



Council Report for October 2024

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

Cllr Joanne Stewart, Tilehurst Birch Copse Ward

West Berkshire Council

Council

There was no meeting of Council in October.

Executive

There was no meeting of the Executive in October.

Economy

In preparation for the 2025/26 budget, WBC will launch a public consultation on Monday 11 November, giving residents an opportunity to provide feedback on potential budget-balancing measures. This consultation, subject to approval by the Executive on 7 November, seeks public input to ensure carefully balanced finances while keeping essential services intact.

Local authority funding continues to be extremely challenging and West Berkshire Council is not alone in making difficult decisions to deliver a balanced budget. When starting the budget-setting process the Council was forecasting a deficit of £12.1m when considering its anticipated income against the cost of delivering services. Around £3.3m savings have been found that don't require consultation, and proposals which could deliver a financial benefit up to £1.2m which do. Proposals will be detailed at the Executive meeting but some examples are:

- Consulting on the future of the Council's three resource centres.
- Turning off streetlights in residential roads between 12am to 5am.
- Reduction in the number of vehicles available for winter gritting.

CIL Funding Awards 2024



WBC have awarded £500k to local communities for eleven projects from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money, a charge WBC receive from new developments, to go towards infrastructure.

In July, WBC asked communities to bid for some of this income and it's been great to see the excellent ideas and projects that came through for using CIL funding.

Household Support Fund applications open

West Berkshire COUNCIL

Household Support Fund

Help with: energy bills • food
• appliances • furniture • white goods
• carpets • curtains • clothing and more.

The advertisement features the West Berkshire Council logo in the top left. The main title 'Household Support Fund' is in large blue font. Below it, a list of supported items is shown in green. On the right side, there is a photograph of a blue house-shaped icon resting on a stack of several coins.

The Household Support Fund is there to help people struggling to meet essential housing costs - including energy and water bills, food, and other essentials. There is £695,000 available which includes funding for individuals and families, as well as money set aside to provide free school meals and help for pensioners and young people leaving care.

If you're struggling this winter, WBC are here to help. You can [find more information about the Household Support Fund and begin your application](#) online.

Leisure and Culture

Black History Month: in conversation with Cllr Biyi Oloko



This Black History Month WBC spoke to Councillor Biyi Oloko, Ward Member for Tilehurst South and Holybrook, about his heritage, career and the importance of reclaiming narratives.

You can listen to the conversation [here](#).

New exercise studio for Hungerford Leisure Centre

Plans for a new multi-functional activity and fitness studio at Hungerford Leisure Centre are moving forward with building works set to start in early November.

The new studio will allow the leisure centre, which is run by Everyone Active, to expand its fitness offering and increase the number of group exercise classes.

This investment will see the design and construction of a modular building to create space for a state-of-the-art studio that will benefit the local community for years to come.



Environment

Hampstead Norreys & Frilsham Village Hall bike parking

Working with local stakeholders, WBC have installed new cycle parking beside the village halls at Hampstead Norreys and Frilsham. The village hall at Hampstead Norreys is next to the popular 3km section of the Eling Way pedestrian-cycle-equestrian path that connects Hampstead Norreys with Hermitage.

WBC are working with partners to provide cycle parking at public amenities, following the Active Travel 'Heat Map' consultation. Other locations identified from the consultation that now have cycle parking include Yattendon Square and Cold Ash Recreation Ground and the Council remains open to considering proposals for similar sites.

Encouraging and enabling active travel offers many residents an alternative for some or all of their local, shorter-distance journeys, in line with the Council Strategy priority of tackling the climate and ecological emergencies.

Improving access to the Countryside

The Public Rights of Way teams have been out and about replacing gates and improving Byway surfaces.

Every month, on a Friday morning, an intrepid team of West Berkshire rambler volunteers, install a gate to replace a stile on a public footpath. Very few have ever been cancelled due to particularly challenging weather!

Using the least restrictive principle, WBC try to install pedestrian gates (if needed for stock proofing) which are easier to use, but do have to get the agreement of the landowner, and sometimes, particularly on roadsides, they prefer kissing-gates as an extra safety measure to keep stock safe.

It is a team effort as WBC Rangers carry out extensive clearance work beforehand, and they also CAT scan the site to check for underground cables, and deliver the materials to the site.

The Rights of Way team have also completed surface improvements for walkers, cyclists and equestrians on a Winterbourne Byway and in Streatley.

Free Bus Travel

To help get ready for a jolly holiday season, WBC are once again offering free bus travel in West Berkshire!

For a series of Saturdays in November and December, all bus journeys within West Berkshire will be FREE, providing an excellent chance to explore and enjoy various seasonal events and activities in the run up to Christmas!

Mark your calendars with the following dates:

- Saturday 16 November 2024
- Saturday 14 December 2024
- Saturday 21 December 2024

On these Saturdays, you can travel all day, any time, completely FREE (do check the timetables) within West Berkshire.

It's the perfect opportunity to shop locally for gifts, enjoy the festive lights, catch the panto at the Corn Exchange, dine at local eateries, or visit friends and family.

WBC have worked in partnership with bus operators Reading Buses, Newbury & District, Thames Travel, and Stagecoach, along with the Council's Connect Buses, to bring you this initiative over the festive period. Don't forget, Concessionary Bus Passes are welcome as usual.

The Free Bus Travel at Christmas has been made possible by funding from HM Government, given to West Berkshire Council after submission of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

New Wetland in Pangbourne

A wetland has started taking shape on the Sulham Estate, near Pangbourne. A 2 hectare, low-productivity arable field, which often floods, is being transformed into a permanent new wetland that will provide a home for a variety of native plants, insects, invertebrates and birds.

Its creation is part of the Sulham Estate's wider plan to transform 130 hectares of land into a wildlife haven and has been made possible by Mend the Gap funding.

The new wetland was planned by water experts Action for River Kennet (ARK) and is also part of the Partnerships for Nature programme, led and administered by the team at the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership (NWDNL). The NWDNL published a Nature Recovery Plan identifying priorities to restore nature in the protected landscape. This is one of seven sites where conservation effort will be focused, kick-starting delivery against this plan.



Partnerships for Nature is funded by the government's Species Survival Fund. The fund was developed by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Current Consultations

- [Draft Carers Strategy 2024-2027](#) – Closes 17 November 2024
- [Draft Waste Management Strategy 2025-2032](#) – Closes 6 November 2024
- [Extension to Newbury Town Centre pedestrianisation hours](#) – Closes 5 November 2024

Parish Matters

Ward Casework

Anti-social behaviour

I've been working with a resident concerned about a neighbour's behaviour, which includes violent outbursts and causing damage and fires to the outside of their own property.

Traffic on Warborough Avenue

I've received comments of concern from two residents concerning traffic on Warborough Avenue, in particular for school children and parents walking to Birch Copse School. I am writing to our Traffic team to ascertain what action could be taken, but with the first step being a site visit potentially.

School Transport Appeals

I have attended two panels this year and there have been many more which others have attended. It appears that an increase in the number of requests is putting a strain on council resources financially and is possibly representative of the fact that West Berks residents are struggling financially too and therefore looking for help with getting their children to school.