

Annual Report

Financial year

1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022

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LIBRARIES



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SCAN ME



Introduction

Our vision is for an inclusive, modern, sustainable and high quality public library service at the heart of every community in West Berkshire. This is our fifth annual report and it is intended to give you an idea of what libraries do, who uses them, our staff and volunteers, what the service costs, and how much town and parishes contributed in the financial year April 2021 to March 2022.

In 2021-22 we all hoped to see a return to some kind of 'normality' after the challenges and pressures that the Covid pandemic had presented. But recovery proved to take time, and, with our overriding priority of maintaining safety for visitors and staff, we could not immediately return to our normal level of service and we were not able to revisit all of our plans from the previous year. After the previous months' Order and Collect service, we were pleased that we could re-open libraries on Monday 12 April 2021 when the government announced Step 2 of the Covid Roadmap to Recovery. However, in order to meet the guidelines and to keep everyone safe, we needed to limit the number of people within each building and not all of our usual services were available, namely we restricted PC access, reduced the amount of time allowed in the library, and no seating or study areas were available. But in May, we returned to full-time opening hours, then in July access inside the Mobile library was permitted, and in the autumn some of our regular in-person activities restarted in all of our libraries. As society saw a lifting of restrictions, and a cautious return to a pre-Covid existence, so the library service gradually welcomed back visitors to our buildings.

Libraries continue to play an important role in promoting well-being and community cohesion through offering a range of cultural activities and providing many people with free access to vital online services. We strove to provide this service during and after the pandemic and we will continue to work hard to ensure that West Berkshire libraries reflect and respond to local needs, and provide a safe and trusted space for all. In addition to a wide range of fiction and non-fiction titles to read for pleasure, we also have a number of 'Reading Well' lists of books chosen and recommended by leading health professionals specifically to help adults and children to cope with anxiety, stress and difficult feelings.

As in previous reports we have included comparative data, although of course the figures for 2020-21 reflect the unusual situation resulting from Covid, but this is always a useful way to identify the main trends in library usage so that we can tailor our service accordingly. We are always happy to respond to requests for sharing general data about library usage – we do not share any customer, staff or volunteer details – but please be mindful that requests take up staff time and their priority is to help customers use our services.





As I look back at how the Covid pandemic presented such difficulties over the past two years, I am delighted to see how the library service has stepped up to the mark, thanks to the hard work of the staff and volunteers. They took on the challenges presented during that time and continued to provide a much-needed service, and thankfully this year has seen the gradual return towards a pre-pandemic 'normality'.

I cannot thank enough these staff and volunteers who worked so hard to restore the events, resources and facilities that ensure the libraries are such an important and valued part of our community, and to thank you, the library users, for your continued support. Visitors have provided some very positive and valuable feedback through the "Love Your Libraries" survey and now the forthcoming Libraries Review will enable the service to look to the future and ensure that the needs of its users are answered, and that it remains such an important resource for West Berkshire. The library is free to join, and continues to provide a welcoming environment for all.

West Berkshire Council remains committed to continuing the Library Service and where possible expanding it.

Councillor Howard Woollaston

Have you got a suggestion or query?

Email: Felicity Harrison, Acting Culture & Libraries Manager,
West Berkshire Council
Felicity.harrison@westberks.gov.uk



2021-22 highlights

- During this year, our **46** staff members and **248** volunteers welcomed **201,657** visitors and we gained **4,891** new members, which was an 11.46% increase on the year 2019-20. Our e-library was particularly popular, with **162,657** loans or renewals and **14,289** reservations. Our library stock was replenished with new items, **13,962** of which were physical items, and **1,233** for the e-library. Borrowers also took advantage of our free reservation service, which enables borrowers to reserve an item, either online or in person, and collect it from their chosen branch. We dealt with **62,419** reservations this year.
- The **West Berkshire Libraries app** was launched in April 2021, with a self-checkout function added later in January 2022. The app is available from both [Google Play Store](#) (for Android devices) and the [Apple App Store](#). It allows you to renew your loans, search for and reserve books, read and listen to e-books, access other e-resources, manage multiple accounts for family members, and more – all from your mobile or tablet; plus the self-checkout function means that you can now issue a book to your account yourself whilst in the library building.
- We were very pleased to recommence many **regular, in-person events** in August 2021, after ensuring that appropriate risk assessments were in place. Our popular **Rhymetimes** for toddlers and pre-school children began again in the library buildings in January 2022.
- July 31 2021 saw the **21st birthday of Newbury Library** in its current prominent location on The Wharf. During 2021-22 the library welcomed 92,109 visitors through the doors and enrolled 2,377 new members.



- Our **Love Your Library** survey launched in September 2021, gathering views and comments ready for our **Libraries Review**. On a regular basis we review the services we offer and think about what changes we might need to make to improve them. This important review of the whole library service, incorporating the views of library visitors, enables us to look to the future and think about how we might need to develop the library service over the coming years.

LOVE

YOUR LIBRARY
Have Your Say

Online: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/libraryreview2021>

Socials: #LoveWestBerksLibraries | @WBerksLibraries

Email: library@westberks.gov.uk

Questionnaire available from your local library

- In October 2021 we updated the entire **lighting system at Newbury Library**, which, after 21 years, was no longer fit for purpose. The new lighting design, utilising energy efficient LEDS, not only created a much brighter environment but also meant that the building is far more energy efficient, providing significant savings in CO₂ emissions and energy costs. We also installed autism-friendly lighting with a grant received from the Autism Partnership Board. We now have low glare, 4 colour full-spectrum LED lighting in certain areas of Newbury Library which offers a wide range of effects according to the mood which we want to create.


 a greener West Berkshire

Every year the new **energy efficient LED lighting** at Newbury Library will save **£2,632.43** in energy costs and **15.03 tonnes of CO₂**




- In February 2022 our collaboration with **Educafe** began, welcoming the community café into Newbury Library. The trial period was so successful that we now host the cafe every Wednesday 11am- 2pm.
- We developed a **Virtual Tour of Newbury Library**, which is now available on the West Berkshire Council website, providing a clear and comprehensive walk-through guide to the library and all the facilities that are available. <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/newbury-library>
- We worked with the West Berkshire Central Family Hub in Thatcham to develop a new Toy Library. All members of West Berkshire Libraries can now use their library cards to view and reserve items online and then collect them from the Family Hub. The Toy Library includes a large selection of items to suit children up to the age of 5. Toys are normally hired for 28 days and charges vary.



- Our most borrowed book of the year was Richard Osman's *Thursday Murder Club*. This is the entertaining debut crime novel by the well-known TV presenter, and the first in a series focusing on four amateur sleuths in a retirement village. The novel is available to borrow in various formats – print, large print, audiobook on CD, and digitally from our Libby and BorrowBox platforms as an e-book and e-audiobook.



Libraries Review

Phase 1: Our Libraries Review started in September 2021, with consultants Shared Intelligence undertaking a Community Needs Assessment for libraries in West Berkshire. Alongside this we gathered feedback about the library service through surveys, engaging with staff and volunteers, as well as with the community. In January 2022 we held online engagement sessions for town and parish councils to get their views.

Phase 2: We were successful in applying to have a Libraries Peer Review Challenge through the Local Government Association, funded by the Arts Council. The Peer Review took place in April 2022 and concentrated on the specific question: 'How can we deliver the library service more efficiently in a largely rural area, including innovative ways in which to ensure access?'

Phase 3: The information gathered in Phase 1 and Phase 2 has formed the basis of the Libraries Review options report which will be considered by WBC Council Members.

The Libraries Review process has taken longer than we anticipated because of a change of scope for Phase 2, and also some staff capacity issues due to long term sickness absence.

Challenges and plans for 2022-23

Having gradually restored many services post-pandemic, we now aim to return to our normal level of service and in 2022- 23 to revisit plans that we were unable to fulfil because of Covid, to extend some of the innovations introduced during 2021-22 and to introduce some new projects in order to improve and enhance our service.

Our plans for 2022-23 include:

- Complete the Libraries Review options report by December 2022.
- We will look at the option of using libraries as 'warm refuges' for those who may be struggling with cost of living increases.
- Educafe - this has been a successful community venture at Newbury Library and we will be trialling sessions in other selected libraries.
- Thatcham building works - the feasibility study has been completed, and funding is in place to complete building improvements to Thatcham Library, including relocating the current entrance and installing an accessible toilet.
- Wellbeing Bags - work with Public Health to create Wellbeing Bags for adult library members to borrow. These will contain books, activities and ideas to help maintain health and wellbeing.
- Update the lighting at Theale Library, installing new energy efficient LEDs.
- Following the Carnegie Lounge enhancements, investigate and trial autism-friendly events.
- Work with our Family Hubs and the Early Years team to deliver a pilot project on the 2022-23 Bookstart offer for pre-school children.
- Implement the new BookTrust Storytime programme.
- Recruit more volunteers and review the volunteer roles we offer to make them more flexible for the future.
- Work with The Willink School to assess the feasibility of co-location providing a dual use library facility.
- Review mobile library service provision to ensure an accessible and cost-effective service.
- Set up more library working groups for each library. Library working groups have already proved their worth by directly involving local people who give feedback from their community, which helps us to increase library usage. To find out more, please email felicity.harrison@westberks.gov.uk
- Develop existing links with the Corn Exchange, Newbury, and host arts courses in selected libraries as part of their Ageing Creatively programme.

About the service

The library service is **FREE** to join for everyone, of any age, living, working or studying in West Berkshire. We have 8 libraries: Newbury, Burghfield Common, Hungerford, Lambourn, Mortimer, Pangbourne, Thatcham and Theale, as well as a Mobile Library and an At Home service. As well as providing **free access** to over 110,000 books to borrow, including large print format, graphic novels, quick reads and world fiction, the library service offers the following:

- Free computer use and wi-fi, including Hublets in Newbury and Theale.
- Self-service printing, photocopying and free scanning to email.
- Room hire/library hire.
- Online/in-person talks on popular topics.
- Free access to e-books, e-magazines and e-newspapers.
- Audiobooks and e-audiobooks to listen to on the go.
- Children's online and in-person events, including Rhymetimes, Code Club, craft events and the Summer Reading Challenge.
- BBC micro:bits to try coding projects and ideas at home.
- Book groups – hundreds of titles available in book group sets of 10 copies (annual fee applies).
- Family and local history resources – including Newbury Weekly News archives available on microfilm.
- DVDs to hire for a small charge.
- At Home service for housebound readers.
- Online resources, all available free of charge:
 - Access to Research – access to over 10 million academic and research journal articles (available only from computers and mobile devices within a West Berkshire library).
 - Ancestry Library edition – the leading online resource for family history research (available only from computers and mobile devices within a West Berkshire library).
 - Britannica Online – full version of the world's most famous and respected multi-volume encyclopedia.
 - Britannica Student edition – for ages 12 – 18.
 - Britannica Junior edition – for ages 5 – 11.
 - British Newspaper Archive – millions of pages of historical newspapers from the British Library collection.
 - GoCitizen – online resource for candidates preparing for the Life in the UK test (British citizenship).
 - Oxford Dictionary of National Biography – the life stories of over 50,000 people who shaped the history of the British Isles throughout the ages.
 - Oxford English Dictionary (OED) – probably the most famous dictionary in the world.
 - Theory Test Pro – online simulation of the UK driving theory test, including the entire official question bank from the Driving Standards Agency, plus online hazard perception tests.
 - Who's Who – biographical information on the most influential people of today as well as entries back to 1897.

2021-22 statistics

West Berkshire Library Service	2020-2021	2021-2022	% Var
Loans or renewals of library stock	318,756	553,903	73.77%
Active borrowers	5,207	11,812	126.85%
New library members	1,797	4,891	172.18%
Reservations placed	63,579	62,419	-1.82%
Visits to the library	49,132	201,657	310.44%
Items added to library stock	16,263	15,195	-6.57%
No. of public computers	27	54	100.00%
Public computer usage (hours)	694	7,552	988.42%
No. of public computer users	447	1,573	251.90%
No. of visits to public computers	1,605	10,923	580.56%
No. of staff (total)	46	46	0.00%
No. of staff (full time equivalent)	25.06	25.06	0.00%
Weekly staff working hours	927.33	927.23	-0.01%
No. of volunteers	187	248	32.62%
Volunteer hours	3,407	10,001	193.60%
Weekly opening hours	219.8	219.3	-0.21%
Annual opening hours	11,428	11,404	-0.21%
Planned closure hours	3,731	595	-84.05%
Unplanned closure hours	2,857	51.3	-98.21%
Total closure hours	6,588	646.3	-90.19%
% closed hours during year	57.65%	5.67%	-90.17%
Summer Reading Challenge participants (main challenge in person, excluding digital challenge participants)	181	2,792	1442.54%



pressreader
West Berkshire LIBRARIES

FACES OF THE YEAR
the new year

Feast

Thousands of newspapers in one app.

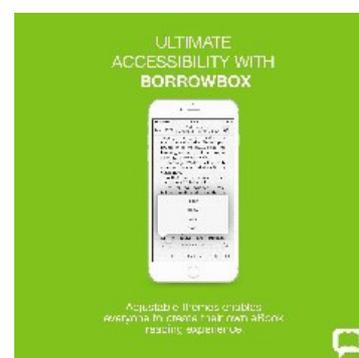
Read or download your favourite title for FREE via PressReader.



The digital library is always open.

OverDrive

OPEN 24 HOURS



ULTIMATE ACCESSIBILITY WITH BORROWBOX

Adjustable themes enables users to create their own eBook reading experience.

How much did it cost / how much income generated?

People sometimes ask how much a certain library branch costs. Some costs are specific to a branch – for example, staff, energy, rates and maintenance. Others are shared with the whole service – professional librarian and back office staff, emergency staff cover, book stock and digital library stock, ICT support, marketing etc. All the parts of the service are inter-dependent, so all branch libraries benefit from being part of the wider service, and the library service as a whole benefits from being part of West Berkshire Council – for example, corporate support for ICT, health and safety, HR, and phone contracts.

Our income includes voluntary contributions from town and parish councils, library item charges and fines, income from rent, room hire charges, events, book sales and grants.

In the information below we have also included information about capital investment in the library service.

Revenue Expenditure (Running costs)	£ 2020-21	£ 2021-22
Staff	863,915	925,034
Premises - energy, rates, maintenance costs	273,402	273,895
Supplies and services - ICT, marketing, transport, e-resources	176,698	205,231
Total	1,314,015	1,404,160
Income		
*Fees and charges/fines, rent, venue hire, events, sales	-89,825	-91,274
Voluntary contributions from town and parish councils	-70,572	-75,227
Other income including donations	-2,515	-3,579
Total	-162,912	-170,080
Net cost of the library service	1,151,103	1,234,080
*Figures for 2021/22 include £33,854 Government loss of income contribution.		
Capital Investment (Fixed Assets)		
Building improvements	16,106	72,988
Book stock and associated costs (*Section 106 funding)	127,076	119,832
ICT improvements (** CIL funding)	6,025	12,702
Total	149,207	205,522

**The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge which can be levied by local authorities on new development in their area. It is an important tool for local authorities to use to help them deliver the infrastructure needed to support development in their area.

Support from Town and Parish Councils

We always appreciate the help and support we get from town and parish councils in helping us to promote the library service, for example, by publicising libraries to their communities and helping us to recruit local volunteers.

We would like to thank those who made a voluntary financial contribution to the library service. In 2021-22 we received a total of £75,227 from town and parish councils, and this vital contribution enabled us to run the current level of library service. The level of contributions we receive from Town and Parish Councils may impact the level of library service we are able to deliver in future, and this funding model is being evaluated as part of the Libraries Review.

We will continue to invite voluntary contributions for the financial year 2022-23, and also to invite town and parish councils to participate in library working groups so that we get local feedback about the service and how we can improve it for residents. Many thanks to all those who chose to do so.

Please note the following:

- The council is a local authority responsible for delivering the statutory library service in West Berkshire. We are not delegating or transferring the responsibility to town and parish councils, nor are we levying a charge on the parish councils.
- We are asking town and parish councils to support the service at local level to help residents benefit from the library service and from the library buildings as community hubs for a range of local activities.
- Contributions are voluntary and ring-fenced within a specific budget, for example for a specific library branch or for the mobile library service only, so that they directly benefit parish residents.
- We will request a contribution each year rather than request a commitment for a number of years at a time.

We are always happy to attend town and parish council meetings to talk about the library service and what we can offer to the West Berkshire community.

Sharing the love of reading

Book groups

We have 79 book groups who have registered with the library service. The number of book groups reduced in 2020 because of the restrictions of Covid, but has almost returned to the 2019 figure of 82.

There are over 200 book group sets for them to choose from. These are sets of 10 copies of a single title which can be reserved and issued together. New sets are being added to stock all the time – in 2021 there were 23, covering a range of fiction and non-fiction to suit all tastes and to stimulate discussion.

It is worth mentioning that one of the first book groups to register to use West Berkshire Libraries book group service in 2000, Hampstead Norreys Book Group, is still registered, and very kindly donates a book group set to the service every year.

West Berks Reads

Our Facebook group was set up during lockdown to connect library members with one another, to share their thoughts about books they are reading and to suggest ideas and recommendations for what to read next. There are now over 360 members sharing their love of reading.



e-Library

If you are a library member it is simple to borrow free e-books and e-audiobooks from either of our two suppliers, BorrowBox and Libby. Both of these are available from the Apple app store or Google Play store, and using your library card number and PIN you can then search and browse thousands of titles to read or listen to online or download to read offline. You can reserve titles and there are no late return fees. In 2021-22 there were 162,657 loans or renewals of e-books and e-audiobooks and we are always adding new titles – in 2021-22 there were 1,233 items added to stock.

Libraries app

The West Berkshire Libraries app was launched in April 2021 and is a quick and easy way for library users to access their accounts, to search the catalogue, renew and reserve books and keep up to date with news from the library service. You can also manage multiple accounts, which is helpful for those with children or relatives who need some additional help.

Once downloaded to a smartphone or other mobile device, users have instant access to the extensive collection of free e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines and e-newspapers.

In January, a self-service feature was introduced, enabling library members who use the app to check out books when they are visiting a library for a faster way to borrow and go.

Working with children and families

Our library service recognises the vital importance of connecting with West Berkshire children and families, both in our colourful, welcoming children's areas as well as online and in the wider community:

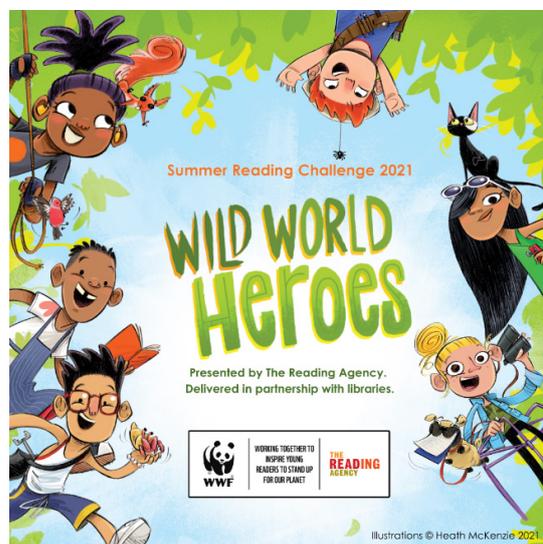
Summer Reading Challenge

The Summer Reading Challenge has been our biggest promotion of the year for some time, enjoyed by thousands of primary school aged children. Run by the Reading Agency, it is a hugely popular nationwide challenge encouraging children to borrow and read six library books over the summer holidays, thereby receiving a medal, certificate and stickers, and being able to engage in fun activities both in the library and online. The challenge helps to build reading confidence and to prevent the 'dip' in reading skills while children are out of school. This summer the challenge also played a key role in supporting reading catch-up after a difficult year. With school life disrupted, it was more important than ever, helping parents and carers to find family-friendly activities, maintain literacy levels and create a safe space for children to connect with their peers.

This year the theme was Wild World Heroes, an environmental theme in collaboration with WWF to encourage children across the country to engage in a fun reading activity while also focusing on environmental issues. 2,792 children took part in our libraries. An additional 289 children took part in an online version of the challenge, which was introduced during the pandemic and continued this year.

We're delighted to tell you that West Berkshire had the highest level of participation in this year's Summer Reading Challenge of any region in the South East of England, reaching 16% of all 4-12 year olds across the district.

There is also a nationwide mini challenge for the under 4s and 461 took part this year in West Berkshire. Additionally, we run a grown-ups challenge for library members over 12, and 618 people took part.



Online events

Weekly online crafts for children continued on Facebook and Instagram, usually inspired by the storytimes that were delivered that week on our social media. There were clear step-by-step images showing how to make simple but fun creations.

There was also the very popular online Code Club for 9-11 year olds. In a free 12 week course the children were emailed instructions each week for a fun project to try at home, helping them to learn how to code with Scratch.

Berkshire Mini Maestros provided another enjoyable online Rhymetime in May, which continues to be available on our YouTube channel.

Lego and Duplo clubs

A number of libraries now run regular Lego clubs, plus Duplo clubs for younger visitors. These help to encourage creativity and simple engineering skills for children whilst using their imaginations and having fun. This included a special International Lego Day event at Burghfield Common Library on 28 January.



Library Stars

In March, we launched our new 'Library Star' scheme to reward younger readers. Children can choose from one of our five character bookmarks when they borrow a book, then collect a star for every book they read - and a certificate when they have collected 10 stars.

Author workshops

Through Lantana Publishing, in November we were able to offer a creative writing workshop to West Berkshire primary schools. This was delivered by children's author Michael Catchpool and hosted on Zoom by the library service. The workshop proved very popular and was repeated on three further occasions in February 2022, with funding from West Berkshire Education.



Bookstart

Bookstart is a universal book gifting programme in the UK, provided through the national charity Book Trust to support and encourage children’s reading. In West Berkshire the Bookstart programme is administered by the library service and as part of our commitment to encourage reading, we have a Partnership Agreement with BookTrust which currently allows us to provide free ‘Bookstart packs’ for babies and young children.

Baby packs are normally distributed for us by Health Visitors across the district. During the pandemic this wasn’t always possible, but this year saw a return to a more comprehensive service.

Bookstart Treasure packs for children aged 3-4 years are normally distributed through nurseries and pre-schools, but any families with a child of this age who doesn’t attend one of these settings were able to collect a pack from any West Berkshire library during normal opening hours.

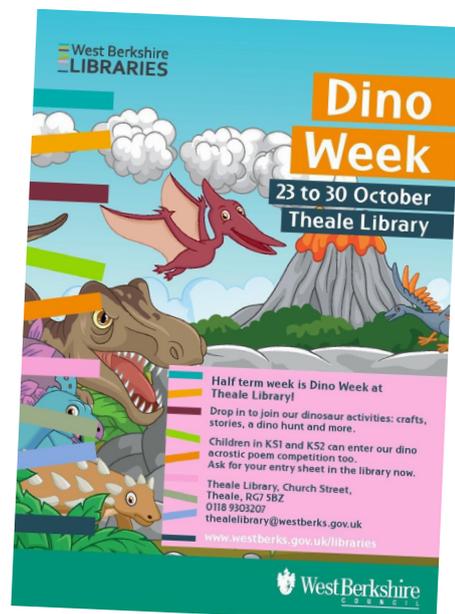
During 2021-22 the library service distributed 1964 Baby packs and 2796 Treasure packs. We also distributed 209 dual language picture books and 89 SEND packs for children with visual, hearing or motor skills difficulties.

Burghfield Common and Thatcham libraries took part in a pilot project for a new Bookstart Storytime programme and were able to contribute to its development for 2022-23.



Dino Week

Theale Library’s ‘Dino Week’ in the October half-term incorporated a range of dinosaur-themed activities, including a treasure hunt, craft activities, ‘dino’ jigsaws, puzzles and stories, plus an acrostic poem competition for KS1 and KS2 schoolchildren. The theme proved very popular throughout the week, with 350 attendees.



Activities, talks and displays for adults

Throughout the year we began to restore the many events and activities that we had held pre-pandemic. Safety was always the main priority, so we needed to ensure that all risk assessments had been undertaken, and current Covid guidelines were being followed at all times.

This is a selection of the varied events on offer during 2021-22:

- Informal, drop-in craft sessions in all libraries.
- Art Group meetings at Thatcham, Lambourn and Hungerford libraries.
- Bridge Group at Theale Library.
- French conversation at Hungerford Library in cooperation with the Hungerford Twinning Association.
- Gardening Club at Hungerford Library.
- Chair based exercise sessions started at Theale in March.
- Talks by local nature writer Nicola Chester, including an online talk on 'The Act of Nature Watching' in April 2021, which is now available on our YouTube channel, and also a talk organised by the Friends of Lambourn Library group about her new book, 'On Gallows Down' .

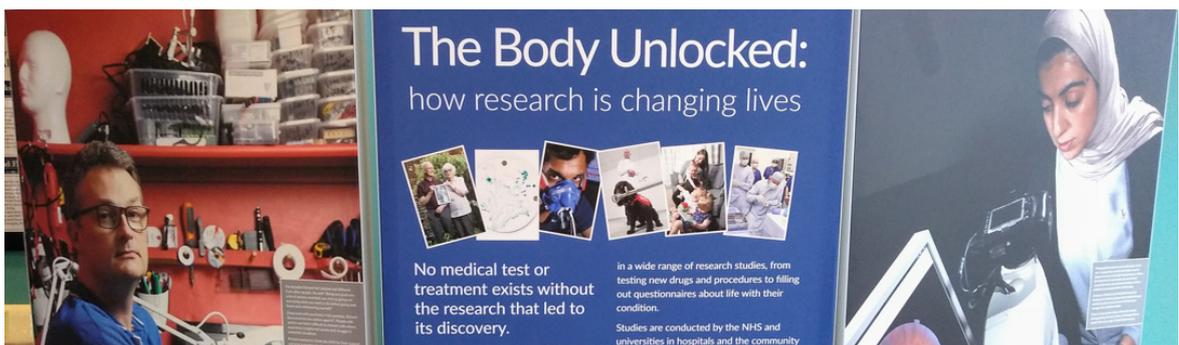


- Participation by Newbury Library in 'PEACE CAMP', an exciting project by artist Jemima Brown to mark the 40th anniversary of the Greenham Women's Peace Camp. Some of Jemima's sculptures were to be found camping amongst the book shelves.

- Two successful online talks by local historian Dr David Peacock, on 'Tudor Newbury' in June and 'Early Victorian Newbury' in November.



- Photo exhibition 'The Body Unlocked' at Newbury Library in October about NHS research in the Thames Valley, highlighting work supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).



- Exhibition 'Focus on Pangbourne' in the library in November, exploring Pangbourne's history and archaeology through some of the objects from West Berkshire Museum's collection.



Supporting our community

West Berkshire Library Service recognises the importance of being a part of our local community, responding positively to the needs of that community. We aim to ensure that our service, including the events and activities that we hold, the library buildings, and the provisions that are available, reflect inclusivity and provide a welcoming experience for all who visit, live in, or work in West Berkshire.

- **Mobile Library**

As government restrictions lifted, we were delighted that we could allow customers back on board the Mobile Library vehicle in July to choose their own books. Although the use of the Mobile Library has declined sharply over the past few years, we continue to have a loyal base of customers using this service, and 5,246 visits were made to the mobile library during the year. We added 690 new items to the mobile stock and welcomed 49 new borrowers to the service.

- **At Home service**

The At Home service is specifically for those who find it difficult to visit their local library because of age or disability. Library items are chosen for each customer by our DBS-checked volunteers who then deliver the books or spoken word CDs directly to the borrower every three weeks. During the pandemic this service was particularly welcome as we extended the reach to include anyone who was self-isolating. During 2021-22 volunteers helped 99 borrowers, including 32 who were new users of the service.

- **Educafe**

We were delighted to welcome Educafe to Newbury Library in February 2022. This is a friendly community café, organised by local residents Clare and Colline, providing a safe space for people to make new friends. It is a weekly drop-in event for all to enjoy arts and crafts, games and puzzles, activities for parents with babies, IT support, a befriending service, a 'chatty corner' for anyone who wants to improve their English language skills, plus free refreshments including home-made cake. It has proved to be very popular and welcome with the community, and we hope to continue providing a home for the café at the library.



- **IT sessions**

Help for those who are unsure of how to get online or need assistance accessing resources was made available at Newbury Library and at some of our branch libraries again this year. These individual IT Help sessions are provided FREE of charge, helping with things such as completing online forms, sorting out digital photos, showing you how to use our e-library or get started on Zoom. Booked in advance, these are one-to-one sessions of 30 or 60 minutes on your own device or on a library laptop.

- **Our English conversation group** in Lambourn Library started in November, a weekly group welcoming non-English speakers to practise their English in a friendly atmosphere.

- **Corn Exchange Creative Arts** sessions began, at Hungerford Library in October and Theale Library in November. We were pleased to be working with the Corn Exchange, Newbury, running Creative Arts Clubs for over 55s as part of their Ageing Creatively programme. Participants had the chance to try a variety of different arts forms in drop-in sessions that were free to attend.



- **Food Bank donations** - a collection point was set up at Thatcham Library and received some generous contributions for those in need. Library visitors donated food with a total weight of 67.2kgs last year – the equivalent of 141 meals for Foodbank clients

- **Period products** - Hungerford, Newbury and Thatcham libraries set up All Yours bins for donations of period products and provided a stock of free period boxes for those who may need them.

- **Recycling collection points** - we extended our collection of various bins for recycled materials, including used batteries, spectacles, sweet wrappers, small toys and old bras in a number of our libraries.



- **VIP group** – Members of Newbury Library’s book group for those with visual impairments were still unable to meet regularly in person but continued to listen to books that library staff sent to them on USB or CD. Staff made sure that contact was maintained with the members by telephoning them regularly.
- **Wellpoint health kiosks** were made available for the public to use at Hungerford, Newbury and Thatcham libraries this year to measure height, weight, BMI, blood pressure, heart age and cardiovascular risk. The kiosks are quick and easy to use and help to maintain health and wellbeing.



Volunteers

We are always immensely grateful to all our volunteers for the help they provide. During 2021/22, because of the uncertainty surrounding Covid and the necessary precautions, we did not have the same number of volunteers as pre-pandemic but we ensured that there were risk assessments in place and that those who returned were reassured by all of our safety measures. Each library welcomed back volunteers at their own pace and any concerns were discussed with individuals, taking their personal circumstances into account and ensuring that they felt comfortable and safe with their roles. During the year 248 volunteers played a vital role in supporting our libraries and the West Berkshire community. Between them they spent 10,001 hours helping us by:

- Supporting staff in ensuring that visitors made the most of their time in the library.
- Assisting PC users with getting online and answering their IT queries.
- Helping out with events and activities such as Rhymetimes and crafts.
- Helping with stock work using our library management system.
- Supporting the At Home service by regularly delivering books and audiobooks to housebound readers.
- Ensuring books were shelved correctly and the library kept tidy.
- Supporting the Summer Reading Challenge, engaging with the participants, and chatting about the books they have read.



We have also helped 37 young people complete the volunteering section for their Duke of Edinburgh placement this year.

The number of volunteers has increased since the pandemic, but we are always keen to recruit new volunteers and to review the roles that we offer in order to be as flexible as possible.

We always take the time to communicate with our volunteers, thanking them for their efforts and giving feedback about the difference they are making. We greatly appreciate the fact that they give their time to support libraries, and we couldn't run the service without them.

If you would like to volunteer please talk to library staff or look online:

www.westberks.gov.uk/volunteer

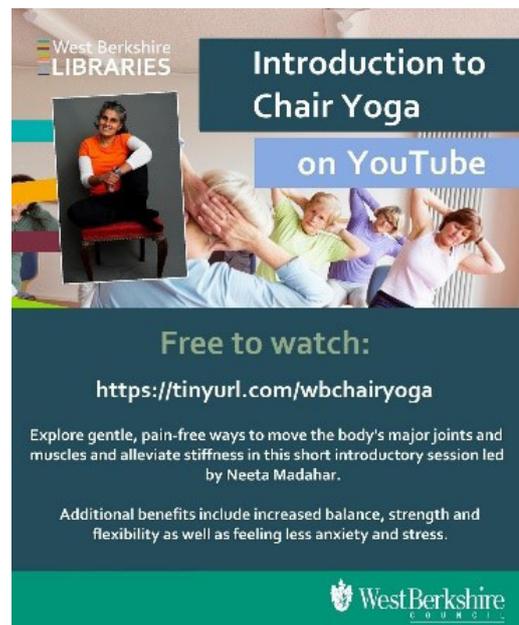
Keeping in touch

We aim to ensure that we communicate effectively with customers to let them know our plans for the service, any important updates, and what events and resources are available. It has been particularly important during this year to be able to notify library users of any changes in the service, but also to remind them of the wide range of resources and facilities that we provide.

- **Newsletters** – we emailed monthly newsletters throughout the year to library members who have opted to receive direct news from us. Library users can change their preferences and email address at any time online via the library catalogue: <https://westberks.spydus.co.uk>. Non members can subscribe to this too and all residents can subscribe to any of a number of Council newsletters via the West Berkshire Council website: www.westberks.gov.uk/SignUp.



- **You Tube** – the West Berkshire Libraries' YouTube channel proved popular and now has over 300 subscribers. Videos cover a range of topics. Throughout the year, younger members were able to enjoy a selection of online stories read by library staff and volunteers. This year we also added guidance on how to use our e-resources and offered a range of online talks, such as an Introduction to Chair Yoga.



- **Twitter, Facebook and Instagram** our social media pages continued to provide a valuable way for us to make sure that everyone can keep up to date with library news and events and share photos and information, as well as providing reading suggestions on a variety of topics and genres. Follow us - [@WBerksLibraries](https://twitter.com/WBerksLibraries)



February 2021:

"This week it's Historical Fiction Week on our Instagram. As it's Valentine's Day here are some Regency Romance books. From Bridgerton to Jane Austen, there are plenty of Regency era books available from West Berkshire libraries.

Head over to Instagram and follow @WBerksLibraries"

Feedback

*Very helpful
and kind
staff.*

*Hurray for
local libraries!
We really love
it here.*

*Great Library!
Staff are
super helpful!*

*The staff made us
feel so welcome
and were incredibly
helpful. What an
asset to the town!*

*We love our local
library. Our little one
is doing the reading
challenge and
enjoying it!*

*Best village
library ever.
Always welcomed
by the staff.*

*A pleasant space
to browse and read
books with great
staff always eager
to assist.*

*So glad to see
a library that's
flourishing in a
small community.*

*A lovely community
library which is so
much more than a
book repository.*

We always welcome feedback from our library users:

- In our Comments books
- On Google
- On Trip Advisor
- On our social media pages



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