

Aldermaston Ward Report for January 2020

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West Berkshire Council

Reflections on 2019

Following the 2018 Local Government Boundary Commission for England review of West Berkshire wards, the district elections last May saw a reduction in council seats from 52 to 43 and changes to the number of councillors representing wards in some parts of the district. Aldermaston ward was significantly affected and I reluctantly said goodbye to Midgham and Woolhampton parishes, while I happily welcomed Beenham and Padworth to join Aldermaston, Brimpton and Wasing parishes. Aldermaston is now one of two wards that straddles the boundary between Newbury and Wokingham constituencies, the other being Bradfield.

A consequence of the reduction in elected members has been to reduce the membership on some committees and change some advisory groups and panels. These changes, alongside the necessary representation on outside bodies, mean that all members have the opportunity to be close to the delivery of WBC services.

In my capacity as a member of the council's Executive Committee, I am Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel and a member of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the West Berkshire Council Fostering Panel. As your ward member, I am a member of AWE's Local Liaison Committee and the Padworth Common Advisory Committee.

Despite the run up to the Christmas and New Year break, December has been a busy period within the Council timetable, complicated by the calling of the General Election which utilised a considerable amount of Council strategic resource. 2020 looks equally demanding with a very full forward plan.

As we move towards to the second year of this session of Council, many of the 2019 Conservative Manifesto pledges are being translated into strategy consultations and delivery plans.

The budget for the coming year, whilst still under pressure, has been considerably less painful to build in comparison to previous years – for the first time in a long while WBC will not have to consult externally on service reductions or changes. Rather, with announcements about additional funding for Adult and Children's Social Care and Education, proposed changes to the budget have avoided major public facing savings.

As referred to in previous reports, with a wider political representation in the Council Chamber, there have been some vibrant exchanges and debate (you are of course very welcome to attend meetings as observers)!

The environment was probably the most talked about issue in 2019 and this will also be a very significant topic going in to 2020 and beyond. The Climate Conference in October was the first stage in a series of conversations relating to the Council's response to the declaration of a climate emergency. We can expect this conversation to continue as we will all need to play our part in delivering the route to carbon zero over the coming decades.

This district, like many others also has issues of the delivering the right housing solutions for people of all ages, as well as caring for our growing populations of elderly and vulnerable residents. Having said this, West Berkshire is a vibrant and economically active area within a beautiful location, with excellent transport links and very strong employment.

All these things make West Berkshire a place to be proud of and we can all look forward to 2020 positively.

Council Meeting

The next Council meetings will take place on 9 January (a special meeting to appoint honorary aldermen, followed by an ordinary meeting to consider various items including the draft Minerals and Waste Local Plan (more below) and a Revised Statement of Community Involvement). Papers relating to the agenda items for the main meeting discussed further below can be found at <http://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=116&MId=5159&Ver=4>.

Honorary Aldermen

At the special meeting referred to above, we will be conferring the title of Honorary Alderman on some of the district's long serving former Councillors including Paul Bryant, Keith Chopping, Adrian Edwards, Graham Jones, Anthony Stansfeld, Quentin Webb, Emma Webster and Mollie Lock. The title will also be bestowed on Pamela Bale but she is unfortunately unable to attend the meeting.

Minerals and Waste Local Plan

The proposed Minerals and Waste Local Plan will be discussed at the ordinary meeting. The draft plan sets out the policies to guide minerals and waste development across the district and includes site allocations for mineral extraction. These documents and supporting papers can be found in the Council Agenda.

The next step for the plan will be public consultation and I urge anyone interested or affected by the proposals to make their comments directly to the council. I will happily submit comments on behalf of any resident if they prefer.

In summary, there is now only one new site identified as being preferred that lies within Aldermaston ward and that is Boot Farm.

Plastics Recycling petition

Council will also debate a petition seeking that WBC recycles more types of plastic than currently.

The background paper in the agenda pack makes interesting reading – to quote from it:

- *It will cost the Council up to £1m in capital investment to make necessary modifications at the Council's materials recovery facility at Padworth, so that additional plastic stream can be sorted, plus ongoing annual revenue cost of c £100k to collect this material;*
- *Collecting the materials is relatively easy compared to securing a viable recycling destination for the materials in the UK. If exported overseas as done by many of the UK authorities who collect these additional plastics, then the Council will have limited control over what happens to the waste (whether it is effectively recycled or ends up in landfills/rivers).*

Executive meeting

Due to purdah a full agenda for the Executive meeting on 19 December couldn't be published in time for the ordinary scheduled meeting, so we had an extraordinary meeting at shorter notice (including a

Part II agenda). Then an item got missed off that agenda, so we needed a second extraordinary meeting. So, we ended up having the ordinary meeting, followed by the first extraordinary meeting, then the exclusion of press and public for the Part II meeting, then everyone back for the second extraordinary meeting. All good fun!

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

At the main extraordinary Executive meeting the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25 was adopted. It articulates the core priorities for the next five years with a focus on enhanced prevention and early intervention to address homelessness and rough sleeping and an increased range of housing options and even stronger partnership working (https://citizen.westberks.gov.uk/media/48320/Preventing-Homelessness-and-Rough-Sleeping-Strategy-2020-2025/pdf/Homelessness_Strategy_Delivery_Plan_v2.pdf?m=637124412041870000).

Climate Change Investment Bonds

We also agreed this scheme, subject to due diligence.

A Community Municipal Bond (CMB) is a bond or loan mechanism issued by a Council directly to the public via a Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) regulated crowdfunding platform (WBC is considering Abundance Investment as a provider). CMBs can be used to supplement, diversify or replace sources of borrowing to fund specific infrastructure projects, or to refinance existing debt. They can also be earmarked for specific suitable projects.

Although the bonds could be used to deliver a wide variety of infrastructure projects, WBC intends to prioritise projects which support its recent declaration of a climate emergency, and the Environment Strategy referred to above.

Individuals (whether West Berkshire residents or not) will be able to invest from £5.00 upwards to support specific projects such as solar panels or tree planting. In return, they will receive Climate Change Bonds and a yield on their investment. This scheme has great potential and could enable the Council to take on important green projects – if our communities invest, it would provide the Council with a cheaper alternative to conventional sources of funds and reduce the overall cost of borrowing to all taxpayers across the district. Keeping the administration as simple as possible is why the Council is seeking to pilot this scheme with an outside organisation.

Subject to completing due diligence on the scheme, which will be funded through the pilot by external funding, the Council hope to launch the scheme to investors in the middle of 2020.

Environment Strategy consultation (from 9 January to 21 February)

As reported last month, following the declaration of a climate emergency in July and the Climate Conference in the autumn, which was the next step in the public engagement process, WBC has been working on a draft Environment Strategy with input from the Environment Board and Environment Advisory Group.

The draft strategy covering the period 2020-30 goes out to public consultation on 9 January and provides six weeks for responses. The consultation will be published on the Council's website as well as being highlighted via email and through media and social media channels to those groups and individuals who are particularly engaged in the district's consultation process. Comments on the

strategy are welcomed from a wide range of respondents so please do highlight this consultation amongst residents.

This is a significant consultation and the Council also intends to hold a short series of community conversations and focus groups in February before the consultation period closes. It is anticipated that, early in the new year, towns and parishes will be invited to send a delegate to discuss how Parish Councils and Town Councils can get involved in the delivery of the strategy and help motivate communities to play their part in the district working towards carbon-zero by 2030 (these groups will be held at Shaw House).

Representatives from the district's other interested parties such as our young people, environmental lobbyists, climate conference participants, residents and West Berkshire Council staff will also be invited to discuss the draft strategy in a variety of conversations held across the district. We also intend holding meetings with representatives from neighbouring Councils to engage in the wider conversation about how we can work together for the best results for our region.

Adult Social Care Budget 2019/20

Further to comments about the budget in the introduction, the ASC budget is currently predicting an underspend for 2019/20, which is hugely encouraging considering the relentless financial pressures on this demand led service. Although it is the single biggest Council service budget, the enhanced financial modelling is proving reliable and provides us with useful data to help predict the spending requirement for service users in both the immediate and mid to longer terms.

Having said this, to highlight how a very small change in numbers can have a massive effect on the end result, after much argument five ASC clients are now having their needs paid for by the NHS through the Continuing Health Care system with a total saving to the ASC budget of £0.6m. To put this into perspective, £0.6m is approximate to a 0.5% increase on council tax.

Housing in West Berkshire

WBC's commitment is to make sure that there are homes available in West Berkshire for all stages of our resident's lives. The focus will continue to be on the delivery of affordable housing in the district and is carried through to the new Council Strategy 2019-23 'Building on Our Strengths.'

One of the six priorities for improvement in the strategy relates to housing to 'Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy.' Additionally, the West Berkshire Vision 2036, specifically commits to delivering a West Berkshire Housing mix with something for everyone.

Items of note include:

- Key regeneration schemes such as Market Street, Newbury which is currently under development for completion by 2021;
- Our Local Plan to 2026 which sets out our planning policies based on 551 dwellings per annum. We are delivering 109% of our target according to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government;
- We currently have a seven year housing land supply which has been accepted by planning inspectors at appeal (this will be tested again in the Land at junction of Clayhill Road and Sulhamstead Road appeal);

- Our development programme currently has over 800 affordable homes approved with additional units on the horizon;
- Our Equity Loan Scheme, First Steps Next Steps, has enabled 35 homes to be purchased by local residents;
- We have launched the Housing Service Improvement Plan that will secure more private rented accommodation through a rent incentive scheme, develop a Landlord Forum and an Registered Provider Forum to increase opportunities for growth in housing;
- WBC is nearing completion on a joint venture with Sovereign Housing that will increase the number of homes in the district;
- We are we are investigating setting up a Local Housing company;
- Our housing team has also done some outstanding work with both families and rough sleepers:
 - We have purchased 18 units of temporary accommodation with a further two under offer. As a result there are no longer any families in B&B accommodation;
 - 33 rough sleepers have been supported to move on from sleeping rough, with current numbers down to 10

Future consultations

There are a number of consultations and delivery plans coming forward in the next quarter which you may wish to respond to:

- Council Strategy Delivery Plan;
- Playing Pitch Strategy;
- West Berkshire Cultural Heritage Strategy;
- Housing Strategy;
- Local Transport Plan review.

Other news

London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE)

Regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate in Newbury is a long held ambition and important project for the Council which will introduce a new northern gateway into the town by delivering new amenities and improving the vicinity.

Consultants, Avison Young were appointed just before the Christmas break to produce a new development brief and masterplan for the area. Subject to contracts being signed, the consultants will begin work on the masterplan in the coming weeks. In coming up with a new masterplan Avison Young will meet with key stakeholders locally to help inform their report. Proposals will seek to both make best use of the area for the town and ensure on behalf of residents to maximise the Council's financial position as a landowner.

The work will set out key details about future development including the principles for redevelopment, planning policy and how the land might be used. The masterplan will guide all development within the regeneration area and not just on land owned by West Berkshire Council.

The brief and associated work will take around five months to complete in draft form. Once received, the Council will review the options and then over the next six months or so agree the type and number of partnerships the Council might wish to enter into to progress with regeneration of the area.

Thirty year transport strategy consultation

People and businesses in West Berkshire are being urged to have their say on a proposed thirty-year transport strategy for the South East which aims to improve journeys, boost the economy and protect the environment.

The strategy outlines how, with the right investment in our region's transport network, the South East's economy will more than double by 2050 to between £450bn and £500bn per year – creating an additional 500,000 jobs, boosting quality of life and access to opportunities for all and helping cut the South East's carbon emissions to net-zero.

It has been produced by Transport for the South East, a unique partnership bringing together local authorities, business leaders and transport organisations to speak with one voice on our region's transport priorities. A major focus of the strategy is reducing the region's reliance on private cars to reduce congestion, cut carbon emissions and improve air quality. Today, cars account for 70% of all journeys in the South East compared to just 4% by rail and 5% by bus. It also highlights how better transport links can support economic growth around our key international gateways, such as Port of Southampton, which are vital to the local, regional and national economy.

To read the draft transport strategy and take part in the consultation, go to tfse.org.uk/transport-strategy.

The deadline for responses is Friday, 10 January 2020.

The final transport strategy is due for publication in April 2020, with a strategic investment plan planned for publication in 2021.

Peer Challenge Review

The Challenge is overseen by the Local Government Association who bring a senior team of officers and Members together from around the country for a week. We had quite a large team come to Newbury, led by the Chief Executive of Southend on Sea Council. She was supported by the Leader of Shropshire Council and the Deputy Leader of Cornwall Council. The team was further supported by a number of other senior officers from around the country each with particular specialisms.

The initial feedback has been very encouraging and we will get the full report in the New Year along with a number of recommendations. In the meantime here is a flavour of what they reported back to us before they left:

- we are a strong performing authority that manages its finances well
- we are modest and tend to 'hide our light under a bushel'

The underlying message was 'we are good and should be more proud of it.'

Pod

A great new learning space known as the 'Pod' will create six additional places for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disabilities at the Intervention iCollege in Newbury.

Children who have and an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) for Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties will benefit from these extra places. They will be able to access support more promptly and within their local area. It will also benefit children who will remain with the iCollege as it will assist with the transition between primary and secondary school.

The West Berkshire Council project to create the Pod cost almost £208,000 and was funded by a Government grant.

I was delighted to be at the formal opening ceremony of this fantastic new facility.

Highwood Copse School

Following the collapse of builder Dawnus in to administration earlier in the year, the contract was reissued to local firm Feltham Construction. As a result of the delay caused by this, rectification work needed to restart the build due to weather damage and some defective work issues, the cost of building the new school has increased by £1.7m. The additional money is coming from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), a contribution paid by local developers to deliver improvements in our communities.

The build is progressing well and is planned for completion in summer 2020 and will welcome up to 30 Reception pupils, with a new intake each year and all year groups in place by 2026. Parents and children interested in attending the school will have the opportunity to visit the site and watch the building evolve; entering the completed school as founder members in September 2020.

M4 junctions 3 to 12 smart motorway

There are two full weekend closures of the M4 coming up early in the new year, between junctions 6 and 8/9 over the weekend of 17-20 January 2020 and between junctions 4b and 5 over the weekend of 14-17 February 2020. You can find out more in the attached bulletin, or at websites:

<http://www.highwaysengland.co.uk/m4j3to12> and <https://m4j3to12smartmotorway.commonplace.is>

Royal Berkshire NHS Trust – Governor Elections

The Royal Berkshire NHS Trust has announced elections for Public Governors, including two for West Berkshire & Borders, one to July 2021 and the other to July 2022. Nominations close at 17:00 on 16 January 2020 and information for prospective applicants and the nomination forms are/will be available on the Trust website - <https://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/open-elections.htm>.