

BASILDON PARISH
ASSEMBLY

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY ON 22nd MAY 2012

PRESENT: Councillors Sonia Higgins (Chairman), Sarah Barnes, Elaine Cox, Arthur Harrison, Sarah Loyd, Tim Martin, Jeremy O'Brien and Nathalie Weekes.

Attended by District Councillor Alan Law, the Clerk and 16 parishioners.

1. MINUTES OF THE ASSEMBLY OF 7th APRIL 2011

The minutes, having been circulated, were confirmed as correct and were signed by the Chairman.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

3. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

Good evening and welcome to the 2012 Parish Assembly.

The Parish Council represents residents' views to West Berkshire Council and has influenced West Berkshire Council decisions on the following matters:

- Core Strategy

- Planning applications

- Eastern Area Planning Committee

and provides the following local services:

- Maintains Public Spaces

- Provides recreation facilities

- Comments on planning applications

- Maintains footpaths and bridleways (with WBC)

- Disposes of litter

- Provides village amenities

- Supports the Village Hall and Parish Plan actions

4.1 COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

During the year the Council has been involved in the following activities:

- Planning applications and appeals

- Financial support for the Basildon Show

- Support for the Faster Broadband project

- WBC Core Strategy

- Village Hall activities as Trustees

- Telephone boxes

- Clearing up fly tipping and litter

- Highway improvements

- Planning for Car Park, bus shelter and Wakemans Recreation Ground

My name is Sonia Higgins and I have been Chairman since May 2011. It has proved to be a busy role.

Firstly, I would like to introduce the members of the Council:

Sarah Barnes

Elaine Cox

Arthur Harrison, who is the Parish Footpaths Officer

Sarah Loyd

Tim Martin and Jeremy O'Brien, who in addition to their duties as councillors act as Trustees of the Village Hall and Recreation Ground and Nathalie Weekes,

The other person at the table is Douglas Bending, our Parish Clerk.

I am immensely grateful to all members of the Council and the Clerk for the support they have given to Parish business and to me during the year.

I would also like to introduce, Alan Law, our District Councillor. Alan is relinquishing his key role at West Berks as Portfolio member responsible for Planning and Housing and taking up the equally responsible position of Portfolio member for Finance and Economic Development. He has been very supportive of Basildon issues in our representations to West Berkshire Council.

4.2 CHALLENGES FOR BASILDON IN MAINTAINING VILLAGE CHARACTER:

Desire for new housing

Pavements, street lights, road signs

Inconsiderate motorists

Speed or safety

Cars or pedestrians, cyclists and horses

Hedgerows versus visibility

Urbanising features in house design

4.3 HIGHWAYS

Over the year there has been continued concern about the state of the roads and about congestion on narrow lanes caused by trucks and coaches, particularly those associated with building projects. Some repairs have been made to the roads but snow has undone some of the repairs and these have been added to WBC'S long list of tasks.

Speeding continues to be a serious problem and further investigations will be made to quantify the true extent of this unsocial practice.

4.4 FOOTPATHS

We work with West Berks Council to ensure that our footpaths are maintained. Arthur Harrison has led from the Parish Council on all matters relating to Rights of Way. Maintaining these is a never-ending task as plants grow and trees fall over. We are extremely grateful to all those who have helped maintain our footpaths over the year.

4.5 ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Several instances of antisocial behaviour have been reported over the year.

Fly tipping and litter

Offensive behaviour

Dangerous driving

Burglary

Un-neighbourly behaviour

4.6 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Although the evaluation of the questionnaire on Affordable Housing has been completed it has not yet been possible to take any positive action in this matter.

4.7 PLANNING

Purpose of Application	Number of Applications	Number of houses
Additional Houses	4	5
Replacement houses	5	5
Extensions, Conservatories	32	
Other (including conditions)	84 (23)	

We have maintained a reasonably good record in obtaining refusals on those applications which we consider inappropriate. Sometimes this requires a presentation before the Eastern Area Planning Committee.

Overall, 70% of planning applications were approved and 30% refused or withdrawn. It is common practice for applicants to be advised to withdraw a proposal that is heading for refusal. This allows them to resubmit with more acceptable revisions and avoid creating a record of refusal for the site.

Four planning Appeals were held in 2011; Two (Tree Cottage and The Barn House) were dismissed, one (Randars) was allowed and one (Tree Cottage extension) was withdrawn but a later scheme was approved by WBC).

5 DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS (S106)

It is only those S106 contributions related to Open Spaces and Highways where the Parish Council has much influence in how the money is spent. We also firmly believe that no amount of additional funding can undo the harm caused by inappropriate development.

However, S106 contributions have made possible schemes for car park improvements, a new bus shelter in Lowe/r Basildon and play equipment at Wakemans Recreation Ground.

6. TRAFFIC MATTERS

The Council will continue to press for further improvements to the local bus service and adjustments to speed limits.

There is a continuing problem with speeding in the village and Speed Indicating Devices will be used to monitor the situation.

WBC is struggling to deal with the huge number of potholes which have appeared on roads all over the District as a consequence of recent harsh winters.

7 DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT (Alan Law)

The District Councillors holds down four jobs:

Ward Member for Aldworth, Basildon and Streatley

Portfolio member for Planning and Housing 2011/12 and for Finance and Economic Development from May 2012

Executive Member involved in the general running of WBC and WBC representative on Thames Valley Local Economic Partnership.

Governor: Royal Berkshire Hospital

West Berkshire Issues: West Berkshire is the third fastest growing local economy in UK and part of the fastest growing Region – Thames Valley. Major developments are Parkway shopping and housing in Newbury, IKEA at Calcott and promotion of a new rail link direct to Heathrow but new housing is still at low levels.

Challenges: Reduced Government grants; Expanding ageing population; employment costs

New Council Strategy: Living within our means and keeping Council Tax at or below inflation; Protecting the aged and vulnerable; Improving education; Protecting the environment; Promoting a vibrant district including road maintenance and improved broadband.

Council budget Tax increases held to 0%; net budget of £M123 for a population of 154,000; budget allocation – 30% Elderly and disabled, 25% Children's services and schools support, 12% Waste and re-cycling, 7% Highways

Local Issues

Planning - inappropriate developments; Unelected inspectors; National Planning Policy Framework

Roads – Restriction of HGV's on local roads; Road repairs and resurfacing at Aldworth Road, Park Wall Lane, Mead Lane, Gardners Lane, Long Bottom Lane and Kiln Corner

Local Achievements - Basildon C of E School – 6th in District in Key Stage 2 at 94.4%; The Downs – Top in GCSE (77%) and second in A levels; Theale Green – Room for improvement.

8 PARISH ACCOUNTS

The detailed accounts for 2010 and 2011 are available - some copies will be found on the side table here tonight and electronic or hard copies are also available from the Clerk. I do not propose to set out all the figures since it suffices to say that in both years the Council remained within its budget and its accumulated reserves were satisfactory.

However, the following notes set out how the Council sees the current and prospective situations.

Routine expenditure

How much	£27K budget for 2012/13
Cost per head of electors	approximately £20 per annum

Where does it come from?

The Parish Council agrees a budget for each year and issues a Precept upon the District Council (£26,600 for 2012/ 13)

The District Council is funded mainly by government grants but to some extent by Council Tax.

Where does it go?

Routine expenditure covers such items as Clerk's salary	(£K7)
Office expenses, audit and subscriptions	(£K2)
Insurances	(£K2)
Grass cutting and external maintenance	(£K5)
Litter picking and footpath clearance	(£K2)
Grant to Village Hall	(£K3.5)
Other donations (Country Neighbour etc)	(£K1)
Contribution to Basildon Show	(£K2)
Contribution to broadband project	(£K2.5)

Total	(£K27)
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How are we held to account?

The Parish Council is held to account by its own internal rules regarding budgeting, reporting and minuting all expenditure; the accounts are checked by independent Internal and External Auditors; a check is made to see that every item of expenditure is permitted under the appropriate legislation; the published accounts are available upon request by any elector.

Reserves and the Precept

The Council aims to keep a reserve available for routine expenditure of approximately half of the Precept to deal with unexpected circumstances. In recent years this reserve has exceeded the target figure and the Council has been able to avoid increasing the Precept whilst still setting the budget at a higher figure than the precept and still balance the books. This process can only be carried so far since there are inevitably increases in routine expenditure as time goes by and ultimately the Precept must be set at a level sufficient to cover all routine expenditure. Consequently Council has set the underlying Precept at the level agreed three years ago (£24,000) after two years in which it had proved possible to keep the Precept down to £22,000. However Council also agreed to support the West Berkshire Broadband project, which will provide very much higher broadband download speeds to Berkshire villages including Basildon, at a cost to Basildon of £2,600 per annum for each of three years. To put this in context, electors are being asked to pay £2 each per annum for three years only as a contribution towards the cost of a much improved service and Council took the view that these costs should be found by increasing the Precept temporarily rather than by putting a strain on routine reserves.

Non-routine expenditure

Apart from its routine activities Council has been able in recent years to carry out or support a number of capital projects. The funding for these has been obtained by setting aside reserves from the Precept (for Village Hall and Parish Plan projects) and by way of WBC capital grants or very considerable developer contributions for Open Spaces consequent on the granting of planning permissions for additional houses in the village.

The reserves for these purposes (£K10 for Parish Plan projects and £K19 for Open Spaces projects) are not available for routine or maintenance expenditure and can only be spent on certain approved projects. There are several main candidates for expenditure under these headings including the provision of allotments, upgrading facilities at Wakemans Recreation Ground and possible contributions towards replacing the derelict Lower Basildon Bus Shelter and upgrading the car park near the Church which is effectively being used as a public car park as well as serving the Church. Although as stated above the reserves are quite high they are still not sufficient to fund the estimated costs of all these projects and choices must be made as to what should be prioritised.

Initially Council gave most weight to the allotments proposal but found it impossible either to get agreement to use part of Bethesda Street Recreation Ground (mainly because the area available was not big enough to accommodate both sports pitches and allotments but also because the cost of the work necessary to make allotments would have been too high) or to find an alternative site so that there was little prospect of the allotments proposal coming to fruition in the near futures. Council decided to proceed with the proposal to carry out that part of upgrading at Wakemans Recreation Ground which could be afforded with the funding currently available for Open Spaces projects (whilst not discounting the possibility of obtaining some grant aid from external sources to release part of the Open Spaces funding for other projects). So far as the bus shelter and upgrading the car park are concerned there is a very strong expectation that the major part of the funding will be made available by WBC from developer contributions for Highways work but Council would be prepared to make a contribution from a small reserve set aside for non-routine projects in the ordinary reserve and/or to use part of the Parish Plan reserve to facilitate these very desirable measures.

9 PARISH PLAN

Council will be refreshing the Parish Plan during the forthcoming year and it will then be possible to bring forward projects to make use of the reserve held for this purpose.

10 Mrs Jones described the preparations for the Jubilee celebrations and Council indicated that it was willing to provide a measure of support.

11 .ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Several questions were asked about anticipated progress on the Faster Broadband project but all that can be said at this stage is that there is an

overall programme of three years but no decisions can yet be made as to when individual parishes will be affected. It will be important for residents to register their interest in the programme since this will affect how soon work may be put in hand at Basildon.

Thank you for coming tonight and for your interest in the Parish Council's activities. Please do contact the Parish Council, or our District Councillor on matters that concern you. We cannot resolve problems unless we know about them. You are welcome to attend and speak (briefly) at Parish Council meetings, held here usually on the second Thursday each month.

There being no other business the Chairman declared the meeting closed.

.....Chairman