



## WBC Parish Report for June 2022

Councillors Hilary Cole & Garth Simpson, Chieveley & Cold Ash Ward

### West Berkshire Council

#### Council

##### *Meetings*

There was no meeting in June. The next scheduled meeting will be on 19 July.

##### *Being a Councillor – Women in Politics*

Last month WBC ran the first in a series of webinars to encourage more residents to be involved with local politics and make a difference for their community.

The first webinar, which you can watch back [here](#) (the passcode is `c5q%=wd0`), was based on the theme of Women in Politics. Current West Berkshire councillors, including the Leader of Council Lynne Doherty, spoke about their experiences, how they had reached their position as councillors and the value of representing their community. They also discussed how important it was for there to be a basic allowance, the ability to claim for childcare allowance, and the flexibility this gave them to be a councillor.

If you are interested in becoming a councillor, please visit [here](#), and watch out for forthcoming events.

#### Executive

The Executive met on 9 June and, as well as dealing with public and Members' questions:

- Agreed the proposed First Homes policy.
- Agreed the Improvement Plan for the Review of Town and Parish Engagement.
- Approved the Strategic Asset Plan.
- Noted the results of a survey (more below) to be used to inform the decisions about what will be prioritised in the Council Strategy 2023-2027 and to identify further communication and engagement activities with residents, especially from the groups with lower response rates to the survey. In addition, a number of actions are already being taken in response to the feedback received.
- Noted the positive feedback provided by residents about satisfaction with the area and the Council; service improvement and prioritisation; communication and engagement; safety and feeling that they belong to the local area.
- Approved the re-profiling of £9.4 million of expenditure from 2021/22 into the 2022/23 financial year as recommended and agreed by the Capital Strategy Group.
- Noted the provisional outturn of a £0.2m underspend, 0.17% of the Council's 2021/22 net revenue budget of £142m.

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

The next meeting is on 7 July (starting at 17:00 and, as always, to be broadcast live on the WBC YouTube channel).

## Economy

### *Latest finance report shows balanced budget*

The latest WBC finance report shows the budget has been successfully balanced during the last year - delivering important services for residents whilst strengthening reserves and preparing for the challenges ahead

In 2021/22 WBC had a budget of £142m for services, with a further £43 million for capital projects to support delivery of the Council's approved Capital Strategy. The budget remains balanced despite the challenges of the pandemic, the steep rise in inflation, and keeping the Council Tax increase to 2%.

Throughout the year, reserves have been protected so as to be ready for future challenges, leaving WBC in good shape to manage the impact of inflation, increasing energy bills, and to support essential services as the needs of local communities change.

WBC is already delivering on a number of capital projects as part of the budget allocation for 2022/23. £52 million of investment has been earmarked for new and improved educational facilities across the district, £12 million for leisure facilities, and more than £80 million to improve local infrastructure.

Latest figures also show that West Berkshire is among the country's top-10 districts in providing value for money. Find out more [here](#).

### *London Road Industrial Estate*

A London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE) Project Refresh report, setting out the next stages for delivering regeneration on the site on the outskirts of Newbury Town Centre, was approved by the WBC Executive at its meeting on 9 June.

The report, which supersedes a development brief approved in November 2020, outlines a fresh approach for the site, focussing on job creation, attracting investment to Newbury and achieving carbon neutrality.

The LRIE, which is currently home to around 36 businesses and 300 jobs, is set to welcome additional employers and investment as well as at least 200 new jobs.

The approach was developed following a review of the project which took into account the post-pandemic economy, market demand and the district's ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030. This marks a move away from the previous mixed-use approach and instead will unlock the site's potential as a sustainable, high quality, employment site and business destination.

Under the delivery strategy, it is expected that site-wide improvement works will commence and a planning application will be submitted for the former depot site within the next 12 months. Environmental improvements, flood prevention works, and negotiations with leaseholders to provide the certainty needed to stimulate private sector investment, will get underway.

In the long term, the former depot and playing field will be redeveloped for employment use, with at least £250k of private sector investment being brought forward by the estate's existing businesses, seeing an increase in council income from rent and rates, which will in turn be invested in public services to benefit residents.

### *Recovery: supporting West Berkshire to bounce back from the pandemic*

A programme of activities to help the district recover from the pandemic has delivered mental health support, distributed millions of pounds of funding to businesses and supported children and young people across West Berkshire.

Work to support the district's recovery began early on in the pandemic as it became clear the significant impact it would have on the district, its communities and economy. A recovery strategy was published and approved in June 2020 which put health, education and economy central to the district's recovery. This has delivered support for local communities across the district in a number of ways, including:

- 4,700 residents have benefitted so far from a Surviving to Thriving Fund to improve mental health and wellbeing. The £300k fund was created jointly with Greenham Trust and has supported 26 different projects receiving £228k - and funding is still available;

- £35k has been awarded from the Let's Get Active Fund (jointly with Greenham Trust) towards groups helping residents to stay physically active;
- More than 1,200 children took part in a successful scheme to provide food and activities during school holidays. We also provided nearly 4,000 children with food vouchers under a related scheme;
- 450 businesses have benefitted from £6.5m in Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG) - helping them cope with the impact of pandemic restrictions. This includes 44 receiving a share of a £700k ARG Challenge Fund - ARG funding aimed at supporting environmental and digital recovery.

Work to address longer-term impacts of the pandemic will be reflected in the Council Strategy 2023-27 which is currently being developed, and through the ongoing delivery of services.

A Recovery Strategy closure report is due to be considered by the Executive on 7 July.

## Adult Social Care

### Local Services for Older People

The WBC Adult Social Care team will be available at the upcoming Local Services Information Day at the Fairclose Centre in Newbury on Tuesday 12 July from 10:00 to 16:00.

There will be free tea, coffee and cake alongside the opportunity to find out more about many local services. As well as Adult Social Care, information will also be available about local volunteer car services, shopmobility, meals on wheels, foot-care and hair dressing. It will also be a chance to see the provision the Fairclose Centre has for fun, food and friendship for older people.

Free transport to the event can be arranged by Handybus.

## Environment

### Food waste collections: survey results

Thank you to everyone who took part in the recent food waste survey.

There were more than 3,000 responses from residents sharing their views about the new collections so that the best possible service can be provided. More than 80% of residents told us it's extremely or very important to recycle food waste - and 73% said they will be using the new food waste service when it starts.

The survey has also helped us to understand barriers to participation so that WBC can look how to encourage even more people to recycle their food waste.

You can view the results of the weekly food waste survey online: [www.westberks.gov.uk/WBCfoodwaste](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/WBCfoodwaste)



### Who you gonna call? Draughtbusters!



A new group, Draughtbusters, is being created to help tackle draughts and poor insulation in the homes of the district's elderly and vulnerable residents.

WBC is seeking volunteers to help find and fix draughts in homes and to help raise awareness of what residents can do to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

If you're interested in energy saving and the environment will you join us? WBC need both a core team who can set up the organisation, arrange training, publicity and work with other bodies; and also practical people who are willing to give some time to find and fix problems in homes.

The move will mean residents have warmer and more energy-efficient homes - while also having a positive environmental impact. It will also help to reduce energy bills at a time when home heating costs have rocketed alongside a broader increase in the cost of living.

### **“Bag it, Bin it or Take it Home”**

Summer time is when open spaces are enjoyed the most with picnics, sports events, gatherings, exercise and dog walks.

We are, it is said, a nation of dog lovers and never more so since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic - since 2020, dog ownership has increased considerably and, whilst owning a dog has been shown to have a positive impact on our physical and mental wellbeing, it does mean dogs bins are being used more often!

Our contractors empty bins on a regular basis and WBC are adding extra resource to this service to meet demand in high usage areas. However, any help to get the message out is appreciated - to ensure open spaces and pavements stay clean and tidy from fly tipping and overflowing bins:

*When you are out and about please:*

- Don't dispose of your household waste in litter bins or dog bins – use your black bin at home or visit one of the recycling centres: [westberks.gov.uk/clickandtip](https://westberks.gov.uk/clickandtip)
- Take your litter and dog waste home with you if the bins are full
- Report full bins so they can be emptied. This can be done online: [westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem](https://westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem) or by calling: 01635 551111



*Thank you to everyone who looks after our open spaces by using litter bins and dog waste bins respectfully.*

Let's keep West Berkshire beautiful!

## **Community**

### **The Summer Reading Challenge**

Children aged 4-11 can now sign up for the Summer Reading Challenge at West Berkshire Libraries. The theme for this year is 'Gadgeteers', a celebration of creative thinking and teamwork, developed in partnership with the Science Museum Group. Young innovators will be introduced to many aspects of science engagement, including food, fashion, music, and sport – something for everyone.



Primary age children will be challenged to read up to six library books between now and 15 September and to collect free incentives from their library for their achievements as they read – with medals and certificates for everyone completing the challenge. There's also a mini-challenge for pre-school children and one for grown-ups too!

Adults are welcome to get involved by volunteering to help run the Summer Reading Challenge at their local library over the summer. Find out more about volunteering [here](#).

### **West Berkshire United: Get inspired – Get active!**

A celebration of sport and physical activity inspired by the Queen's Commonwealth Games Baton Relay will be held on Thursday (7 July).

Local schools and residents are invited to a special West Berkshire United celebration event at Northcroft Leisure Centre in Newbury where you can enjoy an incredible array of taster sports sessions, musical performances, arts activities and inspirational speeches from former Great Britain athletes.

The afternoon sessions are reserved for pre-booked primary and secondary schools but from 17:00 to 19:00 everyone is invited to experience the West Berkshire United 'Village'.

Find out more here: [westberks.gov.uk/westberksunited](https://westberks.gov.uk/westberksunited)



### Scam Aware



Citizens Advice West Berkshire and WBC'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.

To help stop more people being fleeced here are their top tips on how to spot scams:

- It seems too good to be true – for example a holiday that is much cheaper than you'd expect;
- You are being pressured to transfer money quickly or in an unusual way (eg by Amazon vouchers or a money transfer service);
- You have been asked to give away personal information or PINs.

If you've been scammed:

- Talk to your bank or card company immediately if you've handed over any financial and sensitive information or made a payment;
- Call the Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 0808 223 1133 or visit [citizensadvice.org.uk/scamsadvice](https://citizensadvice.org.uk/scamsadvice) they will pass the details of the scam to the local Trading Standards service and can offer further advice;
- 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 at [actionfraud.police.uk](https://actionfraud.police.uk) – they will also issue a crime reference number.

### Missing Persons Information Hub

The MPIH, supported by the National Police Chiefs Council, the UK Missing Persons Unit at the National Crime Agency, the charity Missing People, and some universities (notably Portsmouth with their Centre for Missing Persons Studies) was launched in May.

The hub seeks to create an easier way for everyone to find the right services and advice when they are missing, thinking of going missing, or as a professional, academic or family member. It includes a library of publications and research about missing persons and associated areas, and can be found at [MPIH](https://MPIH.org.uk).

### Residents Survey - Results

A new Council Strategy will be adopted next year (running from 2023 to 2027). It will set out the priorities for improvement, as well as the delivery of core services such as roads, schools and social care. WBC recently undertook a residents' survey to help inform the draft Strategy and the results have been collated.

The survey was conducted in a way which allowed us to gather views which are representative of communities across the district.

Among the key findings are:

- A high proportion of residents are satisfied with the local area (89%) and with the way the Council runs things (64%). This compares favourably with comparative data from the Local Government Association, where the results are 78% and 56% respectively.
- Results show that West Berkshire residents reported a high level of life satisfaction, feeling worthwhile and happy. The anxiety score is within low thresholds.
- Almost 60% of the residents agreed that the Council acts on their concerns and that they felt well informed about services and benefits provided by the Council
- The areas with the highest proportion of residents considering that improvements are needed are:
  - Environment: in particular, the desire for better recycling/waste management/more materials collected and improved facilities/services
  - Development and Planning: concerns about the quality of the planning process and effects of overdevelopment
  - Communities and Wellbeing: a desire for more/improved services, concerns about insufficient support
  - Education: the need for additional funding, improved choice and Special Educational Needs (SEN) support
  - Adult Social Care: the need for better services, support, facilities and funding.

WBC have already started acting on the responses and the views given will inform the draft Strategy, as well as future communications and engagement activities.

## Education and Young People

### *iCollege rated Good by Ofsted*

iCollege is West Berkshire's alternative education service, covering children in Key Stages 1-5 across six sites, and is celebrating the publication of its recent Ofsted inspection report following an inspection in April, having achieved a Good rating for overall effectiveness.

Inspectors described the calm, kind and nurturing atmosphere within the school where pupils feel valued and learn how to be successful. Parents shared stories of their children thriving at iCollege and realising what they can achieve with their lives.

Inspectors saw the impressive progress most pupils make, with the older year groups achieving national qualifications, and pupils in younger year groups (who often join the school as reluctant readers) experiencing a wide range of activities and approaches which help them to significantly improve their reading skills.

The Ofsted Inspectors praised the broad and ambitious curriculum delivered by highly skilled staff who tailor the learning to individual pupils, prioritising their mental health and wellbeing. They recognised that the strong relationships between adults and pupils are central to the school's success.

### *Calcot Services for Children allegations*

This statement was put out in early June:

*"West Berkshire Council is aware of allegations reported by the media in relation to standards of care and treatment of children and young people by Calcot Services for Children.*

*Calcot Services for Children is a big provider in the region running services including children's homes, semi-independent living for 16-25-year-olds, as well as schools. West Berkshire Council has a small number of children and young people placed with Calcot Services for Children.*

*As a local authority we take very seriously our responsibilities towards the vulnerable children and young people in the district. We have three children placed in these homes and their social workers will be contacting*

*them directly to discuss this with them. In addition, we will be contacting any of our young people placed in the care of Calcot Services for Children over the past three years and arranging to speak to them.*

*We will continue to monitor this issue and take any appropriate steps. However, at this stage we wish to reassure local people that we have had no specific cause for concern about young people from West Berkshire.”*

## Planning

### *Update to Local Development Scheme timetable*

Following an operational review, WBC’s Service Director for Development & Regulation has updated the Local Development Scheme’s (LDS) timetable, setting out how and when WBC will produce, and consult on, the documents required to produce a new Local Plan. Notwithstanding this update, submission of the new Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate in March 2023 remains on target.

The change to the timetable allows a number of technical matters to be resolved. Importantly, there is a need to identify more commercial and industrial space in West Berkshire – the change to the timetable allows WBC to consult with other local authorities under its ‘Duty to Cooperate’. The implications of the recent nutrient neutrality designation in the Lambourn Catchment Area will also be considered.

The updated timetable will see the new Local Plan go to full Council in December rather than July for decision, with submission to the Planning Inspectorate expected to remain in March 2023.

## Current Consultations

- [Minerals and Waste Local Plan - Main Modifications](#): closes 6 July 2022
- [West Berkshire Bus Survey 2022](#): extended to 31 July 2022
- [Need Help With Numeracy?](#) closes 31 July 2022
- [School Streets Schemes - the Calcot Schools](#): closes 30 September 2022

**With best wishes, Garth & Hilary**