



Council Report for January 2024

Written by your local Conservative team to keep you up to date.

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Hungerford and Kintbury Ward

West Berkshire Council

Council

Council met on 19th December to discuss:

- Withdrawal of Local Plan Review
- Creation of Service Director for Children's Social Care and Service Director for Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- Update on the Appointment of and Allocation of Seats on Committees for the 2023/24 Municipal Year

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

The next meeting is on 20th February for an extraordinary meeting, closely followed by the Budget on 29th February.

Executive

Executive met on 14th December to discuss:

- Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2023/24 Quarter Two
- 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter Two
- 2023/24 Performance Report Quarter Two
- Newbury Town Centre Pedestrianisation Extension Trial
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework
- Contract Award for the Provision of Bus Service Network Contract
- Rural England Prosperity Fund Business Grant Scheme
- Senior Management Restructure (Resources)
- Response to Council Motion on the 'Rwanda Scheme'
- Awareness Days

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

The next meeting was held on 8th February – report to follow.

Planning

Withdrawal of the Local Plan

There was an [Extraordinary Meeting](#) of West Berkshire Council on December 19th at which the Liberal Democrat administration proposed to withdraw the West Berkshire Council Local Plan Review.

The proposal to withdraw the Local Plan would have affected everyone in West Berkshire, particularly in our rural villages, even in the AONB.

The report makes clear that once the plan is withdrawn, with no up-to-date plan in place, all of West Berkshire would have been at risk of unwanted development, including our villages in the AONB, as developers will win applications on appeal.

The report says that a new Local Plan will take years to prepare and cost at least £1.6m. The current Local Plan Review, submitted in March, was the product of years of cross-party work, has already cost millions to produce, provides for housing for the next 16 years in allocated sites and was certified as sound by WBC's senior planning officers when it was submitted in March.

Had their attempt succeeded, there would have likely been an immediate application for 2,500 homes in North East Thatcham following the withdrawal which the Council would have found difficult to defend. All of this is in the report which is linked above. It is now even more pressing for rural parishes to consider developing Neighbourhood Plans which might provide some protection against unwanted excessive housing.

Environment

Flooding

Whether they have been affected by the recent flooding or are concerned that they could be affected in the future, now is the time for residents to get prepared as the time of flooding is often too late.

Above all, the advice is to be prepared and, if in doubt, check the list below for help on what to do:

- Find out if you are in a [flood risk area](#).
- [Sign up](#) to flood warnings from the Environment Agency.
- Know [what to do](#) should you get a flood alert, a flood warning, or a severe flood warning.
- Have a plan in place to protect your property in advance. This may include having property level protection such as flood doors and gates, air brick covers, or pumps.
- [Report](#) any blocked road gulleys on our website to allow the teams time to fix the problem.
- Be prepared for bad weather on the roads and try to avoid driving through flood water. For more information about driving in wet/flood conditions click [here](#).
- Information on school closures due to bad weather will be announced on the WBC website [here](#).

As always, keep up to date on weather warnings by following your local news and weather channels. More information about preparing for emergencies and adverse weather can be found on the WBC [website](#).

Pang Valley Flood Exhibition

There was a great turnout at the Pang Valley Flood Exhibition. There was a good selection of exhibitors, including the Pang Valley Flood Forum, West Berkshire Council, Project Groundwater, Environment Agency, and Thames Water, who engaged with residents from across West Berkshire who came along to find out more information on: local flood projects, flooding in the area and ways to increase flood resilience.



It was an opportunity for residents to speak to local flood authorities about the support they need. Many thanks to all the residents and organisations who came along. WBC will now be taking on board the information received from residents to help us understand how they can best continue supporting communities at risk of flooding.

Removal of mature trees on Stroud Green



Officers checked the Italian Poplar trees on Stroud Green and found six old ones that are not doing well. They will need to cut them down very soon because they are decaying and are over matured.

These trees were planted in the late 1960s and usually live for 50 to 60 years. As they get older, the trunk and stems become weaker, making them unsafe. Four of the trees have fallen in the last three years during strong winds and storms, so we need to act to keep everyone safe.

These trees are important to those in the area, so new ones will be planted to keep the area looking green and appealing.

Over the next 12 months other trees will be checked that are the same age. Some of them might need to be cut down too.

If residents have any suggestions on what trees should be planted there, please email the team on: Trees@westberks.gov.uk

Support available this winter

Comprehensive support package for residents facing winter challenges

As living costs soar and the winter sets in, HM Government are funding a robust support package to assist the local community until spring 2024.

Collaborating with local voluntary sector partners, including Greenham Trust, WBC have been allocated over £1.3 million from HM Government and have allocated funds to address various needs. Key measures include:

- **£30,000 for food and energy support:** channelled through local charities to alleviate food and energy expenses.
- **£19,580 for appliances and furniture:** providing essential items for residents in need.
- **£10,000 emergency accommodation support:** ensuring access is available to hot meals for those in emergency accommodation.
- **£30,000 for carpets and curtains:** supporting those moving into accommodation without these essentials.
- **£80,000 for struggling pensioners:** boosting assistance for pensioners towards hot meals, energy costs, and essential repairs.

If residents need additional help, please don't let them struggle in silence. Read more and apply for the Household Support Fund [online](#). Further advice and support can be found on the WBC [website](#).

Supporting rough sleepers

During cold weather WBC work hard to support rough sleepers by providing a warm place to stay.

The Winter Plan and Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, or SWEP, is a proactive plan to minimise the impact of cold weather on rough sleepers this winter across West Berkshire. Beds are set aside to ensure anyone who is verified as sleeping rough can have access to accommodation to be safe and warm.

It helps the small number of people who are not normally eligible for services, choose to sleep rough or have previously refused support from housing services and feeds into a broader programme of activity to tackle homelessness in the district.

More information about the support available for rough sleepers can be found [here](#).

If you spot a rough sleeper, here is some information on what you can do:

- Report a rough sleeper to Streetlink on: <https://thestreetlink.org.uk>. If you are a rough sleeper you can also self-refer yourself via Streetlink
- Contact our Rough Sleeper Team: housing@westberks.gov.uk
- If you think the person you are concerned about is in immediate danger or needs urgent care, please call 999
- Donate to **local homeless charities** rather than directly to **individuals**

The infographic features four illustrations: a person sitting on a bench, a person sitting on the ground, a person sleeping in a tent, and a person sitting on the ground with a laptop.

MMR vaccinations

Measles is an infection that spreads very easily and can cause serious problems for some people. The infection usually starts with cold-like symptoms followed by a rash a few days later. Some people may also get small spots in their mouth.

Having the MMR vaccine is the best way to prevent it and two doses can give lifelong protection against measles, mumps, and rubella. Ask at your GP surgery if you're not sure if you or your child have had the vaccine.

Any suspected cases of Measles shouldn't go to the emergency room, urgent care, or doctor's office without calling first. Call ahead let them know about the symptoms so that they can explain what to do next.

You can find out more about measles [here](#).

Leisure

Lido opening announced

Residents can look forward to enjoying the redeveloped Northcroft lido – which will open for its first full season on 1st April 2024.

Elections

2024 Elections

The WBC elections team is busy gearing up to run an election in May for the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner – and a general election at some point in the next 12 months, for the election of local MPs too

on the new boundaries. Before then, residents should make sure they are registered to vote and check they have an acceptable form of ID.

Changes to postal and proxy voting

Residents who know they won't be able to get to the polling station on polling day can vote by post or ask someone they trust to cast their vote for them, which is called a proxy vote.

Residents can apply online to vote by post and for some types of proxy vote. They also need to prove their identity when applying, by providing their National Insurance number.

There are limits to how many people a voter can act as a proxy for. This means they can only act as a proxy for two people living in the UK. If they act as a proxy for people living overseas, they can act as proxy for up to four people, but only two of these can be based in the UK. If they applied for a proxy vote before 31st October 2023, this will expire on 31st January 2024 and will need to apply for a new one.

These changes apply to UK Parliament elections, including by-elections and recall petitions, local elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

Culture

Free e-resources for library members

WBC libraries have some fantastic e-resources available for library members to freely use for homework and studying. For instance, the online encyclopaedia Britannica has three age-related editions.

Secondary school students can also enjoy an engaging and interactive way of learning with Brillder, which aims to add some fun to studying in more than a dozen subjects, including English, Maths, Science and History.

Visit the [website](#) to find the full list of e-resources available from West Berkshire Libraries.

Ancient Egypt family fun day

At West Berkshire Museum on Saturday 3rd February, 10am-3pm, residents can meet members of the Thames Valley Ancient Egypt Society at the free Ancient Egypt Family Fun Day!

There is a special exhibition, From the Nile to Newbury: Exploring Life and Death in Ancient Egypt, where residents can have a go at some crafts, play an ancient board game, complete a trail, dress up and handle some real ancient Egyptian objects.



Opera: The Tales of Hoffmann

Kennet Opera present "The Tales of Hoffmann" by Jacques Offenbach in the Great Hall of Shaw House on Friday 2nd and Saturday 3rd February at 7pm and Sunday 4th February at 2.30pm.

After a string of comedy triumphs, Offenbach's last work was this strange opera fantastique, based on the writings of E T A Hoffmann, the Romantic German poet, telling the story of his three romantic failures. The opera is sung in English with piano accompaniment.

The performance length is two hours with one interval. The café will be open selling light refreshments and drinks. Tickets cost £15 for adults and £10 for children. Book [here](#).

Current Consultations

- [Francis Baily Primary School - School Streets Scheme Feedback Survey](#) – closes 3rd March
- [Proposed School Term and Holiday Dates for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools 2025/26](#) – closes 16th February

Parish Matters

Report a Problem

Potholes etc.

I know that I've banged this particular drum in previous reports but it's especially relevant now after the awful recent weather...

The West Berkshire website can seem a little less than 'user-friendly', however, the 'Report a Problem' facility is a really useful tool and good way to highlight issues such as faulty street lights, litter or other issues such as potholes. The wet winter has taken its toll on our roads and potholes are commonplace in West Berks. The 'Report a Problem' page is an effective way of pinpointing exactly where the issue is and resources can be directed to resolve the problem.