

Introduction

This report is an edited extract from some of our parish reports over the last year, with recent updates where relevant.

By way of an introduction, I am Vice Chair of the West Berkshire Council and sit on Personnel Committee, Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and substitute on Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) and Health and Wellbeing Board. I am also a Trustee of Berkshire Maestros, Corn Exchange, Watermill Theatre, and Governor at St Marys School Burghfield. Councillor Ian Morrin sits on OSMC, Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Local Liaison Committee and is an active member of the Finance, Transformation and Economic Development

West Berkshire Council

Budget

The difficulties in setting a balanced budget have continued, with Revenue Support Grant now virtually zero – in 2013/14 it was almost £24m. Growth in other income streams has helped to mitigate this but, taking inflation into account, there has been a real terms reduction in our annual spending of over £40m since 2013/14.

A major issue is the spiralling cost of adult social care, which represents 35% of our net budget, with the number of elderly people in West Berkshire growing faster than in many other areas of the country (it has been estimated that in twenty years' time there will be one retired adult for every two of working age - in 2001 13.3% of the WBC population was aged 65 or over; by 2036 this is predicted to rise to 27.2%). Caring for our most vulnerable residents is one of the most important things we do, but it costs a lot of money.

In March WBC set a budget with a 2.99% council tax increase alongside a 3% Adult Social Care precept. The council tax for a Band D (the average) household will rise by £82.59.

In addition we will be introducing some income measures, the most important of which is green waste roadside collection charging (taking green waste to a recycling centre, eg Padworth, will remain free of charge).

Capital Strategy and Programme (to 2022/23)

The programme allocates £73.6m of WBC capital resources over the next five years with capital spending to be financed from capital receipts, government capital grants, s106 funds and Community Infrastructure Levy. It helps to deliver the key priorities for improvement in the Council Strategy 2015-2019 (see further below) by proposing investment in the following key areas:

- improving educational attainment and closing the educational attainment gap: £69.8m for new school places and improvements to school buildings;
- key infrastructure improvements in relation to roads: £55.5m for the maintenance and improvement of highways;
- regeneration and the digital economy: £4m towards the delivery of superfast broadband across the district;

- safeguarding children and vulnerable adults: £15.7m for occupational health equipment, home adaptations and supported living for vulnerable adults and looked after children, and to improve the supply of temporary accommodation for people at risk of becoming homeless;
- supporting communities to do more to help themselves: £3.7m for maintenance and improvement of parks, open spaces, sporting and cultural facilities, and £0.5m for grants to support community projects;
- becoming an even more effective council - living within our means: £30m for investment in commercial property in order to generate revenue income to help meet the running costs of WBC services.

West Berkshire Council Strategy 2015-2019 Refresh

In March WBC agreed a refresh of its strategy. The revised document can be found at <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=34790&p=0> and contains a great deal of information about West Berkshire and WBC's strategic vision.

WBC Boundary Review

In January the Local Government Boundary Commission for England published its final proposals for new WBC electoral wards and at the end of February the West Berkshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2018 was laid in draft before Parliament seeking to confirm the proposals. If accepted the new electoral arrangements will come into force at the next scheduled elections for WBC in May 2019.

The Commission accepted the West Berkshire Council representation regarding our local wards (which the four local Conservative councillors, including me, had supported), namely (a) to exclude the southern part of Sulhamstead from the new Burghfield & Mortimer Ward (proposed by the Commission to be included) and (b) to split the proposed three-member Aldermaston & Bucklebury Ward (which would have included Padworth and Ufton Nervet) into three single-member wards (Aldermaston, Bradfield and Bucklebury).

The Beech Hill Parish will form part of the three-member Burghfield & Mortimer Ward, along with the parishes of Burghfield, Stratfield Mortimer and Wokefield, (with an anticipated electoral variance from the predicted average number of electors per councillor in 2023 of -1%).

West Berkshire Local Plan Review to 2036

WBC is reviewing its Local Plan to cover the period up to 2036, to assess the future levels of need for new homes and employment land, and other land uses, and to provide an appropriate basis for housing, employment land and infrastructure provision over that period. Full details are on the WBC website.

West Berkshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation

WBC is currently preparing its Minerals and Waste Local Plan which will set out policies to manage minerals and waste development across the district. The Local Plan will also include allocated sites for minerals development to meet the Council's primary aggregate (construction material) need over the plan period.

WBC has consulted upon its Preferred Options Minerals and Waste Local Plan, and the results are now being reviewed.

WBC Children and Family Service

Residents may recall that the service was regrettably judged 'inadequate' two years ago. After a great deal of hard work, and a considerable amount of investment, it is gratifying to see that it was announced in July that OFSTED has judged the service as 'good' – a two-step increase (WBC is the first solo authority to make the jump straight from inadequate to good).

Consultation

WBC propose that the review will look at the future levels of need for new homes, employment and other land uses up to 2036. It will also consider what our associated infrastructure needs will be. This consultation ended on 26th March with the results planned for December 2018

Local Matters

Three Year Highway Improvement Programme

Work scheduled in 2017/18 MilePave Type Inlay along Church Lane to Ammers Farm Road, Hawksworth Road to Reading Road, Micro Asphalt/SD(&LockChip) Overlay on School Lane and Surface Dressing Along Hermits Hill. For the years 2018/19 MilePave Type Inlay along Clayhill Saxon Gate to Hawksworth Road, Sulhamstead Road to Bennetts Hill and Hermits Hill to The Hatch. Surface Dressing Field Farm Road Mill Lnae

AWE - Burghfield Emergency Planning Zone

The new zone was announced in mid-March and a map of the zone can be found at <http://www.onr.org.uk/images/reppir/burghfield-2018.jpg>. To what extent the new zone will affect any plans for Grazeley waits to be seen (see further below).

Grazeley

The proposals for a "Garden Settlement" of 10,000 – 15,000 homes in Grazeley on land across the boundary between WBC and Wokingham Borough Council remain alive, but with a number of issues. Briefings last year by the WBC Development & Planning team covered a lot of ground, and some current key elements were:

- No formal decisions have been made;
- Wokingham is leading on Master Planning, ie technical work/feasibility;
- There are discussions with multiple land owners;

- Grazeley was not included in the original list of projects granted infrastructure spending by the Government (the Garden Communities funding), but was recently shortlisted for another round of funding (the Housing Infrastructure Fund) - this requires a business plan, which is being worked on;
- Discussions are underway regarding the extent to which the new AWE Burghfield EPZ (see above) affects the proposals;
- The current thinking is that Mortimer Railway station will remain open, but possibly with a reduced service outside peak times (but nothing is confirmed or agreed, indeed it is a fair way off in any event – from one of the briefings: *“Is Mortimer Station going to close? In the short term definitely not, in the medium term (20 years) unlikely”*).

This will be on the radar for the foreseeable future...

Pangbourne Police Station

It has been announced that it is intended to close the police station in Pangbourne (identified in 2015 as an opportunity for replacement with something more modern) as and when the planned new Fire Station in Theale, which is intended to include accommodation for the local policing team, is constructed and occupied.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue

The RBFR have submitted a planning application to WBS for a fire station with accommodation for partner services (police), community facilities, offices and support accommodation, training facilities including training tower and satellite vehicle repairs, and access points. | Land at Junction Of Wigmore Lane Bath Road Theale Reading Berkshire

Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group

Permission was given by NHS England for the four local CCGs – North & West Reading, South Reading, Newbury & District, and Wokingham - to merge and to create a single CCG for Berkshire West. The change is intended to reduce duplication and inefficiency and came into formal effect at the start of April.

Padworth Household Waste Recycling Site

We are still awaiting the committee meeting to consider the planning applications to allow for general household waste to be accepted and to extend the opening hours.