

# ***Account of Purley on Thames***

## **Tales of West Berkshire**

### **2018**

R200605 22/2/19

*By Rick Jones published in Purley Parish News 2018*

### ***June 2018***

At the Council's annual meeting on 1 May, the Leader announced a 'cabinet re-shuffle' of Executive members for the coming year. My new portfolio is Corporate Services, which covers the effective internal workings of the Council, like HR and Legal, IT, Customer Services including payments and revenues, audit, etc.. Not exciting, but essential!

We have recently appointed new heads of Children and Family Services (Peter Campbell) and Public Health and Wellbeing (Matthew Pearce). Children and Family Services provide a 'corporate parent' function for around 200 looked-after children in West Berkshire, and Public Health and Wellbeing are charged, with the NHS locally, to maintain and improve our physical and mental health across the District.

Over the last year, I have tried to inform you about various Council functions how they are organised and how they work. I have concentrated thus far on those provided by the Communities Directorate as being the least well known. In the coming months I hope to continue those descriptions by looking at the other main directorate - Environment. This covers services like Highways, Planning, Housing, Countryside, Leisure, Community Partnership, Trading Standards and Environmental Health. More next month.

### ***November 2018***

The public meeting mentioned last month took place on September 20, organised by Alok Sharma MP. This was to encourage residents to talk about their public safety concerns with the Police and Council. People from Purley itself, and also from the Tilehurst part of the Ward attended a very full session. All of the concerns raised will be pursued, hopefully by joint working between community representatives and Parish Council, supported by police and Council officers.

The concerns ranged from parking and speeding issues to Council services and to drug dealing and anti-social behaviour. The drug problems, both in Purley and Tilehurst, are the most serious, and will get the most focus over the next few months. I will also be raising the parking and speeding issues with my Highways colleagues. More information will follow through Parish channels (PPN, web site and notice boards,) but also through social media from the first community group - the Purley Residents Support Committee, based in the lower village.

The Council's Countryside group, whose officer has been helping us determine whether the unofficial paths over Spring Farms lands should be adopted as rights of way, has received a letter from the Planning Inspectorate on 18 September 2018 stating that the period for exchange of documentation/evidence (i.e. between West Berkshire Council, the landowner and applicant) for the

claimed public footpath appeals on Springs Farm land has now ended. The routes in question are shown on plans that can be viewed on request from WBC or the Parish Council. The current appeals are to determine whether orders should be made and publicised for objection, rather than about whether the routes meet the legal criteria to be recorded as public footpaths right now. In other words, a Planning Inspector will now consider all of the evidence and decide the appeals. If the appeals are refused then NO order will be made to record the routes as public footpaths. If the appeals are successful then the Planning Inspectorate will direct West Berkshire Council to make and advertise orders to record the routes as public footpaths.

I have had a number of complaints recently about unexpected small roadworks with traffic lights, where nothing seems to be happening. These disrupt journeys locally. Many of these belong to the utilities, and they have to apply to the Council for permission, with a plan covering timescale and traffic control measures. I understand that the problem arises because the utilities contractors do not always stick to the plan, and although our Highways people monitor as much as they can, we cannot manage all these sites daily. Thames Water have apparently been especially problematic, and our officers are meeting with them to try and improve their performance in this regard. I am assured that we take traffic flow very seriously, and will put pressure on utilities to minimise disruption.

The Council has just published its Winter Service Plan for roads in West Berkshire. I am pleased to say that, in spite of financial pressures, the road gritting scheme will be the same as in the previous few years, and does cover very effectively the valuable routes through our Ward in Purley and Tilehurst and Sulham/Tidmarsh.

## *December 2018*

I am at this moment feeling really proud of our area and our communities, during the World War 1 Centenary celebrations. Purley Village produced a whole programme of super events, and Tilehurst's red displays were terrific, too. Enjoyable and moving presentations, culminating in services and music everywhere on Remembrance Day itself. The commitment of so many people, to make this so memorable was brilliant.

The following has been said several times, so apologies for repeating announcements by the Council, by me and by the Parish Council, but I sense that many residents still do not realise that Padworth Recycling Facility now accepts General Household Waste, as well as the previous recyclable materials. This has been the case since July, but the publicity doesn't seem to have reached everyone, and people who could be taking advantage of the new capability have not done so and are being unnecessarily inconvenienced. Although this general household waste service was requested by all the local district councillors soon after we lost access to Reading's Smallmead site, it took a long time to upgrade Padworth, not due to money or works required, but because of local resident objections, and the consequent legal process for obtaining planning permission.

I and many other people have been saddened by the sudden and tragic death of Stuart Chester. Purley Parish Councillor, Flood Warden and all-round good chap, we will miss his gentle good nature and sense of humour, a contribution to the community. We extend our good wishes and sympathy to his partner and family and wish them all well.

I will describe more of the work of the District Council in this column in the new year. For now, like you I guess, we'll be enjoying the build up to Christmas. There are plenty of local events to visit, community and church which should help to put us all in the right frame of mind for the festivities

May I wish all residents and families of Purley, Tilehurst, Sulham, Tidmarsh and Maidenhatch a wonderful Christmas and a healthy and happy New Year.