



Parish Council Report for September 2020 Councillor Clive Hooker (West Berkshire Council, Downlands Ward)

West Berkshire Council

Council Meetings

Links to all agendas and public meeting papers are at <http://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk>, 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](#).

Executive

The Executive met on 3 September (a recording of the meeting can be viewed on the YouTube channel referenced above) and considered a number of papers on Council performance and budget outturns for Quarter 1, agreed that the draft London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE) Development Brief should go to public consultation (see more below), and received a plethora of public and member questions.

Council

Council met on 10 September (a recording of the meeting can also be viewed on the YouTube channel). There were 21 public questions - all of which will have received a written answer in accordance with the Resolution on public remote meetings passed in April (more about public questions below) – and 13 questions from Members answered on the night.

Planning White Paper

The main paper discussed at the meeting was presented in order to formulate the WBC response to the HMG Planning White Paper published in August which is currently out for consultation (closes on 28 October). The response was agreed, having previously been discussed at a cross-party briefing and the Property Advisory Group (which contains opposition members).

Parish Councillors involved in planning may be interested in the response - it is contained in the meeting agenda pack, which can be read [here](#), as amended by a [notice of corrections](#).

Public Engagement in Remote Meetings

A major change to the way in which we conduct remote public meetings was introduced by a Conservative motion, supported by Members unanimously. This allows the public into meetings on a restricted basis, eg to receive the answers to public questions (and ask supplementaries if desired), and to answer questions on planning submissions.

Thus (for example and amongst others) town and parish councils can now put forward a representative to an area planning committee to answer any questions that the committee members might wish to ask regarding a submission made regarding a planning application on the agenda.

WBC has published [guidance](#) for the public wishing to engage in remote meetings.

Future meetings

The next scheduled meetings of the Executive and Council are on 15 October and 3 December respectively.

Local Economy

London Road Industrial Estate Consultation

Regeneration of the area has been a long-held ambition for the Council and, in December 2019, WBC commissioned a report from independent consultants on the redevelopment. The report has found that regeneration remains a viable prospect and puts forward possible options for developing a new masterplan for the area.

Regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate will deliver new office and light industrial space in the area. West Berkshire already offers excellent opportunities for businesses but the Council is committed to doing more to support start-ups and business growth. A strong local economy will better serve local residents' needs and redevelopment will help West Berkshire keep its competitive edge.

As well as meeting a commitment made in the Council Strategy, regeneration also supports a wider regional effort to create more opportunities for businesses looking to move into the area as well as providing space for start-ups looking to get off the ground. A [recent study](#) by the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership identified a need for more affordable innovation spaces within town centres in Berkshire - and regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate will help.

The consultation has begun to provide local people with the opportunity to have their say on the plans. You can [find the consultation on our consultation portal](#) and it is open until 20 October.

Housing and Planning

Housing Strategy Consultation

West Berkshire Council is inviting residents and stakeholders to provide their views on its draft Housing Strategy 2020-26, which details how the council intends to support residents with access to good quality housing while preventing homelessness and rough sleeping.

This public consultation of just over six weeks will close at midnight on Sunday, 1 November.

The Housing Strategy sets out West Berkshire Council's strategic housing priorities and the range of actions that the Council intends to take in partnership with relevant partners and stakeholders. In addition, the draft strategy explains how a thriving housing market – within both the local and national context - can positively influence and support the delivery of the Council's vision through the following twin priorities:

- **Priority 1** - Enable every resident to have access to a home that meets their needs
- **Priority 2** - Reduce homelessness

The draft strategy looks at the demographics and anticipated demand for housing across the District for the future. Overall, the population is projected to grow by just under 5% by 2036, but the modelled shift by age groups is stark, with the 0 – 60 population predicted to fall by (rounded) 5.5% and the 60+ population predicted to rise by 33%.

Thus, while West Berkshire has a relatively young population at present, the population is forecast to become older with household sizes reducing. These factors will impact on the future requirements for the type and size of housing across the district and the need for appropriate affordable housing.

To read the policy residents and stakeholders go [here](#). Those unable to participate online can request a hard copy by calling 01635 519530 and selecting option 1.

Funding award to help rough sleepers

West Berkshire Council has been awarded £184k from the Government's [Next Steps Accommodation Programme](#).



This successful bid for funding is part of a range of financial assistance made available by central Government to help local authorities get through the worst of Covid-19.

When Covid-19 began to take hold earlier in the year, WBC worked swiftly with partners to make sure that rough sleepers in West Berkshire were safe and had somewhere to go at a time when we were all being asked to stay at home. Together with local partners, a task force was set up to help and find accommodation for them.

Reducing rough sleeping is a key Council priority and this money will enable the Council and partners to continue with this work. It will help provide accommodation in the private rented sector, secure interim accommodation and allow the assessment of the wider support needs for vulnerable people to rebuild their lives. As colder weather approaches the good this funding will do in keeping people off the streets cannot be underestimated.

Environment

West Berkshire Community Climate Bond

The Community Municipal Investment remains open until 15 October so there is still opportunity for those who have not yet done so to invest if they wish. The Bond which aims to raise £1m for photovoltaic panel installation has reached nearly £800k.

Investments start from £5 and will earn a return of 1.2 percent over a five year term, with capital returned in instalments across the investment term.

Further information can be found [here](#).

Education

West Berkshire Council to invest £43m over next three years on schools and education services

We have announced our Education Capital Programme for 2020-23, with an investment of £43 million on new builds, expansion and improvement of schools, and the refurbishment of education-related care facilities across the District – including provision for new equipment and services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Recent major successes include the £8.8 million site purchase and new build of Theale Primary School, refurbishment of the Castle Gate respite care home in Newbury (£128k), Hungerford Primary School kitchen expansion (£417k), and extensive repairs carried out at Falkland Primary School, Newbury (£474k).

Projects scheduled for completion over the next six months include:

- Highwood Copse, Newbury - new primary school (£7.7m);
- Winchcombe Primary School, Newbury - increased accommodation to cater for a greater number of pupils (£341k); and
- Trinity Secondary School, Newbury - extension to the main school building to provide a new science classroom

Additional projects scheduled for completion throughout 2021–22 include:

- Parsons Down Partnership, Thatcham – bringing the junior and infant schools together into the same building to rationalise accommodation in line with pupil demand and improve financial efficiency. The project also includes the renovation and expansion of outdoor play areas (£1.5m);
- The Willink School, Burghfield - expansion project to increase the size of the sports changing rooms (completed), build a new English studies block with seven classrooms and associated facilities, and refurbish several other rooms (£2.9m).

Following a successful funding bid by West Berkshire Council, a separate project is under construction by the Department for Education to erect a new £14.8 million building for Little Heath Secondary School in Tilehurst. Works are currently scheduled for completion by early 2021.

Culture and Leisure

Draft Cultural Heritage Strategy

The draft Cultural and Heritage Strategy sets out the Council's vision for the next 10 years to ensure that culture and heritage continues to be an important part of everyone's daily life in West Berkshire.

The vision is to have a sustainable, resilient and thriving cultural heritage sector that supports creativity and innovation, while bringing significant benefits to the economy and all our communities. This draft strategy aims to build on its existing strengths and has identified a number of high-level objectives to be achieved by the council and key stakeholders working together.

To promote and develop our cultural heritage, the Council has worked with stakeholders to develop the following five objectives as part of the draft strategy - to:

- Ensure our cultural and heritage organisations thrive and are as sustainable as possible;
- Contribute to the improvement of the health and well-being of all our residents;
- Improve access to cultural education, learning and employment;
- Protect and promote our unique cultural history, heritage and environment; and
- Increase domestic and international tourism to generate income, investment and increase economic resilience.

With the pandemic proving to be a threat to cultural organisations large and small, regionally, nationally and internationally, a clear strategy and plan is needed now more than ever.

The [consultation on the draft strategy](#) has opened for six weeks, closing on Sunday 18 October.

Libraries re-open to public from 21 September

West Berkshire Libraries are delighted that the initial phase of restoring the service has proved a great success. The Order & Collect service which have been running for the past couple of months allows customers to reserve books online or to tell the service about the sort of books they like to read and for staff to choose a selection for them.

As well as continuing with this, the library service is now moving forward with the next phase, which will enable public access to all our library buildings across the district from Monday 21 September

Customers will not need to book a time to visit, but the number of people within each building will be limited and so you may need to queue to get in. Library staff will ask you to keep your visiting time to about 30 minutes and to use the hand sanitiser provided on entry and exit. Test and Trace contact details will be collected at the door.

Computers and printing/photocopying facilities will be available, but there will be fewer computers in order to ensure adequate social distancing. Customers will be able to use a computer for one session of 45 minutes per day. There will be no other seating or study areas available within the libraries and no access to toilets, baby changing facilities or refreshments.

The fines amnesty has also been extended and there will be no fines charged on items due for return between 20 March and 30 September.

Please remember that wearing face coverings is now mandatory in public libraries.

Waste Services

Putting Waste in Its Place



Food waste makes up nearly 25% of the rubbish in a black bin but it can easily be recycled in the green bin without the need to subscribe to the green waste scheme.

Over the coming weeks, WBC will be placing stickers on black bins to remind residents to recycle their food waste and put it in the green bin.

For more information on food waste recycling, go [here](#).

Recycling Permits

WBC green recycling permits with an expiry date of 30 September 2020 are still valid at the Council's recycling centres in Padworth and Newbury - residents do not need to order a new permit as the green permits will continue to be accepted until further notice, although the permit needs to be displayed to allow entry into our recycling centres (and a booking made).

Transport and Countryside

A339 road improvements at Newbury to start on 5 October

Work on improvements along the A339 between the Pinchington Lane Roundabout in Newbury and the entrance to the Household Waste Recycling Centre will start on Monday, 5 October and last until early Spring 2022.

Volker Highways has been contracted to carry out the works where the A339 will be widened on both sides to make room for two lanes in both directions and a new traffic light controlled junction installed. The new junction will connect the A339 to a link road to the new Highwood Copse Primary School and will include a pedestrian crossing to allow users to safely cross the A339.

The project, which is part funded by Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's Local Growth Deal Funding, also includes relocation of underground pipes and cables on both sides of the A339, significant surface water drainage works and footway construction.

Once the work is underway, weekly progress updates will be posted on the project blog at www.westberks.gov.uk/a339.

Please contact Network Improvements team by tel. 01635 551111 or email a339@westberks.gov.uk with any questions, comments or for further information.

Ultra Low Vehicle Emissions Strategy (ULEV)

The Government's 2018 Road to Zero Strategy sets out the ambition that by 2040, no new petrol or diesel cars, or vans will be sold. Last February the Government announced its intention to bring this forward to 2035, and sooner if possible. Hybrid vehicles would also be banned, and only new full electric or hydrogen vehicles would be sold from 2035.

The [West Berkshire Ultra Low Emission Vehicle \(ULEV\) Strategy](#) seeks to map out a programme for supporting ULEV uptake in the district. It is the intention that this document informs the general direction for West Berkshire, with more detailed policy or guidance documents produced where appropriate. Whilst some improvements have already been implemented, it is recognised that we are at the start of the transition, there remains uncertainty for the future to the technical advances we are seeing and the resulting changes to driver behaviour, therefore this strategy will be regularly reviewed, at least biannually, to ensure it is kept current.

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>

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

Other Matters

District/Parish Conference – Tuesday 20 October

The next conference, to be held virtually via Zoom, will include topics such as Low Power Wide Area Network (LORAWAN) gateways and the Smart Cities project; Community Engagement and Covid-19 recovery; and the Planning White Paper (see more above).

Details about booking a place have been distributed via Parish Clerks.

Covid-19

Local outbreak control planning

The Council has distributed an information leaflet on the Local Outbreak Control Plan, also available [here](#).

The leaflet explains how we will aim to protect residents and communities by minimising further spread or recurrence of Covid-19 across West Berkshire.

Coming soon
to your door

Information on our
Local Outbreak Control
Plan for COVID



Social Distancing

Whilst community transmission rates are comparatively low, as lockdown is eased and those in the shielded and vulnerable groups are able to leave their home (if they so wish) it is as important as ever that social distancing is observed – see the latest [HMG advice](#).

Covid-19 testing advice for Berkshire West residents

Residents across western Berkshire are being asked to only request a Covid-19 test if they have symptoms, or have been asked to get a test.

There is currently a high demand on the Covid-19 testing system, caused by capacity at the labs (and not at local testing centres). The Department for Health and Social Care is prioritising tests in areas where there are higher rates of Covid-19 (Berkshire having lower case numbers than elsewhere in the country – with 97% of tests on Berkshire residents last month coming back negative for Covid-19).

If you have been identified as a contact of a case then you should isolate for 14 days. Two weeks covers the incubation and infectious periods of the infection. You do not need a test unless you have symptoms but if you do have a test and it comes back negative, you still need to isolate for the whole period. The same applies if you are isolating having returned from overseas.

Residents can play their part by maintaining social distancing guidelines and wearing a face covering where it is required to do so.

Local Covid-19 outbreak

Nationally there has been an increase in cases of Covid-19, and we are likely to see more local cases and outbreaks over the coming months.

Agencies are working together to manage an outbreak of Covid-19 within a workplace in Newbury. In recent days a number of police officers from Thames Valley Police have tested positive for Covid-19. Those officers, and a number of other people they have been in close contact with are now self-isolating in line with national guidelines.

Agencies including West Berkshire Council and Public Health England are working with Thames Valley Police to ensure that appropriate steps are being taken to minimise the spread of the virus in line with our local outbreak control plan.

Clive Hooker

Councillor Downlands Ward