



Council Report for August 2023

Written by your local Conservative team to keep you up to date.

Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

West Berkshire Council

Council

There was no meeting of Council this month.

The next meeting is on 5 October.

Executive

There was no meeting of the Executive this month.

The next meeting is on 21 September.

100 Day Plan

100 Days have now passed since the Liberal Democrats won the election.

Their 100 Day Plan has been reviewed with a report available online at: wbca.org.uk/100DayReview

The new administration has struggled to even start most of their own plan and have faced significant difficulties keeping any of their election pledges, primarily due to their failure to listen to residents, businesses, or even their own council officers. More row backs are expected.

Leisure

Northcroft Lido is officially open!

Northcroft Lido is now officially open! Hundreds of excited visitors have enjoyed the new facility, which includes water slides, a splash pad and an Olympic sized 50 metre swimming pool, to entertain children and adults alike.



The lido will be open until the end of September, and residents can book via the Everyone Active app, the Northcroft Leisure Centre website, or by calling the centre on 01635 31199.



Visitors can also pay on the day at the leisure centre but with sessions expected to be popular they could be turned away if the session is at capacity. It's best to book in advance to avoid disappointment.

This renovation project was started by former Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cllr Howard Woollaston, back in 2021 and involved years of meticulous planning, design, and consultation with residents to keep this site a local treasure as well as being fit for the 21st Century.

The Lido is embedded in the history of Newbury. Heritage records show that the large rectangular outdoor pool originated in the late 19th century and can be seen on the First Edition Ordnance Survey mapping of 1880-1881.



The pool was enlarged in 1914 and completely rebuilt and converted to a Lido in 1937, when it was said to be the largest pool in the south of England at 70 metres long. The Newbury Weekly News of 4 August 1870 includes the dimensions of the basin itself as 240ft in length, "the whole extent is 254ft x 40ft".

In 1967, it was transformed into a more organised Lido complex with an adjacent 'baby pool'.

The new 50 metre Olympic length pool has been developed alongside interactive water play features for children and young people. There are also more changing cubicles within the grounds including improved and accessible changing facilities.



Without the vision of the outgoing Conservative administration and the investment that it committed, the Lido would have been at risk of closure as it needed important structural work. Now, the outdoor swimming season will increase to a period of six months, from Easter through to September.

The new facilities will enable a greater range of water-based exercise to increase fitness and improve wellbeing. It will also allow competitive swimmers to train in an Olympic length pool.

The investment is projected to increase usage to over 50,000 across the six-month opening period, providing further opportunities for physical activity in West Berkshire.

The refurbishment is a once in a lifetime opportunity that will ensure that the Lido is here for many future generations to enjoy.

Elections

Annual Electoral Registration Canvass 2023

Every year, WBC check the electoral register is up to date so that everyone who has the right to vote in upcoming elections are able to do so.

On 30 August, residents will receive an email from WBC asking them to check their details. Those without emails on the records, and those who do not reply after receiving an email, will get a paper form delivered two weeks later. It's very important that they follow the instructions to confirm their details as soon as possible so that they appear correctly on the published register.

During the canvass period, residents can respond online using the details on the form on the household response website. They will need to use the security codes given on the form or email to do this. They will also need to remember to add any 16 or 17 year olds in the household.

Residents can also contact the Council directly on 01635 519464, where the team are ready to help. Any new electors can register to vote on the gov.uk website.

Economy

Jobs Fair

Returning to Work

Returning to work Jobs Fair

10am – 4pm | 6 September

at Shaw House, Newbury

WBC are hosting a Return-to-Work Careers Fair at Shaw House on 6 September from 10am where advisors can help residents match their skillset to local employment vacancies.

The fair is being run in conjunction with local partners including the National Careers Service and other local employers such as Downe House to offer a wide variety of vacancies for you to discuss with the recruiting teams. There will also be local volunteering opportunities.

Laura Farris MP

Another jobs fair in Newbury next month will provide information about job and training opportunities available locally.

The event will bring together employers and organisations that are able to offer work and training opportunities with local people who are seeking employment, a change of career or career advice. We will be attending the event to talk about careers with West Berkshire Council, alongside other organisations from a wide range of sectors - from health and social care to construction, banking, telecoms, retail and hospitality. Other local employers attending including Vodafone, Metro Bank, AWE and Sovereign Housing.

It's been organised by Laura Farris, MP for Newbury, with the support of Newbury Jobcentre Plus. West Berkshire Council are delighted to help by making Northcroft Leisure Centre available as the venue for the event.

The event will take place on Thursday 28th September from 10am until 1pm. Admission to the jobs fair is free, but places must be booked for a specific timeslot via [email](#) or by calling 01635 551070.

Council Finances

An action plan to reduce spending this year has been put in place as the Council continues to be affected by rising inflation, increasing customer demand and a challenging job market.

Spending reductions will be focused on internal measures with frontline services remaining available to the public and future spending prioritised towards supporting our most vulnerable residents.

Forecasts earlier in the year showed an £8.7m overspend by year-end but measures put in place already have reduced this to £6.3m. The ongoing benefits of this work together with new measures should deliver a break-even position by the year end.

Over the summer the Council has worked quickly to halt spending and put in place spending controls which include:

- Reviewing all recruitment activity to fill only the most critical vacancies this year
- Reviewing all spending and approving only that which relates to statutory services or which are otherwise unavoidable
- In particular, reducing the cost of agency workers

Recycling and Environment

More appointments at Household Waste Recycling Centres

WBC are increasing the number of appointments at the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) across the district in order to improve the service for all.

This collaboration with waste contractor Veolia will provide more flexibility and capacity during the most popular time slots for residents.

With a total of 628 daily appointments now available at Newtown Road and 488 at Padworth Lane, we're working hard to accommodate more residents and make recycling more convenient than ever before.



Moving to three weekly bin collections.

Cllr Adrian Abbs, Portfolio Holder for Recycling, recently hosted a meeting of the Environment Advisory Group to hear views about moving to three-weekly bin collections.

This is something that was proposed a few times by officers during the previous administration and something the Conservative Administration always felt was not good for residents and therefore rejected the idea.

Nonetheless, Cllr Abbs is now in the driver's seat and appears to be pressing ahead with the move and a decision will be made by him soon.

Nutrient Neutrality

HM Government has announced it is tabling an amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill that will, if passed, reform EU Rules on Nutrient Neutrality.

This news is being welcomed strongly across West Berkshire, with many residents hoping to be freed from the shackles of these overbearing rules which do not address the underlying causes of pollution they were designed to stop.

This has had a particular effect on the Racing community in the west of the district, who now hope to be able to expand their businesses and provide more employment opportunities and economic output benefiting residents, racers, and businesses alike.

Public Protection

Staying safe online workshop

WBC's Early Response Hub hosted a workshop for young people last month that gave them important information about staying safe online.

They were entertained by fun games and activities, and were very engaged with the interactive presentations given. The children and young people also knew lots about online safety already which was great to see.

The team hope to run more events across the district in the near future.



Fraudulent builder sentenced to four years and three months immediate custodial sentence

A fraudulent builder from Swindon who left work unfinished after pressuring victims to pay more than the agreed price was last month sentenced at Reading Crown Court.

Michael Corcoran aged 43 of Stainswick Lane, Swindon, was sentenced to four years and three months immediate custodial sentence after pleading guilty at an earlier hearing on 26 May 2023 to three offences of fraudulent trading contrary to section 993 (1) of the Companies Act 2006.

Mr Corcoran was prosecuted following a large investigation by officers from the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) Investigation Team supported by the PPP Joint Case Management Unit, the Council's Legal Services, and the National Trading Standards Tri-Regional Investigation Team.

Culture

Robert Fitzmaurice art exhibition

An exhibition of new paintings and ceramics by artist Robert Fitzmaurice is opening on September 27 in Gallery 5 at West Berkshire Museum. The exhibition takes inspiration from local history, especially that of Newbury wharf in its 300th year.

Robert will be providing a free public talk at the Museum on Wednesday 18 October 2023 1:00-2:00pm, and he will be delivering a free creative workshop that explores local history and ideas using colour and line on 10 January 2024 10:00am-12:30pm. Both events are free but must be booked online.

The exhibition can be seen during the usual opening hours, Wednesday to Sunday, 10am-4pm. For further information, please call 01635 519532 or email Museum@westberks.gov.uk



Current Consultations

- [West Berkshire Bus Survey 2023](#) – closes 10 September
- [Hermitage Neighbourhood Development Plan](#) – closes 10 September
- [Cold Ash Neighbourhood Development Plan](#) – closes 10 September
- [Draft Statement of Licensing Policy 2023-2028](#) – closes 20 September

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