

**BASILDON PARISH  
ASSEMBLY**

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY ON 19<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2016**

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

Attended by the Clerk and 13 parishioners. The District Councillor, Alan Law, was unable to be present but had provided a report which will be presented by Cllr Barnes.

**1. MINUTES OF THE ASSEMBLY OF 20th May 2015**

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**

Firstly, thanks to you all for coming along this evening to hear what the Parish Council has been doing over the last 12 months. Let's start with the planning detail and then cover off the finances of the Parish Council. We'll then talk about the year we've had before getting an update from Alan Law. The Parish Council will then take questions after we've completed the update from Alan.

The good news is that I've opted to go for a slightly cut down version to last year.

This will hopefully mean that I won't have to speed read like last year!

So let's start with Planning.....

In the last year there have been 90 applications sent to the Parish Council for review.

Of these:

72 were approved by WBC,

6 were refused,

10 were withdrawn and we await the outcome for the remaining 2.

From a Parish Council point of view, we supported 41 and objected to 14 with the remaining 35 being applications that we had no view on as the Parish Council was not a statutory consultee.

This compares with 84 raised in the previous year.

As an Overall figure, 80% of planning applications were approved by WBC and 20% were refused, withdrawn or not determined for various reasons. 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.

Onto Finances.....

Income for the year was	£57K made up as follows
Precept	£27K
S106 transfers	£25K
A Members bid contributed	£1K
Vat reclaim	£4K

We then spent on the following:

General Budget expenditure and Administration	£3k
Clerk's salary	£7K
Open spaces	£5K
Small Capital projects	£2K
Donations and grants	£6K
This gave us a budget expenditure of	£23K
As a result we had a final balance of	£60K

This is higher than is justifiable but we expect to reduce the balances by setting the budget higher than the precept for 2016/17 and by contributing to transport costs and possibly other cuts in WBC funding. Additionally, with a number of time-consuming issues cleared there's the hope that we'll make further progress with S106 and Parish Plan projects – I'll cover these a little later.

OK, Lets Review the year.....

Firstly, the positives.

Retention of the bus service. With the considerable help of Marion Warren-Tibbetts, the WI and a number of local residents we were able to save the service albeit in a reduced form. We have agreed to subsidise the bus service by £2000 per year (as has Pangbourne PC) and as things stand this represents by the far the cheapest option available for getting people to and from Pangbourne on a regular basis. We still wait for this to be rubber stamped - however, having been prepared to offer £10,000 initially to save the service we are very pleased with this proposal. Before I move on, I'd like to pass on my thanks to Alan Law who worked hard to negotiate us this service and who will I hope get us over the line.

Away from the bus, we've offered support to both the library in Pangbourne and the Mobile Library service which visits Upper Basildon. Initially, we were approached by a friends group for Pangbourne library and asked if we would be prepared to offer a one off subsidy to help them get a service off the ground. We have confirmed that in principle we'd be prepared to help but this will depend upon a business plan they put together and we await the outcome on this. For the Mobile library, we've approached West Berks regarding its future and been informed that a service will remain as Basildon use the facility. However, it's likely that one of the two mobile libraries will be lost which could affect frequency of visits. Again, we will provide updates when we know the full picture.

We've installed new litter bins on Church Lane in Lower Basildon and at the top of Bethesda Street in Upper Basildon. These are now on West Berks Council's emptying list and we've already seen an improvement on Church Lane with considerably less litter being dropped. We've also supplied bike racks to both churches in the Parish and Compost bins for St Bart's Church.

This year we have submitted our tree survey – this measured those Oaks over 4 metres in circumference in the Parish and the results were added to a large county-wide database as well as being shared with the Council and its Archaeology services.

Footpath maintenance – this went particularly well last year. We kept the main paths regularly mowed and free of brambles and nettles and also quickly raised issues with West Berks for the removal of obstacles etc. We received positive feedback from a number of residents and also a thankyou from the school for the work on footpath 5. As you can imagine, the work is a bit of an on-running battle and fly tipping continues to be an issue. We discussed with West Berks Council the idea of installing cameras

and a couple of signs were erected on Adders Lane although as you can see this hasn't deterred people from continuing to use it as a dumping ground.

Parish Plan refresh - this has continued with the Parish questionnaire now agreed and ready to be distributed to residents.

Grants for clubs. We allocated £1200 of our budget to support local groups and made contributions to Chatterbox for room hire, the craft club and its room hire, badgers football who wanted new goals, a new youth club to which we've offered help to cover room hire and the tennis club to which we expect to pay court cleaning costs. We have carried out a refresh of Village Design Statement. Having re-written it we have shared it with WBC with a view to issuing a new publication. This has been both good and bad and despite a number of efforts on our part, we still await feedback from WBC on it.

Signs were added at the bottom of Gardeners Lane and the Aldworth Road and replaced elsewhere on the Aldworth Road near Hook End Lane and Beckfords. We also decided to bite the bullet and order new noticeboards with the School Lane one now in place and an order in place for a replacement at the Triangle and a new install by the Wakemans recreation ground. We've also refreshed our phone box library stock as some of the books were getting tired. A litter picking project is also planned for June.

We've supported the purchase of Emery Down Wood and provided £5,000 to help make it happen. For those that don't know, the trustees have already built a good relationship with the local school and it's the Parish Councils hope that it will be able to provide assistance to help fulfil the area's potential going forward.

On a slightly different note, we've continued to attend meetings for the Neighbourhood Action Group which meets quarterly in Purley and covers local anti-social issues, also the Railway Action Group which meets on an ad hoc basis to push network rail to sort out a more aesthetically pleasing solution through the AONB and of course the usual planning meetings where West Berks reviews those applications which have met with considerable opposition. These all take up councillors' time and I'd like to place on record my thanks to those councillors who have attended any of these meetings over the last year. Whilst talking meetings, we've also moved one of our monthly meetings to St Bart's in Lower Basildon in the hope that we'll appeal to more people. We've had two meetings there in the last 10 months and learnt the hard way that warmer months are better times to meet there due to the lack of central heating!

On a final note, last year I was pleased to confirm that the new website was up and running and over the last 12 months things have settled down. For my part it's been nice to be able to provide a monthly update to the site and hopefully some of you will have found that useful too.

Of course, it hasn't all gone to plan.....

Footpath 5 between Bethesda Street and Emery Acres is still a muddy mess in winter. West Berks Council continue to push back dates, much to our frustration. We have considered picking up the cost for this ourselves, however, we still hope eventually West Berks will deliver. We have recently reviewed proposed plans for the path and hope that there will be positive news sooner rather than later. However, I believe other chairmen have also offered the same hope previously.....

Elsewhere, we offered to spend £15,000 on an outdoor Gym for the Village Hall using some of the S106 open spaces money generated by new house builds. The hope was that this would encourage more people in the village to use the recreation ground and offer something different to what is currently available. The Village Hall committee rejected this proposal for reasons I am unsure of and I'm very disappointed by their actions. However, the money remains and should they offer an alternative idea we will be happy to consider it.

Due to a number of issues, we've also had a number of projects struggle to get off the ground – the Village Green is a slow burn and a proposed tots playground for

Lower Basildon which we have offered to fund is awaiting a decision by the Beale Park Trustees on whether some land they own might be available for leasing to the Parish Council for this purpose. In both matters we are hoping to make progress this year since we have funds available.

There have also been long delays in getting fly tipping cleared from the copse below Wakemans which although out of control is disappointing given the foot traffic in the area. It's even more disappointing that people seem to think it's an acceptable thing to do but that's probably not something you all want to hear me rant about for the next half an hour or so.

So, where are we going from here?

In the short term we'll be working with the steering group to finish the Parish Plan. Initially this will be on the distribution of the questionnaire, later it will cover helping review the results and providing an appendix to the existing plan. We'll also be looking for final sign-off on the Village Design Statement as this will hopefully give West Berks Council an up to date view on the Parish for them to consider when reviewing planning applications. However, this area is not fully in our control and will require chasing and probably begging on our part.

Those projects struggling to get off the ground will hopefully be getting both a boost in effort and finances due to the favourable outcomes on bus fronts and I hope to be able to deliver positive news when we next meet.

We have opened discussions with the school around the access from the gate area off Emery Acres and have offered to pay for the installation of a ramp to replace the muddy incline currently in place.

We will continue with our meeting commitments and maintain the offer of support to local clubs and societies by including it as a budget item for 16/17. Hopefully more groups will take up this option and we'll make a small difference.

Once the bus issue is concluded we intend to explore further the transport arrangements for Lower Basildon. We have looked into subsidising a taxi service but may just need to heavily publicize again the options available to residents and as part of this we've already used the Country Neighbour to highlight what's out there and when it can be called upon.

Looking towards the medium and long term the quest for more substantial projects continues – this may be covered by the village green or park in Lower Basildon but I think it safe to say that we are always on the lookout for more.

Before I conclude, I'd like to make a couple of final comments:

Firstly, one of our councillors has resigned and this evening's meeting will be his last one with us. Jeremy O'Brien has completed 8 years on the Parish Council, including 2 years as Chairman. On behalf of the Parish Council, and I hope, the wider Parish Community, I'd like to place on record my thanks for his service and support over the previous years. We all wish him well in any future projects he gets involved in.

One final area I would like to address is the position of Chair of the Parish Council. Having been in the role for what will soon be two years I'd like to think I now have a vague idea of what's required in the role. Initially, I made a commitment that I would do this for 2 years and as things stand I plan to continue beyond that point although for how long I'm unsure of at the present time. I will be looking at the issue of succession planning over the coming year as it's important we have a plan for the future and will stand aside should any of my fellow councillors decide at some point they wish to take on the position of Chair themselves.

Finally, can I thank you all for your continued support – from the councillors sitting either side of me, Douglas for his continued guidance and you lovely people in front of me who continue to be the eyes, ears and caring side of our community. It's very much appreciated and I look forward to continuing to work with you all.

Before we move onto questions, we have a short statement from Alan Law who unfortunately couldn't attend tonight. This will be read by Sarah Barnes.

#### 4 DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT (presented by Cllr Barnes)

4.1 My name is Alan Law and following upon re-election to West Berkshire Council last May I relinquished my executive role responsible for Finance and moved back to Planning. My key role is to develop and deliver a new Local Plan for the period 2016-2036 whilst retaining my responsibility for Economic Development.

4.2 West Berkshire is a good place to live - it is:  
In the top five most prosperous Local Authority Areas in England  
In the top five for economic growth, and  
Has the lowest unemployment rate in Southern England

4.3 West Berkshire Council was required to find in the new financial year £17.5 million savings out of a total budget of £120 million whilst struggling with continuing demographic pressures due to an ageing population. To cope with this situation the Council has had to make only its second increase in Council Tax in five years, amounting to 3.9% of which 2.0% was exclusively for Adult Social Care. In addition, reductions in front line services have become unavoidable and more community involvement is required to mitigate these cuts in future years.

4.4 One of the areas which will be affected is the provision of subsidies for rural bus services although WBC has not needed to emulate Oxford CC in cancelling all subsidies for rural bus services.  
So far as the local 143 bus service is concerned the current position is that there is a total subsidy of about £44,000 per annum and since there are only 8-10 regular but infrequent users the annual cost per passenger is in the range £4,500 to £5,000. In present financial circumstances this is very difficult to justify. The original proposal was to cut the service entirely but in view of the importance of the service to the few present users an alternative proposal is being considered which, using subsidies from WBC and the affected parishes, would continue a 6 buses a day service but only at non-peak times. Even this will not be sustainable long-term unless more people start to use the bus.

4.5 Another area proposed for cuts was the library services both based in buildings (except in Newbury) and the mobile service. Interim funding has been made available to continue the mobile service with only one vehicle and to maintain the library in Pangbourne based on volunteers and self- service.  
Again, as in the case of the bus service, unless residents get involved the services cannot be maintained indefinitely.

4.6 Expenditure on repairing pot holes has been increased. A cut of £100,000 was proposed originally but pressure on the government has resulted in an additional grant of £215,000 towards dealing with the problem.

During the coming years the following local roads will be re-surfaced:

Under way	A329 at Pangbourne
2016/17	Buckhold Hill (Ashampstead Road to Gardeners Lane) and Un-named road to Buckhold Farm
2017/18	A329 through Lower Basildon, Blandys Lane and Dark Lane Ashampstead Hill
2018/19	Aldworth Road (Hook End Lane to Gardeners Lane) and A329 in Beale Park Area

In addition work will be carried out in Streatley on the A329 and A417.

- 4.7 So far as Broadband is concerned, WBC has a contract with Oxford-based Gigaclear which will provide Fibre to the Home (with 50 or 100 mps options). This will give 2 to 4 times the speeds offered by BT and the speed will be delivered to the house rather than to the nearest cabinet. Coverage will be 98% by September 2017 and details can be found on both the WBC and Gigaclear websites.

## 5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 Questions were raised on the following matters: Litter by the railway bridge in Church Lane; provision of a mirror to aid traffic emerging from Mead Lane onto the A329; the length of time it has taken to complete work on a section of the wall surrounding Basildon Park; rainwater flows near the junction of Park Wall Lane and the A329; proliferation of uncontrolled external lighting schemes; cuts to the bus service and library services.

The following replies were given by the Chairman and Councillors:

A new litter bin has been installed near the railway bridge in Church Lane and collection of its contents by WBC's contractor has started resulting in a marked diminution in the amount of litter lying about. In order to continue the good work the Parish Council is proposing to install another bin at the other end of the railway bridge.

Although there is some risk to vehicles emerging from Mead Lane onto the A329 (because of the possibility of vehicles or bicycles traveling from the Pangbourne direction jumping the lights at Skew Bridge) WBC Highways will not consider the provision of mirrors to deal with this kind of problem. Their view is that mirrors do more harm than good since drivers tend to concentrate on the mirrors rather than taking an overall view of the situation and thus increase the overall risk.

The delay on the completion of work on the wall at Basildon Park has been due in part to ground difficulties but mainly to the bankruptcy of the contractor appointed to carry out the work and the difficulty of finding another competent and willing to carry out this specialised work.

Rainwater flow from Park Wall Lane onto the A329 is a long standing problem and although clearing of gullies makes some improvement the more radical solution which is probably needed to resolve the matter is unlikely to be affordable at this time of financial restraint.

The Parish Council is uneasy about the proliferation of uncontrolled external lighting schemes but at present there is no requirement for planning permission for such installations on their own. When the Parish Council has been commenting on overall planning applications which do or may involve some provision of external lighting it has taken the opportunity to suggest that a condition of consent should be that all fittings should be of approved design and that there should be some form of motion control so that the fittings were not left on all night. So far as Basildon is concerned WBC has introduced a condition to this effect in a very limited number of cases adjoining protected spaces such as Basildon Park but has declined to do so in built up areas generally on the basis that it would be unreasonable to do so since other householders can install free-standing systems without planning permission or any form of control. The Parish Council is not in a position to change WBC's way of dealing (or rather, not dealing) with the problem but will take the matter up with AONB staff to establish whether they can exert any leverage towards introducing a satisfactory way of tackling the problem.

5.2 Residents thanked the Council particularly for its contribution towards the Emery Down Wood purchase and its efforts towards dealing with the bus service and library cuts.

5.3 The Chairman thanked everybody for coming to the meeting 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.

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