

24<sup>th</sup> September, 2021



**Chief Executive**

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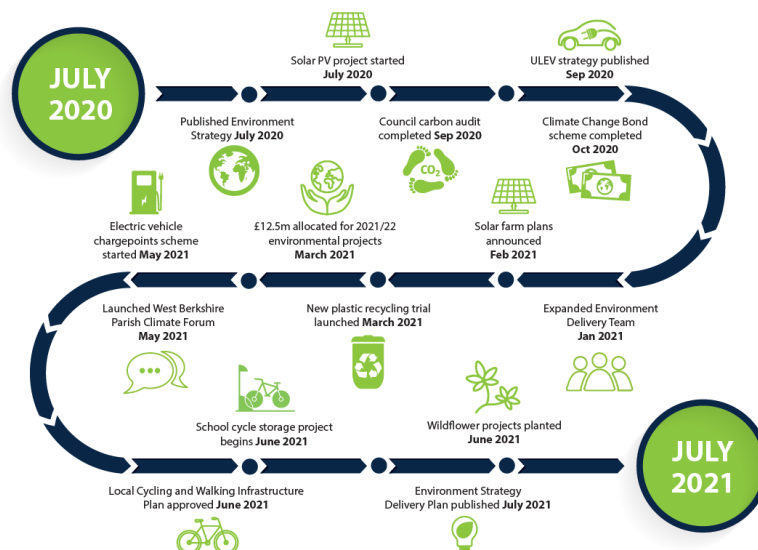
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Good morning,

We write to you after another busy fortnight in West Berkshire which is perhaps reflected in the diverse range of topics we will cover in this weeknote.

As many of you will know, West Berkshire Council declared a Climate Emergency back in 2019 and following a series of engagement exercises and our first ever Climate Conference, we published our Environment Strategy in July last year. Our ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 is clear and we are proud to have made significant progress. The infographic below gives details of some of the projects we have launched and investment we have made to help make this ambition a reality, including our award winning Climate Bond, which was the first of its kind in the UK, and our electric vehicle charging point scheme. We will be focussing on this across our communications channels in the run up to COP26 in November but in the meantime you can read more about what we are doing here:

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/environment>



Those of you who follow our social media channels may also have noticed that we have been marking Great Big Green Week, a nationwide celebration of action on climate change. All week a number of events run by local green groups, as well as parish and town councils, have been taking place and will continue until Sunday (26th September). You can find out about local events here: <https://greatbiggreenweek.com/>

For our part, this week has seen the launch of the Eco Schools programme in the district and we have been encouraging local schools to sign up. Once they have done so, they can work towards earning the Green Flag accreditation. Instilling environmental stewardship in young people is vital if we are to address the Climate Emergency and this scheme will help to do so through the teaching of topics such as biodiversity, energy, healthy living, and recycling. If your school is interested in signing up, please go to: <https://www.eco-schools.org.uk/>

In a similar vein, we have been working alongside Greenham Trust to help offer local schools, councils and community groups the opportunity to plant one or more trees to enhance the local environment for years to come. To celebrate 25 years of the Trust, and in support of the Queen's Green Canopy, which will mark the Platinum Jubilee next year, the Trust plans to provide up to 25,000 trees to be planted throughout the region over the next planting seasons. If you or your group are interested, you can apply for a tree here: <https://greenhamtrust.com/trees/>

We have also been persuading residents of all ages to use alternatives to the car, firstly by supporting World Car Free Day on Wednesday this week and then by marking Bike to School Week from next Monday. Over the last year, we have worked hard to improve our cycling and walking infrastructure in the district so next week will be a great opportunity for young people to try it out for themselves. Alongside this, we want to make travelling to school safer for children, which is why we are piloting School Streets in Calcot. You can learn more about School Streets and give your feedback on the Calcot scheme (survey open until 30 September) at our website:

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/schoostreetscalcot>

You may have seen reference to a so-called 'County Deal' for Berkshire in the local media. At this stage, Lynne and the Leaders of the other five Berkshire local authorities have agreed to speak to Government ministers about how to best support economic and infrastructure investment across the county. The need for this discussion follows a recent Government announcement about the future of Local Enterprise Partnerships, which currently oversee such investment, and draft plans to channel this funding through local authorities instead. The aim of the discussion would not be to create a combined authority or directly elected Mayor, which would simply bring an additional level of administration and cost, but to consider how the six Berkshire councils can work together to support strategic investment across the whole of the county to benefit all council areas, residents and businesses. There is nothing further to report at present but we will continue to engage

with our residents as discussions progress and will ensure that regardless of the eventual direction of travel, the best interests of West Berkshire will be the driver for it.

In other news, Lynne and Councillor Jo Stewart, our Adult Social Care Portfolio Holder, visited the Virtual Dementia Tour Bus. The bus was stationed at Shaw House for World Alzheimer's Day and while there they learned about and experienced some of the effects of dementia on people's day to day lives. More than half of us know someone who has been diagnosed with Dementia and the number of people with the disease worldwide is forecast to triple by 2050, according to Alzheimer's Research UK. For this reason it is important to raise awareness of the experiences of those with Dementia and also, as we mentioned in our last weeknote, to ensure that the issue of adult social care funding is addressed at national level.

We have also had reason to celebrate this week, with West Berkshire Council and its partners picking up a national award for Digital Transformation. The award was presented by the Municipal Journal (The MJ), the UK's leading local government publication, and recognised the work done to improve services as a result of our Smart Cities Cluster project. Through the project we and our fellow Berkshire local authorities worked with local start-ups and SMEs to improve services to residents using new technology. In West Berkshire, this included employing sensors in supported accommodation to help prevent falls in elderly people and the rollout of a chatbot on the Council's website to answer common resident queries during the Covid-19 pandemic. We were very proud to have picked up the award in a very competitive field and look forward to using what we have learned to deliver even better services for residents.

Finally, in our last note we mentioned that we were working with the Home Office and other Government agencies to temporarily host Afghan families in local hotels and we called for donations to be made to help them to settle in. We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of local people and no longer require goods donations, however those who still want to help can donate financially through the Good Exchange here: <https://bit.ly/3nUqGVz>. Thank you to those who have offered their support, which shows once again what a special community we have here in West Berkshire.

Yours sincerely,



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