



Parish Council Report for January 2021

Cllr Graham Bridgman (West Berkshire Council, Burghfield and Mortimer Ward)

West Berkshire Council

A belated happy new year, although not the start to 2021 that any of us would all have wished for a year ago! Despite the pandemic, we have a very fully agenda in the coming twelve months and, now that the vaccination roll out is fully underway, look forward to life getting back to something near to normal as soon as possible.

Meetings

Council

The next meeting of Council is on 2 March and will see the setting of the Council's budget for 2021/22 – one of the set piece meetings of the year.

Executive

The Executive met for the first time this year on 14 January. Among the items on the agenda were papers on the Cultural Heritage Strategy and an urgent item on the Newbury Sports Ground Project, which obtained authorisation from the Executive to enter into detailed negotiations on heads of terms with Newbury Rugby Club.

Remote Meetings

Links to all agendas and public meeting papers are [here](#), 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](#). Guidance for anyone attending a remote public meeting (eg a parish representative at a planning committee) is [here](#).

It is anticipated that remote meetings will continue for some time to come although this will require The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 which were due to come to an end on 7 May being reviewed and renewed by Parliament.

Covid-19

Local Infection Rates

Although the country remains in national lockdown there are early signs that the infection rates have levelled and are beginning to fall. Whatever our position, it is against a background where we know that national lockdown will continue for some time.

As previously referred to, Berkshire local Covid information about the daily reported cases in the district (and across Berkshire), and the weekly per 100,000 rate (one of the principal factors in any decision making) can be accessed from Berkshire Public Health [website](#).



Vaccinations – Local Position



The Covid vaccination rollout began on 15 December.

As stated last month, It will be appreciated that the mechanics of the vaccination programme is in the hands of the NHS, whether via hospitals and acute settings, Primary Care Networks (PCNs), or individual surgeries.

A group of surgeries in the West Reading Villages PCN to the north east of the district began a vaccination clinic in Pangbourne, and this was followed shortly afterwards by surgeries in the other three WBC PCNs (West Berkshire

Rural, A34 and Kennet) setting up a clinic at Newbury Racecourse.

The priority cohorts for vaccination identified by the JCVI (Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation) are:

- Residents in a care home for older adults, and their carers
- All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
- All those 75 years of age and over
- All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
- All those 65 years of age and over
- All individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality
- All those 60 years of age and over
- All those 55 years of age and over
- All those 50 years of age and over

West Berkshire has been supplied with both the Pfizer and Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine. The latter enabled most of those in Cohort 1 – care home residents and staff - to be vaccinated over the weekend of 16/17 January, with the process continuing over the following week. The majority of care home residents have been vaccinated (although there may still be a few who were too unwell to be vaccinated in the first wave).

Generally, the rollout is going well but it will be appreciated that, as with the rest of the country, the district is entirely dependent on the supply of vaccine. The latest data indicates that everyone in Cohort 2 should have been offered a vaccination date very shortly (if this hasn't already been concluded) and that good progress is being made with regard to Cohort 3. Current indications are that (subject to supply) everyone in Cohorts 1-4 should have been offered a vaccination by mid-February.

It nevertheless remains vital that those who have received their first dose of the vaccination continue to follow the lockdown government guidance until more is known about transmission rates.

Vaccinations – National Position

As at 29 January 7.8m people had received their first dose. Weekly reports on the vaccine rollout are being published [here](#), giving data at an Integrated Care System (ICS) level – in our case at the level of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (“BOB”) ICS.

Local Testing

Much work is progressing to create community test sites, with the first expected to go live in the middle of February.

Covid Marshalls

WBC has agreed to fund six Covid Marshalls to cover West Berkshire for a period of three months. The Marshalls will undertake a range duties including advising and supporting members of the public and

businesses to follow social distancing rules. They will also provide support to the local community testing sites (see above).

Community Support Hub

Our [support hub](#) can still be contacted on 01635 503579 if needed.

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

The Local Outbreak Engagement Board meets on alternate weeks in private and in public. Thus, each fortnight, there is a live broadcast meeting to update residents of the current activities relating to Covid-19 in and around the district (and beyond). Public meetings are available on the Council's YouTube channel and further information about the Board can be found [here](#).

Coronavirus information on the WBC website

The Council keeps up to date information for residents and businesses on the [website](#).

Winter Hardship Grant Scheme

Support continues to be available for residents who are in need of help with food, utility bills and other essentials - for more information and applications, go [here](#).

Financial Support for Businesses

West Berkshire Council is administering a further series of grant schemes to support local businesses that have been affected by the national coronavirus restrictions.

The new Closed Business Lockdown (National Lockdown) payment came into effect on 5 January. This one-off Lockdown grant will be paid to qualifying businesses in addition to the Local Restrictions Support Grant payments that eligible businesses were entitled to from 19 December.

A further £11m of government support is being distributed to West Berkshire businesses, with the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB) being extended to cover the new national lockdown. This means that rate-paying businesses will receive a grant for this additional period of enforced closure. This round of funding replicates the previous scheme that ran from 5 November to 2 December.

Both of the new grant schemes will be paid automatically to businesses who have received them before; there is no need to reapply. Any businesses that have not applied previously should check the criteria to see if they are eligible.

Information about eligibility, and how businesses who have not received support previously can apply, can be found [here](#).

2021/22 Budget

The WBC Budget Council Meeting is on 2 March and it will be appreciated that a huge amount of work is going on to finalise the budget proposals for the coming financial year, including proposals for council tax and capital spend.

Draft Local Plan Review 2020 - 2037

There is still opportunity for members of the public to comment on the emerging draft version of the Local Plan Review 2020-37 (see last month's report for more detail) with the public consultation period closing on Friday (5 February). Parishes, residents, partners and other key stakeholders can read the draft Local Plan Review and provide feedback on the Council's [Local Plan Consultation Portal](#).

Adult Social Care

BBC Panorama

Sara Ross, WBC's Service Manager for Responsive Providers (which includes the WBC care homes), was on [Panorama](#) recently talking about her experiences of the pandemic.

Willows Edge Care Home

Following a Covid outbreak at WBC's Willows Edge Care Home in Newbury, and 30 residents and 24 staff testing positive for the virus, seven residents who had tested positive sadly died.

There has now been an inspection by the Care Quality Commission as part of its response to outbreaks of coronavirus in care homes, seeking to ensure that the home's infection prevention and control practices are safe and compliant with CQC measures. [The report](#) shows that infection control standards are being fully met and provides positive feedback on the high standard of care provided by staff at the home.

Care Home Visiting Policy

[The Policy](#) has been revised following the lockdown and updated Government guidance.

Education

Lockdown

The demand for children to attend school during the current lockdown is higher than the previous lockdown in March last year. Schools are doing their best, but the level of demand is now stretching school capacity and due to safety reasons some schools are having to ration places. Special schools, alternative provision and nursery schools are still expected to provide places for all children.

The Department for Education has updated the critical workers section of their [guidance](#) to clarify that parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can, to help manage demand.

A '[critical worker](#)' is defined as a parent or carer whose work is critical to the Covid-19 and EU transition response, including those who work in:

- health and social care
- education and childcare
- key public services
- local and national government
- food and necessary goods
- public safety and national security
- transport and border, and
- utilities, communications and financial services.

Full Fibre for Schools

A successful joint bid by WBC and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership has secured a £1.7m grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to deliver full fibre broadband to as many schools in the district as possible to improve their bandwidth and internet speeds, transforming the way teachers meet the demands of an increasingly digital curriculum.

Doctor's surgeries could also benefit from this additional funding. As we all become more used to virtual consultations, access to full fibre is proving increasingly important. If funding allows, more surgeries will be able to employ the technology.

Full fibre will also support the response of the Fire Service to emergencies by enabling digital options such as real time imaging and video conferencing.

Laptops for Home Learning

Before the latest lockdown, Government and WBC funding had provided 269 laptops for the most disadvantaged to use for home learning. A further allocation of 620 laptops has now been provided and these should be received by schools shortly. In addition, Greenham Trust has opened a fund, worth £250k so far, to allow schools to buy more laptops for pupils that need them.

Children's Mental Health Week

Children's Mental Health Week (CMHW) runs for the first week of February, and the theme for 2021 is *Express Yourself*. WBC's Education and Public Health teams are working together to provide a range of resources and activities for schools, parents, carers and pupils and our services and partners. A guide produced by Place2Be, the charity that set up CMHW, is on its way to schools and highlights the importance of children and young people's mental health. To learn more about what's happening over the week, go [here](#).

Leisure and Culture

Consultation on Newbury Sports Ground

The Council is consulting residents on its plans for a new sports ground in Newbury.

In particular, the Council would like to know whether local people support the proposal and the construction of an artificial pitch, the facilities they'd like to see at the ground, and whether they feel this new ground will give them more opportunities to get involved in sport and physical activity.

The feedback will inform the details of an application for planning permission, should the Council proceed with the proposal.

Newbury Rugby Club has been identified as the preferred site for the facility which would include a high-quality artificial grass pitch, stadium, floodlights and changing room as well as a function room. It would be available for community use for rugby, football and other sports and activities.

At its meeting on 14 January, the Executive agreed to begin formal discussions with the Rugby Club, with the aim of opening the sports facility in March 2022.



The new facility will help deliver the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy, and provide a Step 6 facility – which means teams would have the facilities needed to play in higher leagues. It would also serve as a replacement for the Faraday Road Sports Ground, which closed ahead of the regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate.

Details of the consultation, which is open until the end of February can be found [here](#).

Libraries

West Berkshire Libraries will continue to offer a limited service during the national lockdown restrictions, with library buildings open for book collections only, and public use of computers in libraries has been suspended.

The easiest way to borrow titles is via the apps BorrowBox and Libby, which can be downloaded from the Apple app store and Google Play store. Customers who have a Kindle tablet (such as Kindle Fire) can download the apps from Amazon. Anyone who has these apps can then search for West Berkshire Libraries and login using their library card number and PIN (members can reset their library PIN [here](#)). Customers who need help with this can drop an email to the library, where staff will be happy to help: library@westberks.gov.uk.

Customers who are not already members of the library can join online to get free, instant access to the e-library by [registering](#).

Residents are encouraged to check out the extensive programme of activities for children and adults, which will continue online, and follow the library Facebook, Twitter or Instagram pages (@WBerksLibraries).

Transport and Countryside

Flytipping

Following a report and supporting evidence provided by a member of the public in late 2019, an investigation by officers from the Council's Waste Team led to a Tadley resident recently pleading guilty to fly tipping on the Ridgeway near Compton, contrary to ss 33(1)(a) and 33(6), Environmental Protection Act 1990. The resident was ordered to pay a total of £2,447.78.

Environment

Waste and recycling

Like many other local authorities across the country, we faced a difficult January with significantly increased volumes of waste after the Christmas holiday period and a number of collection crews self-isolating.

The impact on parts of our waste collection services led to the decision to temporarily suspend garden and food waste collections to prioritise rubbish and recycling.

The garden waste collection service was suspended for one collection and has now resumed.

Help the Recycling Crews:

- Please make sure your containers are easily accessible.
- Recycling is sorted into the correct containers.
- Fold large cardboard as small as possible to fit in green box or next to it.

THANK YOU

VEOLIA

working in partnership

West Berkshire

Solar Farm at Grazeley

Following the decision not to include proposals for an element of the previously proposed Grazeley Garden Settlement in the draft Local Plan (see last month's report), a solar farm could be built on land near Grazeley as part of WBC's plans to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels and help combat climate change.



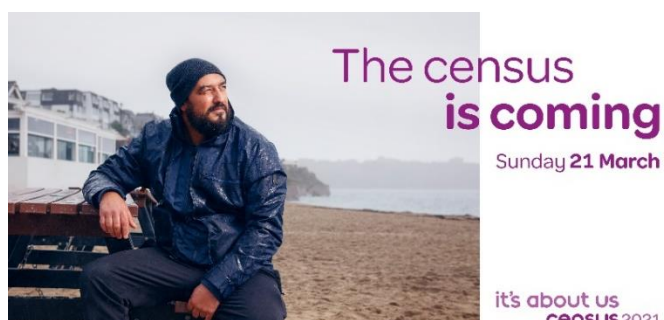
The Council is exploring this possibility as part of its strategy to become carbon neutral by 2030. A feasibility study found that a solar farm provides a viable option for clean, green energy which would offset around 30% of the Council's carbon footprint, taking into account the estimated carbon footprint of key contractors working on behalf of the Council.

The plans would see more than 45,000 solar panels installed on up to 75 acres of land already owned by the Council – generating enough electricity each year to power approximately 4,400 homes.

Funding for the project, which is estimated to cost around £10m and is subject to further studies and procurement, will be included in the capital strategy for Council to approve on the 2 March. Subject to the approval of funding and planning permission being granted work, could start on the site in 2022.

Other Matters

Census - March 2021



The Office of National Statistics is leading the planning and delivery of the Census on 21 March.

Local authorities are one of the key beneficiaries of the rich data resulting from the Census which informs local decision making processes. In addition, local authorities have detailed understanding of the areas they cover.

WBC will be supporting the work to ensure that the Census 2021 is a success (defined by achieving a

95% response rate nationally whilst ensuring that no local area achieves a rate below 80% and, for the 2021 Census, to receive 75% of responses on line). It is a statutory obligation to complete the census.

Community Champions

The Council recently announced the 2020 winning results of Community Champion Awards following the submission of nearly 100 nominations from across the district. Individual volunteers and community groups have been crowned as Community Champion 2020 Winners, Highly Commended, and Commended, for their valuable contributions to improving the lives of people in West Berkshire.

Community Champion



Do you know someone who lives within the West Berkshire district and deserves an award for their work in the community?

In addition to the traditional four categories, four Covid Response specific awards were added to recognise the fantastic volunteer efforts throughout the pandemic. The latter included a new “Big Thank You Award” created to show appreciation for individuals or groups who gave support to the community outside of the other Covid award categories, or for deserving individuals who would appreciate more low key recognition.

For 2020, Volunteer Centre West Berkshire and Greenham Trust each supported an award; Volunteer of the Year (Non Covid) and Community Group of the Year (Covid) respectively.

The awards, which have grown significantly since they first started in 2014, were judged by an independent panel and the award winners were announced by [video](#) by the Chairman of Council, Cllr Graham Pask.

More about our local winners below.

Parish Matters

Ward

Community Champion Awards 2020

Huge congratulations to [Ava Oakes](#) from Burghfield, who was Highly Commended in The Pat Eastop MBE Junior Citizen of the Year Award category, and to [Mashiur Rahman \(Buddy\)](#) from the Hatch Gate, Burghfield and [Rodie Hill](#) from Mortimer, who each received a Big Thank You 2020 Award for their efforts during the pandemic.

Community Infrastructure Levy Fund Bids

I was very pleased to be able to support bids from Burghfield PC and Stratfield Mortimer PC for CIL funding from the £500k fund I referred to in last month’s report, and even more pleased to see that each will be recommended to the Executive for agreement, although for different reasons (see below).

Members’ Bids - Covid

Just as pleasing in their way were the successful Members’ Covid Bids that I co-ordinated and were supported by Royce Longton and Geoff Mayes. These are detailed further below, but in essence we had a joint potential fund of £3k and put forward four bids, each for £1k - three (Alfred Palmer Memorial Field, Beech Hill PC and Burghfield PC) in priority for £1k each, with a bid for Stratfield Mortimer PC as backup if any of the others failed.

Beech Hill

Members’ Covid Bid – 154 Bus Service

We supported a bid compiled by Cllr Martin Plank to assist BHPC in subsidising the 154 bus service. This is currently being investigated further by officers and a decision is awaited.

Burghfield

Planning Application for Energy Resource Centre and Data Centre (20/02029/COMIND)

I know that BPC had no objections to this application, but given the recent media coverage (and having received a number of emails about it) it may be useful to know that I had already called the application in to committee if planning officers were minded to recommend approval – not necessarily because I personally oppose it, but because I think is an important application that should be debated by Members.

So – if officers recommend approval - it will be decided upon by the Eastern Area Planning Committee in a public (virtual) meeting at some point, but I don’t yet have a date (although suspect it will be in March).

As with all EAPC meetings, once a date is set those who have responded (objectors and supporters as well as BPC) will be invited to submit a written representation and, if they do, to register to attend the meeting via Zoom to answer any questions upon their representation.

Community Infrastructure Levy Fund Bids – Village Hall

Congratulations to Cally Morris (the Clerk to BPC) upon the application for funding of £34k towards the village hall refurbishment project, supported by Royce Longton and me, that is going to be recommended for approval.

Members' Covid Bid - Defibrillator

Congratulations also to Claire Stroud (Assistant Clerk to BPC) for helping me to formulate the successful bid for £1k funding towards a defibrillator at the Co-Op.

Stratfield Mortimer

Footway to St Mary's School widening

As anticipated in last month's report, Cllr Danusia Morsley, Pat Wingfield and I had a virtual meeting with Jon Winstanley (the WBC Service Director for Environment, Transport and Countryside) and one of his officers regarding the footway. The meeting seemed to go very well and we await more from WBC Highways.

Community Infrastructure Levy Fund Bids – Footway to St Mary's School

Prior to the meeting referred to above, Cllr Morsley had put together a bid for funding of £32.5k for the project from the Fund mentioned, supported by me and Royce Longton. Whilst this did not succeed for the £500k pot, the reason was that the panel identified another pot of funding to look to – the Environment CIL fund. So, subject to Executive approval (I will of course be declaring my pecuniary interest as a parish councillor), this should mean the project can go ahead.

Members' Covid Bid – Alfred Palmer Memorial Field Trust, Community Wildflower Border

John Hannawin (one of the Trustees and a familiar surname!) had approached SMPC at an early stage when these bids were first announced and I was very pleased to be able to assist him to get the bid constructed and obtain approval from officers so that it could go to the panel. It was approved, so that's £1k towards the project.

Members' Covid Bid - Defibrillator

With Lynn Hannawin, I put together a bid for funding towards another defibrillator for the village (there are ongoing discussions about siting) as a standby in case any of the others failed. Since they have succeeded (although see about Beech Hill's bid referenced above), the bid fell away.

Wokefield

Solar Farm (see above)

We will no doubt discuss this as any planning application comes forward.

Goring Lane

The issue of a footway beside Goring Lane (see last month's report) was discussed further at the last PC meeting and I look forward to furthering a discussion with WBC Highways,



Graham Bridgman

Council Member for Burghfield and Mortimer

Deputy Leader of Council and Executive Member for Adult Social Care

1 February 2021