Annual Report 2021 – 2022

11th May, 2022

# Chair’s Introduction and Report

1. Welcome to the Annual Assembly for Basildon.
2. This meeting will consist of a series of reports, each given by the councillor who has a particular responsibility for an area of the council’s work, over the past year or so. Each councillor will talk for about 5 minutes. There will be an opportunity in the final section of the meeting to ask questions and offer comments. We aim to conclude the meeting at about 8.30
3. Councillor David Jones is unable to attend; his reports will be raid by Councillor Sarah Barnes. Alan Law, our district councillor, also presents his apologies.

## Impact of Covid on parish council activity

1. It is only since October that the council has been able to regularly resume its monthly face to face meetings.
2. We have continued to receive occasional requests for virtual access.

## Changes to the council

1. Councillor Larkin has resigned.
2. Councillor Parsons was re-elected to the position of Chair. Councillor David Jones has been re-elected to the position of Vice Chair.
3. Councillor Greasley has taken on the responsibility for recycling.
4. The council website, now managed by Jane Jones, has been updated in keeping with revised data protection regulations and will undergo a reorganisation in the next couple of months.
5. Individual parish noticeboards are now overseen by individual councillors.

## Planning Applications

1. The council has reviewed 53 applications since last April. It had no objection to 37 of them. West Berkshire Council approved 41 of the applications and refused 9.
2. An application to build 4 new houses at Wakemans has been refused, but has since referred by the applicant to a national appeal.
3. Permission for a replacement house at West Lodge in Lower Basildon was granted. The application to build 3 houses on land beside and behind Appletree Cottage was withdrawn, perhaps following the 35 objections registered with West Berkshire.
4. Perhaps as a result of there being far more remote working we are seeing an increase in applications for buildings within gardens.
5. Site visits have resumed.
6. Planning applications received after agendas have been posted on noticeboards will be reviewed at the next available meeting.

## Subsidies

1. The council continues to subsidise bus services, the visiting post office and the mobile library provision, which it hopes to expand in the next year.

## Issues raised over the past year

1. The council has continued to raise its concerns regarding the damage done by the fire at The Grotto.
2. The district council distributed trees to all parish councils last autumn. These act as memorials to victims of Covid. Two have been received and have been planted on the village green. Two further saplings were received by the council as part of tree planting programme promoted by West Berkshire: it is hoped to transfer these to the green or other suitable site in the village. Residents will need to agree to take responsibility to water the trees in periods of dry weather.
3. Wild flower seeds were also distributed by the district council and these also have been sown on the green. A local resident continues to oversee the green.
4. Grit boxes around Upper and Lower Basildon continue to be topped up in advance of inclement weather.
5. The council has received several requests to mount road side mirrors. It is the policy of West Berkshire Council not to install these, and so the parish council has not acceded to those requests.
6. The council was contacted by Mrs Fielder, on behalf of the WI, and was asked to support the forthcoming jubilee. It was decided that an advertising budget of £500 be agreed and that the council would be happy to consider further requests, Councillor Oliver Chadwyck Healey has represented the council on the planning committee. The parish council website has carried publicity for the event.
7. The council continues to financial support for the defibrillator to be located at St.Stephens proposed by Rosemary Sandbach. We hope to see this installed in the near future.
8. Quotations have been sought for the grass cutting of the green and the recreation ground. We received three responses and have chosen to renew the contract with Scofell.
9. The council is responsible for the upkeep of the grounds at the village hall. It has been decided that it will aim to include one extra maintenance each year to that of the grass and the hedges. In 2022 the outdoor gym has received a full service of its equipment. A different maintenance task will be determined for 2023.
10. We have raised concerns with the Beale Park management team about the increasingly dilapidated frontage of the curtain shop in Lower Basildon.
11. Pangbourne Toilets have received an annual contribution for us of £520.
12. A line marker has been purchased for the village footballers.
13. When pot holes and overhanging vegetation are reported to West Berkshire, through the “Report a Problem” portal, the speed of response seems to be very good. Permanent repairs are more of an issue however. Residents are encouraged to report problems.
14. A new rubbish bin has been installed at the junction of Adders Walk and Yattendon Lane.
15. The council continues to thank those residents who unselfishly collect roadside litter in and around the village.

# Individual Reports

## Geoff Couchman

### Public Transport

I haven’t forgotten but just recovered from Covid. There is very little to report on Public Transport for the Village. Nothing has changed from last year and I think it highly unlikely that we will lose the 143 service for the foreseeable future. I have tried to chase WBC but have had no success for any update (Also not heard from Alan Law). With the strong support for public transport the threat of a few years ago has disappeared. I assume we will still pay the support but I think we should not increase our payment.

### Beale Park

The Beale Park issue has still not been resolved. I had to chase Lucy Costello for feedback from the Trustees meeting. Unfortunately their position is still the same that they wish to secure their boundaries so I don’t see this position changing in the near future. I believe it is the Trustees that are taking this harder line. With regard to the annual discount this may need to be renegotiated for next year. It would be useful to know next week how many parishioners have taken advantage of the discount. It will also be useful when the time comes to have the conversation for next year.

## Elaine Cox

### Public Rights of Way (PROWs)

Works

The parish council has not carried out any works on public rights of way during the year. The overall responsibility for their maintenance and protection lies with the District Council (WBC).

WBC has outstanding requests for surface improvement works on Bridleway 12 (Red Lane), Restricted Byway 13A (Adders Lane), and to remedy badger holes on Footpath 11 (off the drive to Hillfields Farm). During the year, WBC carries out vegetation clearance works, signposting maintenance, and any necessary enforcement works to keep paths open and free from interference.

Active travel and routes to school

WBC is beginning to work with the Public Health Team to improve active travel via the promotion and improvements of certain PROWs, yet to be identified. At the moment the work is to identify more and improved walking and cycling routes to school, and off-road routes for exercise or travel between and around villages. WBC would welcome the parish council’s views on this.

2026 ‘cut-off date’

The Government has announced that it plans the abandonment of the 2026 ‘cut-off date’, which was the date by which all footpaths and bridleways in existence in 1949 had to be registered, otherwise they would be extinguished. Various PROW user-groups have, however, been compiling lists of such routes, and they would still be free to submit the evidence to WBC, which then has a duty to investigate the evidence.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

WBC has carried out a consultation for the review of its Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Nearly 2000 responses where received and the initial results have revealed some of the public’s priorities:

Headlines from the ROWIP on the value of the public rights of way (PROW) network:

Overwhelmingly people valued public rights of way. All of the local councils, 92% of the public and 88% of landowners agreed that that they were an important asset for West Berkshire.

The top 6 priorities for the public in the ROWIP (in descending order):

* Making sure public rights of way are protected and new routes created through development and other projects.
* Maintaining and investing in the current network.
* Connecting missing links on the public rights of way network.
* Supporting parish councils and other community organisations to take a more active role in maintaining local public rights of way.
* Improving accessibility so that more people can use public rights of way.
* Providing information and promotional material to encourage more people to use public rights of way.

Elaborating on these, and adding some other known priorities, there is a clear need for the following:

* Better education of users on appropriate behaviour in the countryside.
* Better management of the PROW network for increased non-car travel and active travel.
* Information about appropriate routes for certain types of users, including those with disabilities.
* Physical improvements to cater for those with disabilities.
* Surface maintenance improvements, e.g. reduction of mud.
* Safe equestrian links to avoid busy roads.
* Promoted routes to include heritage features and attractions of the area.
* More promoted material for equestrians, cyclists and motorised vehicle users.
* Rural car parks.

## Melanie Greasley

### Recycling

At the previous annual assembly the Parish Council were asked to consider some small scale recycling activities which would be of benefit to the local community. Chief amongst these was the introduction of recycling boxes at the village hall for residents to use.

Following investigation, Terracycle were selected by the Parish Council as a first step and as a means to see if the take up would justify the outlay. Two (relatively) large containers were ordered and, following agreement with the Village Hall trustees, it was decided to locate them within the main entrance of the building which would keep them both dry, yet accessible, on a regular basis. The containers arrived in the spring of 2022 for coffee pods and pet food packaging and have proved popular with the one for coffee pods already full! Following the resignation from the Council by Nicky Larkin, the clerk and myself will now share the responsibility for removing the filled bins from site.

As a next step, the Parish Council will be asked if they would like to continue to support the initiative, which to date has cost £329. Should they be supportive, the Clerk will renew the order and a note will be placed in the Country Neighbour to advise as well as offer local residents the opportunity to suggest further schemes that could be implemented.

### Clubs and societies

For a number of years, the Parish Council has looked to support a number of local clubs and societies with financial grants for various projects with local benefits.

Over the last 12 months, advertisement(s) have been placed in the Country Neighbour to bring this to the attention of residents and we have also discussed our general support at various Parish Council meetings along with ring fencing a small pot of money for these grants.

Take up continues to be on the low side although we have helped the local community football club with a new line marker which is being used for both league matches and the weekly practice sessions that are held at the Village Hall. We have also contributed to the Tennis Club by covering some costs around shrub maintenance.

The offer to help remains in place for either new or established clubs within the Parish and we will discuss any requests on a case-by-case basis. We will continue to advertise this periodically in the Country Neighbour too.

## Oliver Chadwyck-Healey

### Parks and Recreation

## Since the update from Autumn last year there have not been any fundamental changes to the playgrounds of the villages. They continue to be well used on a casual and organised basis and provide villagers of all ages for a means to get out doors for exercise and entertainment.

## At time of writing we are awaiting the results of our annual RoSPA (Royal Society of Prevention of Accidents) survey of the Wakemans playground which we hope will show the benefit of the remedial work we carried out last year to make the playground a safer environment to play in. The survey is carried out each April and provides us with an independent view of the safety upgrades and investment required.

## Villagers will remember that last year we agreed to invest in two new pieces of play equipment: At Wakemans the installation of a Pendulum Swing with Basket Seat is due before the end of May. This offers the chance for children to enjoy the equipment in groups as well as individually and will complement the existing equipment without taking up too much green space.

## Up at the Village Hall playground we were planning to install a combined goal, basketball hoop and cricket stumps unit in the eastern corner of the playing fields just behind the tennis courts. Sadly the price we were quoted has increased by over 120% due to the cost of tarmac that was required for the surrounding area so we have decided not to go ahead with this installation. We will instead be looking in to investing in the goals already in situ on the playing field and a further update will be available at the next Parish Council meeting on this.

## As ever any feedback or suggestions from villagers young and old are welcome and I can be contacted via the Parish Council website.

## David Jones

### Libraries

Libraries in the UK benefit from a huge amount of visits-250m pa. This is bigger than all visits to cinemas, theatres, the UK top ten tourist attractions and live music gigs combined! Visits are, however, declining from this large base.

There was significant change in W. Berks. in April 2017 when the Council cut funding by 44% and asked Parish Councils to support the service by giving £1 per head per annum. Since then we have made donations of £1740 each financial year, as we thought as a Parish Council it was an important service to support. The total this year will be £1862.

There are 8 libraries and 1 mobile library served by 46 permanent staff and 187 volunteers. Volunteers are now a key plank of the service.

The library service has three aims:

• A library service which is responsive to local needs

• A safe and trusted place to get good information including online

• Free and available to all

The pandemic closed the library service from 23rd March 2020 to 13th July 2020. From that date they delivered a reduced service but were then closed in both November 2020 and January 2021 during the second and third lockdowns, when services were delivered online and through book collections only. The figures for this year’s use are therefore quite compromised. In Basildon we benefit from our proximity to Pangbourne library. The latest published data shows that 50 residents use the library service and they mostly use Pangbourne. They borrowed 1158 items across the year.

We also benefit from a service which is non existent in many parts of the UK nowadays-a mobile library. This visits the car park of St. Stephen’s church every 3rd Tuesday between 2.05pm and 2.45pm. We were also in discussion before lockdown with the library service about a potential stop in Lower Basildon. If as a community we do not support the mobile library, the inevitable consequence is that eventually it will be withdrawn, yet it importantly visits 73 sites throughout the county. As a rural Parish Council we have asked that our contribution is ring fenced for the mobile library. There is also a service for the housebound where a volunteer can visit their home every

few weeks with a small selection of library items from which they can choose something to borrow.

The biggest growth area is the free e-library service which is showing a huge increase in usage. There is free, multiple copy access to 140 magazine titles in digital format. Equally Britannica Online is available remotely as is Ancestry where 4718 searches were made alone in May 2020.

To finish, a quote from the writer Sidney Sheldon: "Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination. They open up windows to the world and inspire us to explore and achieve, and contribute to improving our quality of life.”

…and J. K. Rowling said: "When in doubt go to the library.”

### Traffic Matters

Background

Speeding has become more and more an issue for those we represent. Lower Basildon, spread as it is along the A329, has the benefit of two speed cameras but Upper Basildon has no such traffic calming measures.

This desire to improve traffic calming is driven by a genuine concern to prevent a serious accident. It also reflects residents’ concerns expressed at the last two Annual Assemblies and at residents speaking at our 5 minute forums.

The route through the village from Pangbourne and Aldworth, although 30mph, is where residents believe that cars frequently travel over the speed limit.

Residents are understandably anxious and this problem was particularly highlighted during lockdown with many more walkers and riders on the road. This manifested itself in a resident organising a petition to respond to West Berkshire questioning how many people this is affecting. 151 completed the speeding survey and 94% of respondents state that it is “pretty bad or excessive”. 96% of respondents would be supportive of a solar power speed sign in the village and there were many comments about going even further than this (e.g. 30 mph painting on the road near speed limit changes).

Outcomes

At the peak of lockdown in December 2020 we had meetings with West Berkshire’s Principal Engineer and the Senior Engineer (Traffic) to put our case forward. This included support from both our District Councillor and Member of Parliament, who we had engaged on this issue. These meetings were received positively by WBC and they have committed to a number of improvements including the replacing of some signage and repainting white lines. We have continued to benefit from frequent communication with them.

More importantly they undertook a speed surveys from 4/11/21 through to 18/11/21, with respect to the possible introduction of an additional Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) in Upper Basildon, should the data support such a solution. The recording device captured speeds of vehicles travelling in both directions along the Aldworth Road. It operated throughout a 24 hour period, so it also recorded vehicle speeds in the early hours and evenings when other traffic was at a minimum, and when there are often reports of speeding vehicles. The specific data is attached in the Appendix.

The 85th Percentile is the speed up to which 85% of traffic is travelling under free flowing conditions. This is the measure that for many years has been used by highway authorities nationally to determine the most appropriate speed limit. The 85th Percentile has to be significantly above the 30mph speed limit to trigger the deployment of a VAS.

Whilst there may be a small number of vehicles which are using the road above the posted speed limit, the survey results indicate that the overwhelming majority of road users are able to comply with this limit and does not indicate a problem which is any greater than on many similar roads in our district. In these circumstances it is a police enforcement issue not a Council one.

This locality has a very good road safety history with one recorded Personal Injury Accident occurring at the junction of Aldworth Road and Hook End Lane junction last summer. According to the official police report the incident was as a result of careless / reckless driver behaviour rather than a fault with the existing highway layout and was beyond the extent of the current 30mph speed restriction.

In accordance with the current VAS policy, Vehicle Activated Signs are primarily intended to be introduced at locations that have a very poor accident history or where a significant problem regarding excessive vehicle speeds has been identified. With the survey results as they are, unfortunately our location does not meet the criteria for the introduction of a Vehicle Activated Sign. A Council imperative is that Vehicle Activated Signs are only introduced at locations where the existing conditions dictate that it is appropriate, so as not to reduce their effectiveness elsewhere on the network.

One of the things as residents we must realise, however, is that when these surveys have been done in the past, some 65% of speeding vehicles are actually driven by local residents! Signs can help but the key is to change drivers’ behaviour.

Next Steps

The Council have committed to putting in a new gateway at the junction of Aldworth Road and Hook End Lane. This is currently being progressed. An example is included in the Appendix.

It is also our intention to consider mobilising a Community Speed Watch Team which will need volunteers from the local community. We have met with the Senior Road Safety Officer and signed up for the scheme. We will now investigate with them, the right kind of equipment to support such a scheme. We will need to purchase this and also think about how we engage with residents to help in this area. All on the Parish Council are committed to improving this issue in Upper Basildon and we also ask residents to play their part. If there are any volunteers who would like to administer this scheme, please let us know.

## Rob Greasley

### Finance

Our closing balance as of April 1st was £34,784 in the current account and £32,604 in our holding account. In comparison, a year before we had £47,596 and £32,000 respectively.

* The reduction in our reserves was viewed positively by our auditors.

The significant spends over the past year were as follows:

* The Clerk’s Salary is in the region of £7, 500. This will be reviewed in the light of there being no change in the annual salary for the past two years.
* Grass Cutting:£3500.
* Park surfacing and repairs: £4000.
* Gritting: £2600.
* Streetlight Repairs: £2200 (which includes £100 each month to power the lights in Wakemans.
* Post Office hall hire: £1600.
* Library Support: £1720.
* Club Support: £400.
* Gym Maintenance: £1000. This is the 2022 task that is additional to the essential grounds maintenance tasks which are completed at the Recreation Ground.

Of those above, streetlights, park repairs, gym maintenance and an extra bus contribution (due to timings) were unexpected and account for almost 8.5K of the 13K shortfall. The rest came from a smaller precept and our usual spending.

## Comments and questions

Residents are invited to comment on and ask questions about the reports.