Berkshire Council Street Works Permit](#) – closes 04/03/22

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