



WBC Parish Report for May 2022

Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

West Berkshire Council

My year as Chairman of West Berkshire Council came to an end on 10th May when I installed Councillor Rick Jones as the new Chairman for the municipal year of 2022-23; Rick is Ward member for Tilehurst and Purley and I wish him a very enjoyable and successful year ahead.

My year as Chairman was both busy and enjoyable having chaired full Council meetings throughout the year and represented West Berkshire at Civic events on 55 occasions, including welcoming Princess Anne at Newbury Race Course for the British Horse Society Awards ceremony.

My lasting memory of my year will be realising and comprehending the amazing amount of time, effort and energy that is given by the many volunteers across West Berkshire in all the various charities, help groups and clubs, this was emphasised with the Community Champions Awards ceremony held at Shaw House in March. My thanks continue to go out to you all for your ongoing commitment and the support you give to your chosen causes.

The Platinum Jubilee weekend celebrations are now over and the residents of all the villages in Downlands Ward excelled in the events they fundraised for and then arranged, from the Beacon lighting on Thursday night, party nights on both Friday and Saturday and Church services and afternoon teas on Sunday to celebrate the Queen's 70th Anniversary of her reign. Well done and thank you to all of those who for months running up to the weekend planned meticulously to make all this happen, we will not see another occasion like this again in our life time.

Council

The Annual Meeting of the Council on 10 May saw the election of a new Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Council, the announcement of the Executive membership by the Leader and some changes to Committee memberships, Committee Chairmen, etc.

Councillors Rick Jones (pictured, right) and Alan Law (pictured, left) were elected Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively. The Chairman is the formal representative of West Berkshire Council and, as well as presiding over Council meetings, officiates at civic functions and welcomes distinguished visitors of national and international significance on behalf of the district.



Before standing down as Chairman of Council I had the enjoyable task of awarding four Councillors with their Long Service Awards. Councillors Hilary Cole, Jeremy Cottam and Alan Law were recognised for 15 years' service, and Councillor Graham Pask was recognised for 35 years' service.

Refurbished Council Chamber

As anyone attending the District Parish Conference on 26 May will have seen, the Council Chamber has been refurbished with new tables, lighting and connectivity as well as enlarging the available floor area by removing the permanent dais. It is looking very smart!

Executive

The nine Councillors making up the Executive, the main decision-making body of the Council, were confirmed at the meeting. The Executive takes key decisions – those that affect two or more wards or where decisions will have a significant impact on the Council's budget.

Joining Council Leader Lynne Doherty on the Executive will be eight other Councillors, including Graham Bridgman who remains as Deputy Leader, and Tom Marino who has been appointed to the Executive for the first time since he was elected in 2019. Tom replaces Hilary Cole who has stepped down after 13 years as a member of the Executive.

The full Executive membership, announced by the Leader, Lynne Doherty, is as follows:

- Cllr Lynne Doherty - Leader of Council
- Cllr Graham Bridgman - Deputy Leader of Council, Health and Wellbeing
- Cllr Jo Stewart - Adult Social Care
- Cllr Dominic Boeck - Children, Young People and Education
- Cllr Richard Somner - Planning, Transport and Countryside
- Cllr Steve Ardagh-Walter - Environment and Transformation
- Cllr Ross Mackinnon - Finance and Economic Development
- Cllr Howard Woollaston - Housing, Leisure and Culture
- Cllr Tom Marino - Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships

HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee

Special Platinum Jubilee Bus Travel in West Berkshire



Following the success of the free bus travel offer last Christmas and for the recent Easter weekend, most bus journeys starting in West Berkshire over the Jubilee weekend (2-5 June) will be completely free.

This initiative has been developed by West Berkshire Council in partnership with Reading Buses and Thames Travel, and will be valid on any Reading Buses, Newbury & District, or Thames Travel services within West Berkshire.

Road Closures

With numerous events taking place over the special four-day weekend, including the Big Jubilee Lunch on Sunday 5 June encouraging neighbourhoods to get together to celebrate, a huge vote of thanks to the WBC Traffic and Road Safety team, who have been extremely busy behind the scenes processing applications and arranging all the necessary signage with WBC's contractor Volker Highways (the road closure signs are being organised in advance and will be supplied free of charge for event organisers to collect and return as part of their application).

Over the weekend there will be 64 events taking place, with Volker Highways providing road signs to 55 of these (a total of 180 road signs).

Thanks are also due to the WBC Insurance Team, who have arranged public liability insurance for the street parties at no cost to the organisers.

You can find out more about where the road closures will take place on the [interactive map](#).

More information on Council events taking place over the Platinum Jubilee weekend can be found on the [dedicated Jubilee page](#).

Finance

Council top nationally for overall performance and amongst the best for value for money

According to independent research by money.co.uk, out of 304 local authorities surveyed nationally, WBC is one of the top ten (eighth) for value for money, and top for overall performance.

The research analysed a variety of council services - recycling levels, road conditions, crime rate, percentage of good or outstanding schools and care homes. The report found the district scored well on road maintenance compared to other councils and was the highest scorer on social care.

Across key areas West Berkshire Council scored highly out of ten:

- Road Maintenance - 9.06
- Household Waste Recycling - 7.59
- Education – 8.99
- Social Care - 9.77

The overall performance score for West Berkshire Council was 8.49 out of 10 – top of all 304.

Of the top 15 authorities, eight are London Boroughs and three are Metropolitan Districts (all Manchester) (with all of them “N/A” for road maintenance). That leaves three Unitary Councils, all in Berkshire - Windsor & Maidenhead (third for value for money and 13th for overall performance), WBC (eighth and first) and Wokingham (13th and fifth), with Maldon District Council in Essex completing the 15 (at 15th and 11th).

The top ten are detailed below and for more information about how WBC spends taxpayer’s money, see <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/councilspending>.

Rank	District	Road maintenance score (/10)	Household waste recycling score (/10)	Crime score (/10)	Fire service score (/10)	Education score (/10)	Social care score (/10)	Final value score (/10)	Overall Performance Score (/10)
1	Wandsworth	N/A	0.13	4.65	10.00	8.75	9.63	7.85	6.63
2	Wigan	9.61	8.80	N/A	8.47	7.07	8.29	5.03	8.45
3	Windsor & Maidenhead	5.62	7.96	6.47	7.50	9.83	5.75	4.88	7.19
4	Westminster	N/A	0.33	0.08	10.00	7.63	1.34	4.68	3.88
5	Bromley	N/A	4.62	5.89	10.00	9.79	8.83	4.63	7.83
6	Merton	N/A	4.11	6.43	10.00	9.34	8.83	4.53	7.74
7	Bolton	9.26	8.06	N/A	8.47	7.11	8.09	4.34	8.20
8	West Berkshire	9.06	7.59	8.02	7.50	8.99	9.77	4.32	8.49
9	Kensington & Chelsea	N/A	0.27	0.85	10.00	9.86	7.73	4.31	5.74
10	Trafford	N/A	8.16	N/A	8.47	9.09	3.85	4.30	7.39

Grant figures announced

The Economic Development team in West Berkshire is focused on helping businesses in the district to succeed and thrive through the support WBC offer. In the past 2 years, helping businesses through the Covid pandemic has been the focus of the team and they have distributed a huge amount of grant funding to help businesses recover and grow, in collaboration with the Business Rates team:

- 20 businesses have received a share of over £85k in Welcome Back Business Grants;
- 44 businesses have received a share of £700k from the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) Challenge Fund;
- 450 businesses have received a share of £6.42m from the ARG Funding.

Household Support Fund Scheme extended

The Household Support Fund has been extended until the end of September to support vulnerable households most in need of help with significantly rising living costs.

To date the fund has successfully helped support over 1,400 households to pay for energy bills, food and clothing. The funding has also supported 4,000 children across West Berkshire by providing Free School Meal vouchers, recognising the additional financial pressure during this time.

The funding is limited and will be made available to assist vulnerable residents, pensioners and children across West Berkshire. To read the criteria and apply for the Household Support Fund, please visit [here](#).

Culture

Antiques & Brocante Market

Shaw House in Newbury is hosting an Antiques & Brocante Market on Sunday 14 August.

This unique French-style Brocante market is making a welcome return to Shaw House, offering antiques, vintage, retro, bric-a-brac and decorative arts items plus vinyl records outside on the Great Lawn. It is a great day out for all the family with free entry to explore the House. Street food will be available outside, plus light refreshments from the café and pre-prepared picnics are available to order from www.westberkshireheritage.org/whats-on.



Education

Children's Services retains 'Good' rating

WBC's Children's Services has retained its 'Good' status following the latest inspection from Ofsted. It follows a visit from Inspectors, who spent a week with the Children and Family Service in March.

Building on the progress made during the last inspection, WBC achieved 'Good' across all four inspection areas:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families;
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection;
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers;
- Overall effectiveness.

The report praised the effectiveness of "strong, stable and child-focused leadership team" and said "Leaders in West Berkshire demonstrate a strong political and corporate commitment to achieving the best outcomes for children and families". It also recognised the experience that West Berkshire has in supporting asylum-seeking children, noting that unaccompanied children are met with kindness when they arrive here.

In particular, the report noted the introduction of an early response hub through which highly effective working relationships have been developed with universal, voluntary and community services. It means that children and families benefit from help and support at the earliest opportunity, provided by a range of skilled services and valued partners who serve the children and families of West Berkshire.

Keevill Unit officially opens at Speenhamland School



A new learning space for children with physical disabilities was officially opened at the end of April by Paralympian Louise Sugden. Louise is a former Speenhamland and Keevill pupil, and has competed both as a former wheelchair basketball player and current powerlifter.

The Keevill Unit is part of an £860k transformation project funded by WBC. The first phase saw the refurbishment of the Pelican Building, an existing structure on the school site, into an inspiring learning environment for Early Years children, providing two new classrooms, a designated outdoor learning zone, accessible toilet and hoist for children with physical disabilities and extra indoor and outdoor space, for all pupils to enjoy.

When the Pelican Building was complete, work began to relocate the Keevill Unit for children with physical difficulties. The expanded area now provides two classrooms, a dedicated Special Educational Needs therapy room, an accessible hygiene room, two resource areas/office, and a kitchen area.

Curridge School Eco-success

Curridge Primary School in Thatcham are celebrating their Eco-Schools Green Flag award with merit! To achieve this accolade, Year 6 children made a huge effort in continuing the 'green' work featured in the curriculum, and collected evidence over an eighteen-month period to submit to the Eco-School team.

This included taking part in lessons and projects featuring art inspired by Wangari Maathai and Jadav Payeng; drawing up an environmental review & action plan; designing a sustainable housing development of 150 homes, and building bug hotels and gardens to attract more wildlife.

Health and Social Care

Healthy Start Scheme

WBC has been promoting changes to the Government's Healthy Start Scheme, which supports eligible low-income families receiving benefits (with a move from vouchers to a card based scheme).

Healthy Start is a national programme to help those who qualify by providing free vitamins from pregnancy, plus financial support to pay for healthy food and milk until their child is four.

Mums that are more than ten weeks pregnant, or have a child under four, may be entitled to receive a Healthy Start card, which can be used to obtain free vitamins, and has money loaded on it to buy items including vegetables, fruit, pulses, cow's milk and infant formula milk, in a number of shops displaying the MasterCard logo. The card can be applied for [online](#) and a further benefit will be added to it every four weeks.

Health and Wellbeing Bags

Sometimes people need to take some time and do something for themselves – maybe reading a book, learning a new recipe, having an activity to do with a friend, or going for a walk...

WBC launched this new scheme last month and wants to advertise that you can find all of this and more in the new Wellbeing Bags, each containing a selection of items, that can be borrowed free from local libraries.

Cyclomaniacs

Cyclomaniacs is a fun session of cycling for children aged nine to 12 years taking place on Saturday mornings from 09:00 to 11:30. No specialist equipment is needed; just a bike, a cycle helmet and a can-do attitude to have fun.

Costing just £15 per rider, there are limited places available. The sessions will take place at Shaw House, Church Rd, Shaw, Newbury, RG14 2DR, and the next events are taking place on the following dates: 4 June, 18 June, 2 July, 16 July, 3 September and 17 September (a limited number of loan bikes are available on the day at a cost of £5 per bike per session). Level 2 and Level 3 Bikeability courses are also available - this is the modern standard for cycle training, giving everyone the skills and confidence to cycle on the road.

For more information and to book a place for Cyclomaniacs, or for more about Bikeability, please email activetravel@westberks.gov.uk.

Environment

Free soil conditioner giveaway success!



WBC's first ever soil conditioner giveaway at the Integrated Waste Management Facility at Padworth was a huge success, which saw 25 tonnes of soil conditioner collected by West Berkshire residents on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 May.

Residents patiently waited for their turn as there were long queues on Saturday due to high demand for the material, which is a fine grade, peat free soil conditioner, made from garden and food waste collected from households across West Berkshire.

Community

Sustainability Fund



After a successful launch in 2021, Veolia's Sustainability Fund is back this year and offering up to £1,000 worth of funding to innovative project ideas to transform local communities across the UK.

The Fund will support inspirational ideas that aim to make a positive change towards local communities. The purpose of the Fund is to support non-profit organisations, community groups or individuals that help transform their local community through enhancing biodiversity, promoting sustainable waste behaviours, protecting or preserving resources and the environment, or using recycled, reused or reclaimed materials.

Projects can apply at veolia.co.uk/sustainability-fund.

Transport

New community bus for the Newbury and Thatcham Handybus service

WBC has funded a new community bus for the Newbury and Thatcham Handybus service, run by the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire.

The bus, which has been adapted to be fully accessible, was successfully funded through the Capital Grant Fund, which is available for all local community transport operators to bid for.

The new service will provide an opportunity for those who are unable to use public transport to access local town centres for shopping, to attend appointments and meet friends.

The new minibus is part of the ongoing support for community transport schemes. £55k has been allocated in funding this year to help local providers deliver services, as well as making grants totalling £50k available for capital projects each year.



Speed Checks

WBC's Road Safety Team and officers from Thames Valley Police visited several locations on Friday 13 May to carry out speed checks.



Using a laser speed detection device, speeds were checked and those drivers found to be breaking the speed limit were pulled over.

As a result, nine drivers were issued with tickets for excessive speed in 30mph zones.

One driver was found to have no insurance or MOT and had his car seized as a result, and another was cautioned for not wearing a seat belt.

Officers spoke to a further 17 people, whose speed was over 30mph but less than 35mph, to remind them of the dangers of breaking speed limits and the consequences for both themselves and the pedestrian should they hit someone.

Current Consultations

- [School Streets Schemes – the Calcot Schools](#) – closes 30/09/22;
- [Minerals and Waste Local Plan – Main Modifications](#) – closes 06/07/22;
- [Community Governance Review for Greenham Parish 2022](#) – closes 03/07/22;
- [WBC Website Structure Review](#) – closes 14/06/22;
- [Proposal for a New Sports Pitch at Manor Park, Newbury](#) – closes 12/06/22;
- [The Future of Notrees Care Home, Kintbury](#) – closes 08/06/22.

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