

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

Uniting the USA? Strong democracy needs good opposition and belief in the system

The President has boldly set as his main aim uniting a fractured and divided USA. He wisely accepts this will not be easy. Too many of his followers seem to think if they just insist more strongly on their views of the world and claim the electoral right to enforce them the country will come together behind a new left wing Democrat settlement. If they reinforce this with tough action against any who disagree, through court cases against certain types of speech and protests, and censorship on media and social media, they will impose a more disciplined conformity on an unruly country.

They need to understand some things about how normally healthy democracies like the USA work. They provide in the constitution for strong opposition to government or Presidential plans. There should always be a good democratic alternative government on offer, that has an alternative view of the more contentious or questionable policies pursued by the incumbents. A great democracy does not have 95% support for what the majority government does. It debates choices and options and exposes the chosen course of government to criticisms. Exercising majority governing power is a constant exercise in persuasion, listening, seeking improvement, compromising with the Opposition when they have a good point. A good Opposition know when to disagree and when to campaign hard against a policy or law. A good government gives ground when it is wrong but does not compromise its main aims, pledges and beliefs.

A successful democracy as the USA usually is has top level agreement between all the democratic parties over two crucial things – the system by which governments make and sell their decisions to elected bodies and the wider public, and the results of free and fair elections. There has to be a belief by the main elected officials that an election produced a fair and accurate result. In opposition parties need to believe they have sensible opportunity to make their case and to seek change peacefully. When the Commons has a government with a decent majority the Opposition accepts that government has a mandate to get through the main business from its Manifesto and from its statements of aim and principle. A good Opposition also makes it difficult every time government stumbles, wanders too far from its promises or principles, or offers incompetence instead of good administration. In the Commons an Opposition can only win a vote by working with governing party MPs who also think on that occasion the government is wrong, which can happen quite often. Opposition is there to question, to ask for second thoughts, to offer alternatives but not to stop government governing. Only the electorate can do that when they come in an election to judge the result, short of a major governing party split and collapse.

The tragedy of the USA in the last few weeks is the breakdown in trust or belief in the system by the main Opposition party. A large number of Trump voters think the results in a handful of key swing states were fiddled, but

their side has been unable to persuade the courts or the Senate of that allegation. As those institutions hold the reserve powers to order a re run or insist on a different electoral College result President Biden can fairly claim he won and passed all the checks and balances in the system. It leaves Trump voters arguing that the whole system is corrupt and out to get their man. This impression is not going to be stilled or calmed by the Democrat decision to impeach President Trump after he has left office. It will build the sense of grievance amongst many Trump supporters. If President Biden is to heal his country he cannot avoid tackling and talking about the issues around voting systems that perturb Trump supporters.

The Republican leaders have an important role to play. They need to show that they can now offer strong but sensible opposition to this new President. Going through his back history to try and find a way to impeach him as has become all too common in US politics would not be helpful. Setting out a positive alternative vision to the left's, and making it difficult in a 50/50 Senate to get through anything the Conservative half of the country disagrees with makes perfect sense. The Senate and House elections produced no landslide or big majority for a Democrat solution to US problems. Republican legislators need to show Trump voters they can use the power of opposition afforded to them to resist hated Democrat policies for their followers. For his part the President needs to show which parts of the Republican offer he thinks has some merit if he wants to build bridges. He needs to see just how divisive to Trump followers the Democrat position is on gun control, relaxation of abortion, bans on carbon fuels and completely open borders to name but four highly charged US issues .

[My Question to the Leader of the House](#)

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): People voted to take back control so that the Government would use the new powers to make their lives better, so will the Government urgently make time available for the VAT cuts, the new enterprise zones, the freeports, the policies to increase our fishing fleet, the policies to boost our domestic food production and the so many other good ideas that Ministers should be queuing up to put through our House now we are an independent country?

The Leader of the House (Mr Jacob Rees Mogg): My right hon. Friend is not only right but he reads my mind.

There are great opportunities: the new financial services regulation, which will encourage innovation and competition; the faster and more agile clinical and regulatory regime that is going through with the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill; a revolutionary approach to gene editing, on which the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is consulting; freeports, on which the Treasury is consulting; and looking at public procurement

differently.

We are really taking back control and seeking the advantages, but I hope that my right hon. Friend will join in this enterprise and send a list of all his good ideas to every Minister so that we know there are more ideas bubbling away.

[Berkshire West CCG Covid Vaccination Update](#)

Twelve Covid vaccination sites covering the whole of Berkshire West are now up and running. There is a phased approach from 21 December.

Please do not call the GPs surgeries or hospitals directly, you will receive notification from the NHS when it is your turn to come for an appointment.

Name of PCN	Name of site	Site address	Practices participating at this site	Wave
Tilehurst PCN	Tilehurst Village Surgery	Tilehurst Village Surgery, 92 Westwood Road, Reading, RG31 5PP	Westwood Road Surgery, Tilehurst Village Surgery, Grovelands Medical Centre	WAVE 1
Wokingham North PCN (2)	Wargrave Surgery	Wargrave Surgery Victoria Road, RG10 8BP	Wargrave Practice, Woodley Centre Surgery, Parkside Family Practice, Loddon Vale Practice & Twyford	WAVE 1
Wokingham South PCN	Swallowfield Surgery / Swallowfield Village Hall	Swallowfield Medical Practice, The Street, Swallowfield, RG7 1QY	Swallowfield Medical Practice & Finchampstead	WAVE 2
Wokingham North PCN (1)	Woodley Centre Surgery	Woodley Centre Surgery, 1st Floor, 6 Headley Road, Woodley, Reading, Berkshire, RG5 4JA	Wargrave Practice, Woodley Centre Surgery, Parkside Family Practice, Loddon Vale Practice & Twyford	WAVE 2
Reading West PCN	Circuit Lane Surgery	53 Circuit Lane, Reading RG30 3AN	Western Elms & Circuit Lane Surgeries, Tilehurst Surgery Partnership	WAVE 3

Name of PCN	Name of site	Site address	Practices participating at this site	Wave
University PCN	University Medical Centre	9 Northcourt Avenue , Reading , RG2 7HE	University Medical Group	WAVE 3
West Reading Villages	Boathouse Surgery / Rosewood Hall	The Boathouse Surgery, Whitchurch Road, Pangbourne, Reading, RG8 7DP	Pangbourne, Chapel Row , Mortimer & Theale	WAVE 3
Earley Plus PCN	Chalfont Surgery / Salvation Army Hall	Chalfont Surgery, Chalfont Close, Lower Earley, Reading, RG6 5HZ	Brookside Group Practice & Wilderness Road Surgery	WAVE 5
Wokingham East PCN	Wokingham Medical Centre	23 Rose Street, Wokingham, RG40 1XS	Wokingham Medical Centre, Woosehill Medical Centre, Burma Hills, New Wokingham Rd Surgery	WAVE 5
Reading Central PCN & Whitley PCN	Eldon Square Surgery / Garden Hall	9, Eldon Square, Reading, RG1 4DT	Abbey Medical Centre, Chatham Street surgery, Eldon Road Surgery, Pembroke Surgery, Russell Street Surgery, Reading Walk-In-Centre, Longbarn Lane, South Rdg & Shinfield Medical Practice, Milman & Kennet Surgeries, London Street Surgery, Melrose Surgery	WAVE 5
Caversham PCN	Emmer Green Surgery	4 St Barnabas Road, Emmer Green, Reading RG4 8RA	Balmore Park & Emmer Green Surgery	WAVE 6
A34 PCN, WEST BERKSHIRE RURAL PCN & KENNET PCN	Newbury Racecourse	Racecourse Rd, Newbury RG14 7NZ	Eastfield House, Strawberry Hill MC, The Downland Practice, Burdwood Surgery, Falkland Surgery, Hungerford Surgery, Kintbury & Woolton Hill Surgery, Lambourn Surgery & Thatcham HC	WAVE 6

Hospital Hubs

Wokingham Hospital Hub – started 14.12.20

Royal Berkshire Hospital Hub – started 4.1.21

My contribution to the debate on High Speed Rail (West Midlands – Crewe) Bill

The case for HS2 before the pandemic hit was made on the basis of the need to expand capacity. I always argued that there was a quicker and cheaper solution for capacity, and that was to digitalise signalling, introduce more short sections of bypass track and improve engineering around the main stations. By those means, we could have got a 25% or so increase in capacity much more quickly at a fraction of the cost, leaving over money to improve local services and the use of the existing railway, and for other purposes.

Now that we have had the pandemic, as we move to the recovery phase, which we hope will be quite soon, we have to accept, as the right hon. Member for Warley

(John Spellar) and others have mentioned, that the nature of work and the use of the office will change. We may well find that the intense pressure during the Monday-to-Friday morning and evening peak, as a result of people tending to start work at 9 and tending to leave for home at 5 or half-past 5, will diminish. We may well find that people will want much more flexible use of their railway—that they will not travel every day, and will not necessarily be going at peak hours. One of the big problems that the railways face—capacity on journeys to main towns and cities at peak—will be changed or relieved by that.

We are due, from the Government and the industry representatives that advise them, their interim thoughts on what the shape of the railway and railway demand might look like in two or three years' time, assuming that all has gone well with vaccination, and that there is a pretty good, robust recovery. We should not assume that it will be recovery to the same work and railway travel patterns that we had before.

I hope that we will make more intelligent use of the railway for freight, because there is still plenty of scope for that if we can get better at single-wagon marshalling, and can make better use of the railway for the relatively longer distances that freight often has to travel to get from ports to all parts of the United Kingdom. That would be a possible use of the capacity that we already have. I dare say that there will also be plenty of promotional schemes for leisure and tourist travel. The fact remains, however, that the use of the railway for work will change very dramatically. I do think this whole project needs appraising in the light of that, and that we are owed a proper plan with the latest forecasts, which must be very different from the forecasts that the Government were using when they first put this proposal to the country and to the House.