

# Annual Assembly 2019

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## Agenda

Time	Speaker	Content
8.00 – 8.05	Welcome	Ian Parsons
8.05 – 8.15	Alan Law /District Councillor	Report on West Berkshire matters relating to Basildon over the past year.
8.15 – 8.20	Geoff Couchman	Local Transport
8.20 – 8.25	Sarah Barnes	Traffic
8.25 – 8.30	David Jones	Library Services
8.30 – 8.35	Halina Czajka	Village Gates/Highways
8.35 – 8.40	Elaine Cox	Footpaths and Byways
8.40 – 8.55	Ian Parsons	Chairman's Report
8.55 – 9.10	Questions	

## Opening Remarks

- Welcome and Introductions. I am Ian Parsons, chair of the council. We have 2 new councillors: Martin Marsh and Oliver Chadwyck-Healey. The District Councillor is also here.
- The format of the meeting will follow previous patterns: a series of reports from the District Councillor and parish councillors followed by an opportunity in the last section of the meeting to ask questions and volunteer comments. We aim to complete the meeting by 9.15.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Speaker

Alan Law was recently elected to serve a further term as our district councillor but was unavailable for this meeting.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker

Geoff Couchman spoke on public transport.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Speaker

Sarah Barnes spoke on speeding in the village and our efforts to ease this problem.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Speaker

David Jones spoke on Libraries.

Libraries in the UK benefit from a huge amount of visits—n250million per annum. This is bigger than all visits to cinemas, theatres, the UK top ten tourist attractions and live music gigs combined! Visits are, however, declining from this large base.

There was significant change in West Berkshire in April 2017 when the Council cut funding by 44% and asked Parish Councils to support the service by giving £1 per head per annum. In 2017/8 and

2018/9 we made donations of £1740 per financial year as we thought as a Parish Council it was an important service to support.

There are 8 libraries and 1 mobile library served by 42 permanent staff and 270 volunteers. Volunteers are now a key plank of the service.

The library service has three aims:

1. A library service which is responsive to local needs,
2. A safe and trusted place to get good information including online,
3. To be free and available to all.

In Basildon we benefit from proximity to Pangbourne library. This library has 1084 active users of whom 248 are new this year, has 20000 visits and 137 PC users. It has an active “coffee and craft” morning, a family history group and regular rhyme time and story time.

We also benefit from a service which is non existent in many parts of the UK nowadays - a mobile library. This visits the car park of St. Stephen’s church every 3rd Tuesday between 2.05pm and 2.45pm. If as a community we do not support this, the inevitable consequence is that eventually it will be withdrawn, yet it importantly visits 73 sites throughout the county. We will be asking that our 2018/9 contribution is ring fenced for the mobile library.

Certainly I’ve decided, that when I can, I will order books to be delivered by the mobile library to ensure footfall continues. Reservations are free and the service is very good. Further details can be found on the Parish Council website which carries a copy of an article recently submitted to the Country Neighbour. There is also an Annual Report for the library service which covers the financial year 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018 which has been the source for this report.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Speaker

Halina Czajka spoke on Village Gateways

We approached WBC as the gateway signs which welcome people into the village had seen better days. We quickly realised that replacing them would not be as straight forward as we had thought. WBC policy is only to install and or replace signs where there is a change in the speed limit.

After discussion and a site meeting it was agreed that 4 signs would be installed:

- Pangbourne Road
- Yattendon Road
- Two on the A329 in Lower Basildon

West Berkshire Council is paying for the work - we were happy to fund this, especially as we were keen to get exactly the design we wanted, but this was not possible.

Work is due to be done on 20 May – it turns out one sign has already been installed in Lower Basildon.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Speaker

Elaine Cox spoke on Public Rights of Way.

Basildon has 17km of public rights of way, which comprises Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open To All Traffic. The District Council is legally responsible for recording them and making sure they are well maintained and clear from obstruction. There are over 700 miles of public rights of way in West Berkshire, so Basildon makes up only a small proportion of the District Council's responsibility.

Parish councils have a number of discretionary powers, including maintenance. The District Council holds a database of all reported problems on the network. At the moment, for Basildon, there are recorded problems of overgrowth, fence obstruction, waterlogging, tree, rotten gate and rabbit holes. Volunteers are playing an increasing part in delivering rights of way work for the District Council, but it is not clear whether any volunteers are working independently in Basildon. There is a team from the Ramblers' Association which makes its way through each parish in the District, carrying out a survey, and remedying simple problems such as overgrowth. Unless there are any volunteers from the meeting tonight, I will arrange for Basildon to be added to the list of parishes for survey.

The District Council has a duty to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which sets out the Council's aims to improve the access network for the enjoyment of all its users. The present Plan runs to 2020, when it is due for review. There will be a formal review consultation but do contact Elaine Cox if you wish to make any views known.

## Final Speaker

The general report on the parish council's activity over the past 12 months from the chairperson.

## Finance

- The council continues to remain cautious in its spending: the pressure upon parish councils to provide services that, traditionally, have been provided by the district and county councils continues, now for the 10<sup>th</sup> year.
- At the end of the last financial year our current account held in the region of £25,500 whilst our savings account showed a credit balance of £32,500. We expect to spend the entirety of the current account in the coming twelve months and to respond to unexpected and substantial events with payments out of the savings account.
- Our precept is £26,000, so our current account balance is approximately £51,000. We expect some sizeable Community Infrastructure Levy payments for the new housing in Blandy's Lane and, within the next year or so, for the building at The Nurseries near Spring Close.
- Our clerk has been awarded a pay rise of 1%, not far off what public sector workers might expect generally.

- Winter gritting of the commuter network of roads in the village is largely paid for by the parish council, the exception being the A329 through Lower Basildon which is part of the primary network of road. This will vary according to the degree of inclement weather – last year we were charged £2,526. Obviously, the colder and lengthier the winter the greater the demand on our finances.
- As previously noted our major outlays in the last year have included our support for the Library Service, – in the region of £1700, and the bus service - nearly £1300.
- In addition, we supported, and will continue to support, the visiting Post Office, and by implication the venue St.Stephens, with a £1600 subsidy. This covers the cost of hiring the room and heating regardless of whether the Post Office attends or not.
- We have a contract, and have renewed this, with Scofell Landscapes to cut the grass at the Recreation Ground and the Village Green. We pay £3,000 for this service.
- From our savings account we have paid in full for the replacement of the small posts around the Village Green - £4,900 – and the outdoor gym - £19,802. *We will be reclaiming the VAT on these payments.*

## Planning

- At the last Annual Assembly we reported that 56 planning applications had been received; in 2018/19 that number has reduced by 16 to 40. 6 of these concerned new houses; several related to Conditions for the two houses in Blandys Lane; others concerned a house opposite the Village Green, a replacement for Oak Tree Cottage on Aldworth Road and a new build on the corner of Maple Lane.
- Of the 40 applications in 2018/19 the parish council objected to 11. A sizeable number of the objections related to where building was proposed beyond the settlement boundary and to where the council felt it could support concerns expressed by neighbours.
- West Berkshire Council approved 33 of the 40 applications.
- The bulk of the applications have been for small scale, usually ground floor extensions, though we have also had applications for sheds, porches, garage conversions, garage roofs, dormer windows, maintenance on the Gatehampton Bridge, stables and remapped driveways. And a couple of retrospective applications for work begun or completed without permission.
- Building for new housing is complete in Blandys Lane, has been begun alongside Spring Close and is anticipated opposite the Village Green and next door to Emery Down Wood.
- The council continues to object to any construction outside of the settlement boundary.

## In the last year...

- Nathalie Weekes, a councillor for many years, has resigned her post as she expects to move out of the village in the near future. The council, on behalf of the village, records its thanks for her contribution. And formally welcomes two new councillors, as mentioned earlier.
- Pot holes continue to be reported where significant by individual councillors and residents; the yellow markings that tend to appear quite quickly indicate the council is responding quite quickly with emergency albeit temporary repairs.

- Fly tipping remains an occasional problem on several of the incoming roads to the village. However, reporting the problem seems to produce a response within at most 48 hours.
- We aimed to have installed some more dog waste bins in the village. Whilst we can have them installed we face the problem of having them emptied as the collection contract taken out by WBC for the whole of the county has no scope for expansion. Our clerk is looking into our organisations that might carry out the work.
- The council has engaged with the head teacher at the primary school and has continued a dialogue about how the council might be able to support the school in ways that will benefit it and other members of the village community.
- The play equipment at Wakemans recreation ground is currently undergoing a significant refurbishment. The equipment itself is quite sound, as was confirmed in the last safety assessment, but it does bear witness to a number of years of outdoor living.
- The council has agreed to take on the financial responsibility for the maintenance of the recreation ground at the Village Hall and to share responsibility for the upkeep of the car park. Those of you who attended the recent annual meeting at the Hall will have heard that the costs of maintaining both the hall and the ground, despite an annual £2,500 subsidy from the council, has proved to be unsustainable.
- The telephone box in Lower Basildon has been purchased by the council. This is now maintained by a local resident in Hartslock View as a lending library.
- The council has been responsible for approaching several residents to have hedges cut that encroach upon pavements and roadways and are causing obstructions as a result. These matters have been resolved amicably.
- The state of The Grotto in Lower Basildon remains a matter of concern. We have asked WBC to intervene both in the matter of general decay to the fabric of the building and the increasing danger of the boundary wall collapsing onto the pavement that borders the A329.
- We have made a £250 contribution to the public toilets in Pangbourne, which as many of you will know faced closure several years ago, and which are now managed by a group of volunteers.
- The council continues to send a councillor the Neighbourhood Action Group forum which meets quarterly in Purley. This group offers the opportunity for a closer liaison between the police and the concerns of the parishes.
- Two Basildon volunteers have been busy litter picking on a regular basis within the village, one to raise money for a school in Africa and the other as a community contribution. The council has made a contribution to the charity in question.
- In consultation with the trustees and the management at Beale Park Basildon residents are now eligible for a 50% discount on family season tickets to the Park. Applications for this discount are made to the council initially. So far some 25 families appear to have taken up the offer. The discount came about, in part, because the council approached the trustees with a request to be lent some land to build a children's playground for children in Lower Basildon. The discounted family membership is seen by the trustees as a counter offer.

The Minutes of the meeting in full will be available at the 2020 meeting.