

BASILDON PARISH
ASSEMBLY

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY ON 20th MAY 2014

PRESENT: Councillors Jeremy O'Brien (Chairman), Sarah Barnes, Elaine Cox, Geoffrey Couchman, Edward Golton, Rob Greasley, Tim Martin, Ian Parsons and Nathalie Weekes.

Attended by District Councillor Alan Law, the Clerk and 25 parishioners.

1. MINUTES OF THE ASSEMBLY OF 21st May 2013

The minutes had previously been circulated and 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 BY CHAIRMAN

Good evening and welcome to the 2014 Parish Assembly.

My name is Jeremy O'Brien and I have been Chairman since May 2012 as well as being a Trustee of the Village Hall and Recreation Ground.

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

Sarah Barnes

Elaine Cox

Edward Golton

Tim Martin, who is also a Trustee of the Village Hall and Recreation Ground and Nathalie Weekes

We also have three new members who have recently joined us

Geoffrey Couchman

Rob Greasley and

Ian Parsons

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 the WBC Portfolio member for Finance and Economic Development. He has been very supportive of Basildon issues in our representations to West Berkshire Council.

4.1 THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS

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

Core Strategy consultations

Planning applications

Eastern Area Planning Committee

and provides the following local services:

- Maintenance of Public Spaces
- Provision of recreation facilities and village amenities
- Maintenance of footpaths and bridleways (with WBC)
- Disposal of litter and fly tipping
- Support of the Village Hall and Parish Plan actions

4.2 COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

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

- Planning for new bus shelter
- Church Car Park upgrading
- Provision of public benches
- Contributions to hearing loop and public access defibrillator at the Village Hall
- Improvements in parish communication

4.3 PLANNING

We faced the usual challenges in planning matters including striking a balance between pressure from developers vs local environment character and in summary the outcomes can be summarised as follows.

Purpose of Application	Number of Applications	Number of houses
Additional Houses	6	15
Replacement houses	2	2
Extensions, Conservatories	22	
Tree Works	13	
Other (including conditions)	33(22)	

- There was a very similar number to last year and this still represents a marked reduction from previous years in the total number of planning applications
- Many dealt with minor changes, details, conditions, tree work etc These would formerly have been dealt with by administrative action and would not have required a separate planning application.
- Overall, 90% of planning applications were approved by WBC and 5% refused with 5% not determined for various reasons. 3 are still being considered. 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.
- The Parish Council objected to 5 applications of which 3 were approved, 1 refused & one is still being considered.

- There were 3 planning appeals relating to applications submitted during 2013. 1 was allowed and the other 2 have yet to be determined.
- Nine schemes for additional houses which had previously been approved by WBC or on appeal and had not been started on site by the end of 2012 were almost all started during 2013.

4.4 HIGHWAYS

Flooding was a significant issue this year for WBC although not within the Parish.

WBC Highways Department was pressed for funds and but part of the Aldworth Road was re-surfaced and there will be an ongoing patching program to address the worst issues elsewhere.

4.5 FOOTPATHS

The Council is negotiating funding to resurface FP5 from Emery Acres to Bethesda Street and work to FP16 from Ashampstead Rd to Aldworth Rd

4.6 CHURCH CAR PARK

New setts and base have been laid and are awaiting consolidation before final surface layer is laid.

4.7 LOWER BASILDON BUS SHELTER

Planning of this project has run into a number of difficulties including investigation of an alternative site and an embargo on access from the A329 during repair work to Whitchurch Bridge and will be delayed until that work is finished.

4.8 PUBLIC BENCHES

Council received generous donations from The Country Neighbour and ?? towards the cost of public benches and this together with some Council funding allowed for the provision of two benches, one at the Village Green and one at Bethesda Street Recreation Ground.

4.9 PARISH COMMUNICATIONS

The cost of printing and sending letters to all residents has risen considerably in recent years and the Council is investigating other ways of communicating including making more use of our web site, introducing Facebook and Twitter accounts and establishing a comprehensive database of residents' email addresses.

4.10 FASTER BROADBAND

Basildon was unsuccessful in being chosen for broadband speed improvement in the first round of Phase 1 and the financial conditions applicable to a second round were so onerous as to make it impossible for the Council to take part. Basildon will now await inclusion in Phase 2 which aims at 95% fast access for the whole of Berkshire by 1917.

5 SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS DURING THE YEAR

Various Actual/Estimated Project Costs – S106 funded

- Wakemans Playground £18K
- Church Car Park £15K
- Bus Shelter £8K

Broadband Project

- WBC has Repaid all Phase 1 contributions
- Waiting for information about Phase 2

6 PARISH ACCOUNTS

The accounts for 2013/14 are available in full on application to the Parish Clerk but the main figures are summarised below.

Bank Balance

• Starting balance		£33K
○ Ordinary reserve	£14K	
○ S106 reserve	£9K	
○ Parish Plan reserve	£10K	
• Income		£41K
○ Precept	£27K	
○ Other	£14K	
• Expenditure		£35K
• Ending balance		£39K

Precept (Income from WBC)

- £27K up from £24K
- Increase mainly due to Broadband Project Contribution

Significant Expenditures

Clerks Salary £7K

Office supplies £2K

Insurance £2K

Open Spaces (Grass, Footpaths, litter, etc) £7K

Grants and Donations £7K

- Village Hall, Outreach Post Office, Summer Show, etc

7 LOOKING FORWARD

- Finish Church Car Park upgrade
- Lower Basildon Bus Shelter
- Telephone Boxes
 - Seeking ideas
 - Getting them repainted
- Village Green
- More Footpath refurbishment
- Parish Plan setting out residents' aspirations
This needs to be refreshed but cannot be PC led and needs community support. Residents are urged to get involved in the project.

When a new plan is in place money will potentially be available for projects.

8 DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT (Alan Law)

8.1 As your District Councillor I have 3 roles.

1. To act as your representative at West Berkshire Council
2. To represent and report back from WBC to you.
3. As the Executive Member for Finance, Human Resources and Economic Development, to help with the running of the Council.

Let me comment on the last point first. As Finance Portfolio Member I am responsible for setting the Council's Budget and ultimately what you see as the manifestation of that.. Your Council tax bill. So I'm pleased to take some of the credit for setting a zero increase in CT for the current year. That makes it 3 years out of the last 4 that we have been able to Freeze the CT and we hope to be able to do next year as well. We're doing our best to help address the cost of living which most families feel to one degree or another. We've done that in the face of reduced grant revenues from central government, as it rebalances the national finances and deficit, and we've done it without any significant reductions in Frontline services. We've done it by focusing on Council's Key Priorities as presented to the electorate at the last election. They are:

1. To live within our means
2. To maintain & improve our vital Infrastructure (Waste /recycling; Roads and Broadband)
3. To Improve our Education attainments
4. To protect the vulnerable in our Communities
5. To continue to protect our Environment.

I don't intend to say anything further about these priorities except to say these are the things I am personally committed to and I believe they are what you would want your elected representatives to focus on.

The Year past –

Let me now comment on the year just past as it has impacted on Basildon. I would suggest, and I trust you would agree, the most important thing that has happened was the terrible weather and extraordinarily long winter we suffered.

8.2 The State of the Roads

The severe weather and flooding has impacted us all either directly if you live in Cleeve Court in Streatley or visit or work at the Swan Hotel, or indirectly via the additional wear and tear it has caused on our roads.

I have to say the Emergency response to the flooding across West Berkshire was, with one exception, outstanding. The one exception was Thames Water, who required quite a lot of prodding to do anything. We've also had the recent water contamination problem and here again their response was very mixed. They did get their act together supplying bottled water, but the timeliness of their communications left something to be desired.

The effect of the weather on the roads has been dreadful. Water, even more

so than ice, created many potholes and overcame many parts of the road drainage systems. The state of the roads is one of our priorities and I'm pleased to say we are, as I speak, currently carrying out a major £2.3million Flood repair program, partly funded from emergency Government funds and the rest funded out of our cash reserves at West Berkshire. Reserves are there for rainy days and boy did we have some of those!!!

I would urge you all, if you see any potholes or flooded / blocked drains to please report these straight away to the Council, either via the Council Web Site or by calling the Council and asking for STREET CARE. I assure you bad potholes get a temporary fix within 24- 36 hours and will get more permanent fixes before next winter.

I cannot finish on potholes and the state of the roads without mentioning the significant resurfacing work that was carried out last year on the Aldworth Road, Church Lane Lower Basildon, Wakeman's and the drainage improvements on the A329 just north of Skew Bridge.

8.3 Whitchurch Bridge

The closure of the bridge has as predicted, increased by some 50% the amount of traffic flowing through Streatley Village and the Bull Cross roads. Thanks to advanced planning, cross boundary co-operation and sheer dogged persistence by elected Members, I have to say we are managing extraordinarily well. I am continually surprised how well the traffic does in fact flow, although for those travelling into Streatley from this direction at peak times there are significant tailbacks. Having restricted parking on both High Streets has been a major contribution as has some extremely sophisticated computer control software at the Bull traffic lights. Once normal conditions are restored, now forecast to be September, I am sure we will have an even greater debate on the merits or otherwise of such parking!

8.4 Broadband

Next I'd like to address Broadband. In the 21st century we just cannot live or work without a good internet connection. Unfortunately, Basildon, like much of West Berkshire is rural but more spread out than most, so that means many properties are distant from the telephone exchange and the phone cabinets. With broadband, distance from the cabinet/exchange reduces speeds. At the Council we have lobbied hard for government and other local funds to roll out what will now be a 2 or 3 phase approach to what is called Super Broadband and Fast Broadband. Our target is to have some 90%+ of all West Berkshire homes on Fast/Superfast by end of 2016. We may, via other technologies, be able to get this closer to 95%, but as yet this is not certain. This will still mean that not all homes, especially those far from a cabinet, will get the superfast speed, but all will get a major improvement over what they have today, and I had a Broadband review meeting last week where I have been assured that the contract with BT commits them to provide a minimum of 2 MB to EVERY premise within West Berks by Sept 2015

There has also been a lot of misunderstanding about what can and what cannot be delivered. The technology and the economics of the roll out are complex. Add to all that some poor communications from Government, BT and the Council and ordinary residents' expectations of what they can expect are confused.

Also your Parish Council chose not to pursue the initial Rural Communities Broadband Funding, designed to help those 15 parishes who didn't fare very well in the 1st phase Berkshire superfast broadband project. That project required a commitment to match funding, and 3 of the 15 parishes felt they couldn't commit to raise the funds in the time required. However, once we finalise the next phase of the roll out, Basildon, especially upper Basildon, should see an improvement in the service. Details are still being worked on and the Council will liaise closely with your Parish Council to keep you all informed.

8.5 The Parish Plan

Finally, as many of you know, I first got involved in local issues through the development in 2006 of Streatley's first Parish Plan and my determination, along with others, to prevent Gladedale from building on the High street and the Meadows in Streatley. I was pleased to have been able to help the team here to get your parish plan developed and adopted a few years ago. Many issues in the village can only be addressed by the District Council if they have been previously identified and agreed in the Parish Plan. So I urge you to refresh your Parish Plan as soon as possible.

5.6 Lastly, I'd like to thank you all for your support and I'll continue to help with local issues in the coming year.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman replied to questions about dangerous driving on various roads, and about the introduction of 20mph speed limits. These are matters for WBC rather than the Parish Council but the PC will continue to press the matter.

In response to a question about review of settlement boundaries the PC's understanding is that all settlement boundaries will be reviewed in the next few years as part of the West Berkshire Development Plan but this does not imply that the boundaries will necessarily be amended.

The PC's understanding about the situation regarding faster broadband is as described by the Chairman and District Councillor earlier in the meeting and nothing further is known at present although both will continue to put the Parish Council's case.

The chairman thanked everybody for coming tonight and for their 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 Tuesday of each month.

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