



## Parish Council Report for September 2021

Cllrs Dennis Benneyworth, James Cole and Claire Rowles

Hungerford and Kintbury Ward

### West Berkshire Council

#### Council

Full Council met in a hybrid format on 9 September, with (as a result of changes to Covid advice regarding physical meetings, arising from the relaxation of restrictions nationally) more Members in the Council Chamber than previously (23 Members physically present rather than 14).

The main items discussed were the recommendations of the West Berkshire Council Independent Remuneration Panel 2021 regarding the new Health Scrutiny Committee and a Motion regarding accessibility to council services. The papers, and a recording of the meeting, can be found [here](#).

Council will next meet on 2 December.

#### Executive

Executive met on 2 September to discuss:

- commencing a separate food waste collection (approved);
- the Revenue Financial Performance Report - Q1 of 2021/22 (noted);
- the Capital Financial Performance Report - Q1 of 2021/22 (approved);
- Key Accountable Performance for 2021/22: Quarter One (noted).

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#). The Executive will next meet on 14 October.

#### Education

##### *Back to School*

Pupils in West Berkshire have now returned to schools and colleges after their summer breaks.

Many pupils will be returning with far fewer restrictions than when they left for the summer holidays, and this will enable pupils to have access to more group activities, team sports, playing with friends, plays, and taking part in musical groups.

What's changed:

- Keeping pupils or students in year group or classroom bubbles to reduce mixing is no longer a requirement.
- Close contacts will now be identified via NHS Test and Trace. Education settings are no longer expected to undertake contact tracing.
- Face coverings are no longer advised for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas.

What's stayed the same:

- Coronavirus hasn't gone away so there will still be a need for schools, pupils and students to follow basic measures to avoid the spread of the virus.
- Testing remains important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within schools.
- Ensuring good hygiene including frequent and thorough hand cleaning and the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach.
- Maintaining appropriate cleaning regimes.
- Keeping occupied spaces well ventilated.
- Following public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19.

### ***New school in Newbury***



Newbury's new primary school, Highwood Copse, welcomed its first pupils this month.

The new £7.7m school will help meet the need for additional primary school places in the area, and will be run by Newbury College Academy Trust. It was built on the College campus and WBC have worked together with them to ensure the provision meets the needs of the local community.

Serraphina Robinson, Head of School, said: "We're so delighted that it's now time for the children of Highwood Copse to enjoy their school. We've created a fantastic learning environment where they can become lifelong learners, adventuring down any path their ambitions take them."

### ***Holiday and Food Activities Programme***

WBC's Holiday and Food Activities programme made a splash at the Waterside Centre in Newbury and across the district.

The summer holiday programme provided a variety of fun activities for children including sports, music and arts as well as a nutritious meal each day. It's been open to children aged 5 to 16 who are eligible for free school meals.

It has been running at 28 schools across West Berkshire and, following a successful pilot at Easter, has returned with even more activities – including kayaking at the Waterside Centre.



With schools returning this week the summer programme is coming to an end – but head over to [YouTube](#) to see children at Hungerford Primary School enjoying one of the activities. More to come at Christmas!

### ***School Streets Pilot Launched***

A Schools Streets pilot is now underway in Calcot to improve children's journeys to and from school.

In order to reduce congestion, improve air quality and make it both easier and safer to walk to school, vehicles will be unable to drive near Calcot Infant and Junior school at either end of the school day. It's a pilot scheme which, if successful, could be rolled out to other schools across West Berkshire.

Elsewhere in the country Schools Streets projects have shown that traffic outside schools has reduced on average by 68%, children cycling to school has increased by 51% and harmful vehicle pollution outside schools was down by almost three-quarters.

Vehicles will be prohibited from driving down Curtis Road and Gatcombe Close, and Royal Avenue (Garston Avenue to 10m east of the Curtis Road junction). This will apply between 08:15 to 09:15 and 14:30 to 15:30 on weekdays.

## West Berkshire Libraries – Annual Report

The last year has been challenging everyone due to the pandemic – but WBC’s library service has worked hard to continue providing as much as possible within the restrictions which were put in place.

The West Berkshire Libraries Annual Report is available now to look back all that has been achieved in 2020/21 – as well as plans for the year ahead. This year WBC hope to:

- increase engagement with West Berkshire schools;
- allow users to do more with the libraries app, including using them to check out books as well as develop a separate app for children;
- complete some essential refurbishment of Thatcham Library; and
- introduce autism–friendly adjustable lighting in Newbury Library.

[Read the full report](#) to see what WBC have been up to and what comes next.

## Economy

### More Welcome Back Business Grants



The Welcome Back Business Grant scheme has continued to make an impact with two businesses using the grant to host events over the bank holiday weekend – giving a real boost to local footfall.

Enborne and Dawson Equestrian hosted a joint open day event (pictured) to introduce more visitors to their riding school, showcase the local industry, and provide an entry point for young people who are interested in riding.

Great Grooms Hungerford hosted a three day ‘Welcome Back’ exhibition event displaying art and antiques to visitors. WBC also supported Crepe O’Clock to create a seating area for their customers in Newbury Market Place, which they hope will provide a new draw for daytime visitors.

Grant funding totalling more than £112,000 has been paid to 26 local businesses and the three businesses detailed above will receive over £12,000 overall in grant funding from the Council to re–open successfully this summer after the effects of the pandemic.

### Covid Testing Poster

As people are returning to the workplace, it's vital to keep a safe environment for employers and employees. WBC have put together a [poster](#) for employers to communicate with staff on the free testing kits available. More information is available [here](#).

### Kickstart Scheme

The Kickstart scheme has been a huge success so far in West Berkshire. Many local employers, including the Council, have used it to create fully funded job placements for 16 – 24 year olds; offering an essential first step for the young person, and free support for the business.

The deadline for placements to begin is 31 December 2021. This means that if a business has not yet applied, they must act now to make use of the scheme. The application process is simple, but it can take up to one month to receive a decision.

If anyone needs any advice or support with your application then contact WBC’s Economic Development Team on: [Economicdevelopment@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:Economicdevelopment@westberks.gov.uk).

## Environment

### Zero–carbon bus visits district

WBC, the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, and other partner organisations met at Newbury College last week for the Zero Carbon Tour.

A 100% electric coach made a stop in Newbury on its Zero Carbon Tour journey through the UK to COP26 (the 26th United Nations Climate Change conference).

The Zero Carbon Tour is illustrating the phenomenal array of actions the business community is taking to address the climate crisis. Digital and physical events will take the net zero carbon message throughout towns and cities to demonstrate the “carbon stories” of actions and initiatives being taken by organisations, community groups, services and individuals to play a part in creating a sustainable future for the United Kingdom and beyond.



The Tour is accelerating the UN-backed Race to Zero as part of the UK's #TogetherForOurPlanet campaign, and provided the ideal opportunity to showcase how Berkshire is leading the global green agenda on a local level with attendees hearing from a host of speakers as well as a panel discussion on Berkshire's green agenda.

### Tackling air pollution

**Reasons not to be idle:**

- To improve air quality.
- To improve your health.
- Reduce fuel costs.
- To comply with the law.

**What you can do:**

- Walk or cycle short trips instead of driving.
- Switch off your engine when parked for 10 seconds or more.
- Switch off your engine while waiting for someone.

Now the autumn term has started, WBC are asking motorists to help protect air quality around West Berkshire schools.

Some people just pull up outside the school gates or park down residential streets and leave their engines on. Idling vehicles pollute the air which in turn we all breathe in as we walk past, and children get a greater impact of this - the shorter you are, the nearer to the exhaust fumes you are.

More information about improving air quality can be found by visiting the Public Protection Partnership [website](#).

A well as reducing the time spent idling, electric and other ultra-low carbon vehicles are also helping to protect air quality in West Berkshire

(hence the zero-carbon bus visit to the district, and WBC's endorsement of World Car Free Day which took place on 22 September).

### Cut it Back



Overgrown vegetation such as hedges, trees, plants and flowers can put the safety of pedestrians and motorists at risk, so residents and businesses that are responsible for vegetation that overhangs from private property on to the public highway within West

Berkshire are being urged to 'cut it back'.

Whilst trying to promote active travel throughout the district, overgrown vegetation can force people, particularly visually impaired, wheelchair users, and parents with pushchairs into the road, putting their safety at risk.

WBC are often inundated with reports from residents who are unable to use footpaths due to overhanging trees and hedges. 'Cut it back' aims to raise awareness that maintenance of trees and hedges growing on private land is the responsibility of the property or landowner.

Where WBC receive a report of overhanging vegetation, the Council's Asset Management Team will write to the landowner asking them to cut it back within 14 days. Reports can be raised through WBC's website at: [westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem](http://westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem)

If the owner/occupier does not take corrective action, West Berkshire Council will issue a formal notice for the work to be undertaken. If this formal notice is ignored and action is not taken, the Council will organise the undertaking of the work and seek to recover the costs from the owner/occupier.

Before commencing work, it is important to check for nesting birds. For more advice about nesting birds, and what to look out for when you cut your hedges back, visit the RSPB [website](#)

## Car Club



WBC have joined forces with Enterprise Car Club to bring an exciting new transport service to Newbury.

Residents, visitors, and businesses in the town can now join Britain's largest privately held car club with the arrival of Enterprise Car Club. New electric and hybrid vehicles are sited at five locations in Newbury and are available from a low cost per hour.

The service will help reduce congestion and improve air quality by enabling people to make more sustainable travel choices. WBC also have new introductory offers available saving individuals more money.

Anyone with a West Berkshire postcode or who is an existing member of the previous car club, there are some limited time offers available:

- Join for £1, plus get £10 FREE driving credit, using promotional code NEW110, saving new members with a West Berkshire postcode £59. This offer expires on 19 November 2022\*.
- Join for FREE, plus get £25 FREE driving credit, when joining from a previous Car Club provider and reside in West Berkshire, using promotion code NEW025\*.
- Discounts are available for members of the Armed Forces, NHS and Emergency Services.
- (\* promotional T&Cs apply).

## More items accepted for recycling

Pringles tubes and other paper food containers with metal ends now accepted at West Berkshire Recycling Centres - in partnership with Veolia UK and the Alliance for Beverage Cartons & the Environment (ACE UK), WBC is launching a new recycling service for paper containers with metal ends, such as Pringles tubes, packaging used for hot chocolate, nuts and other products.

Local residents can now recycle their containers alongside food and drink cartons at specialist banks at the Council's Newbury and Padworth Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) and Mini Recycling Centres (MRCs) located at Waitrose - Newbury, Sainsbury - Newbury, Station Car Park - Hungerford, Kingsland Centre - Thatcham, Hillier Garden Centre - Hermitage, and Willink Leisure Centre – Burghfield.

## Community

### Annual Canvass



It's time for the annual electoral registration canvass, which checks who is eligible to vote at all properties in the district, enabling WBC to update the Electoral Register. It's a legal requirement to make sure these records are up to date. Being on the electoral roll will allow you to vote and help in keeping your credit history up to date.

WBC may have contacted you by email already, but only if WBC currently hold an email address for you or a member of your household. The message is genuine and saves WBC both money on postage and lots of paper. Properties who do not respond to the email or where WBC do not hold an email address will have received a form by post during September. Please read the form carefully to see if you need to send it back by post or use the household response website.

Residents can respond online using the link in your email or login to [householdresponse.com/WestBerkshire](https://householdresponse.com/WestBerkshire) where they can enter their security codes. This allows them to update residents, make amendments or ask for a postal vote application form.

Any new eligible residents aged 16 or over at your property will still need to register to vote at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote). If anyone needs any help, contact the elections team on 01635 519464.

### ***World Alzheimer's Day***

To mark the occasion staff from the Adult Social Care team were at Shaw House to undertake training on the 'Dementia Bus'.



The bus tours the country providing immersive training to participants who experience physical and mental challenges which replicate those that people living with dementia face on a daily basis.

- Many local 'in-person' groups and activities for people living with dementia and their carers have restarted again recently. A new dementia café and carers support group has launched at the Fairclose Centre in Newbury. It runs on the first Wednesday of each month from 11am-midday.
- Regular dementia walks are also organised locally by Age UK (Berkshire) and Dementia Friendly West Berkshire.
- The Corn Exchange, Newbury, also runs a monthly Memory Café and more information including 'how to book' can be found on their website.

### ***World Food Day***

Educafe will be holding a special community cafe on Saturday 16 October to celebrate World Food Day. As well as the usual tea and cake, there will be a variety of food available as well.

Save the date, and pop in for something to eat and drink – the World Food Day Community Cafe will be open at The Globe in Newbury from 11:00 to 16:00. More information will be available nearer the time.

Educafe provides weekly community cafes with complimentary tea, cake and other snacks as well as information and support accessing local support services.

- Weekly activities and learning opportunities, including English conversation practice;
- Local service provider pitches;
- Confidential help desks;
- Ethnic market stalls for ethnic enterprises.

They are held every Wednesday from 11:00 to 15:00 at The Globe Indoor Garden on Bartholomew Street in Newbury. To find out more visit the Educafe website.

### ***Afghan refugees welcomed to West Berkshire***

Refugees from Afghanistan have been welcomed to West Berkshire over the past month. Families will be settling in the district as well as staying temporarily whilst longer-term accommodation is found. WBC are proud to be playing a part helping people who have experienced unimaginable hardship as a result of events in their home country.

Two hotels in West Berkshire are being used to host Afghan refugees whilst longer-term accommodation is found for them - WBC officers have been busy welcoming them to the district, checking them in and ensuring their healthcare and other needs are met.

They will be staying in the district whilst accommodation is found for them with other councils across the country. WBC have also welcomed three Afghan families to settle in the district.

The families will be offered privately rented furnished accommodation with a fixed tenancy, support with school admissions, access to health care, financial aid, English language teaching and employment and training assistance as well as any other help they may need to settle in to the community on an ongoing basis. They will also receive indefinite leave to remain, ensuring that they can settle permanently and continue to build their lives and future in the United Kingdom.

They're arriving under the Government's Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme. The scheme has been put in place to protect the human rights of Afghan Locally Employed Staff who have supported British Forces deployed in Afghanistan and are now at risk since they have withdrawn from the country.

### ***Donations to Afghan refugees***



Thanks to the generosity of local residents WBC have now reached the target for community goods donations in support of families affected by the Afghanistan conflict. WBC are very grateful to everyone who has dropped off items, made financial donations, or offered help over the past few days.

A call for donations was made Wednesday 8 September with requests for specific essential items to help them during their stay in the district and after just four days, all of the items requested have been gifted by local residents and businesses.

The [Good Exchange page](#) remains live for those who wish to make financial donations.

### ***Fostering in West Berkshire***

West Berkshire Council foster carers do much more than just provide a home or act as substitute parents – they provide a much needed and highly valued service to vulnerable children and young people.

ITV Meridian visited to hear about the work of the foster team – and the positive impact foster parents have on those they care for. Carl went into foster care as a child – he's now a fitness coach in Newbury. His story on the importance of keeping siblings together and how being fostered with his older brother made a big difference. The ITV Meridian feature can be watched [here](#).

### **Leisure**

#### ***Northcroft Lido***

Northcroft Lido closed on Sunday 5 September – thank you to everyone who visited for a swim this summer season!

#### ***Consultations***

[Active Travel Schemes to help the people of West Berkshire walk and cycle more](#) – closes 22 August 2022.

[Hackney Carriage tariffs](#) – closes 14 October.

[Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-23](#) closes 10 November.

## **Other Matters**

### **Changes to Thames Valley Police structure locally**

From 6 September three new Chief Superintendents have been introduced with responsibility for providing strategic leadership within the local policing directorate - the Chief Superintendent with LPA responsibility for Berkshire is [Chief Superintendent Bhupinder Rai](#).

### **Free Trees**

In 2022 Greenham Trust will be celebrating its 25th anniversary and, as part of the celebrations and to support the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, they are working alongside WBC to offer local schools, councils, charities and community groups the opportunity to plant a tree (or trees) to enhance the local environment for years to come.

This is an excellent opportunity to help increase the number of indigenous trees around the local area and recipients might include Parish and Town Councils, Schools, Guides/Scouts etc – the eligibility criteria is [here](#).

There will be further opportunities but the first application deadline is Friday 15 October - relevant parties can apply [here](#) (further information and guidance on the type of trees recommended is available on the Greenham Trust website).

## **‘Berkshire County Council’**

Despite some press headlines, there is no move to recreate Berkshire CC!

What has actually happened is that the Government is due to consult shortly on what they have termed ‘County Deals’, which will be a new way in which local councils can receive funding for infrastructure and economic development. Cllr Lynne Doherty, the Leader of WBC, and the other five council leaders across Berkshire have agreed to explore the options of securing a County Deal with a view to secure greater investment into the local economy and infrastructure.

This is not about creating a needless combined authority or directly elected Mayor, which would simply bring an additional level of administration and cost, it is about how a deal might support strategic investment benefitting all council areas, residents and businesses.

## **Parish Matters**

### **District Parish Conference**

A reminder that the conference is taking place virtually on Tuesday 19 October.