



Council Report for May 2023

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

Cllr Paul Dick OBE, Chieveley and Cold Ash Ward

Introduction

Dear colleagues,

I am writing to you for the first time as Leader of the Opposition, and Leader of the Conservative group on West Berkshire Council.

Whilst we are disappointed to now be in opposition, we are committed to providing the same care and attention to the issues faced by our local residents as ever.

We know that these reports have been popular with Parish Councils, residents, Members of Parliament, and many other key stakeholders across the district, so we want to continue to produce this report to keep you all up to date on the work that we and the Council have been doing in a non-political way.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Ross Mackinnon
Leader, West Berkshire Conservative group
Leader of the Opposition, West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council

Council

Council met on 25 May for its Annual Meeting, this meeting is largely procedural and involved:

- Election of the new Chairman (Cllr Jeremy Cottam)
- Election of the new Vice Chairman (Cllr Billy Drummond)
- Election of the new Leader (Cllr Lee Dillon)
- Appointment of the Executive
- Appointment of and allocation of seats on committees
- Appointments to outside bodies
- Elections of Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of each committee.

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

The next meeting is on 20 July.

Executive

There was no meeting of the Executive this month.

The next meeting is on 8 June.

The Election

Elections were held across West Berkshire this month for District, Parish, and Town Councils.

The Liberal Democrats gained a majority on West Berkshire council for the first time since 2003, and the first Labour Councillor was elected.

The new breakdown is:

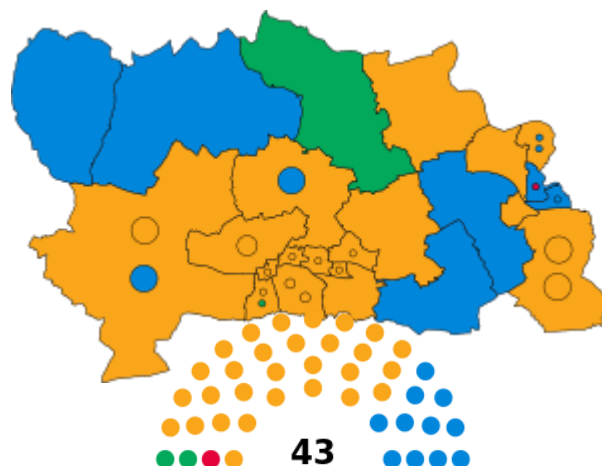
Liberal Democrats: 29 (+13)

Conservatives: 11 (-13)

Green: 2 (-1)

Labour: 1 (+1)

The new District Councillors can be found online at westberks.gov.uk/councillors



Transport

New funding to enable active travel schemes



West Berkshire Council has been allocated £275,000 of funding from central Government to deliver a new School Streets Scheme and develop improvements to walking and cycling routes.

It is part of the council's ongoing commitment to boost active travel options for residents whilst also helping to drive down carbon emissions.

Following the successful bid to Active Travel England, a new agency set up by HM Government to boost cycling and walking, the funding for West Berkshire will go towards:

- The introduction of an additional School Street scheme at Francis Baily School in Thatcham
- Development of proposals to improve the pedestrian and cycle connection between Theale and Calcot
- Assessment of scope to improve active travel routes adjoining Robin Hood Roundabout
- Evolution of a scheme to connect the planned Stockcross active travel path into the Newbury area network at Speen

Planning

Lawrences Lane, Thatcham planning appeal dismissed

The Planning Inspector has dismissed a planning appeal for a development at Lawrences Lane in Thatcham. In doing so, the original decision to refuse planning permission has been upheld.

It follows a refusal to grant planning permission in November 2021. Following a planning inquiry, the original decision was upheld and the approach towards resisting developments which are harmful and contrary to WBC policies.

As a plan-led authority, WBC seeks the highest quality developments in the district on behalf of local residents. The planning team will continue to work positively with applicants but, as they have done here, will take appropriate and proportionate action where development is harmful and carried out intentionally without planning permission.

The team will now carefully consider the appropriate next steps following the dismissal of the appeal.

Culture and Leisure

Poetry Competition



A search has begun to find the best poets across West Berkshire – with favourites to be displayed at Shaw House, in libraries, leisure centres and council offices.

Being creative improves mood, helps get ‘in the zone’ or lose track of time, could improve social life, boosts self-esteem and confidence, and improves brain function.

To get started, residents can choose or write a poem on any of the following topics: Social isolation and loneliness, finding refuge, exploring anxious feelings or mental health and wellbeing. And email the poems to publichealthandwellbeing@westberks.gov.uk by 31 August 2023.

Newbury Library

West Berkshire’s central library in Newbury has been awarded ‘Library Of Sanctuary’ status by a national organisation in recognition of its work to welcome refugees and others seeking sanctuary.

The library hosts a lively Educafe on Wednesdays, 11am to 2pm. Residents are always welcome to drop in and enjoy a chance to make new friends and learn new things – with delicious cakes and other refreshments provided free of charge.

There will be a special celebration in Newbury Library on Wednesday 21 June at 1pm to mark this award. Everyone is invited so please encourage anyone interested to come along.

Faraday Road Football Pitch

Work has begun to get the Faraday Road pitch in Newbury ready for organised football.

Currently open as a recreational space, there’s some pitch preparation work the Council will need to do first to improve the playing surface before games and coaching sessions can take place.

WBC have been out to start the preparation by mowing the grass and then they will be back to carry out a full renovation programme including re-seeding and top dressing soon.

It is expected to have a suitable playing surface later in the year.

The previous Conservative administration had earmarked the site for a jobs-led commercial regeneration over the next 3 years, and providing for high-level and recreational football with an outstanding new sports hub at Monks Lane, supported by both Newbury FC and Newbury Rugby Club. The new Liberal Democrat administration have committed to cancelling the sports hub. It is unclear how they plan to replace the economic benefits of regeneration on the Faraday Rd site.

Economic Development

Supplier Fair



A free supplier fair will be held in June to help local businesses understand how the Council commissions work, and how to tender for it.

Residents can meet the commissioning and procurement team to find out more and meet the team face-to-face. Attending these events is an effective way to meet key buyers, learn about the latest opportunities and gain an insight into the procurement process.

This drop-in event will include networking opportunities, talks and “how to” sessions. There will be demonstrations on how to use the In-Tend procurement portal and how Social Values are embedded into procurements.

Hosted by the commissioning and economy teams, there will also be representatives from other teams, including Early Careers, IT, Facilities, Finance, HR, Agency & Consultancy, Transport and Construction.

This event has been organised as part of WBC’s support for local businesses. As one of the largest organisations within the district, the Council hopes to work closely with local businesses to deliver great results for local residents and organisations.

Return to Work Careers Fair

There are many reasons why people step back from paid work. Residents considering returning to work, but unsure how or where to start, may find this event helpful.

It’s not easy picking up a career where it left off, and WBC wants to offer opportunities to fit present life. Priorities may have changed, perhaps traveling for work is no longer an option, or more flexible hours are needed. Valuable transferable skills are still gained during a break and professionals from WBC’s HR department will be on hand at the Return-to-Work Careers Fair to help review CVs.

There will be the chance to speak about volunteering opportunities as well as discuss current vacancies and self-employment initiatives such as the Support with Confidence scheme.

The event is being held at Shaw House on 6 September 10:00-16:00

Environment

World Environment Day

World Environment Day is on 5 June. This year’s theme focusses on beating plastic pollution, here are some ideas on how to reduce plastic use:

1. Make a switch to shampoo and conditioner bars
2. Ditch single use plastic wipes for reusable options
3. Refill detergent bottles
4. Give reusable nappies a try
5. Buy fruit and vegetables loose where you can
6. Remember to take reusable shopping bags with you to the shops
7. Use reusable water bottles and travel mugs (this can save you money each time you reuse too).



Sustainability Fund

The Sustainability Fund, from WBC's waste contractor Veolia, provides cash sponsorship, in-kind resources, or staff volunteers to support not-for-profit organisations and community groups to transform their local community or environment. A successful project needs to provide evidence in one or more of the following:

- Enhancing biodiversity
- Promoting sustainable waste behaviours (reduce, reuse and/or recycle)
- Protecting or preserving resources and the environment
- Use of recycled, reused or reclaimed materials

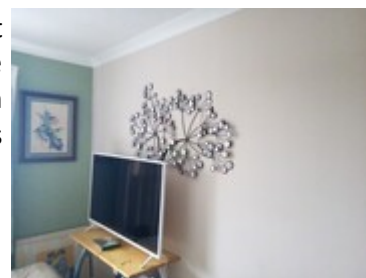
Over £100,000 is available for community groups across the country. Last year, the fund supported 5 groups across West Berkshire and it would be great to be able to support more worthwhile causes across the district this year, check out their [website](#) and apply today. The application deadline is 29 September 2023.



Community Repaint

The community re-paint scheme, in partnership with Veolia, is the perfect solution for anyone looking to refresh their décor while also being environmentally conscious. By repurposing leftover paint, residents are reducing waste and promoting sustainable living.

A resident recently shared her experience with WBC's community re-paint scheme: "I wanted to send you a couple of pictures of my son's bedroom we have redecorated with paint from your leftover paint scheme. Both the cream and green paint came from your Newbury site, and we've transformed his room for nothing! I'm telling everyone I can about this brilliant scheme, and we will definitely be using it again for future decorating."



From frosty ground to a blossoming wildlife haven



Four months after the local community gathered at Shaw Park (Almond Avenue) in Newbury to plant 25 fruit trees in their new community orchard, the trees are flourishing and in blossom!

Fruit trees produce spring pollen and nectar for pollinating insects including bees, hoverflies and butterflies, and over time the hedge will create an ideal habitat for small mammals such as hedgehogs.

A big thanks to the community for supporting this project as it will become a wonderful wildlife haven and hopefully the trees will produce various fruits later in the year for all to enjoy and share.

Community

Payment window for £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment announced

The Department for Work and Pensions has announced that disabled people in the UK will receive their one-off £150 disability cost-of-living payment from 20 June.

Those being paid a disability benefit will receive it automatically during a two-week window starting on 20 June and finishing on 4 July. A small proportion of payments will be made after this date, where claimants were still awaiting confirmation of their eligibility or entitlement to disability benefits on 1 April. There will also be further payments of £300 for pensioners due later this year.

Be Scam Aware - Don't let scammers steal money!

Citizens Advice West Berkshire (CAWB), and West Berkshire Council's Public Protection Partnership have launched their annual Scams Awareness campaign to encourage people to report scams, share their experiences and look out for others.

Residents can find out more about staying safe from scams on the Citizens Advice website.

Actions to take if a resident has been scammed:

- Talk to the bank or card company immediately if any financial and sensitive information has been revealed or payment made.
- Contact Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 0808 223 1133 or visit their website.
- West Berkshire residents can call Citizens Advice West Berkshire on 01635 516605 and leave a message.
- Report the scam to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or online. They'll also issue a crime reference number.



Health and Social Care

Carers Week Events: Fun, Information and Advice

Carers' Week takes place between 5 - 11 June this year and a number of events are being held across the district to celebrate the work Carers do in communities and to provide advice and information about available support.

A special 'Spain comes to Newbury' event is taking place at the Fair Close Centre, Newbury, on Tuesday 6 June, with Spanish themed food and entertainment planned, including flamenco, tapas and alcohol-free Sangria.

Residents can also find advice and information at drop-in events organised by the Carers' Partnership during the week:

- Thatcham Medical Centre, Thatcham (Monday 5)
- Sainsbury's Hector's Way, Newbury (Wednesday 7)
- Kennet Shopping Centre, Newbury (Thursday 8)
- Burdwood Surgery, Thatcham (Friday 9)

Our Adult Social Care team and other local charities will also have stands at the Kennet Centre Event on Thursday.

For more information and to book for the Spanish-themed event, please email info@ageukberkshire.org.uk or call 0118 959 4242.

Education

Exams

Everyone experiences different things before, during, and after exams and that sometimes exam stress can affect how young people feel, think, and behave. When feelings of stress become too much, this can affect mental health and make existing mental health problems feel harder to cope with.

[kooth.com](https://www.kooth.com) is a free online mental wellbeing community available to support you and talk anonymously with other people going through the same struggles as you. The ICB are in the process of appointing a new service – Tellmi – on 1 July, so residents may be advised to download this app to access support.

[Young Minds](https://www.youngminds.org.uk) have a website for tips on how to manage exam stress.

Free numeracy online courses for adults

The community learning team is offering a range of short, online numeracy courses in topics such as working out bills, understanding payslips, calculating weights and measures or supporting children to do their homework. The courses are free of charge for residents and are perfect as a revision exercise or for preparing to move on to further learning

- Further information about the Multiply on-line programme can be found online at: westberks.gov.uk/mathcourse
- To access the courses simply enrol at: westberks.gov.uk/onlinenumeracycoursesenrolment
- Once enrolled participants will receive a link to the Multiply programme site to activate their account and start a course.
- All courses are non-accredited (no qualification) and delivered at the learner's pace. Residents can drop in and out of the course at any time.

For more information contact the community learning team by emailing aclteam@westberks.gov.uk or calling 01635 519060.

Current Consultations

- [Healthy Weight Needs Assessment Survey](#) (Closes 14/6)
- [Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment Survey](#) (Closes 12/6)
- [65+ Active Travel Survey](#) (Closes 16/6)

Parish Matters

Curridge Footpath Extension

I wish to congratulate the team at West Berkshire and the contractors, for an impressive project in Curridge. The footpath through the village has been extended, in a very sympathetic fashion, providing a safer route for walkers (including young children on the way to school). The path already blends in well with the local environment and the residents to whom I have spoken are delighted. Well done!