



Parish Council Report for November 2021

Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

West Berkshire Council

Introduction

This report includes a report on the Council and Local Outbreak Engagement Board meetings in early December. There won't be a further December report, and the January report will include any matters arising during the rest of December.

Council

Full Council met on 2 December and faced a very full agenda including eight Motions, to the extent that the meeting finished at 22:27 (after nearly three and a half hours) without completing all of the items. Discussions will take place shortly as to how the remainder of the agenda will be addressed.

The meeting commenced with tributes to Cllr Peter Argyle, our friend and colleague, whose death was reported last month.

We then moved on to agree papers on Electric Vehicle Chargepoints, a new Statement of Principles relating to Gambling Act licensing, the appointment process for external auditors, and sending the Compton Neighbourhood Development Plan to referendum.

We also agreed to add an extra meeting of the Council in March 2022 so that the existing scheduled meeting could deal exclusively with the WBC 2022/23 Budget, and agreed meeting rules for that Budget Meeting (eg removing Members' questions from the agenda, limiting public questions to the Budget [and taking them earlier], seeking to agree timings for debate on the Budget papers and any proposed amendments, etc).

Finally we moved to the tabled Motions (and extended the meeting from 22:00 to 22:30 for debate), and debated two of the Motions (out of eight tabled). The two Motions debated were, first, for a return to full physical meetings of Council from next March (ie all 43 Members in the meeting room) and, second, regarding civility in public life. The first Motion was defeated (although all those speaking expressed a desire to get back to full physical meetings), principally because of uncertainty regarding Cov19 and opposition to setting a specific date for a return, and because the Motion did not set any limit on the cost of the exercise. The second Motion was passed unanimously (although a proposed amendment relating to anonymous social media accounts was defeated).

The meeting can be viewed [here](#).

Executive

The Executive met on 18 November and, as well as public and Members' questions:

- noted a progress report regarding the Environment Strategy (available [here](#));
- agreed an increase in Taxi (Hackney Carriage) meter charges (the first since 2013);
- agreed a Social Value Policy in line with the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 - meaning that all suppliers and providers of council services will need to consider the core values set out by the council when bidding on procurement opportunities (eg climate change, local employment opportunities and local community benefits);

- awarded (subject to legal finalisation) a new contract for the WBC Drug and Alcohol Behaviour Change Service.

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#). The Executive will next meet on 16 December.

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

Having been stood down at the start of November, the LOEB was stood up again on 6 December in the light of the Omicron variant, but also to look at the level of Cov19 in the community and vaccination numbers.

The meeting is available to watch back [here](#) and principal matters discussed included:

Current Cov19 Situation and Epidemiology

Case rates remain high (lower or approximate to rates in the South East but higher than the national rate). There is a lot of testing happening and the positivity rate remains high at 11+% of those tested.

Rates are higher for children, with the highest rates in those 5 to 9 years old and the next highest in those 10 to 15. Rates are however reducing, which is probably to do with the rollout of vaccinations in the younger age groups and second doses for those 12+.

What is absolutely clear is that those being hospitalised, or worse being in Intensive Care, are in the main those who are unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated. If anything made clear how important the vaccination programme is, it is this.

Omicron

It is very early to make any predictions about the new variant, and at the time of the meeting there was one known incidence in the district (out of 261 across England). The indications are that Omicron is more transmissible than Delta, and that the window between being infected and becoming infectious is shorter.

(No doubt by the time this report is read the paragraph above will be considerably out of date.)

Control Measures

As everyone will know, a range of control measures, including wearing face masks in particular situations and travel restrictions, have been introduced. The Public Protection Partnership continue to be involved in spreading these messages – various items of publicity and signage are available for businesses - and in local contact tracing (300+ traces in the fortnight to 24 November). The PPP is also carrying out compliance checks and reviewing risk assessments for events.

Generally the comment was that compliance seems to be good across the district.

Vaccination Programme

The presentation regarding Cov19 vaccination boosters was discussed, as well as the programme to give second jabs to those aged 12-15 (and this, from a Guardian article on 5 December: *“The figures show that by 2 December just under 20% of children aged 12 to 15 had received their first Covid vaccine in the London borough of Hackney and the City of London. But in Newbury and elsewhere in the West Berkshire local authority, more than three times as many (62%) of the same age group had been jabbed.”*).

The change to reduce the time lag between second dose and booster (now 91 days+) was referred to, and that there has been an increase in local capacity, particularly in the centre and west (the easterly surgeries having already been involved in the booster rollout) – with a revised Health on the Move Van schedule. Booster take up amongst eligible groups is good across the district



Both the Leader of Council, Cllr Lynne Doherty, and the Deputy Leader (and LOEB Chairman), Cllr Graham Bridgman, have recently received their booster jabs.

Cllr Bridgman received his from the former Leader of WBC, Graham Jones, at his pharmacy in Lambourn, and they discussed the booster rollout from the point of view of someone at the coalface of delivery.

Mr Jones had commented that the booster programme had proved to be very worthwhile and fulfilling, with excellent patient feedback and a fabulous community response (the pharmacy being supported by a number of volunteers helping ensure the success of the operation) – *“the pandemic has brought out the best in the community”*.

There were some issues through – with the booking system in particular:

- not necessarily recognising those who were immunosuppressed (and thus had three doses plus a booster);
- the booking system acting perversely in sending patients across the country rather than to their local service (Mr Jones had a lot of patients from Wantage, yet Lambourn patients were being sent to Wantage when they would rather stay local).
- people not cancelling bookings when they (eg) got a booster at a pop up / walk-in centre (causing the pharmacy to have to check the patient list name by name for every session).

There was a limit on the vaccine batches they could get, which limited how many they could vaccinate (but they were anticipating getting permission to operate with a second vaccination pod and so double throughput).

Finally, there was a discussion about the clinical evidence for needing a 15 minute wait after the jab.

Vaccines

A reminder (if such was needed) of the need for everyone who is eligible to get fully vaccinated against Cov19, including the booster jab, and to get the flu vaccination.

Anyone who hasn't been invited by the NHS to book a Cov19 Booster, where it is at least five months since the second dose, can call 119 or book [online](#).

Those eligible for the free flu vaccine can book an appointment through their GP surgery or local pharmacy.

Covid Testing

For anyone booking a PCR test at the Newbury Showground, the opening hours have changed slightly – the site is now open from 08:00 to 18:00, seven days a week.

To book a PCR test, please visit the booking site [here](#).

Christmas

Shaw House

There are lots of events taking place and there are still tickets available for children's puppet theatre 'Beastly Belle' on Sunday 12 December where Norwich Puppet Theatre will present a new twist on an old tale, inspired by the iconic era of 1920s and 30s cinema.

On Sunday 19 December, the musicians and storytellers GreenMatthews return with a brand new festive show 'Midwinter Revels' - a celebration of Yuletide Past.



Hungerford

The Christmas Extravaganza with its popular Victorian theme returns to the High Street in Hungerford on Friday 10 December. Arrive from 17:00 and enjoy fairground attractions, entertainers, charity stalls, food stalls, fireworks and a parade! A full programme of events can be found [here](#).

Community

Afghan Families in West Berkshire

In September, WBC pledged to welcome three families to the district under HM Government's resettlement scheme, aimed to protect Afghans who had served our country and supported troops based there. The three families have received help to build a new life in the United Kingdom and since then they have been settling

into their accommodation, getting help with things such as accessing essential services and getting to know the local area.

Anyone wanting to offer help to refugees should register through the Government's [online portal](#).

Economy

Small Business Saturday



Small Business Saturday UK is a grassroots, non-commercial campaign, which highlights small business success and encourages consumers to 'shop local' and support small businesses in their communities.

The day fell on Saturday 4 December this year and in support of the day and what it represents, WBC have compiled a '[Shop Local, Shop Green](#)' digital magazine with some of the district's independent green businesses. This will promote shopping locally at a business which has great green credentials and will be available via the WBC website.

Household Support Fund

WBC have been awarded funding of £695k for the new Household Support Fund which will support vulnerable households across West Berkshire this winter to meet daily needs such as utilities, food and other essential costs.

The Household Support Fund, which is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, will:

- provide a fund of £450k to support those most in need with household costs such as energy bills, food, clothing and housing costs in exceptional circumstances.
- help families over the Christmas Period by providing Free School Meals (FSM) vouchers for the 16 days of holidays, recognising the additional financial pressure the festive period can bring.

To access this additional financial support, an application form with specific criteria can be found by clicking [here](#).

Environment

Energy Efficient Homes

WBC have put together a [leaflet](#) that demonstrates some affordable ways to change behaviours, which will benefit both the environment and our residents' wallets. An individual's home energy efficiency rating and available grants can also be inspected [online](#).

Digital Household Waste Recycling Centre Permit Scheme

WBC is introducing a new online registration scheme for access to HWRCs, replacing the current paper permits with a digital system. Online registrations are open to residents now, and paper permits (including green car permits that have already expired) will only be accepted until 28 February 2022.

Households will be asked to register their car (up to three cars per household) online before 28 February 2022. Each household will first need to set up a My Account profile if they do not have one already on the Council's website via www.westberks.gov.uk/myaccount and then register their car(s) for the digital permits. Un-registered vehicles entering the HWRCs will be identified via Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras.



The digital permit system will enable households to register and update their vehicle details, household addresses and contact details instantly, allowing for seamless entry into the Household Waste Recycling Centres, so long as they have booked an appointment.

The change will mean that WBC won't need to print over 65,000 paper permits to replace those that have expired, or will expire soon. There will also be no need to print and post up to 3,000 additional permits for new properties or lost permits every year.

Health and Social Care

Safeguarding Week

WBC marked Adult Safeguarding Week between 15 and 21 November. It was a good opportunity to highlight how important it is that everyone in the community looks out for vulnerable adults and knows where to get advice if they are concerned that someone is at risk.

If people are worried that an adult may be at risk of harm, exploitation or abuse, it is important that they take steps to raise these concerns:

- the Berkshire West Safeguarding Board have helpful advice on their [website](#) about signs to look out for and who to speak to;
- the WBC Adult Safeguarding Team is available to give advice and are always happy to discuss any concerns – call 01635 519056 or [visit the website for more](#).

Adult Social Care Strategy Consultation Launches

WBC are inviting local people to take part in a consultation on a new strategy for Adult Social Care, to share their thoughts on what the priorities should be over the coming years.

The Adult Social Care service delivers a wide range of specialist support and activities to help people who are living with disability or physical or mental illness to make sure their needs are met and they can live life as independently as possible and stay safe and well.

The strategy sets out the principles and standards which everyone should expect from the service.

To take part you can complete the short survey online or you can request hard copies by contacting the team. The full strategy, survey and further information are available [here](#).

The survey will be open until 17:00 on Monday 3 January 2022.

Surviving to Thriving COVID-19 mental health fund increased



Surviving to Thriving, a joint initiative between Greenham Trust and West Berkshire Council, is aimed at all not-for-profit organisations in West Berkshire providing support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing.

The charitable appeal has exceeded its £300,000 target following a £50,000 boost from WBC, which has been matched by Greenham Trust. With £109,000 in funding available, Surviving to Thriving is calling on all local charitable organisations, voluntary groups, sports clubs and non-profits (including schools and other educational facilities) that deliver services aimed at supporting mental health issues related to the pandemic to apply for funding.

Planning

Local Plan Review Update

In August 2021 WBC announced postponement of the Local Plan Review due to the Government announcing changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The changes required preparation of a Local Plan Review (LPR) detailing a 30-year vision, rather than the existing LPR that detailed plans until 2037 following the Regulation 18 consultation that finished in February this year.

At the time of the announcement WBC sought independent legal advice and it was clear that additional work would be needed to support the new requirements, delaying the Local Plan Review in order to meet the framework for the future developments of an area.

WBC can now confirm that the LPR will go to Council in the summer of 2022 prior to submission to the Secretary of State in early 2023. There will also be a formal period of consultation in the summer of 2022 that will allow residents and businesses to have their say.

Local Plan Review to 2037 - Employment Land Call for Sites

As everyone should be aware from previous reports, WBC is in the process of preparing its Local Plan Review to 2037 (LPR) which will set out the spatial strategy for distributing development within the district and the policies for protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment.

As part of this process, national planning policy requires that local planning authorities make an assessment of need for employment land across their District and identify a strategy through the planning process to meet the level of identified need.

An assessment of need was undertaken as part of the evidence base for the LPR and this assessment is contained within the West Berkshire District Council Employment Land Review (August 2020) (ELR). In determining an appropriate strategy to meet the level of identified need, the Council undertook a 'Call for Sites' exercise as part of the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) in 2016/2017. The HELAA was published in December 2020 alongside the Regulation 18 Emerging Draft Local Plan Review 2020-2037, and identifies potential sites for housing, employment and other land uses across the District. It is a technical assessment, not a policy-making document, to inform the preparation of the LPR.

WBC is now undertaking a focused 'Call for Sites' exercise to explore further the options to address the identified need outlined within the ELR. This exercise is focused solely on identifying land to accommodate office development within the plan period. WBC is inviting landowners, developers and the wider public to submit potential development sites to be considered - submissions will form part of our Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA). The HELAA will not make recommendations on which sites should be developed but will make a preliminary assessment of their suitability and potential. For more, see [here](#).

Transport

Road Safety Week

November also featured Road Safety Week, which engages thousands of schools, organisations and communities in taking action on road safety, seeking to enable safe and healthy journeys every day. It also provides a great opportunity for anyone working in road safety to get more people involved in their work.

The Week is a prompt to everyone to seek to utilise active travel wherever possible – public transport, walking and cycling. It also promotes everyone's own safety and the safety of others, for example:

- reminding everyone to consider road use, and for drivers to drive at speeds appropriate to the road conditions;
- choosing routes that use the safest roads;
- parking sensibly - avoiding blocking entrances and pavements (inconsiderate parking is an issue that has been the subject of recent WBC publicity);
- making sure to be seen while out walking or riding on the roads - wearing brighter colours, high vis, and using reflectors, a helmet and ensuring adequate lighting on a bike.

Consultations

[Adult Social Care Strategy](#), closes 3 January.