

17<sup>th</sup> July 2020



**Chief Executive**

West Berkshire Council  
Council Offices  
Market Street Newbury  
Berkshire RG14 5LD

**Our Ref:** nc/rab

**Your Ref:**

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Good afternoon,

In a week in which we've launched a new Environment Strategy, we've seen over the past few days a number of green projects come to fruition which are all helping us deliver on our priority to protect and enhance our local area.

Twelve months ago the Council declared a climate emergency and we've worked fast, and with a great deal of focus on the commitments we made. In the autumn we held a Climate Conference and welcomed 300 people to Newbury College to talk about how we could look after the wonderful district we're lucky to call home. This conference, as well as workshops, drop-in sessions and a local consultation has helped us to understand local views and priorities. These have helped shape an Environment Strategy which outlines the steps we need to take, together with our partners, to become a carbon neutral district by 2030.

It's based on five key principles; mitigation, restoration, protection, partnership and integration. In practice, it will involve improving local infrastructure, support for industry, investing in active lifestyles and working more closely with our communities. This council-community partnership is vital - we recognise that we cannot do it alone. We all have a stake in the future and we all need to play our part to tackle climate change.

The Environment Strategy, which was approved by the Executive yesterday, is an ambitious one. To give one example, we have teamed up with Abundance Investment to offer an innovative new scheme which gives residents and community groups a unique way to invest directly in a greener future for the district. Launched this week, residents will be able to invest as little as £5 in schemes which will help deliver new projects – such as solar installations – in the district. It's the first of its kind in the country and we are proud the Council is leading the way in developing such a pioneering scheme.

Abundance Investment is an ethical online crowd funding platform and fully regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. [You can find out more about the scheme here.](#)

Also this week we have started installing solar panels on the roof of our offices at Market Street in Newbury – one of several of our buildings to have solar panels added this month. It will save the Council money and, more importantly, reduce its carbon emissions. To cap off a busy and environmentally-focused week our Highways team have started work on new schemes to encourage cycling and walking. These have been funded by a £124,000 Active Travel grant from central government and are part of the response to help the country recover from Covid-19.

It's busy but we won't be resting on our laurels and we are now putting together a delivery plan to support the Environment Strategy. All this activity is being coordinated by a new Environment Delivery Team and we look forward to seeing this developing further over the coming months.

If you want to keep in touch with our progress you can [sign up to our new Environment newsletter](#) and receive updates direct to your inbox.

This new newsletter, and others we will be launching soon, is part of a concerted effort to broaden our communication and engagement with residents and businesses, and deepen the connection between the Council and our communities. We have already started to look at a new communications and engagement strategy to take this work forward – we'll tell you more about this in a future blog. Ahead of the strategy, we are already making improvements – the newsletters being one and increased use of virtual meetings being another. Earlier this week we held our first online District Parish Conference and it was fantastic to see town and parish Councillors, district Councillors and community groups come together online to talk about local plans for managing Covid outbreaks and helping the district recover. Parishes close to one another spoke about different experiences and needs arising from Covid-19 and served as a reminder that there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Recognising there is no one-size-fits-all approach, we have this week announced new funding for each of our parishes to support local projects linked to recovery from Covid-19. Each of our district Councillors can bid for up to £1,000 towards projects in their ward and based on local need. We look forward to seeing the proposals come forward and are confident the funding will make a difference for communities across the district.

Yours sincerely,



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