

A vaccination update from West Berkshire

The vaccination programme is being delivered by the NHS but we retain a keen interest in how the roll out is progressing locally. We were pleased to be joined at Monday's Local Outbreak Engagement Board Dr Abid Irfan from the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group and to hear his update on the progress made so far.

We know what residents are most interested in is what is happening in their community – and when they and those they care about will get their doses.

Whilst there is monumental effort by the NHS nationally to distribute the vaccine, much of the hard work to get doses to residents is being done by local GP surgeries. They have been working collaboratively to set up local vaccination centres which they are running together, and with the support of our local Clinical Commissioning Group.

There are two local vaccination centres; one in Pangbourne, involving three GP local surgeries, and one in Newbury which is a larger site covering nine individual GPs surgeries. Until the end of January they will be vaccinating anyone over 80 as well as frontline health workers and social care workers. From there they will move on to the over-75s, and then the over 70s and those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

GP surgeries have worked really hard to get these vaccination centres up and running as quickly as possible. It has been great to read the praise for the centre staff from patients grateful to have received their vaccine. Although vaccinations are being delivered as quickly as possible it will take time to get to everyone – please be patient and wait for your GP to contact you about making an appointment.

The speed at which our NHS partners are working and the complexity in arranging a national vaccination programme means that along the way they will experience some logistical difficulties. This week Newbury Racecourse has come in for a little criticism for not allowing vaccinations to continue at their site on race days. The reality is that it would be challenging for the site to operate seven day a week due to the vaccine distribution process. GPs were aware of these operational issues before setting up the centre and they did so confident that they would still be able to reach their targets within timelines – even without doing on the odd few days.

Speaking of the vaccination centre, we have received several enquiries asking whether more trains can stop at the Newbury Racecourse station. We've asked the question of GWR, and are pleased to say that they have agreed to put on more trains. It will take a couple of weeks to implement, but we're grateful to them for their flexibility and delighted that local residents will have more sustainable travel options when journeying to get their vaccination.

Elsewhere we are ploughing on with our plans for new community testing facilities in the district. We are close to agreeing our first testing site for Newbury which should open next month and will allow testing for critical and key workers, as well as people involved in the management of local outbreaks. There will be a phased approach to those identified for testing and the relevant cohorts will be invited to join the testing programme over a series of weeks. Once that is up and running we will then be looking at additional sites in the east and west of the district, and potentially a mobile unit too. Testing to identify asymptomatic Covid carriers is important in managing the outbreak, and a potential release of the restrictions so we are working to get these open as quickly as we can. We'll keep you updated on this as our plans progress.

Away from the pandemic response, business as usual continues and this week we were thrilled to announce this year's Community Champion Awards. We haven't been able to do an awards ceremony this year but it shouldn't take anything away from this year's winners with the standard as high as ever. This year we introduced special categories in relation to coronavirus, in addition to our usual categories and it allowed us to recognise a broad spectrum of community-minded activities this year. There are far too many to mention here but do please take a look at the website and read about the incredible winners we've had this year.

We're continuing to look beyond the immediate demands of the pandemic to plan for the future and we have a number of important consultations closing in the next few weeks. These include the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan Study (which closes on 31 January), Local Plan Review 2037 (closes on 5 February) and the Minerals and Waste Plan (closes on 15 February). We have also started a consultation this week on our proposal for a new sports ground at Newbury Rugby Club. Each one is really important in helping us take into account local views as we look at how the district develops in the coming years. Whilst we all find ourselves confined to our homes please take a time to look at these documents and tell us what you think.

- For more information about vaccinations, including the number of people vaccinated as we receive the data, visit:

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/covid-vaccination>

- To find out more about the Community Champion Awards visit

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

Yours sincerely,
Lynne Doherty
Leader of the Council

Nick Carter
Chief Executive