

## ANNUAL ASSEMBLY SPEECH

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 which Ian will read in Alan's absence. The Parish Council will then take questions after we've completed this.

So lets 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10 were withdrawn and we await the outcome for the remaining 2.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As an Overall figure, 80% of planning applications were approved by WBC and 20% were refused, withdrawn or not determined for various reasons.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 and Vat reclaim £4K

We then spent on the following:

General Budget expenditure including VAT along with Administration £3k , Clerk's salary £7K , Open spaces £5K , Capital projects £2K , Donations £6K

This gave us a budget expenditure of £23K

As a result we had a Final balance of £60K which is too much. We expect to reduce the balances by setting the budget higher than the precept for 2016/17, 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 pounds per year (along with 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 await for this to be rubber stamped, however, having been prepared to offer 10,000 pounds 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, however, this will depend them putting together a business plan which as things stand doesn't exist yet. 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 Barts 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 who we've offered to help cover room hire for and the tennis club who we expect to pay court cleaning costs for.

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 on the sharp corner up the hill from the pub and replaced elsewhere on the Aldworth Road near Hook End Lane. We also decided to bite the bullet and order new noticeboards with the school lane one now in place and an order raised for a replacement at the Triangle. A new install by the Wakemans recreation ground is also planned. We've also refreshed our phone box library stock as some of the books were getting tired. A Litter picking project is also planned June.

We've supported the purchase of Emery Down Wood and provided 5k 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 areas 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 review those applications which have met with considerable opposition or comment. These all take up councillor's 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 Barts 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 15k 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 this is very disappointing. 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 playground for Lower Basildon which we have

offered to fund is taking an age to get a decision on the land from Beale Park. Both will be given the appropriate shove this year as we have money to spend.

There's 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 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 appendices 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 the bus front 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 evenings meeting will be his last one. 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.

Regarding 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. I will stand aside should any of my fellow councillors (or new ones) 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 sat either side of me, Douglas for his continued guidance and you, the residents 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.