

Council Report for June 2026

Written by your local Conservative team to keep you up to date.

Cllr Dominic Boeck, Aldermaston Ward

West Berkshire Council

Council

Council met for its Annual Meeting on 14 May to discuss:

- Election of the Chairman for the Municipal Year 2026/2027
- Election of the Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2026/2027
- Appointment of the Executive by the Leader of the Council for the Municipal Year 2026/27
- Leader of the Council's Annual Report
- Formation of an Audit and Risk Committee
- Appointment and Allocation of Seats on Committees for the 2026/27 Municipal Year
- Appointments to Outside Bodies for the 2026/27 Municipal Year
- Lambourn Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Member Development Programme 2026/27

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found here.

The next meeting is on 16 July.

Executive

Executive met on 21 May to discuss:

- Extended Pedestrianisation Hours in Newbury
- Adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy
- Review of Ethical Investment Policy Relating to the Council and Berkshire Pension Fund
- Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report 2024/2025
- Disposal of Ramsbury Drive Play Area to Hungerford Town Council
- Adult Social Care Self-assessment
- Response to Emotional Wellbeing Task Group
- Bond Riverside 13B, C & D
- Scrutiny Review of Called-In Decision: Response to Council Motion: decisions following public consultation

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found here.

Executive next met on 11 June to discuss:

- Contract Award for the Highways Term Maintenance Contract
- West Berkshire Local Plan timetable and commencement
- Planning Enforcement Plan
- New Procurement Strategy and "Think Local" Social Value Strategy
- All Age Autism Strategy 2026-2029
- Asset Optimisation Plan

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found here.

The next meeting is on 2 July.

Public Protection

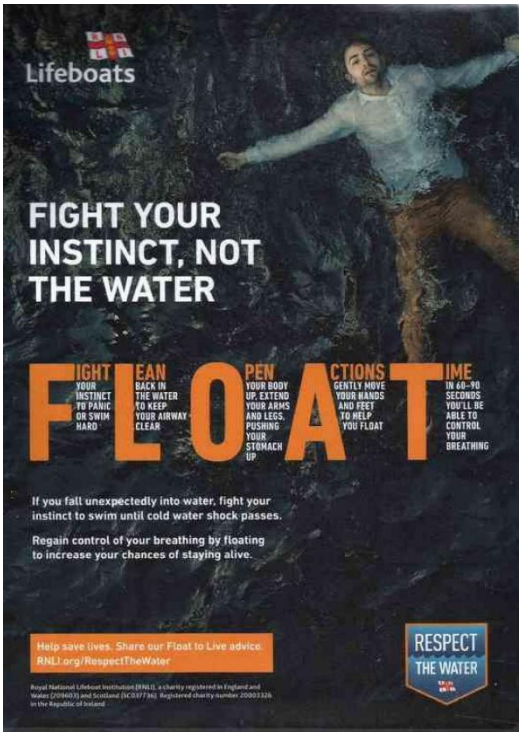
Spot something unsafe? Speak up and help protect others

If you come across a product that seems unsafe or has caused injury or damage, reporting it can help prevent harm and protect others in your community.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards encourages residents to report concerns through the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 0808 223 1133 (or text relay 18001 0808 223 1133). Reports are passed to local Trading Standards teams to investigate, and you may also be entitled to a refund, repair or replacement.

When reporting, include as much detail as possible - what the product is, where you bought it and what happened. If it's safe to do so, keep the item as it may be needed for investigation.

By speaking up, you're helping to remove dangerous products from circulation and keep others safe.



Heatwaves

With sunny weather and high temperatures forecast over the coming days, many will be looking forward to making the most of the summer. While enjoying the sunshine, it's important to take a few simple steps to stay safe.

The NHS advises keeping curtains closed in sun-facing rooms, drinking plenty of water, avoiding excessive alcohol and limiting time in direct sunlight between 11am and 3pm. If outdoors, seek shade, wear sunscreen and a hat, and remember to drink water. Heatwaves can also affect air quality, particularly for people with heart or lung conditions, so keep an eye on local forecasts and follow medical advice if needed.

Across West Berkshire there are cool spaces which are free, welcoming indoor places to take a break from the heat, sit down, shelter from the sun, and, where available, access drinking water while resting during periods of hot weather. Find out more about these here.

Residents are reminded to be cautious around open water. Even in hot weather, water temperatures can remain dangerously cold and lead to cold water shock. Never swim alone, be careful of wildlife, avoid alcohol near water and keep a close eye on children. If someone gets into difficulty, call 999, encourage them to float on their back and throw them something that floats. Never enter the water to help.

For a safer way to cool off, why not take a dip at Northcroft Lido and enjoy the sunshine responsibly? Book your swim via the Northcroft Leisure Centre website, the Everyone Active app, by calling 01635 31199 or by visiting the leisure centre reception.

Heatwave and Bin Collections

During high temperatures, collection crews will start earlier than usual to avoid the worst of the heat. Please put bins/containers out the night before collection day as collection may take place earlier than usual.

Help keep everyone safe during the hot weather. If WBC experience any issues to collections they will update the website.

Heatwave and Highways

With temperatures exceeding 30°C, the impact that sustained heat can have on our road network includes some surfaces may become soft or appear to be 'melting'.

While this may seem unusual, it's a natural response to extreme conditions. This happens because dark road surfaces absorb heat, meaning temperatures on the road can reach around 50°C. In extreme heat, the bitumen, which is the binding glue in asphalt for road construction, can soften, making roads feel sticky and more vulnerable to damage from traffic, particularly heavier vehicles.

WBC highways teams are working with contractor Volker Highways to monitor the network closely and will respond where needed to keep roads safe and minimise disruption. In some locations, this may include 'gritting' the roads which involves spreading sand or dust over the road surface. Think of it as a form of 'sunscreen' for the road – it absorbs the softened bitumen and helps prevent it from sticking to vehicle tyres. Most affected areas return to normal once temperatures begin to cool.

Hardworking operatives are carrying out repairs and inspections in very challenging conditions. Working outdoors in high temperatures while wearing full PPE is no easy task, so please give them plenty of space, patience, and a cold drink if safe to do so - a bit of kindness never goes amiss.

If travelling during the hot weather:

- Slow down on affected roads
- Avoid harsh braking and sharp steering
- Leave extra space between vehicles

Unusual road conditions should report via the WBC website.

Keeping Dogs Safe

As temperatures rise, it's essential to protect dogs from heat-related harm. Dogs should not be walked during the hottest parts of the day. Pavements can burn paws, and even short walks can quickly lead to heatstroke. Instead, walk early in the morning or later in the evening when it's cooler.

Never leave a dog in a parked car, even for a few minutes. Temperatures inside vehicles can rise dangerously fast, putting their life at risk.

At home, ensure dogs have constant access to fresh drinking water, shade, and a cool resting area. Help them stay comfortable by using damp towels, cooling mats, or allowing access to a paddling pool. Always cool dogs down gradually with cool (not cold) water, particularly on their body, paws, and neck.



Watch for signs of heatstroke, such as excessive panting, drooling, or lethargy, and seek veterinary advice immediately if concerned.

Environment

The West Berkshire Conservative Group has called on the Liberal Democrat administration to provide greater transparency about whether the Council remains on track to meet its net zero by 2030 target, and the affordability of proposals linked to the flagship Grazeley solar farm.

Residents deserve clarity about whether the Council is genuinely on track to meet its 2030 net zero ambitions and what the true implications of projects such as the Grazeley solar farm could be for taxpayers.

The previous Conservative administration was prepared to be transparent about the scale, complexity and potential costs associated with major infrastructure proposals. What we are seeing now is far more political presentation and far less clarity.

If the Grazeley solar farm is no longer realistically going ahead, and the Portfolio Holder all but acknowledged at yesterday's Executive meeting that this is a major risk, then the administration needs to explain what the alternative plan is for achieving net zero by 2030. Residents deserve transparency about whether the strategy remains achievable and affordable under current assumptions.

The Conservatives are calling on the administration to clearly explain what contingency plans exist if assumptions underpinning the Environment Strategy and the Grazeley solar farm proposals fail to materialise, and whether the Council's climate targets are now at risk.

Switch Together registration launched on 1 June

There's still time to sign up to Switch Together, a trusted scheme helping explore greener home upgrades while keeping energy costs down.

Building on the success of Solar Together, it now offers a wider range of options, including solar panels, battery storage, heat pumps, EV chargers and smarter tariffs, so you can find what suits homes and budgets.

Residents can register to receive a personalised recommendation and support from sign-up to installation. Group buying secures competitive prices, with vetted suppliers for added confidence.

It's free to join, with no obligation. Registration closes on 24 July 2026.

Free recycling workshops for schools and clubs



Fun and interactive Reduce, Reuse, Recycle sessions are still available for primary schools, clubs, and guiding groups across West Berkshire, and they're completely free!

Led by WBCs Waste Minimisation Officer, each session lasts around one hour and includes at least two breakout activities. There will be educational books and activity sheets to spark curiosity and inspire action.

Want to book or learn more? Email: recycle@westberks.gov.uk

Flooding



The Great Shefford groundwater alert was the last flood alert in West Berkshire to be removed this month after a long-wet winter.

Over the winter, the Environment Agency issued the below flood alerts in our district:

- four flood warnings (risk to properties flooding)

- 15+ flood alerts (flooding is possible)
- three groundwater alerts

The main impact period was at the end of January and the start of February when all the rivers were either on flood alert or flood warnings and the groundwater alerts were in place.

Now is the time to do checks and take action to protect property at risk of flooding. It is too late when flood water is approaching a house. More information about being prepared can be found on our website along with information about flood risk management, who is responsible for what and who to report issues to.

Discover the Ridgeway National Trail

A new interpretation board has been unveiled at Streatley Warren as part of the Historic Ridgeway Project. We are partners with the project, which is connecting local communities, landowners, visitors and volunteers to this historic routeway and the ancient landscapes that it passes through in West Berkshire and Oxfordshire.



The first board, funded by Mend the Gap, highlights human activity from over two thousand years ago. Streatley Warren was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its rare chalk grassland habitat, and the lack of modern ploughing has also preserved the earthworks of Iron Age and Roman fields, which show up well in low light in the open landscape. The ancient field systems would have been widely distributed across the Berkshire Downs, and their range is mapped on the board.

Archaeological information from the West Berkshire Historic Environment Record was provided for the board, in collaboration with Historic England, the Friends of the Ridgeway and others. Further boards funded through the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and Farming in Protected Landscapes will be installed in the coming weeks. A QR code on the panels allows visitors to access all of the project's sites on an interactive map.

Improving the Kennet and Avon Waterside

WBC are working with Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, the Canal and River Trust and Greenham Trust to improve access along the Kennet and Avon Waterside, helping everyone to enjoy the route safely and comfortably.



The long-term programme, called Reimagining the Kennet and Avon Waterside, aims to make the route more accessible in stages, so you can enjoy walking, wheeling, cycling or spending time by the water.
The first phase focuses on the 'Heart of Newbury', between Faraday Road Football Ground and Goldwell Park.

Planned improvements include path upgrades near Faraday Road Football Ground, towpath and canal bank repairs between Town Bridge and Victoria Park, and new signage and lining on Northcroft Lane linking the town centre with Goldwell Park.

These works build on recent improvements elsewhere, including upgraded sections near Aldermaston, Ufton Lane, Burghfield and Calcot.

The partnership is developing plans for future improvements in Newbury, Thatcham and Calcot, taking account of the natural environment, heritage, flood risk, accessibility and wayfinding.

Economy

New Magazine



This edition of the Your West Berkshire Magazine is packed with stories that celebrate the people, places and projects that care for our environment. From hedgehog heroes in Curridge, the River Lambourn climate mitigation initiative in Shaw, winning the prestigious green flags for our parks and open spaces (for the 17th year!), stories of the mighty band of volunteers and residents who give their time, energy and enthusiasm to strengthen our communities, plus the new visitor experience at Shaw House - and much more!

Printed copies are available to pick up at locations around the district, including leisure centres, libraries, family hubs, The Nature Discovery Centre and Greenham Control Tower cafe.

Health and Wellbeing

Wellbeing Support

Parents, carers and those who work with families in West Berkshire can now access free online emotional wellbeing support through a new NHS platform called Togetherness.

Togetherness offers short, self-guided learning residents can complete at their own pace. It covers topics such as pregnancy and early bonding, children's feelings and brain development, family relationships, and the changes children and young people experience as they grow. There are also dedicated pathways for teenagers and resources to help professionals support emotional wellbeing in their work.

Developed by NHS experts and backed by psychological research, Togetherness is designed to help better understand emotions, behaviour and relationships, and build confidence, resilience and stronger family connections.

Access here using the code **BWFAMILIES**.

Togetherness

Looking after emotional health matters at every stage of life. Residents expecting a baby, raising children, or supporting a young person, can get help strong relationships and understanding emotions to make a real difference to wellbeing.



Togetherness offers free, NHS backed online learning to support families. Short, flexible sessions provide practical ideas and expert insight to help understand feelings, behaviour and development, and build confidence in everyday life.

Topics include children's emotions and brain development, managing behaviour, sleep and routines, building positive relationships, and supporting children through change. The approach is reassuring and non-judgemental, offering guidance rather than telling families what to do.

Togetherness is for:

- parents and carers
- expectant parents

- families looking for accessible, trusted support
- professionals working with children, young people and families

Culture

Leisure Centres

Leisure centres are seeing more people through their doors following multi-million-pound Council investment to upgrade facilities across the district.



At Cotswold Sports Centre in Tilehurst, the new 3G pitch has proved particularly popular, recording almost 3,000 bookings in its first six months and significantly boosting overall attendance. Hungerford Leisure Centre has also seen encouraging growth, with more people using the gym and taking part in fitness classes since the addition of a new fitness studio.

Kennet Leisure Centre has reported a marked rise in visitors following improvements to the gym and squash courts. Squash in particular has seen a resurgence with participation up 86%, alongside gym visits more than tripling and increased attendance at fitness classes.

Northcroft Leisure Centre has also experienced one of the biggest upturns in activity, with far more people using the gym (up 973%), soft play sessions (up 494%) and children's parties (up 103%) since the facility upgrades. These positive trends extend to Northcroft Lido, where last season's attendance increased by 37%, including significant rises in family swims, lane swimming and SEN sessions.

The refurbished Northcroft café has been warmly received too, drawing in both centre users and visitors from the wider community, as visitors don't need to be leisure centre users to enjoy a great cup of coffee in this lovely space.

Playing Pitch Strategy

The West Berkshire Conservative Group has criticised the Liberal Democrat administration's Playing Pitch Strategy, warning that the document is "not worth the paper it is written on" because it contains no credible funding plan and relies heavily on third parties to deliver its promises.

While the strategy identifies significant shortages in football provision, overused pitches and growing demand for all-weather facilities, Conservatives say the document amounts to little more than an aspirational wish list with no realistic route to delivery.

Everyone supports improving sports provision and investing in grassroots facilities. The problem is that this strategy is long on ambition and desperately short on reality.

"When you actually read the detail, much of this plan depends on external funding, voluntary cooperation from schools and clubs, or third parties delivering projects the Council neither controls nor appears capable of funding itself."

The strategy raises major unanswered questions about affordability, long-term maintenance liabilities and future taxpayer exposure at a time when council finances remain under severe pressure.

This administration has produced another glossy document full of aspirations and headlines, but without the funding, certainty or delivery mechanisms required to make it happen.

Residents are entitled to ask which parts of this strategy are actually funded, which are realistic, and which are simply being included to create the impression that the administration has a plan.

The group also warned that the strategy risks creating unrealistic expectations among sports clubs and local communities without any guarantee that projects will ever materialise.

There is a real danger here that clubs and young people are being sold false hope. Producing a long list of ambitions is easy. Delivering them, particularly in the current financial climate, is something very different.

Conservatives have also questioned whether the council has fully assessed the long-term revenue implications associated with maintaining new facilities, including artificial pitches and associated sinking fund commitments.

The Liberal Democrats increasingly govern through press releases, masterplans and strategies rather than funded, deliverable policies.

West Berkshire needs serious financial discipline and credible delivery plans, not another unfunded wish list designed to generate positive headlines.

Newbury Library - a place of welcome and support

Newbury Library has once again been recognised as a Library of Sanctuary – celebrating its ongoing commitment to welcoming and supporting refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

This re-accreditation recognises the library's sustained work to promote compassion, inclusion and wellbeing, and its role as a trusted, free and accessible space for the whole community. Working closely with council teams and partners such as EduCafe and the Community Engagement Team, the library helps people access vital support, from digital inclusion and language learning to wellbeing services and opportunities to connect.

From free Wi-Fi, IT support and multilingual resources to events that celebrate culture and shared experiences, Newbury Library continues to go above and beyond to ensure everyone feels safe, supported and part of the community.

Pianos for use



Pianos are available to use in Newbury, Theale and Hungerford libraries, provided by Berkshire Music Trust as part of their Musical Communities programme, giving individuals the opportunity to practise and explore music, particularly those who may not have access to a piano of their own. The Trust has also supplied a selection of sheet music for visitors to use.

Everyone is welcome to play on a first-come, first-served basis. The digital pianos must be used with headphones to ensure other library users are not disturbed

Archaeology and Nature Conservation in the Kennet Valley 11,000 years ago!

Archaeology and Nature is the theme for this year's Council for British Archaeology's Festival of Archaeology. On Thursday 23 July at 7pm WBC will be hosting a talk at Shaw House by Martin Bell (Emeritus Professor of Archaeology at the University of Reading).

The one hour talk on the environmental and landscape history of the Kennet Valley will consider the setting it provided for Mesolithic hunter-gather-fisher communities between about 11,000 and 6,000 years ago when the middle Kennet had one of the most significant concentrations of human activity in Britain. Discover how the activities of animals, especially deer and beavers, shaped the landscape and how human communities, even at this early date, transformed aspects of the landscape by the use of fire.



The talk will be from **7pm to 8pm at Shaw House on Thursday 23 July,** doors open at 6pm for refreshments in the café. Tickets are £5 per person.

Shaw House

As part of the ongoing project to bring Shaw House's history to life, WBC are working to reinstate the Edwardian Rose Garden. Complementing the Tudor Garden, which opened at the front of the house in March 2025, the tree work to the rear is helping to recreate the gardens as they appeared in 1910, as originally featured in Country Life magazine.

Over the past few weeks, the historic yew trees have been carefully tamed using wire to restore their elegant, manicured shapes. These are the very same trees that stood here in 1910, and they are now ready to be showcased just as visitors would have seen them over a century ago.

The garden works form just one part of a wider programme of improvements. Inside the house, four rooms have also been dressed to reflect different periods of Shaw House's long history. These house and garden enhancements have been made possible thanks to funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Looking ahead, a brand-new accessible playground, funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), is planned to open by summer 2026.

Summer Fair at Shaw House

Browse over 60 local stalls located on the Great Lawn and enjoy refreshments from our café, bar and caterers. For our younger visitors there will be creative crafts, face painting, a magic show from Mr Muddle and a bouncy castle - all taking place outside in the grounds.

Dogs on leads are welcome outside.

Shaw House | Sunday 19 July | 11am – 4pm | Entry to the grounds: Adults £2, Children £1 (Free for children aged 3 years and under)



Education

Progress at Falkland Primary School



Construction of Falkland Primary School's new building is progressing well. The blockwork is looking great and it's fantastic to see classrooms and learning spaces really starting to take shape.

As the project progresses, additional time is being allocated for completion, testing, commissioning and safety checks to ensure the new building is delivered to the highest possible standards. Pupils will remain in their current accommodation at the start of the autumn term, with a phased move into the new building planned around October half term.

World Cup

Domestic Abuse

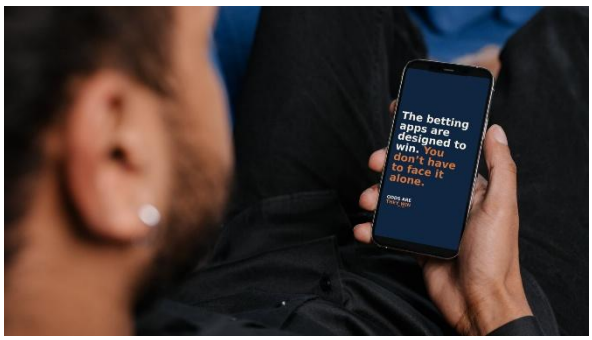
Research shows that domestic abuse incidents increase significantly during the World Cup. Whilst football does not cause abuse, the tournament can exacerbate existing abuse through increased alcohol consumption, emotional stress and 'high stakes' watching behaviour.

If you, a friend or relative are being affected by domestic abuse, please get in touch with Berkshire Women's Aid, our commissioned domestic abuse support service, who help support all genders.

To contact their free, confidential helpline, call 0808 801 0882 or email helpdesk@bwaid.org.uk

Gambling

With the World Cup bringing a surge in gambling advertising this summer, WBC are supporting 'Odds Are: They Win' - a public health campaign highlighting how gambling can affect anyone, at any time, and encouraging people to seek support.During major sporting events, more than half of televised gambling adverts promote free bets or incentives, and six in ten people in the UK see gambling ads at least once a week. The campaign aims to reduce stigma with a simple message - it is not your fault, you are not alone, and help is available.



In West Berkshire, support is available through GamCare, debt and budgeting advice, mental health services and Citizens Advice. Residents can also access free and confidential support 24 hours a day through the National Gambling Helpline on 0808 8020 133, with live chat and WhatsApp also available. The NHS National Centre for Behavioural Addictions takes self-referrals. If someone is in immediate distress, support is available at any time via NHS 111 (option 2) or 999.

Transport

Pedestrianising Newbury

The West Berkshire Conservative Group has condemned the Liberal Democrat administration's handling of the Newbury pedestrianisation experiment following the Executive's decision to abandon the scheme after months of defending it publicly.

The Conservatives say the decision represents a humiliating political U-turn which the administration is now attempting to dress up through "hopeless spin" and carefully managed communications.

Despite more than 3,100 consultation responses being submitted, with approximately 77% objecting to the scheme, Liberal Democrat councillors repeatedly claimed the trial was proving successful and sought to present the exercise in a positive light.

Internal analysis later acknowledged there was "no clear retail uplift", with spending reportedly below expected levels and no measurable increase in town centre footfall.

This entire episode has exposed a Liberal Democrat administration that simply cannot run the council competently. Residents and businesses were ignored for months while councillors pushed an ideological scheme which never had convincing evidence behind it in the first place.

What we are now witnessing is a desperate attempt by the Liberal Democrats to dress up a complete U-turn as though it were some kind of success story. The public can see straight through it.

The administration spent months insisting the trial was working, talking up supposed economic benefits and trying to dismiss legitimate concerns from residents, businesses, disabled groups and town centre users. Now, after overwhelming public opposition and mounting evidence of failure, they are quietly retreating while pretending this was always the plan.

The Conservatives say serious questions remain unanswered about:

- the total taxpayer cost of the experiment,
- consultancy and officer spending,
- legal and enforcement costs,
- the impact on congestion elsewhere in Newbury,
- what further financial exposure may now arise through continuing "master planning" proposals.

This has been chaos from start to finish, poor decision-making, contradictory messaging, weak evidence and endless political spin.

At a time when residents expect the council to focus on core services and sound financial management, the Liberal Democrats instead pursued an expensive and divisive vanity project which they are now trying to quietly back away from.

The most damaging part of this entire process is the growing sense that this administration starts with a political objective and then works backwards to justify it, regardless of the evidence or the views of residents.

The Conservative Group says the handling of the scheme has significantly damaged public confidence in the administration's judgement, transparency and ability to manage major projects effectively.

Active Travel ambitions showcased to national partner

WBC were delighted to welcome Max Longley, Regional Manager at Active Travel England, to West Berkshire to share ambitious plans for walking, cycling and active travel improvements across the district.

Max met with the team to hear about West Berkshire's priorities and see first-hand a range of recent, planned and proposed schemes in Newbury, Hermitage, Thatcham and Theale.

WBC value the strong partnership we have with Active Travel England and their support in developing and delivering these schemes, and we look forward to continuing to work together to create safer, more accessible routes for our communities.

Robin Hood Roundabout



Work to improve Robin Hood roundabout will begin on Monday 27 July, with a lane closure in place for around three weeks.

The scheme, delivered by Volker Highways during the school summer holidays to help reduce disruption, will widen the north-west corner of the roundabout. This will create two lanes for traffic towards Shaw and the A4 Thatcham, improving capacity and traffic flow.

They'll also be upgrading traffic signals, refresh road markings, clear vegetation to improve visibility, and resurface the carriageway.

Resurfacing is scheduled overnight from Monday 17 August to Friday 28 August. Some delays are expected, so please plan ahead and allow extra time for journeys.

Current Consultations

- Reinstatement of pedestrianisation hours for Newbury Town Centre from 10am-11pm to 10am-5pm– closes 3 July

Parish Matters

Road Closures

When West Berkshire Council plan a road closure, they inform affected parish councils and ward members by issuing and email notification, which I then post on my Facebook page, Cllr. Dominic Boeck. Recently in Aldermaston Ward, there have ben a number of instances where the contractor performing the work has given WBC very short notice, causing severe disruption for residents.

I have already taken this up with Highways and if anyone has been so inconvenienced, please let me know at dominic.boeck@westberks.gov.uk or you can visit my Facebook page here Cllr. Dominic Boeck

Members Bids

I am pleased to report that the bid I submitted on behalf of St Peter's Church in Brimpton was successful. Given the scale of the renovation works being planned on the church and spire, the £2,004 I secured is modest but I hope it will help in replacing missing flints. Every little helps!

CYP Scrutiny

Since my last report I have chaired two meetings of WBC's Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. An important policy statement has been developed by council to set out how they will support for students who cannot attend mainstream schools.

This statement, called for short the Section 19 Education Duty, was expected to come to the Committee for scrutiny before being approved. However, the statement was approved by the Portfolio Holder for Children independently of the Scrutiny or Executive Committees.

Such a weighty decision that will affect parents, carers and families of some of our children who have special needs, should be supported and challenged by elected members. Consequently, I arranged cross-party support to call in this policy for scrutiny in a future meeting of the Committee, probably in October.