

WBC Newsletter November 2024

Produced by your WBC Ward Councillors



Past Council and Executive meetings

- [Extraordinary Council](#) and [Executive](#) 7th November. WBC CEO Nigel Lynn left the Council for personal reasons and Joseph Holmes, former Head of the Resources Directorate, has been appointed as interim CEO.

Sport, Culture, Leisure and Countryside

Football's finally home!



Describing Faraday Road as their 'spiritual home', Newbury FC had their first mens' game at Faraday Road football ground this month! The ribbon was cut by WBC Chairman **Billy Drummond** (Newbury, Greenham). Newbury MP, **Lee Dillon** and the **Sport and Leisure portfolio holder Nigel Foot** (Newbury, Clayhill), both made speeches welcoming the Club back. Interviewed by the BBC for the evening news, Nigel spoke about how having the football ground back in the heart of Newbury provides the heartbeat of the community and that he was proud that WBC Members and Officers made it happen.

Economy and Regeneration

Rejuvenating the Wharf



Funded entirely by grants secured by WBC from the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership and £420,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the first phase of the vision for Newbury's Wharf area regeneration is underway with a redesign of the Peace Garden.

Cllr Louise Sturgess (Newbury Central), portfolio holder for Economic Development and Regeneration said, "This is an exciting time for Newbury as we take significant steps to bring the Wharf

area to life and create a vibrant, welcoming space for all."

Keeping Benchmark in West Berkshire

The Council was made aware last year that [Benchmark](#), the bespoke furniture makers founded by Sir Terence Conran at his home Barton Court near Kintbury in the 1980s, has to move by 2027. Their new landlord has given notice for their lease to end.

Benchmark are one of the leading furniture and joinery companies in the UK, renowned for their pioneering stance on sustainability. They have won three queens award and recently a king's award for enterprise in sustainable development. Employing over 50 people, most of them locally trained through an award winning apprenticeship scheme they have been running for over 35 years. The majority are highly skilled and living in West Berkshire. The Council is helping their management find a new home as near as possible to its current location.

Cllr Tony Vickers believes this should be possible in principle – even if the new site is in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. The Plan allows for commercial development that supports the rural economy to be permitted provided it conserves the landscape quality.

Peru comes to Newbury!



Louise was also excited to welcome a small bear from Peru to Newbury as part of the nation-wide 'Paddington Visits' initiative.

Newbury is the hometown of Michael Bond, Paddington's creator. Louise noted that Paddington's arrival will put Newbury firmly on the visitors map and give a boost to local tourism!

Children and Young People

Falkland and Kennet Primary School improvements!



The portfolio holder, **Cllr Heather Codling** (Chieveley and Cold Ash) is delighted that the designs for the much-needed new classrooms at Falkland School are with the planning department for approval. Open sessions for staff, parents and neighbours have been held and these fantastic new buildings will replace the old pre-fab buildings.



This follows the recent opening of the excellent SEMH facility at Kennet Primary School for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and/or a diagnosis of Autism (left). Heather said 'the children of West Berkshire are one of the top priorities for the administration and these projects contribute towards our manifesto commitment of supporting our young people.'

Public Health and Community Engagement

Another successful District Parish Conference...

Was held in October when the Leader, **Cllr Jeff Brooks** launched **West Berkshire Council's service offering to Town and Parish Councils**, the first step in offering additional devolved services, including gully and ditch clearing, sign cleaning, dog waste bin collections and pop-up libraries, whilst ensuring that the quality of such services remains strong. Presentations were also given on how Town and Parish Councils can work collaboratively with Berkshire Youth to support young people across the district and by the Environment team on how to get involved and be supported to help with the Council priority of 'Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency'.

Winter Fuel Payments

At September Council **Cllr Mat Shakespeare** (Pangbourne) proposed a Motion calling on the government to rethink their policy on changing the eligibility criteria for qualifying for winter fuel payments. The Motion found cross-party support (full details [here](#)) and also called for WBC to take action to encourage pensioners to see if they are eligible for Pension Credits - which will then enable them to claim the Winter fuel payments. As a result, drop-in sessions to help people apply have now started to help people apply ahead of the Government deadline of 21st December.

Community Forum – 19th November, Hungerford Town Hall:

Following the last very successful Community Forum on Planning the next one will be to inform residents on help available and answer any questions they may have on issues of concern this winter including the cost of living, flood prevention and winter preparedness.

Update: owing to inclement weather, this was cancelled - to be scheduled soon online only.

Travel and Highways



Following a Lib Dem Motion in 2023 and a local petition organised by Theale **Cllr Alan Macro** (Theale) the way the council deals with requests from residents to lower the speed limit on their roads has changed, resulting in the implementation of several local schemes to introduce a 20 mph limit. The portfolio holder at the time was **Cllr Stuart Gourley** who said "By reducing speed limits [where residents request it], we are addressing local concerns, making our roads safer and supporting the Council's long-term commitment to creating safer, more sustainable communities across West Berkshire."

Alan added "I am very pleased that these petitions have now resulted in the introduction of 20MPH limits...these limits will make it much safer for pedestrians walking along the many narrow pavements in the village and should encourage more people to walk or cycle to the shops and schools."

Signs publicising the 20mph limit have also been erected in Westfields at the request of residents to remind drivers to slow down...

Last month WBC also fixed 260 potholes, cleaned 2,066 gullies and repaired 67 streetlights. Look for our December newsletter for a total for 2024's road repairs!

Vegetation blocking roads and footpaths

The wet weather this summer led to much greater vegetation growth, causing road signs to be obscured and hedges and trees to obstruct paths used by local people. **Cllr Tony Vickers** asked a formal Member Question at a recent meeting of the Executive: *"How are we, as Highway Authority responsible for keeping roads and public footpaths open to all users, balancing the conflicting legal requirements to protect nesting birds and the literally growing problem caused by climate change of vegetation obstructing public highways, including rural road signs and footways beside roads - especially affecting pedestrians of all ages and those with mobility impairment?"*

The answer from **Cllr Stuart Gourley** was: *"As Highway Authority we are responsible for the safe passage of all road users and must balance several conflicting requirements including the protection of nesting birds. Most of the hedges along the highway network are the responsibility of the adjacent landowners."*

Countryside and the Environment

Top Tip!



Newtown Road HWRC won the award for the best recycling centre in the country from LARAC. The awards team said "Their focus on creating more opportunities for recycling and reuse has made a significant impact, making them a well-deserved winner this year. Congratulations!" New portfolio holder **Cllr Stuart**

Gourley praised the efforts of WBC staff and partners Veolia and reminded residents that as well as recycling increasing amounts and types of waste, Newtown Road also collaborates with The Community Furniture Project to refurbish items and sell at reduced rates to people in need.

An iconic avenue to be replanted



The Italian poplar trees on Stroud Green have come to the end of their lives and are starting to break and present a danger to the public. They are being replaced - like for like, after WBC consulted and over 1000 residents voted for poplars again! The planting will start in Autumn of 2025 once the current trees have been safely removed.

Chairman's News

Learner Achievement Awards 2024



Attended by Newbury's MP, the Leader and Chairman of West Berks Council and the Mayor of Newbury, the Learner Achievement Awards were given this year to Linda Turner, Charlotte Davies, Michelle Gilbert, Gina McGuinness, Rona Maail, Nadiia Torpoka, Tom Allport, Elena-Ramona Zamfir and Cara Giles-Allen - all amazing people who have all shown incredible determination to change the direction of their lives, achieving their goals in

difficult circumstances, often against all the odds. You can see all the award winners [here](#). Cllr **Heather Codling** the portfolio holder also attended and spoke of how impressed she was by the winners' efforts, "Hearing the stories of these incredible people is extremely moving. It really shows the depth of determination and strength it takes to succeed. They have all gone above and beyond to get there and benefit others along the way. I'm delighted that we're able to recognise their efforts and hope that their stories will inspire others to follow their lead and reach their full potential too. Our winners show that, although this may be hard, it can certainly be done. Congratulations to all our LAA winners and everyone who was nominated for their incredible efforts."

Lest we forget...



Along with other dignitaries from West Berkshire and the Town Councils, the Chairman **Billy Drummond** (Newbury, Greenham) attended Remembrance Day events across the district. Deputy Leader of Council **Cllr Denise Gaines** attended the Hungerford event.

And finally...

Find out about [Free Festive Bus Travel](#)

Have your say on balancing West Berkshire Council's books by contributing to the **Budget Consultation** [here](#) (closes 23.12.24)

[Explore reducing the cost of Adult Social Care \(ASC\) Resource Centre services, through the use of another provider or others ways to deliver the service](#)

[Increase some Adult Social Care \(ASC\) fees and charges above the inflation rate.](#)

[End the Mobile Library Service, that visits Burghfield, Mortimer and Beech Hill.](#)

[Enable a charitable giving option for non-statutory council services](#)

[Turn off residential streetlights between midnight and 5am](#)

[Reduce the number of winter gritting routes](#)

[Remove the Downland Sports Centre in Newbury from the council's leisure management contract](#)

Find out how to help victims of Domestic Abuse this Christmas with our [Giving Tree](#).