



## Council Report for October 2023

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

CLlr Paul Dick, Chieveley and Cold Ash Ward

### West Berkshire Council

#### Council

Council met on 5 October to discuss:

- Draft Council Strategy 2023-2027
- Enhancement Of Climate Emergency Declaration
- Hermitage Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Cold Ash Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Annual Report - Governance and Ethics Committee
- Report by the Returning Officer
- Monitoring Officer's Annual Report 2022/23 - Conduct and Ethics

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

The next meeting is on 30 November.

#### Executive

There was no meeting of the Executive this month.

The next meeting is on 2 November.

#### Environment

##### ***Thames Water ordered to pay compensation for permit breaches***

Thames Water Utilities Limited has been ordered to pay more than £10,000 in compensation for permit condition breaches following a successful prosecution by West Berkshire Council.

The prosecution related to a breach of a permit condition and undertaking works without the required permit. Thames Water expressed remorse for these incidents in mitigation after pleading guilty to both offences.

##### ***Soil conditioner giveaway***

350 residents came along to the most recent soil conditioner give-away event at Padworth Recycling facility.

A huge 33.5 tonnes of soil conditioner, which is made from the food and garden waste WBC collect from resident's homes, was given away over the two days. Thanks to contractor Veolia for working to make this happen.

This product will be useful to residents for their gardens and allotments, and WBC hope to run more of these events in the future.

## ***Have a say on the new Rights of Way Improvement Plan***

WBC are responsible for around 1,190 kilometres (740 miles) of public footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways. These paths are important for West Berkshire residents to access and enjoy the outstanding countryside and natural areas of the district. They are also important for health, mental wellbeing, travel and the economy.

The new Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) sets out how the Council will look after public rights of way and make sure they meet the needs of the public, now and in the future.

Residents can read the new draft ROWIP and have their say [here](#).

## ***Bad Weather***

The weather remains unsettled at the moment with Storm Ciarán due across the South East bringing heavy rain. The MET Office have issued yellow rain and wind warnings on their latest forecast.

So far, the Thames Valley area has not suffered significant widespread flooding, but with the recent heavy rain and more forecast over the coming days and weeks, now is the time to act. Be prepared and if in doubt, check the list below for help on what you can do:

- Find out if they are in a flood risk area.
- Sign up to flood warnings from the Environment Agency.
- Know what to do in the event of a flood alert, a flood warning, or a severe flood warning.
- Have a plan in place to protect 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 gully's on the WBC 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.
- Information on school closures due to bad weather will be announced on the WBC website.

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

## **Health and Social Care**

### ***Carers' Rights Day***

It's Carers' Rights Day next month and the Carers Partnership for Reading and West Berkshire has organised an event on Thursday 23 November from 13:00-15:00 at Thatcham Rugby Club, Thatcham, RG18 3BN.

The WBC Adult Social Care team will be there, along with a number of local organisations who can offer advice and support including: Age UK Berkshire, Eight Bells, and Gardner Leader Solicitors. There will also be talks on Wills Deputyships, Trusts and Power of Attorney, and on Direct Payments by West Berkshire Council.

Everyone is welcome to pop in and there will be free refreshments available. No need to pre-book- Just turn up! For further details of this event email [Stephen.Hammond@Ageukberkshire.org.uk](mailto:Stephen.Hammond@Ageukberkshire.org.uk) or call 0118 959 4242.

## **Leisure**

### ***New Pump Track Opened***

More than 200 thrilled visitors gathered at Goldwell Park in Newbury on Saturday to witness the grand reopening of the brand-new pump track!

The day was packed with adrenaline as BMX demos by the United Wheels Foundation and pro BMXer Jak Tones wowed the crowd with their skills and tricks, as well as people of all ages and abilities trying out the new track.

This isn't just any pump track; it's a state-of-the-art gem designed in a continuous circuit designed for wheeled sports like BMX and mountain biking. Riders use a unique "pumping" motion to maintain momentum as they

navigate a thrilling sequence of rollers and swoopy, banked turns, built to withstand all weather conditions. Whether you're a seasoned rider or just looking for outdoor fun, there's something for everyone.

Thanks to a £112,000 investment by West Berkshire Council and collaboration with the United Wheels Foundation, this dream has become a reality.

## Communities

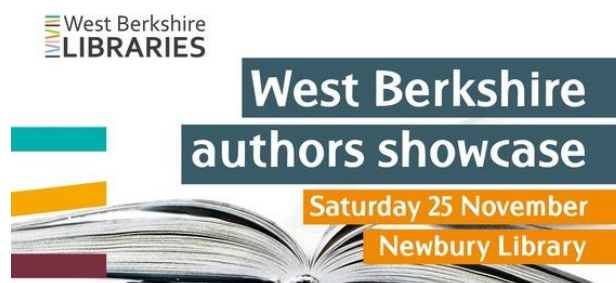
### *Local authors invited to showcase their work*

WBC are providing an opportunity for local authors to showcase their work at Newbury Library on Saturday 25 November, 11am-3pm.

The event will be a 'marketplace' where authors will be allocated space in the library, allowing them to promote their books and sell copies if they wish.

Any residents who have had a book published that they would like to promote, please contact the team for further details. Early expressions of interest are advised as space may be limited.

Please send email enquiries to [library@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:library@westberks.gov.uk) for more information.



### *Their Finest Hour*



WBC are taking part in a nationwide campaign to ask communities to come forward with everyday stories and objects of the Second World War so that they can be digitally preserved for future generations.

'Their Finest Hour' is a new initiative working to create a comprehensive digital archive of this incredible wealth of history and knowledge that lots of residents hold either in their heads or lofts. Many have war-related stories and objects that have been passed down from parents, grandparents and other family members.

The Culture and Libraries team are looking for people to bring stories about their family's wartime experience – and associated objects such as diaries, letters, medals, journals and ration books to their Digital Collection Days to be recorded, digitised, and then uploaded to the Their Finest Hour online archive, which will be free-to-use and launch in June 2024.

### *Newbury Wharf*

We are excited to announce that Adams & Sutherland, the multidisciplinary architectural and urban landscape consultancy who have been appointed to complete work on the Wharf, have now made their next step towards beginning the project.

Adams & Sutherland have applied to West Berkshire Councils planning department for a Lawful Development Certificate. This is to support the first stage of preparatory works on the Wharf, which is the next logical step in the project. Full planning application will be made in October.



The funding awarded for the project is £375k from the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership to be spent in the current financial year, and £420k from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to be spent in the next financial year.

We are so grateful to have this funding to use on phase 1 of the Wharf project, which includes improvements to the peace garden and the waterfront. Both projects are set out to improve and transform the current space into a more inviting and welcoming place.

### **Black History Month**



This Black History Month, WBC libraries have been showcasing some of their wonderful books celebrating Black history, storytelling and culture. These include children's books, biographies, young-adult fiction, fiction and non-fiction.

The theme for this year's Black History Month is 'Saluting our Sisters', and one stand out book is 'Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History' by Vashti Harrison. The book profiles some of the inspirational Black women who have helped shape history and is perfect for young children to read and learn from.

Books like these can be found in libraries, and online via BorrowBox and Libby, all year round so please do check them out.

### **Shaw House Incident**

The historic gates, pillars and finials were damaged in a collision last month. Fortunately, nobody was hurt.

Shaw House is a Grade 1 listed building and has various regulations and restrictions setting out how repairs can be made, and by whom. Whilst WBC greatly appreciate the generous offers of help from local people, they are not in a position to take them forward and are dealing with this through the insurance arrangements in place.



### **Transport**

#### **Shaping the future of parking in West Berkshire**

WBC's draft Parking Strategy for 2024-2034 is now live and residents are invited to share their views.

The strategy is evolving to meet the changing needs of the community, addressing traffic shifts and sustainability. Residents can share their thoughts on how the council runs their car parks, on-street parking, charges, permits, enforcement, and electric vehicle charging.

The consultation is open until 12 November 2023 [here](#).

#### **£2 bus fare until 31 December 2024**

HM Government has announced that the Single Fare Cap Scheme has now been extended to 31 December 2024. The scheme provides affordable bus travel for everyone across England, allowing passengers to travel at any time of the day for £2 (£4 return).

The following service enhancements have also been introduced:

- A new late evening service, operated by Newbury & District, between Newbury and Thatcham on Fridays and Saturdays called the 1e.
- Reading Buses Lime 2a has been extended to serve Mortimer every 2 hours on Sundays.
- Thames Travel's X34 service now operates between Newbury and Harwell Campus/Didcot providing a link to employment and retail opportunities.
- An early bird concessionary fare ticket has been introduced, allowing those with a valid concessionary bus pass to travel for discounted rates before 0930am Monday to Friday.
- A Connect Group Day ticket is available allowing unlimited use for up to 4 people on valid routes.

## ***Hungerford***

A lane closure in Hungerford High Street is set to remain in place for some time.

The closure has been in place since December 2022 after a building was left in an unsafe condition when it was struck by a vehicle. On the advice of structural engineers, one lane has been closed and two-way traffic lights have been in place to keep pedestrians and motorists safe pending repairs.

The insurance companies involved have been actively working to appoint a builder to complete the works but have found this difficult due to the nature and location of the work. Efforts are being made to bring this to a conclusion as quickly as possible.

This situation is out of the Council's control and until the work can be arranged it is not possible to say how long the lane closure will be in place.

## **Council Matters**

### ***Applying for postal votes***

The application process for postal votes has changed with a new online service being [launched](#).

Applicants must now include their National Insurance Number on all future postal vote applications for verification purposes. Paper applications will still be valid, but voters must use the new version of the form.

If old versions of the application are received, these will have to be returned to applicants for the addition of a National Insurance Number, or a fresh application can be completed if preferred.

Residents who already have a postal vote don't need to do anything. Postal votes will no longer be permanent and will last for three years, with effect from 31st October. Any existing postal vote users will be asked to renew their application in 2026. Any new applications from electors can be made online or on a paper form.

### ***Single person discount review***

WBC regularly review all taxpayers receiving discounts, with the latest review looking at the single person discount for Council Tax, using information from a National Fraud Initiative data matching exercise. Therefore, some residents may have received a letter from the Council about this.

Local Authorities are required to take reasonable steps to confirm whether a discount is still applicable, which is why this letter has been sent out. If any residents have recently received a letter, please be reassured that this is standard procedure.

It is often the case that there has been no change of circumstance, however issues arise when WBC are not advised of any changes of occupancy in the household. This is why all who have received this letter should complete the form, sign the declaration and return it by email or by post within 14 days so that the records can be updated.

For further information or to ask any questions, please email [revenuesreviews@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:revenuesreviews@westberks.gov.uk)

## **Education and Young People**

### ***Over 4,500 people took part in the Summer Reading Challenge 2023!***

An impressive 3,261 children visited a West Berkshire library to take part in this year's Summer Reading Challenge to read six books over the summer holidays, while over 200 more joined in digitally via the Summer Reading Challenge website. All of the children who completed their challenge received a certificate and a medal to celebrate their achievement along with a free swim voucher courtesy of WBC leisure provider, Everyone Active.

With 435 pre-school children taking part in a Mini Challenge and 873 people in the West Berks Book Challenge for over 12s, this has been the best Summer Reading Challenge figures since the pandemic, which is certainly something to shout about! Well done to everyone who rose to the challenge this summer.

## **Current Consultations**

[Francis Baily Primary School - School Streets Scheme Feedback Survey](#) – closes 3 March 2024

[Berkshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) – closes 31 December

[Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan \(ROWIP\) 2023-2033](#) – closes 23 November

[Draft Parking Strategy 2024-2034](#) – closes 12 November

## Parish Matters

I have continued to drop contact leaflets around the ward, to ensure residents have my contact details, should they wish to bring any appropriate local issue to my attention. In the last few weeks, these included planning matters, drainage and flooding issues and highways problems. Personally, I have been active on various West Berkshire committees including Licensing and Scrutiny. I have also visited local schools as a West Berkshire appointed member of SACRE....Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. Finally, and importantly, speeding on local roads is a concern to many and I have followed the fine example of some residents, and I am now an active member of Community Speed Watch. May I encourage others to do the same? Email your interest...SpeedWatch@thamesvalley.police.uk