

Parish Council Report for period up to 13 March 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 met, for the last time before the May elections, on 5 March. There was a packed agenda including the 2019/20 budget, about which much more below. We also agreed the Statutory Pay Policy, noted changes to the legislation on council tax for empty homes, agreed the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations review, and endorsed the West Berkshire 2036 Vision.

Mollie Lock

Many current WBC councillors will not be seeking re-election in May (about which, more below) and, towards the end of the March meeting, it was announced that one of those would be Cllr Mollie Lock.

Although we sit on different sides on the chamber, we all recognise the huge contribution that Mollie (and her late husband Keith) have made to the life of residents in West Berkshire generally and Mortimer in particular. Her knowledge about education is second to none and her caring approach to what can be difficult and sensitive personal issues for some of our residents has helped many in our community. There will no doubt be many plaudits to follow and Mollie deserves them all.

Budget

The main business for the May council meeting was to agree the revenue and capital budgets for the forthcoming financial year, and the medium term revenue financial strategy (MTFS) and capital strategy for the next three years.

Revenue Budget

On the revenue side, Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from HMG is now zero, but it has been announced that those councils with zero RSG will not be further penalised by a downward adjustment in the business rates tariff as was previously postulated – for WBC this is a positive £1.8m that we might otherwise have had to hand to HMG.

The business rates retention pilot continues as we have reported previously – this is worth £1.75m to the WBC budget.

The headline council tax increase is 2.99%. This increase is alongside a savings/income generation requirement of £6.24m to set a balanced budget, including retaining prudent reserves (the general reserve is to be set at £6.55m or 5% of the net revenue budget). Be assured that we are not raiding our reserves as might be happening elsewhere.

Taking into account the Police & Crime Commissioner, Fire & Rescue, and Parish precepts, the average final council tax and precept totals for the different parishes (at Band D) are: Beech Hill: £1,821.40; Burghfield: £1,880.09; Padworth: £1,819.76; Stratfield Mortimer: £1,864.84; Ufton Nervet: £1,798.78; and Wokefield: £1,796.17.

Capital Budget

On the capital side, the strategy period is now three years, rather than the previous five, so as to align with the MTFS. The programme is set to deliver £131m in capital spend over three years, much of which will come from external grants, CIL and s.106 funding. Headline areas of spend over the period include over £38m on education (including the new primary school at Theale), £12m for road resurfacing, £3.6m on occupational therapy aids and equipment, and £4.7m on disabled facilities grants.

Elections

As if anyone needed reminding, the local elections, for WBC, Town Councils and Parish Councils (where there are more nominations than seats) will be on Thursday 2 May.

Candidates and voting

So far as the election for WBC is concerned, anyone qualifying and wanting to stand is able to do so with a deadline of 4pm on Wednesday 3 April for completed nomination forms, and a list of candidates standing for election in each ward will be published online on Thursday 4 April – for more information about the elections see <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=46801&p=0>.

Residents not on the electoral roll have until Friday 12 April to register to vote. Residents are able to vote by post if they prefer to, or to apply for a proxy vote which allows another person to cast their vote for them. The deadlines are Monday 15 April for new postal votes and changes to existing postal vote details, and Wednesday 24 April for applications to vote by proxy. See <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/elecereg> generally.

Purdah

The period of time before an election is a period of heightened sensitivity, commonly known as ‘purdah’. It is also sometimes referred to as the ‘pre-election period’.

For WBC, purdah will commence on Friday (15 March) and will continue until after the elections on Thursday 2 May. Generally, the advice is that it should be ‘business as usual’ during purdah, unless there are very good reasons why this should not be the case (examples of matters where caution should be exercised would be where a proposal is likely to be very politically sensitive or highly contentious - in the vast majority of cases the pre-election period will have no impact on normal day to day WBC business).

There will be restrictions on publicity and WBC will not publish material which appears to be designed to affect support for a political party - in particular WBC is restricted from issuing any publicity which relates to or identifies individual members or groups of members.

So far as the three of us, and other current councillors, are concerned, we are free to respond to enquiries received from the media in a personal capacity, to issue our own statements, use social media, contact the media directly or say what we like in a personal capacity, but we must not use council resources to do so.

Practically, this means that we will be restricted in the use of our WBC email addresses so, as one example, the parish report next month must come from a personal email address.

Secondary School choices

Considering some of the headlines (*“Record numbers to miss out on first choice for secondary school places”* – Telegraph.co.uk) the WBC numbers look excellent – despite a 9% increase in the number of West Berkshire children applying for a secondary school place since last year, 90% were offered their first choice of school, with 97% being offered one of their school preferences.

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

The paper setting out the results of the review (we referred to the consultation last month) was agreed at the council meeting. As reported before, there are no changes in where people will vote locally.

Council Vision

The West Berkshire Vision 2036 was adopted at the meeting on 5 March following a widespread consultation.

Owned by the Health & Wellbeing Board, and designed to focus on what is important to local people, the economy, well-being and the environment, the Vision will be a key driver for council policy over the next 15+ years.

Local Matters

Padworth Household Waste Recycling Centre

As reported via Facebook, and following lobbying by councillors from this end of West Berkshire including the three of us, the Recycling Centre will extend its hours of public operation from 1 April on a trial basis - from 8am to 6pm every day until 30 September, after which the usage will be assessed.

Up until now the planning permission to extend the hours was not triggered because the usage didn't increase dramatically when the site began accepting household waste as well as recyclables. We local members responded that this was Catch-22 - until the hours were extended the usage wouldn't increase, and at the March council meeting Hilary Cole, Executive Member for Waste Services, announced the trial.

So, the message is to everyone: if you weren't going to Padworth before because it wasn't open when you needed it to be, it will be from April – so use it, or the hours will go back to what they are currently.

Having said this, please ensure that you access the site via the A4. One of the huge concerns raised by residents living locally was that increased hours would see an increased number of vehicles down Rectory Road and Silver Lane (etc) which already suffer from traffic issues – please let's ensure that doesn't happen.

Three Year Highway Improvement Programme 2019/20 – 2021/22

The WBC programme includes the following highway improvements within the two wards. Some of the work will go across parish boundaries (eg James Lane).

In the details below, Year 1 is 2019/20, Year 2 is 2020/21 and Year 3 is 2021/22. For each parish the text shows the following: the name of the road (with the start and end points for the work); the length to be resurfaced in metres; and the treatment being recommended:

Beech Hill

Year 1 (2019/20)

- Beech Hill Road (Grazeley Road > Wokingham Boundary); 1,113; Surface Dressing

Year 3 (2021/22)

- Unnamed Road (Cross Lane > District Boundary); 764; Surface Dressing

Burghfield

Year 2

- Clayhill Road (Sulhamstead Road > Hawksworth Road); 1,200; Surface Dressing
- James Lane (Hermits Hill > Goring Lane); 1,690; Surface Dressing
- Reading Road (Hawksworth Roundabout > 40mph Speed Limit); 825; 40mm Inlay/Overlay

Year 3

- Ash Lane (Clayhill Road > Sulhamstead Road); 409; 40mm Inlay/Overlay
- Deans Copse Road (Hose Hill > Burghfield Road); 2,455; Surface Dressing
- Field Farm Road (Mill Road > End); 622; Surface Dressing
- Fullers Lane (Burnthouse Lane > District Boundary); 970; Surface Dressing

Padworth

Year 2

- Reading Road (Soke Road Roundabout > Silver Lane); 2,141; Surface Dressing
- Silver Lane (Padworth Lane > Reading Road) 1,953; Surface Dressing

Year 3

- Bath Road Service Road, Beenham D C'way (A4 > A4); 494; Surface Dressing

Stratfield Mortimer

Year 1

- Longmoor Lane exc Estate Service Road (Windmill Road > Burghfield Road); 1,216; Surface Dressing
- Unnamed Road (Padworth Road > St Catherine's Hill); 943; Surface Dressing
- Unnamed Road aka Mortimer Lane (Beech Hill Road > District Boundary); 1,644; Surface Dressing

Year 2

- Birch Lane (West End Road > End); 165; 40mm Inlay/Overlay
- The Street (Station Road Roundabout > Goodboys Lane); 1,963; Surface Dressing

Year 3

- Longmoor Lane, Estate Service Road (whole length); 88; 40mm Inlay/Overlay
- West End Road, inc mini roundabout (Victoria Road > Stephens Road); 600; 40mm HSC Asphalt

Ufton Nervet

Year 3

- Island Farm Road/Sulhamstead Road/Church Lane/Camp Road (Island Farm Road 50m south of junction with Sulhamstead Road > Unnamed Road from Ufton Lane to Camp Road); 1,134; 40mm Inlay/Overlay

Wokefield

Year 1

- Goring Lane (350m east of Reading Road mini roundabout > 450m east of Reading Road mini roundabout); 100; Re-Texturing

Neighbourhood Action Group

Ian and Carol have been working with the NAG, WBC and the Willink to set up a date for a Community Conversation to be held at The Willink School. A planning meeting is scheduled for the next couple of weeks and we will be proposing initial dates shortly after that.

AWE

Graham attended the AWE Local Liaison Committee this morning (13 March) when a number of items of local interest were discussed:

Review of REPIR and effect on Burghfield DEPZ (and thus Grazeley)

The Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 are drafted but yet to be laid before Parliament. If they proceed as drafted (currently held up, as with other legislation, by other issues!) the detailed emergency planning zones (DEPZ) for both sites may need to be updated and the indications are that they will become larger. This in turn has implications for the Grazeley Garden Settlement project, currently awaiting the submission of a detailed Housing Infrastructure Funding bid.

In this context, John Steele ((AWE's Planning & Estate Development Manager) shared the following extract from MOD representations to the WBC and Wokingham Borough Local Plan Reviews: *"Burghfield provides a unique capability in support of the UK's deterrent programme. That capability could be significantly affected by the current proposed housing development. The extent of that impact is related to the proximity both within and adjacent to any existing and future AWE associated public safety zones. It is, therefore, essential for the local planning authorities to continue to work with the MOD to identify an acceptable solution that also seeks to maximise the opportunity to deliver significant housing at Grazeley."*

Drones

AWE has now received MOD approval for the uses of drones to inspect the site (and access difficult to view places, like chimney stacks). Generally drone flights will be kept to non-working Fridays and weekends and should rarely be able to be seen from outside the site perimeter. The drones may be available for community projects (eg inspecting building roofs etc?), but very much only on a case by case basis.

Local Projects

As many councillors will have seen in relation to recent Facebook posts about Thrive in Beech Hill (one of AWE's chosen charities this year), various AWE personnel have recently been involved in corporate volunteering, helping to clearing around the pond and cut back plants.

AWE are interested in hearing about local projects they can get involved in – preferably during the working week and needing between 15 and 60 volunteers. For more information/to make contact please email communityandschools@awe.co.uk.

Recycling

Graham had previously asked for clarification of where general waste from the AWE sites ends up. The latest figures are that 95% is recycled, 2.7% goes to be converted to energy, and 2.3% goes to landfill.

Site Under Cover Exercise

There will be an exercise on Wednesday 3 April involving the sounding of alarms.

Dementia Action Alliance

The West Berkshire Dementia Action Alliance (DAA) is a community run group that will be hosting a one-day conference on 28 March for people from health, social care, local businesses, emergency services, the voluntary sector and local government to explore how West Berkshire, and similar rural communities, can become better places for those living with dementia. Graham is intending to be there as portfolio holder for Adult Social Care.

This from Greg Walsh, Chairman: *"This is an important step in creating a more inclusive community for people living with dementia and will also benefit those living with cognitive and/or sensory impairments and the elderly. Working together we can provide more effective health and social care services while making our community, businesses, homes, towns and villages more accessible and relevant to people living with dementia.*

"Dementia costs more than heart, cancer and stroke combined today with over 850,000 people in the UK affected at a cost of over £26bn. This is expected to nearly triple by 2050 with over 2.1 million people affected. Two thirds of people living with dementia, live in the community and can live fulfilled and meaningful lives for years if empowered correctly."

Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner

Matthew Barber

Hot off the press is that Matthew, the current Deputy PCC, has been adopted as the prospective Conservative candidate for the PCC election in 2020.

John Campbell

Mr Campbell, who is the force's current Deputy Chief Constable, has been chosen to replace the current Chief Constable, Francis Habgood, when he retires at the end of March.

PCC Newsletter

According to the latest PCC newsletter, residential burglary had gone down by almost 2% as at the end of January this year. Whether this trend has continued will no doubt be a point for discussion at the SMPC Annual Parish Meeting, when Anthony Stansfeld, the PCC, is due to attend as reported last month.

Also as reported previously, the HMG police funding settlement was in part subject to agreement from local taxpayers to increase the police council tax precept. After a consultation, 69%+ of respondents agreed to an increase and, after funding pay and price rises, the increase in council tax (referred to above) will provide around £8.5m for Thames Valley Police for investment in a number of priority policing areas, including the recruitment of additional officers, investment in 101 call handling, the recruitment of investigators to tackle complex crime, and investment in technology.

Parishes

Beech Hill

Fly tipping - CCTV

Further to the discussion at the parish council meeting last month (see last month's report), Graham has shared the response from the WBC Waste Team with BHPC and awaits their deliberations. (Nb see also re Burghfield below.)

Burghfield

Fly Tipping

Carol has raised issues regarding fly tipping with Sovereign Housing who have been investigating the use of CCTV in areas where this is a significant problem.

Fly tipping can be reported to WBC via http://www.westberks.gov.uk/servicerequests/describe_case.aspx?lev=0. Where material is on West Berkshire land it will be cleared.

Reading Road Speed Review

Carol and Ian have been working with officers to investigate the options for a speeding review.

Safe in Our Hands

Carol and Ian presented the Safe in Our Hands accreditation to Garlands School on Friday 8 March, and had the opportunity to meet the pupils in their school assembly and learn about how they have been working towards this accreditation.

Land north of Reading Road (Crest Nicholson site)

Ian has been in correspondence with Crest Nicholson regarding fly tipping on the site, requesting that they remove the current rubbish and make the site less appealing for fly tipping.

The response from Crest Nicholson South was that they had cleared some waste in Autumn last year but weren't aware this had re-occurred. They are seeking quotations for the removal of this waste and for the erection of signage to deter further re-occurrence.

As part of the response they have informed us that they will shortly be submitting their reserved matters planning application – we wait to see the specifics for the site.

Padworth

Aldermaston Wharf Lift Bridge Replacement

This note is to ensure that everyone is aware of the report currently out to consultation (noting that it was on the PPC agenda for Monday (11 March)).

Stratfield Mortimer

Horse and Groom - advertising application

Further to Graham's submissions to WBC Planning and his discussions with Cllr Dennett reported last month, the applicant has now removed the application for the "V" signage, thereby clearing the way for approval.

Horse and Groom – planning application

The application, anticipated in last month's report, has now been validated. There are some issues to be discussed (the extent of the site, parking, the effect of the proposal on the new houses planned behind, etc) and Graham has called the application in to committee, so it will be going to the Eastern Area Planning Committee for decision whatever the WBC planning officers recommend.

SID

Graham is sure that Cllrs Kilshaw and Lewis will report to the SMPC meeting about their meeting at WBC with Jeanette Clifford, the portfolio holder, and officers, but suffice it to say that his comment is "tough going, but I think we got there in the end!".

Graham Bridgman, Carol Jackson-Doerge & Ian Morrin

13 March 2019