

# HUNGERFORD TOWN COUNCIL

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**MINUTES** of the **Full Council Meeting** held on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 at 7.00pm remotely through Zoom.

**Present:** Cllrs Simpson, Knight, Winsor, Lewis, Chicken, Fyfe, Downe, Alford, Hudson, Yakar-Wells and Shatford

Also: District Cllrs James Cole (left meeting at 8.11pm) and Dennis Benneyworth – West Berks Council. Representatives from Newbury News, Penny Post and Adviser (left meeting at 8.21pm).

Two representatives from Hungerford Nursery School (left meeting at 7.08pm). Three members of the public. In attendance: Claire Barnes (Town Clerk), Jeff Ford (RFO), Sarah Hennessey (Deputy Town Clerk) and Sarah Chatters (Admin Assistant).

The meeting was being recorded.

**Presentation from Hungerford Nursery School.** Maureen Martin is Chair of Governors at the Nursery School. She was present to update the meeting on behalf of Suzanne Taylor and the board of governors and they are very grateful to HTC for the continued support. She reported that the nursery reopened today to keyworker children and children with additional needs following a two-week closure due to the number of staff having or recovering from Covid and other staff having to self-isolate. Nursery resources and on-line learning had continued to be delivered to all families during the closure period.

The Government has agreed an extension of transitional funding for 2021-2022 for maintained Nursery schools which is good news, but this doesn't provide long term security. The school continues to lobby our local MP on this matter.

Earlier this month the school lobbied our MP and District Councillors regarding the funding allocation for this term which had the potential to cause significant financial problems. Government guidance has now changed, and the school is very grateful to our MP and District Councillors for their support on this.

**Police Report – (attached).** The report had been circulated. The Mayor emphasised the need for all residents to report all incidents of crime to the police as there will only be a police presence in the town if we can demonstrate there is a need for it.

**FC20210021 Note apologies for absence** – District Councillor Claire Rowles – WBC.

**FC20210022 Declarations of interest** – None.

**FC20210023 Approval of Minutes of the meeting of the Full Council meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021, and outcome of actions** – CIL bid: The Town Clerk was thanked for her work in submitting our CIL bid in time to meet the tight deadline; unfortunately, our bid was unsuccessful.

The H2036 joint meeting has taken place and the Mayor thanked the H2036 team for the huge amount of work they are doing.

All other actions have been completed.

**Proposed:** Cllr Downe

**Seconded:** Cllr Knight

**Resolution:** To approve the minutes of 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021 as a true record.

**FC20210024 To receive written applications for the office of Town councillor and to Co-opt candidates to fill existing vacancies** – A welcome was extended to Patrick Doyle, whose resume had been circulated. He was invited to attend a month of council meetings to give him the opportunity to

get to know councillors and council business, which he accepted. His co-option will be added to the March Full Council agenda. **ACTION:** Include this item on the March FC agenda.

Nick Schlanker has attended council meetings over the last month. He advised he is keen to get involved and to try and make a difference in the community.

Councillors requested the meeting be moved to a Part 2 meeting so that the co-option could be discussed, and a vote taken by online poll.

The public and press were removed to the waiting room.

The public meeting was resumed and the public and press were readmitted to the meeting.

**Proposed:** Cllr Simpson

**Seconded:** Cllr Knight

**Resolution:** To co-opt, following a vote by online poll, Nick Schlanker to join HTC as town councillor

The Mayor welcomed Nick to HTC and advised he would be able to vote at future meetings once he has signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office forms.

**FC20210025 Mayor's Report** – The report had been circulated (**attached**).

**FC20210026 District Councillor's Reports** – A report had been circulated (**attached**).

DC James Cole advised he has sent information to the Headteacher at John O'Gaunt regarding potential funding for high-speed internet which is available for schools and other organisations. He reminded councillors the consultation period on the WBC draft local plan ends on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> Feb and individuals can also submit responses via the online portal.

DC Dennis Benneyworth advised he will circulate a press release from Royal Berks Fire and Rescue Service regarding cooking safety in the home. HTC will share on social media. He has visited the local vaccination centre at Newbury Racecourse and feels it is a very well-run operation. Volunteers from the Hungerford Self Isolation Group have been transporting local residents to and from the centre. Garden waste recycling collections will resume this week. The Mayor expressed disappointment that no Hungerford resident or group had received a WBC Community Champion Award.

**FC20210027 Health & Safety – Any complaints or concerns, including Impact of Coronavirus** –

Following a number of concerns received from members of the public relating to a recent sharp increase in Covid cases in Hungerford, the Mayor contacted WBC to ask for any detail/information regarding these numbers. The response from WBC is attached below. The Mayor thanked WBC for addressing these concerns so promptly.

**FC20210028 Local Plan Consultation – Consider response from HTC** – A draft response, formulated by Cllr Downe had been circulated. Cllr Downe advised the key issues he has put a lot of support for include the AONB, climate, environment, heritage. It is encouraging that there is a very clear role embedded in this draft plan for the Neighbourhood Plans of Hungerford and other areas. Thanks were extended to Cllr Downe for all his work on this.

**Proposed:** Cllr Downe

**Seconded:** Cllr Simpson

**Resolution:** To submit the responses from HTC to the draft local plan consultation via the online portal

**ACTION:** Office to submit response before deadline of 5<sup>th</sup> February.

**FC20210029 Hungerford 2036** – Receive a report from the Project Team (**attached**).

**FC20210030 Committee reports (no more than 3 minutes per report)**

**R&A** – nothing to report.

**F&GP** – report attached.

**E&P** – report attached.

**H&T** – report attached.

**FC20210031 Propose authorisation of cheque run payments (circulated along with copies of invoices) for January.**

**Proposed:** Cllr Winser

**Seconded:** Cllr Knight

**Resolution:** To authorise the cheque run for January of £62,457.48.

**FC20210032 Propose Year to date accounts – refer to circulated Income/Expenditure Report.**

**Proposed:** Cllr Winser

**Seconded:** Cllr Simpson

**Resolution:** To agree the year-to-date accounts as accurate.

**FC20210033 Propose Local Council Risk Assessments for 2020-2021.**

**Proposed:** Cllr Simpson

**Seconded:** Cllr Winser

**Resolution:** To accept the Local Council Risk Assessments.

**FC20210034 Consider quotations for renewal of Health & Safety policy (Private report circulated).**

**Proposed:** Cllr Simpson

**Seconded:** Cllr Knight

**Resolution:** To change provider to Peninsula for a 3-year term at a cost of £1,656 (annual premium).

**ACTION:** Town Clerk to instruct Peninsula and provide feed back to council on how the new arrangement is working.

**FC20210035** The Mayor advised this item will be discussed in the Part 2 meeting below.

**FC20210036 Consider alternatives to Town Meeting to engage with public – promotion of Action Plan/Strategy and Annual report** – It was suggested that a working party be set up to discuss the best way forward. Working party to consist of Cllrs Simpson, Downe, Knight, Lewis and Winser. **ACTION:** Town Clerk to set up a meeting date.

**FC20210037 Any other Reports (3 minutes each) not to include any proposals** – None.

Before the meeting closed, DC Dennis Benneyworth, on hearing of the RFO's resignation, wished to pass on his thanks to the RFO and to say that he has enjoyed working with him over the years.

Meeting closed at 8.39pm. DC Dennis Benneyworth, press and members of the public left.

## PART 2

Confidential

The public and press may be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity might be prejudicial to the public interest as per the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960.

**FC20210035 Consider alternatives for Freedom of the Town event** – Councillors agreed it would be best to postpone the event for the time being as it will not be possible to hold the ceremony as in previous years, due to the current restrictions. **ACTION:** Include this item on the May FC agenda for a formal decision to be made.

**FC20210038** Propose acceptance of annual contract for Penny Post.

**Proposed:** Cllr Simpson

**Seconded:** Cllr Knight

**Resolution:** To accept the quote for renewal of the annual contract for Penny Post.

**FC20210039 Triangle Field Management Agreement – Receive update following meeting with solicitor**

– A draft Heads of Terms has been received from the solicitor. This will be reviewed by the working party and brought back to council for a decision. **ACTION:** Town Clerk to set up a meeting date for the working party.

**FC20210040 Update on filling of RFO vacancy** – Applications have been received for this vacancy with one candidate being suitable for interview. This will take place on Wednesday and a decision will be made following the interview as to whether the position needs to be readvertised.

Meeting closed at 9.06pm

# REPORTS

## **POLICE HUNGERFORD TC UPDATE February 2021**

Covid – We are still in National Lockdown – **STAY AT HOME.**

We continue to receive a steady stream of reports of breaches of the Coronavirus Act.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 is law. It sets out your legal obligations and restrictions that are enforced by law. If you are found to be breaking the law we will act accordingly.

You must abide by the restrictions. They are there to control the spread of the virus and to keep you safe.

We are a rural neighbourhood policing team made up of five PCSOs, 2PCs and a Sergeant. Due to the ongoing Covid situation we continue to work out of the TRI Station in Hungerford. This has been our home since March 2020 and will remain so for the foreseeable.

Our patrol area covers many miles. From Hungerford to Lambourn. The Downlands to the Oxfordshire border to as far as Aldermaston and Midgham, incorporating all the rural villages in between. We cannot be everywhere which is why it is important to officially report to us.

That brings me to social media, whilst it is a great resource if used correctly, over the last couple of weeks we have been made aware of different posts on social media discussing “crime” in the town, namely criminal damage, anti-social behaviour and the lack of Police.

In the last month for Hungerford town we had one reported theft of a trailer and just two reports of anti-social behaviour. These have been at The Croft and the Cricket Field on Bulpit Lane. There has not been a single report of criminal damage since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. Therefore the demand is elsewhere which takes us out of the town. As I have said many times – If it isn't reported to us it's not happening.

We work from a patrol plan. This is regularly updated from the calls/ online reports we get in so that as a team we can focus our attention on problem areas.

Overnight on the 6<sup>th</sup> January on the outskirts of the town there were two reports of burglary non dwellings. An outbuilding was broken into at one property and garden tools were taken. At another the suspects were disturbed and made off across fields. This is currently under investigation – if anyone has any information please contact us.

You can report online at <https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk>. If it is urgent please continue to call on 101 (non-emergency) and 999 in an emergency or a crime is in progress

If you would like to report anonymously you can do so via Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or online at [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org).

You can pass us information via or team email address:

[hungerfordanddownlands@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk](mailto:hungerfordanddownlands@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk), however this is not monitored 24/7 so do not use to report crime.

## **Mayors report Full Council Feb 2021**

This month has been fairly quiet but there have been a few gems which has made me remember what's so nice about being in a civic role.

### **John O' Gaunt School**

Following a grant from HTC which was match funded through the good exchange, alongside funding from Excalibur and the department of education, 83 families in Hungerford who required a device to access online learning resources now has access to one. This is an incredible achievement. I was thrilled to have a socially distanced photo with Headteacher Richard Hawthorne. Richard and I are delighted to be working more closely, joining forces to ensure Hungerford's youth have everything they need to thrive. Richard shared some wonderful aspirational ideas for the school which I hope HTC will be able to support in the future. Richard your huge sense of community and commitment to JOG will I'm sure bring wonderful achievements for staff and pupils. Congratulations team JOG!

### **CIL funding**

Sadly, HTC's bid for the Triangle Field car park was unsuccessful on this occasion. I'd like to thank the Town Clerk for her commitment to getting this bid across to WBC at such short notice. Hopefully we can have another try later in the year. HTC will proceed with the car park improvements already budgeted and planned for at TF.

### **Chestnut Walk**

Members of HTC/WBC/Sovereign met to discuss the potential development at the old care home site in Chestnut Walk. More information will follow (meeting only attended today)

### **PennyPost**

The Town Clerk and I gave a written interview for HTC's Penny Post newsletter. The link can be found here:

[https://pennypost.org.uk/2021/01/interview-with-helen-simpson-mayor-of-hungerford-and-claire-barnes-hungerfords-town-clerk/?fbclid=IwAR1\\_dVBT391NTvH0Pge6OBPggRKvMqGMKBf\\_nRd8giGSD5oT34pNvjgkOr4](https://pennypost.org.uk/2021/01/interview-with-helen-simpson-mayor-of-hungerford-and-claire-barnes-hungerfords-town-clerk/?fbclid=IwAR1_dVBT391NTvH0Pge6OBPggRKvMqGMKBf_nRd8giGSD5oT34pNvjgkOr4)

### **Vaccination Centre**

I accompanied my Mother to Newbury Racecourse to receive her 1<sup>st</sup> Covid vaccination. I couldn't have been more impressed with the set up there. I was able to speak to many of the volunteers who couldn't have been more friendly and helpful. My Mum was nervous as she has limited mobility, she didn't need to be as the staff accompanied my mum to the door and allowed me to collect her at the exit in the car due to not managing the steps at the exit. This is a monumental operation, but you would never know, the personal service really helped to calm my Mums fears, I was so thrilled she's now received her first dose. For anyone concerned about mobility at the site, I hope this offers you some reassurance.

### **Personal**

I just wanted to say thank you to the many members of public that go out of their way to drop me a private message, saying thank you. Knowing you are happy with me in my civic role, really lifts my spirits. I just wanted you to know. I don't take this role lightly and your appreciation of my efforts in supporting Hungerford means a great deal. Thank you for taking the time to tell me.

## **H2036 Public Report**

### **Report to:**

Full Council meeting 1st February 2021.

### **Agenda Item No FC20210029:**

Report from Hungerford 2036

### **Current Activities**

The H2036 Site Assessments have been "fact-checked" by their respective site promoters and returned to us.

During January the project team started working through the site promoter responses but have not yet finished this work. As well as considering the additional information that has been sent to us and whether any changes to our assessments are warranted, we are also making sure that we have objectively checked for consistency between all sites following any changes. We expect to complete this activity and report back to the Council in February on our next steps. With the continuing Covid situation effective public consultation remains extremely challenging.

With approval from the Town Clerk and Mayor our Neighbourhood Plan consultant was authorized to provide an additional 4 hours support and in the short term we seek approval for a further 10 hours (£750 approx) to continue this work. A further case for external support spending will be presented in March. The current request is well within the budgeted and reserved amounts for the H2036 project.

**Signed:** John Downe, Joint Chair H2036, 31/1/2021

## **FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSE REPORT FOR FULL COUNCIL MEETING ON 1<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2021**

### **MONTH 10 INCOME & EXPENDITURE REPORT: JANUARY 2021**

#### **101 FINANCE:**

100% of the Annual Precept has been received to date.

#### **102 ADMINISTRATION:**

Net Income over Expenditure £1,988 below Budget. Underspent Year to date by £10,342 with reduced office costs, mayoral expenses and Professional fees and a total of £2,530 non budgeted income. £1,398 income in January was the WBC Covid Grant to cover our line 4026 costs.

#### **103 GRANTS & DONATIONS:**

£1,767 above Budget. There are funds of £1,462 available year to date, although £1,150 was granted at the last F&GP, leaving £312 available.

**104 POOL HOUSE:**

The Tenants are still £433 behind with their rent, the promised deferred rent was not received as advised.

**105 CONTINGENCY:**

No Expenditure this month. Year to date £15,745 available due to monies transferred from the savings on the Swimming Pool annual payment due to Covid-19 closure, Line 4100.

**109 HUNGERFORD 2036 PROJECT:**

No Expenditure to date. £4,708 available.

**201 RECREATION & AMENITIES:**

Net Income over Expenditure £895 below Budget.

**202 WAR MEMORIAL GROUND:**

£1,437 below Budget. HTC were successful in receiving a District Councillor Member's Bid of £2,240 for the refurbishment of the Bridge Street Memorial Gardens.

**203 ST SAVIOURS:**

Net Income over Expenditure £2080 above Budget. Burial Fee Income of £2,053.

**204 CROFT FIELD:**

Net Income over Expenditure £77 above Budget.

**205 LIBRARY MAINTENANCE COSTS:**

No Expenditure this month.

**206 TRIANGLE FIELD:**

No Expenditure this month and HRFC have resumed paying their rent. Year to date £1,185 below budget.

**301 CHRISTMAS LIGHTS:**

Net Income over Expenditure £7,738 below budget. Year to Date Donations £5,450 including the Good Exchange match funding.

**302 HIGHWAYS:**

Net Income over Expenditure £495 below Budget.

**303 CCTV:**

Net Income over Expenditure £1,178 above budget.

**304 TOURISM & ECONOMY:**

No Expenditure this month.

Month 10 Net Income over Expenditure £13,278 positive variance.

Year to Date Net Income over Expenditure £26,403 positive variance.

Claire Winsor, Chair of F&GP, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**Report on a Virtual Meeting of the Environment and Planning Committee that met on Monday 11 January 2021**

**EP2021004. Planning Applications -**

**a. 20/02868/FUL.** 8 Charnham Lane, Hungerford – Hungerford Land Ltd.

Change of use from D2 to B2 (D2 is Assembly and Leisure, currently used as a Fitness Studio, B2 is General Industrial). ***Cllr Yakar-Wells proposed No Objection, seconded by Cllr Chicken, all in favour.***

**b. 20/02921/LBC2.** 3 and 3A Bridge Street, Hungerford – Mr and Mrs Styles.

Replace glass Door and Security Grill with Wood Panelled Door.

***Cllr Simpson proposed No Objection, seconded by Cllr Lewis, all in favour.***

**c. 20/02994/FUL.** Land at River Dun, Bearwater, Hungerford – Action for the River Kennet.

To install a fish pass within an existing structure on The River Dun, Bearwater.

***Cllr Simpson proposed No Objection, seconded by Cllr Chicken, all in favour.***

**d. 20/03045/ADV.** Delta House, 4 Tealgate, Hungerford – Toolstation Ltd.

Application for three front elevation signs, entrance sign, opening hours sign, one side elevation sign and 4no A0 poster clip frames. ***Cllr Chicken proposed No Objection, seconded by Cllr Lewis, all in favour.***

Cllr Simpson, on behalf of HTC, welcomed Toolstation to the town.

**e. 20/03046/HOUSE.** Standen Hussey, Standen, Hungerford – Mr and Mrs Lee

Extension to existing detached garage. ***Cllr Lewis proposed No Objection, subject to the condition that the proposal does not constitute independent living accommodation, seconded by Cllr Yakar-Wells, all in favour.***

f. **20/02857/CERTP.** WBC has not asked HTC to comment on this application, this is for information only:

Parking Area Opposite The Plume and 25 High Street And Junction Of Park Street Hungerford – Mr S Finlay

Operate a food trailer for click and collect takeaway pizza - Saturday nights 5pm to 10pm. ***Cllr Lewis proposed No Objection, subject to the food trailer not interfering with the existing takeaway kebab van and the food trailer not parking in any disabled parking space, seconded by Cllr Chicken, all in favour.*** These comments will be forwarded to WBC planning department.

**EP2021005. Case Officers Reports** – These were read out and noted.

**EP2021006. Chestnut Walk, Hungerford** – Discussion/response to the consultation on the redevelopment of the former care facility at this site. The committee agreed redevelopment of this site is welcomed but had the following comments:

- The proposal is for the housing to be available as shared ownership units, but it is social rented units which are urgently needed in the town.
- The designs are unimaginative.
- The housing units to be more eco-friendly.

**ACTION:** Cllr Downe produced a draft response to the consultation which have been updated following the committee's comments and this will be circulated to the committee for their consideration. ***Cllr Simpson proposed Cllr Downe's response be forwarded to WBC, District Councillors and Sovereign Housing with an invitation for them to attend a future meeting with HTC and the H2036 Project Team to enable us to be involved in the process, seconded by Cllr Winser, all in favour.***

**Afternote.** HTC is positive on the principal of the redevelopment, but with reservations of varying severity. This an opportunity for Sovereign & WBC to make sure they understand our concerns and either try to justify their plans or possibly explain how they might be able to improve the proposals.

**EP2021007. Local Council Risk System** – Review E&P committee risk assessments (attached) and propose

approval of documents with any amendments. ***Cllr Winser proposed approval of the documents with no amendments, seconded by Cllr Lewis, all in favour.***

**EP2021008. WBC Draft Local Plan Consultation** – Formulate a proposed response from HTC. Cllr Downe volunteered to formulate a response through the online interactive tool and will produce a draft document to be considered at February FC. The deadline for responses to the consultation is 5<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021. Councillors were encouraged to contact Cllr Downe with any specific comments they would like included in the response from HTC.

**Meeting closed at 8.30 pm.**

**Alistair Fyfe, E&P Chair, 31 January 2021**

## Highways and Transport Committee

Report for Main Committee

Rob Chicken, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021

### **Summer Flowers in the High Street**

The committee agreed to go ahead with the flower decorations for the High Street this summer. The proposal includes using the new lamppost planters. The budget cost is £4,000.00.

### **Update on Hungerford Station improvements**

John Downe and myself, recently met with GWR, Network Rail, and a representative from West Berkshire regarding the painting of the Footbridge and other improvements we would like to make. There is no progress at present, but we have arranged to have another meeting in February.

### **Installation of recycle bins**

It was agreed to purchase 5 recycle bins for public use. Three will be located in the High Street, one will in Canal Walk, and one in Bulpit Lane Play Park.

### **Local Council Risk Assessment was approved.**

### **Footpath improvements along the A4 to the county boundary near to Froxfield**

The committee decided to make a request for S106 money to start these improvements.

### **Christmas Tree Lights**

The three-year contract with our installer has come to an end. It was agreed to begin the tender process for the next three years in May.

### **Pigeons in the High Street**

The new spikes which have been installed under the railway bridge across the High Street by Network Rail have reduced the number of pigeons resting there quite considerably.

### **Temporary Footpath**

While the building work for the new houses at the south of the Town continues, and the footpath leading south from Priory Road remains closed, a temporary route has been allocated along the A338. Some Committee members commented that this footpath is in poor condition and should be improved and continue along to the new section at Prospect Farm.

### **Active Travel**

The location of a cycle shelter in the Church St Car Park was not approved. We will continue to seek an alternative site.

### **Speeding**

West Berkshire working towards introducing a 30mph speed limit across the Common and through Lower Denford. We should have a clearer picture towards the end of March. The request for a 20mph speed limit in the High Street is still being considered by West Berkshire.

**COVID19** There has been a spike of new cases in the Nursery and the Primary School

## **RESPONSE FROM WBC REGARDING RISING COVID NUMBERS**

Further to our email correspondence below, I have managed to review the data in light of your concerns around the rising number of cases in Hungerford.

The 31 positive cases in the 7 days to 21/01/21 that you mentioned below refers to a geographic footprint called a Medium Super Output Areas (MSOA) for Hungerford. So we have therefore looked at the data within this area.

Taking all cases into account, the Hungerford rate per 100,000 for the week ending 21/01/21 is significantly higher than the West Berkshire average. There has been a rise in cases since 07/01/21, but the total case rate since the beginning of November have been significantly below the West Berkshire average. 8 of the case within the last week have been associated with a recent outbreak in a high risk setting, and when we remove this from the total number (for both Hungerford and for the West Berks total), this brings the Hungerford case rates for the week end 21/01/21 more in line with the West Berks average.

We also looked at removing Pillar 1 tests from the data (those individuals that tend to have contracted Covid within a healthcare setting e.g. hospital), so we can just focus on community transmission. When we do this, it further decreases the gap between Hungerford and the West Berkshire average. In light of this, it appears that Hungerford is not seeing a significant growth in numbers and having looked at the most recent few days which, although incomplete, it would indicate that the case increase in Hungerford is temporary. However, we will continue to monitor the numbers.

Clearly, any rise in cases is a concern for the community and you will be aware that the new variant has unfortunately led to a substantial rise in cases across the whole of West Berkshire, despite the best efforts from our communities to control the virus. We are now seeing a decrease in our rates, and whilst this is a slow decline, I am sure that that this will continue for the weeks to come, depending on future national and local restrictions.

## Parish Council Report for January 2021

Cllrs Dennis Benneyworth, James Cole and Claire Rowles

(West Berkshire Council, Hungerford and Kintbury 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 fully 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 (LRSRG) 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](mailto: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**

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 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.

[Parish Matters](#)

The Town Centre Masterplan consultation is now closed but others are still open, notably the Local Plan Review which affects most of us in one way or another; individuals can respond on their own behalf as well as parish councils – all the current open consultations can be found at <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/consultations> .

Subject to formal approval by West Berks Executive next week, both Inkpen and Kintbury should benefit from the recent offer of CIL funding – Inkpen will get a contribution towards what should be the final piece in the Pavilion jigsaw, and Kintbury a contribution towards playground equipment.