



Parish Council Report for January 2021

Cllrs Tony Linden and Jo Stewart, Tilehurst Birch Copse Ward

West Berkshire Council

A belated happy new year, although not the start to 2021 that any of us would all have wished for a year ago! Despite the pandemic, we have a very full agenda in the coming twelve months and, now that the vaccination roll out is fully underway, look forward to life getting back to something near to normal as soon as possible.

Meetings

Council

The next meeting of Council is on 2 March and will see the setting of the Council's budget for 2021/22 – one of the set piece meetings of the year.

Executive

The Executive met for the first time this year on 14 January 2021. Among the items on the agenda were papers on the Cultural Heritage Strategy and an urgent item on the Newbury Sports Ground Project which obtained authorisation from the Executive to enter into detailed negotiations on heads of terms with Newbury Rugby Club.

Remote Meetings

Links to all agendas and public meeting papers are [here](#), and all WBC public meetings are broadcast live on YouTube and recorded so that they can be viewed at leisure - [West Berkshire Council YouTube Channel](#). Guidance for anyone attending a remote public meeting (eg a parish representative at a planning committee) is [here](#).

It is anticipated that remote meetings will continue for some time to come although this will require The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 which were due to come to an end on 7 May being reviewed and renewed by Parliament.

Covid-19

Local Infection Rates

Although the country remains in national lockdown there are early signs that the infection rates have levelled and are beginning to fall. Whatever our position, it is against a background where we know that national lockdown will continue for some time.

As previously referred to, Berkshire local Covid information about the daily reported cases in the district (and across Berkshire), and the weekly per 100,000 rate (one of the principal factors in any decision making) can be accessed from Berkshire Public Health [website](#).



Vaccinations – Local Position



The Covid vaccination rollout began on 15 December.

As stated last month, it will be appreciated that the mechanics of the vaccination programme is in the hands of the NHS, whether via hospitals and acute settings, Primary Care Networks (PCNs), or individual surgeries.

A group of surgeries in the West Reading Villages PCN to the north east of the district began a vaccination clinic in Pangbourne, and this was followed shortly afterwards by surgeries in the other three WBC PCNs (West Berkshire

Rural, A34 and Kennet) setting up a clinic at Newbury Racecourse.

The priority cohorts for vaccination identified by the JCVI (Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation) are:

- Residents in a care home for older adults, and their carers
- All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
- All those 75 years of age and over
- All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
- All those 65 years of age and over
- All individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality
- All those 60 years of age and over
- All those 55 years of age and over
- All those 50 years of age and over

West Berkshire has been supplied with both the Pfizer and Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine. The latter enabled most of those in Cohort 1 – care home residents and staff - to be vaccinated over the weekend of 16/17 January, with the process continuing over the following week. The majority of care home residents have been vaccinated – there may still be a few who were too unwell to be vaccinated in the first wave.

Generally, the rollout is going well but it will be appreciated that, as with the entire country, the district is entirely dependent on the supply of vaccine. The latest data indicates that everyone in Cohort 2 should have been offered a vaccination date very shortly (if this hasn't already been concluded) and that good progress is being made with regard to Cohort 3. Current indications are that (subject to supply) everyone in Cohorts 1-4 should have been offered a vaccination by mid-February.

It remains vital that even those who have received their first dose of the vaccination continue to follow the lockdown government guidance until more is known about transmission rates.

Vaccinations – National Position

As at 29 January 7.8m people had received their first dose. Weekly reports on the vaccine rollout are being published [here](#), giving data at an Integrated Care System (ICS) – in our case at the level of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (“BOB”) ICS.

Local Testing

Much work is progressing to create community test sites, with the first expected to go live in the middle of February.

Covid Marshalls

WBC has agreed to fund six Covid Marshalls to cover West Berkshire for a period of three months. The Marshalls will undertake a range of duties including advising and supporting members of the public and

businesses to follow social distancing rules. They will also provide support to the local community testing sites (see above).

Community Support Hub

Our [support hub](#) can still be contacted on 01635 503579 if needed.

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

The Local Outbreak Engagement Board meets on alternate weeks in private and in public. Thus, each fortnight, there is a live broadcast meeting to update residents of the current activities relating to Covid-19 in and around the district (and beyond). Public meetings are available on the Council's YouTube channel and further information about the Board can be found [here](#).

Coronavirus information on the WBC website

The Council keeps up to date information for residents and businesses on the [website](#).

Winter Hardship Grant Scheme

Support continues to be available for residents who are in need of help with food, utility bills and other essentials - for more information and applications, go [here](#).

Financial Support for Businesses

West Berkshire Council is administering a further series of grant schemes to support local businesses that have been affected by the national coronavirus restrictions.

The new Closed Business Lockdown (National Lockdown) payment came into effect on 5 January 2021. This one-off Lockdown grant will be paid to qualifying businesses in addition to the Local Restrictions Support Grant payments that eligible businesses were entitled to from 19 December 2020.

A further £11m of government support is being distributed to West Berkshire businesses, with the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB) being extended to cover the new national lockdown. This means that rate-paying businesses will receive a grant for this additional period of enforced closure. This round of funding replicates the previous scheme that ran from 5 November to 2 December 2020.

Both of the new grant schemes will be paid automatically to businesses who have received them before; there is no need to reapply. Any businesses that have not applied previously should check the criteria to see if they are eligible.

Information about eligibility, and how businesses who have not received support previously can apply, can be found [here](#).

2021/22 Budget

The WBC Budget Council Meeting is on 2 March and it will be appreciated that a huge amount of work is going on to finalise the budget proposals for the coming financial year, including proposals for council tax and capital spend.

Draft Local Plan Review 2020 - 2037

There is still opportunity for members of the public to comment on the emerging draft version of the Local Plan Review 2020-37 (see last month's report for more detail) with the public consultation period closing on Friday (5 February). Parishes, residents, partners and other key stakeholders can read the draft Local Plan Review and provide feedback on the Council's [Local Plan Consultation Portal](#).

Adult Social Care

BBC Panorama

Sara Ross, WBC's Service Manager for Responsive Providers (which includes the WBC care homes) was on [Panorama](#) recently talking about her experiences of the pandemic.

Willows Edge Care Home

Following a Covid outbreak at WBC's Willows Edge care home in Newbury, and 30 residents and 24 staff testing positive for the virus, seven residents who had tested positive sadly died.

There has now been an inspection by the Care Quality Commission as part of its response to outbreaks of coronavirus in care homes, seeking to ensure that the home's infection prevention and control practices are safe and compliant with CQC measures. [The report](#) shows that infection control standards are being fully met and provides positive feedback on the high standard of care provided by staff at the home.

Care Home Visiting Policy

[The Policy](#) has been revised following the lockdown and updated Govt guidance.

Education

Lockdown

The demand for children to attend school during the current lockdown is higher than the previous lockdown in March last year. Schools are doing their best, but the level of demand is now stretching school capacity and due to safety reasons some schools are having to ration places. Special schools, alternative provision and nursery schools are still expected to provide places for all children.

The Department for Education has updated the critical workers section of their [guidance](#) to clarify that parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can, to help manage demand.

A '[critical worker](#)' is defined as a parent or carer whose work is critical to the Covid-19 and EU transition response, including those who work in:

- health and social care
- education and childcare
- key public services
- local and national government
- food and necessary goods
- public safety and national security
- transport and border, and
- utilities, communications and financial services.

Full Fibre for Schools

A successful joint bid by WBC and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership has secured a £1.7m grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to deliver full fibre broadband to as many schools in the district as possible to improve their bandwidth and internet speeds, transforming the way teachers meet the demands of an increasingly digital curriculum.

Doctor's surgeries could also benefit from this additional funding. As we all become more used to virtual consultations, access to full fibre is proving increasingly important. If funding allows, more surgeries will be able to employ the technology.

Full fibre will also support the response of the Fire Service to emergencies by enabling digital options such as real time imaging and video conferencing.

Laptops for Home Learning

Before the latest lockdown, Government and WBC funding had provided 269 laptops for the most disadvantaged to use for home learning. A further allocation of 620 laptops has now been provided and these should be received by schools shortly. In addition, Greenham Trust has opened a fund, worth £250k so far, to allow schools to buy more laptops for pupils that need them.

Children's Mental Health Week

Children's Mental Health Week (CMHW) runs for the first week of February the theme for 2021 is *Express Yourself*. WBC's Education and Public Health teams are working together to provide a range of resources and activities for schools, parents, carers and pupils and our services and partners. A guide produced by Place2Be, the charity that set up CMHW, is on its way to schools and highlights the importance of children and young people's mental health. To learn more about what's happening over the week, go [here](#).

Leisure and Culture

Consultation on Newbury Sports Ground

The Council is consulting residents on its plans for a new sports ground in Newbury.

In particular, the Council would like to know whether local people support the proposal and the construction of an artificial pitch, the facilities they'd like to see at the ground, and whether they feel this new ground will give them more opportunities to get involved in sport and physical activity.

The feedback will inform the details of an application for planning permission, should the Council proceed with the proposal.

Newbury Rugby Club has been identified as the preferred site for the facility which would include a high-quality artificial grass pitch, stadium, floodlights and changing room as well as a function room. It would be available for community use for rugby, football and other sports and activities.

At its meeting on 14 January, the Executive agreed to begin formal discussions with the Rugby Club, with the aim of opening the sports facility in March 2022.



The new facility will help deliver the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy, and provide a Step 6 facility – which means teams would have the facilities needed to play in higher leagues. It would also serve as a replacement for the Faraday Road Sports Ground, which closed ahead of the regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate.

Details of the consultation, which is open until the end of February can be found [here](#).

Libraries

West Berkshire Libraries will continue to offer a limited service during the national lockdown restrictions, with library buildings open for book collections only, and public use of computers in libraries has been suspended.

The easiest way to borrow titles is via the apps BorrowBox and Libby, which can be downloaded from the Apple app store and Google Play store. Customers who have a Kindle tablet (such as Kindle Fire) can download the apps from Amazon. Anyone who has these apps can then search for West Berkshire Libraries and login using their library card number and PIN (members can reset their library PIN [here](#)). Customers who need help with this can drop an email to the library, where staff will be happy to help: library@westberks.gov.uk.

Customers who are not already members of the library can join online to get free, instant access to the e-library by [registering](#).

Residents are encouraged to check out the extensive programme of activities for children and adults, which will continue online, and follow the library Facebook, Twitter or Instagram pages (@WBerksLibraries).

Transport and Countryside

Flytipping

Following a report and supporting evidence provided by a member of the public in late 2019, an investigation by officers from the Council's Waste Team led to a Tadley resident recently pleading guilty to

fly tipping on the Ridgeway near Compton, contrary to ss 33(1)(a) and 33(6), Environmental Protection Act 1990. The resident was ordered to pay a total of £2,447.78.

Environment

Waste and recycling

Like many other local authorities across the country, we faced a difficult January with significantly increased volumes of waste after the Christmas holiday period and a number of collection crews self-isolating.

The impact on parts of our waste collection services led to the decision to temporarily suspend garden and food waste collections to prioritise rubbish and recycling.

The garden waste collection service was suspended for one collection and has now resumed.



Solar Farm Grazeley

Following the decision not to include proposals for an element of the previously proposed Grazeley Garden Settlement in the draft Local Plan (see last month's report), a solar farm could be built on land near Grazeley as part of WBC's plans to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels and help combat climate change.



The Council is exploring this possibility as part of its strategy to become carbon neutral by 2030. A feasibility study found that a solar farm provides a viable option for clean, green energy which would offset around 30% of the Council's carbon footprint, taking into account the estimated carbon footprint of key contractors working on behalf of the Council.

The plans would see more than 45,000 solar panels installed on up to 75 acres of land already owned by the Council – generating enough electricity each year to power approximately 4,400 homes.

Funding for the project, which is estimated to cost around £10m and is subject to further studies and procurement, will be included in the capital strategy for Council to approve on the 2 March. Subject to the approval of funding and planning permission being granted work, could start on the site in 2022.

Communications Channels

As well as Twitter there are also a number of Facebook pages which the Council uses, for example:

- West Berkshire Council;
- West Berkshire Community Support Hub Group;
- West Berkshire Libraries.

The WBC website also contains more about the CSH and useful information for residents and businesses:

Residents <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-residents>

Business <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-business>

Community hub <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-communityhub>

Broadcast meetings [West Berkshire Council YouTube Channel](#)

Linked to all of these initiatives is the WBC Customer Service telephone line: 01635 551111.

Other Matters

Community Champions

The Council recently announced the 2020 winning results of Community Champion Awards following the submission of nearly 100 nominations from across the district. Individual volunteers and community groups have been crowned as Community Champion 2020 Winners, Highly Commended, and Commended, for their valuable contributions to improving the lives of people in West Berkshire.



In addition to the traditional four categories, four Covid Response specific awards were added to recognise the fantastic volunteer efforts throughout the pandemic. The latter included a new “Big Thank You Award” created to show appreciation for individuals or groups who gave support to the community outside of the other Covid award categories, or for deserving individuals who would appreciate more low key recognition.

For 2020, Volunteer Centre West Berkshire and Greenham Trust each supported an award; Volunteer of the Year (Non Covid) and Community Group of the Year (Covid) respectively.

The awards, which have grown significantly since they first started in 2014, were judged by an independent panel and the award winners were announced by [video](#) by the Chairman of Council, Cllr Graham Pask.

Census - March 2021



a 95% response rate nationally whilst ensuring that no local area achieves a rate below 80% and, for the 2021 Census, to receive 75% of responses on line).

It is a statutory obligation to complete the census.

The Office of National Statistics is leading the planning and delivery of the Census on 21 March.

Local authorities are one of the key beneficiaries of the rich data resulting from the Census which informs local decision making processes. In addition, local authorities have detailed understanding of the areas they cover.

WBC will be supporting the work to ensure that the Census 2021 is a success (defined by achieving