

Chair's Report

Finance

- Currently the parish council's two accounts have a combined total of approximately £60,000.
- We gave ourselves a budget of £26,000 in the last financial year and have spent, so far, £23,000 of that. The discrepancy of £3,000 arises as some 2017-18 payments weren't actually made until April and May 2018. Our spending, therefore, is broadly in line with our earlier projection.
- We remain very vigilant about spending as our responsibilities for local services continue to increase as district council responsibilities reduce. In the past few years our sole annual commitment to the village hall and recreation ground was in the region of £2,500; now we have become responsible for supporting such services as the two bus companies that run routes through the village, the visiting mobile library that calls every three weeks, the filling of the village's grit bins as well as the actual road gritting service that proved its worth several times over when we were visited by the beast from the east.
- The outdoor gym, which will be fully funded by the parish council, is our major project and largest outlay at approximately £16,000.
- Our internal audit is close to completion and the more formal, external one will begin in the next month or so.

Planning

- The parish council during the last year received 56 planning applications. The council objected to 20 of these and presented No Objections to 32. West Berkshire Council approved 28, refused 10; 5 were withdrawn before the consultation process began in earnest. This does represent an increase in the number of objections offered by the council. It reflects, in part, the diminishing amount of building space in the village, the increase in applications to build in the frontage of residential plots and the growth in the number of proposals to demolish one house and to build in its place two or three. The council continues to object as a policy to any proposals outside of the settlement boundary.
- There were 4 proposed applications for new housing developments - Pamber Green and Knappswood Farm were both approved. Both were initially for three dwellings, a lot of Objections were received; both were reduced to two dwellings and passed. Similar proposals for Oak Tree Cottage and the Nursery were refused.
- We continue to receive applications for dwellings to be constructed behind existing houses. So far West Berks Council have given these short shrift.
- The biggest planning issue in terms of local response was to the proposed phone mast at Kiln Corner. This prompted some 30 or so letters of objection on the two occasions when it was presented. As a council we would hope to see similar responses on the part of residents to other applications which are seen to impact negatively upon the quality of life in

Basildon. Proposals which reduce views across beautiful countryside, which affect the setting of our older and most historic buildings, which urbanise what remains a largely rural environment; all of these, hopefully, will prompt the kind of response we saw when confronted with the prospect of a mast at Kiln Corner.

- Other decisions are currently pending. The most notable of these is the development of The Grotto and the grounds about which nothing has been heard since last year; it is likely that the building has decayed further. We have written to WBC about to try and move things forward.

Changes to the council

- Halina Czajk, unfortunately not able to be present this evening, joined the council earlier in the year.
- We are now one councillor short of a full council and continue to welcome interest in the vacant position.

The last year...

- Pot holes in roads in the parish – at our April meeting we each resolved to report on those in our immediate neighbourhoods. A number have been recognised as in need of full resurfacing and have been treated as priorities. The more residents in the parish report these as problematic through the WBC website the greater the likelihood of some work being done. The problem is a national one, the result of reductions in central government funding of local government.
- Outdoor spaces such as the village green and the recreation grounds continue to be maintained by Scofell Landscapes. Approximately £2,500 has been spent in this area, which includes the additional planting on the village green.
- The two bus companies that serve the village have received subsidies of approximately £2,000. Geoff Coachman will talk about this in his report.
- The outdoor gym, which will be fully funded by the parish council, is our major project and largest outlay at approximately £16,000.
- We continue to support the post office that visits on two mornings a week with a subsidy of £1600 and continue to feel that this is a worthwhile use of residents' money: it provides not only access to the obvious mail services but it also offers residents the chance to withdraw cash and to meet other residents as one of the occasions coincides with the church café.
- The council continues to support the county library with an annual subsidy of **£1,700**. David Jones will say more about this later in the meeting.
- The winter gritting programme in the village is now funded for the first time by the parish council; we expect a bill in the region of £1,000 for this winter's work.

- In addition to this we to contribute £2,500 to the running of the village hall and recreation ground.
- The council has made contributions totalling £600, to our local children's football club, which now has a total membership in excess of 50 children, the equivalent in a fully funded educational service of 2 primary school classes. All local groups, present and future, that have some social dimension to their activity are eligible for help from the council.
- Two more waste bins have been installed in the village.
- We are in contact with Melissa Cliffe, the head at our primary school, about possible ways of supporting the school and, in the process, benefiting the wider community.
- We continue to represent the village by sending a councillor to the Neighbourhood Action Group, a forum where parish councils can meet with the police and raise matters of mutual concern. it meets every three months at the Purley Community Centre. Issues of concern to residents can be communicated to the council and raised at this meeting.
- We continue to hold at least one meeting each year in Lower Basildon, and would expect to hold more should major issues specific to this part of the village occur.

Individual Councillors' Reports

Councillor Geoff Couchman

- The 142 will continue to run at 7.30 am on weekdays with a small subsidy from the Parish Council (£50 per month). There are 2 people using this service which follows the same stops as the 143. The 143 continues to run from Upper Basildon with the same time-table as last year. Privately and not for publication I am not sure how long WBC will support the 143 from Upper Basildon. You can say that the service will be reviewed by WBC for the next financial year so the more people use it the more likely it will be retained. Publishing the time tables on a regular basis will help as a reminder to those not sure of both services.

Councillor Sarah Barnes

- The Parish Council undertook a speeding survey from 1st August until 6th August. During this time we took readings from the Pangbourne Road in Upper Basildon and Reading Road in Lower Basildon, at different times of the day. In total 4487 cars were monitored during this time period, with 1429 cars travelling over the speed limit which equates to 31% of all traffic. The Average speed was 29 mph for 69% of traffic, whilst the average speed was 34mph for the 31%, however some cars were traveling as fast as 55mph. As a council we are investigating the possibility of placing 2, if not 4 new speeding signs in the village at strategic places to try and keep the speeding down within the village. The company we are looking at is Elancity, who already have cameras in a lot of rural locations, these signs will show both the speed as well as a message to the driver. We are hoping that these signs will look to reduce the speeding in the Village by approximately 25%. We will report back further at our next parish council meeting, based on practicality and cost.

Councillor David Jones

- Context
 1. This started 2 years ago when the Department for Culture, Media and Sport intervened to delay plans to close eight of West Berkshire's nine libraries. West Berkshire Council wanted to save £730,000 by closing the eight branch libraries – as well as two mobile libraries – which would leave the district served by just one branch library in Newbury. This was against a background where West Berkshire Council needed by law to provide a "comprehensive and efficient library service" as per The Public Library and Museums Act 1964.
 2. The Council then announced that seven branches and a mobile library would be saved from closure for the time being thanks to £1.4m in "transitional funding" from the government, £475,000 of which would go to libraries over the next two years. They needed a plan to save funds in the future and asked for Parish Council's to contribute £1 per head. Our February minutes record our contribution of £1740 for the year 2017/8
 3. As of July 3rd 2017 the library service had made cuts to an extent that it had 44% less staff and resources than it had in the previous financial year. Thirty staff were made redundant and a scheme for complementing paid staff with volunteers was instigated in order to get the new service operating. As volunteering matures this will also increase the resilience of the service in busy periods.
- Use by Basildon Parish
 1. The headlines are of our 1740 residents, 154 borrowed 6,059 books. Most of these (128) used Pangbourne library with 12 residents using the mobile library which visits St. Stephen's Church car park once every 3 weeks and one resident using the "At Home" service.
 2. These are active users but it is important to also remember that there are other constituencies who use our libraries. Residents may go to read the paper, children may go to hear stories being read and importantly the library provides IT access for jobseekers etc. Every Monday in term time Pangbourne library has a Coffee and Craft afternoon where people are encouraged to bring their own cross stitch/tapestry/knitting/embroidery and enjoy coffee and a chat with likeminded people. Equally every Thursday morning Monday in term time there is a Storytime/ Rhymetime session.
- Future Funding
 1. The Council has asked for funding from Parish Councils for three years so we will face the need for a decision in this financial year.
 2. If we do decide to contribute this year, we have ascertained from Paul James, Culture and Libraries Manager that any contribution can be ring-fenced within the library budget for a specific use that best benefits our residents. This could be for a specific library only, the library book stock, or the Mobile Library Service.

3. If we do continue to contribute, and we will debate this, it would be our intention to focus any future contributions on Pangbourne Library and the Mobile Library Service. An equitable split for our £1740 could be for instance £1600/£140.
4. My favourite library quote. Ray Bradbury said “Without the library, you have no civilization.”

Councillor Elaine Cox

Basildon has a network of 17km of public rights of way (PROW), which comprise footpaths, bridleways, byways open to all traffic, and restricted byways. This is a small proportion of the total network of around 1200km in West Berkshire. The District Council is the highway authority, and has statutory duties to keep PROWs open and to maintain and record them. Parish Councils have powers to maintain and create new PROW. Some Parish Councils, including Basildon, produce their own walks leaflets.

In 2017/18, the following work on Basildon’s PROWs is worthy of note:

- A parish councillor has regularly surveyed the PROWs in the parish.
- Fly-tipping on PROWs has been reported to West Berkshire Council’s waste team.
- A water leak on Footpath 3 (opposite the end of Bethesda Street) was reported to and fixed by Thames Water.
- Volunteers from West Berkshire Council are to trim Footpaths 4 and 5 (crossing the field between Emery Acres and Bethesda Street).
- An obstructing barrier has been removed from across the footpath through the car park near Lower Basildon church.
- Volunteers managing the community woodland have arranged for some tree work to be done in the vicinity of the adjacent footpath.
- Finally, both the Parish Council and West Berkshire Council are looking for volunteers to survey PROWs in the parish, and perhaps to carry out some simple maintenance such as clipping vegetation. Contact Elaine Cox if you would be interested.

Councillor Natalie Weeks

Beale Park

- Beale Park has contacted the Parish council as it would like to make a gesture to benefit the residents of Upper and Lower Basildon. Beale Park have offered to provide a half price single or family annual ticket for residents living in Basildon, if the Parish Council are able to administrate it.
- The parish council is currently investigating this possibility and will hopefully be able to set up a working system with Beale Park. We will update as soon as we have any developments.