

**Parish Council Report for period up to 13 February 2019**  
**Cllr Graham Bridgman (West Berkshire Council, Mortimer Ward)**  
**and Cllrs Carol Jackson-Doerge & Ian Morrin (West Berkshire Council, Burghfield Ward)**

**West Berkshire Council**

**Meetings**

Council has not met since December. The next scheduled meeting of Council is on 5 March (the meeting that will set the 2019/20 budget).

**Budget**

Last month we reported that Berkshire has been successful again in bidding for the business rates pilot (something we weren't banking upon). We now have details – WBC is set to receive a £1.7m top-up from business rates, as one of (only) 15 areas to be part of the Government's Business Rates Retention pilot scheme for 2019/20.

In simple terms this means WBC will benefit from 75% of the total Business Rates levied in the district in the next financial year. The additional funding will be used in the main to address the council's growing budgetary requirements, particularly around the high demand for Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children's Services (as we have reported previously, particularly because it is Graham's portfolio, in the current financial year 35% of WBC's net budget was spent on ASC, a figure which is likely to increase by around 3% year on year to meet growing demand).

Graham sits on the WBC Budget Board which has been discussing how to address funding and spending issues generally. There will be more about this once the draft budget has been published.

**Government funding awarded for road maintenance**

WBC has been awarded a grant of approximately £2m from the Department for Transport as a share of the £420m of new Local Highways Maintenance Funding money – designed to help local authorities fix potholes and carry out other repairs, after a harsh winter followed by a scorching summer took its toll on road networks across the country.

By the end of this financial year WBC will have already invested £3.6m on resurfacing and a further £1.06m on other road repairs to maintain the 1,292km of roads in the district. This new money will go towards further maintenance of West Berkshire's roads.

**Positive Ofsted for Children's Services**

A two day visit from Ofsted in December focused on WBC's Contact, Advice and Assessment and its Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, and looked at the effectiveness of how Early Help services are provided and child protection enquiries are dealt with.

In the Report Overview, inspectors stated: *"Decisions made when children are first referred to children's services are appropriate, correctly overseen by managers and lead to prompt and effective action to safeguard children when this is necessary."*

## **Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations within West Berkshire Council**

The consultation on this recently concluded, but none of the proposals locally were (in our view) particularly controversial – essentially nothing new was being proposed for the various parishes with the current wards (although there was an error in the table under the new Bradfield Ward map which Graham mentioned at the last Ufton Nervet Parish Council meeting and has pointed out to WBC Electoral Services).

### **West Berkshire Lottery**

Further to our report in December, the West Berkshire Lottery is now up and running.

More than 35 good causes in the area have signed up to take part, with players able to choose which cause they would like to support. From every £1 ticket sold, 50p goes directly to the chosen cause and another 10p is put into a community fund (if no good cause is chosen, 60p goes into the community fund) – the community fund will allow one-off grants to be made to the lottery causes in addition to their direct fundraising, and will be awarded by an independent panel on behalf of WBC. The balance goes to the prize fund and to administer the lottery.

Good causes can join the lottery at any time – it's free to join, easy to sign up and takes only a few minutes.

The first weekly draw will take place on Saturday 30 March. Prizes are a jackpot of £25,000 for a matching sequence of six numbers, £2,000, £250, £25 or three free tickets.

To buy your tickets or register as a good cause visit [www.westberkshirelottery.co.uk](http://www.westberkshirelottery.co.uk).

### **Council Strategy consultation**

Every four years (to align with the electoral cycle), WBC produces a Strategy (which is then refreshed in year three). The Strategy sets out what WBC plans to prioritise and improve over the next four year period, and how it aims to achieve these improvements alongside delivering business as usual in respect of services (eg emptying the bins, fixing potholes, safeguarding vulnerable children and providing care for older people).

The current Strategy was adopted in 2015 and a draft for the period 2019-2023 is now out to public consultation.

To read the draft and take part in a short survey, visit [www.westberks.gov.uk/draftcouncilstrategy](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/draftcouncilstrategy) (the consultation closes at midnight on 24 March 2019, with the new Strategy being proposed for adoption at the May council meeting).

### **£8.6 million upgrade for Theale Railway Station**

Because the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) scheme Reading BC had been promoting is not now going to be able to be delivered in the planned timescale, WBC and Great Western Railway (GWR) are to receive funding from the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVB LEP) for additional investment in Theale Railway Station.

The work is planned to start within the next two years and will see Theale Station benefit from a new pedestrian bridge and lifts, a cycle hub, electric vehicle charging points and a significant number of additional car parking spaces.

It will be funded with £4m through the LEP's investment of Local Growth Funds, £4m from Network Rail and £470k from WBC (from funds specifically ring-fenced for the station and other successful funding bids).

### **Accuracy of property details on WBC interactive map**

A recent issue raised by a resident has thrown up that the property reference shown on the resident's council tax record didn't match the one on the WBC interactive map, such that the interactive map record showed the property as having no council tax record, leading to issues with credit checks etc.

So, it may be worthwhile checking the interactive map to ensure your property details are accurate (<https://gis1.westberks.gov.uk/applicationtemplates/onlinemap/>)!

## **Local Matters**

### **The Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP**

Congratulations to Sir John on his knighthood.

### **M4 Smart Motorway project**

There are several overnight full closures (usually 22:00 to 05:00) currently planned this month (too many to list here) – details on the Traffic England website ([www.trafficengland.com](http://www.trafficengland.com)).

### **Traveller encampments**

From a recent letter from the Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government) and the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP (Secretary of State for the Home Department): *“Action is needed to address the sense of unease and intimidation residents feel when an unauthorised encampment occurs; the frustration at not being able to access amenities, public land and business premises; and the waste and cost that is left once the encampment has moved on”*.

The Government has published a response to a detailed consultation, which will *“take forward a comprehensive range of measures across government, and ensure fair play”*: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/powers-for-dealing-with-unauthorised-development-and-encampments](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/powers-for-dealing-with-unauthorised-development-and-encampments).

Included in the proposals are: extended police powers to tackle trespassers; considering a new criminal trespass offence; additional support for local authority enforcement activities; further reforms to the planning system to tackle unauthorised development and encampments and support for law-abiding Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (the Racial Disparity Audit identified significantly worse health and education outcomes for these communities compared with the rest of society).

As an example of the proposals, it is seeking to lower the number of vehicles needing to be involved in an unauthorised encampment before police powers can be exercised – changing this from six or more, to two or more. The Home Office will also conduct a review that will consider whether it should criminalise the act of trespassing when setting up an encampment – there is currently similar legislation in Ireland and they will be examining the Irish model.

## **Parishes**

### **Beech Hill**

#### ***CCTV***

Further to the discussion at the parish council meeting yesterday (12 February), Graham has raised some questions about CCTV to combat fly tipping with WBC.

### **Burghfield**

#### ***Burghfield Road resurfacing***

Concerns have been raised by a Mortimer resident about the failure of the contractor to abide by the advertised times of working/the language and attitude of the contractor's staff to those affected. Graham took this up with WBC Highways and an answer has been provided to the resident. The language/attitude issue is being investigated.

### **Stratfield Mortimer**

#### ***Horse and Groom advertising application***

Councillors may be aware that an application has been made to revamp the signage for the H&G and to add a "V" board at the base of the post adjacent to the community centre car park (details can be found on the planning portal). Graham has been in discussion with Cllr Dennett and neither of them have an issue with the general scheme – in Graham's view it will be an improvement. However they do both have issues with the "V" signage and its potential impact on sight lines when exiting the car park. Further, the application (which, incidentally, has contradictory statements as to who is the applicant) states that the applicant has the landowner's permission for the sign, although this appears to be WBC highway land.

Graham has taken these issue up with the company making the application and is awaiting a response.

Whilst on the subject of the H&G, we note the publicity pack issued by Punch Taverns as to a revamp of the premises although, as yet, there is no sign of a planning application.

### ***Fairfield Park/Birch Lane***

As some councillors will know, with the Deputy Clerk's very helpful assistance, Graham organised a meeting on 24 January between Gary Rayner (WBC's Development Control Manager) and residents of Birch Lane, also attended by Graham and members of the parish council, to discuss issues arising from accesses created between Fairfield Park and Birch Lane, the destruction of hedges and trees, etc, and what could be done. Gary promised to reconsider the WBC position and we await his further views.

### ***Annual Parish Meeting***

Following the discussion at the recent PC Communications Committee meeting, Graham has arranged for Anthony Stansfeld (the Police & Crime Commissioner) to attend the APM if desired.

### ***42 West End Road – planning appeal***

Further to the joint submission by the PC and Graham to the Planning Inspectorate it is pleasing to note that the appeal against the WBC refusal of planning permission has failed.

### ***West End Rd Roundabout***

Further to correspondence with SMPC councillors (and as reflected in SMPC minutes), Graham obtained confirmation from WBC Highways that they have an order currently placed with their contractor to refurbish this mini roundabout and the four give way markings (although with regard to timescale, the response was *“The order placed is to be completed this financial year but that doesn’t narrow it down. Lining in particular is difficult to programme as it shouldn’t be laid in wet weather. The lining gang tend to complete multiple jobs in West Berks as and when they can, weather permitting.”*).

### ***The Street/Station Road***

Having been postponed in December, the remedial work referenced in previous reports was rescheduled for the end of January then cancelled again because of the weather. Perhaps if we don’t anticipate it happening it eventually will!

### ***Ufton Nervet***

### ***Camp Road – carriageway repairs***

Camp Road will be closed between the junctions of Church Lane and Green Lane on 20 February for one day (08:00 to 16:00) so that contractors can carry out carriageway repairs (as we have learnt to say, weather permitting).

Access will be maintained for residents, with a signed diversion for other traffic and all enquiries should be directed to the WBC Highway Maintenance Team on 01635 519080 (a plan of the closure can be found at <https://roadworks.org/?tm=112683315>).

***Graham Bridgman, Carol Jackson-Doerge & Ian Morrin***

13 February 2019