

Chair's Report – Councillor Ian Parsons

Finance

- Currently the parish council's two accounts have a combined total of £57,599.80 - £42,356.59 in the savings account and £16,563.75 in the current account.
- We gave ourselves a budget of £30,000 in the last financial year – the precept of £27,000 and a transfer of £3,000 from our savings – and spent all but £500 of that.
- Major spending outlays include supporting the visiting post office - £1,650; grounds and open spaces, including the village green improvements - £5,811; support for clubs and groups - £470. We have provided nearly £1,000 to support the bus service and expect to make similar contributions to the operation of the library service and the winter gritting programme, which will include filling the salt bins around the village.
- The internal audit has just been confirmed as complete; the more formal external audit will begin in the next month or so.
- Parish councils are being asked to take responsibility for a wider range of tasks, hence our caution in keeping our savings at a higher level than ordinarily would be advised.

Planning

- We have dealt with 76 planning applications: there were only 7 where the parish council's view was not supported by the West Berks planning committee.
- Of the 76 applications 6 of these were for replacement dwellings (2 were approved and 2 were withdrawn).
- We have also had applications for 12 new houses in the form of 6 applications – 2 have been refused and 4 are still pending.

Changes to the council

- Douglas Bending, Clerk to the council, resigned after many years of notable service. His position is now held by Rob Greasley.
- Rob resigned as Chair of the council to take up this role, and I, as Vice Chair, have taken on his former role.
- I am pleased to report that David Jones joined the council earlier in the year and is already playing a full role in the council's activity.
- We are two councillors short of a full complement.

Decisions taken

- Several new noticeboards and waste bins have been installed around the village. We plan to extend this in the coming year.
- We have funded the installation of the access ramp between the primary school and Footpath 5.
- We hope soon to open discussions with the new head at Basildon primary about the issue of parking.
- The Village Design Statement has been updated to reflect changes in the village and includes new sections from Michael McNeill and Anne Dewing. Our thanks for their contribution.
- We have had no success in persuading Beale Park to lease some land behind the curtain shop for use as a children's playground

- The council has spent time in consideration of the various reductions and changes in local services: libraries, road gritting, the bus service have all been significant issues and have prompted responses not only from the council but also from many residents.
- Gigaclear has arrived in the village; only one problem has been reported to the council – the use of the green as a spoil tip – and that was resolved within 48 hours.
- Several councillors have attended induction and planning training run by the Berkshire association of local councils.
- We have supported the trustees of Emery Down Wood with the purchase of new gates.
- We continue to represent the village by sending a councillor to the Neighbourhood Action Group, a forum where parish councils can meet with the police and raise matters of mutual concern. It meets every three months at the Purley Community Centre.
- We expect to hold at least one council meeting in Lower Basildon and, given the geography of the village possibly one at St Stephens in an effort to make the work of the council more accessible to more residents.
- Two councillors now act as trustees for the village hall; we continue to lobby for the installation of an increased range of recreational equipment at the ground.

Libraries – Councillor David Jones

- This started over a year ago when the Department for Culture, Media and Sport intervened to delay plans to close eight of West Berkshire's nine libraries. W Berks wanted to save £730,000 by closing the eight branch libraries – as well as two mobile libraries – which would leave the district served by just one branch library in Newbury.
- The Council then announced that seven branches and a mobile library would be saved from closure for the time being thanks to £1.4m in "transitional funding" from the government, £475,000 of which would go to libraries over the next two years but they needed a plan to save funds in the future.
- This is the library proposal we have supported as a PC.
- West Berks Council need to provide a "Comprehensive and efficient library service" as per Public Library and Museums Act 1964
- There are 8 libraries in W Berks, including an at home service and two mobile libraries.
- These are important constituencies who use our libraries. Older, families and IT access for jobseekers etc.
- Active users (those who borrow books) 21k out of 155k W Berks residents
- Pangbourne 5th biggest library with 1142 active users
- biggest after Newbury 10028
- Thatcham 2574
- Theale 1747
- Hungerford 1545
- Proposal was:
 - Close Wash Common
 - Mobile goes from 2 to 1, still a 3 week cycle which includes St Stephens Church Lower Basildon. There are 765 mobile library users and 150 at home users
 - Move to a mix of salaried staff and volunteers

- £150k asked to be raised by town and parish councils
- 63 Councils asked for £1 per head and initial returns suggest they will raise between £122k to £135k
- Our cost is £1740 pa and after debate we agreed this use of our budget
- Ray Bradbury said “Without the library, you have no civilization.”

The 143 Bus Service – Councillor Geoff Couchman

- The future of the 143 bus service is very uncertain at the moment. What we do know is the following.
- The 142 service commenced on the 15th. May running from Goring and Streatley via Lower Basildon to Pangbourne, Whitchurch Cane End and onto Caversham and Reading.
- The 143 bus service is now scheduled to cease on the 1st. July as two Oxfordshire Parish Councils decided to no longer contribute. However Matthew Metcalfe of WBC is in talks with Thames Travel to negotiate a reduced Monday to Saturday service from Upper Basildon to Reading, missing out Whitchurch which may be more attractive to parishioners. We would still be required to continue our contribution plus 2%. That I believe will only get us to the end of this financial year and we will need to review our position in January 2018. A fall back might be we enter into an agreement with the volunteers of the 142 to divert up Park Wall Lane, via Bethesda Street the Church and Wakemans. Whatever the outcome I will write a piece for the Country Neighbour.

Footpaths – Councillor Elaine Cox

- Although a parish councillor, I am reporting as a representative of West Berkshire Council (WBC), where I am in charge of the Public Rights of Way Team.
- Public Rights of Way (PROW) comprise four categories: Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways, and Byways Open to All Traffic.
- Basildon has 26 PROWs totalling around 14 miles in length. WBC’s duties include maintenance, enforcement, surface vegetation clearance, and signposting. Footpaths 5, 6 and 17 are routinely cut by WBC.
- Parish Councils have certain powers, which include maintenance, enforcement, and signposting with the permission of WBC.
- Landowners have the responsibility to ensure that vegetation from boundary hedges or private land doesn't obstruct PROWs. They are also responsible for keeping PROWs clear of crops, and for maintaining some structures.
- WBC keeps a database of all problems reported on PROW. At present this shows that 12 problems were resolved in the last year, but 25 are still outstanding. The sorts of problems presently recorded are to do with gates, stiles, vegetation, obstructions and fly- tipping.
- S.106 developer funding was used to resurface Footpath 5, between Bethesda Street and the school, in recognition that via is a useful route to school. Unfortunately it has occasionally been used by horses, which would ruin the surface if use was frequent. Signs have been erected and please report horse use if seen.
- Assistance from volunteers is always welcome. Please contact Elaine Cox if you would like to help, e.g. surveys, or some simple clipping back or maintenance.

- WBC has recently introduced a new scheme whereby Parish Councils are helped to carry out work in addition to that which is done by WBC, called 'Devolution'.
- WBC has produced resources and information to help Parish Councils add value to things which matter to their communities. The scheme is being tried out in small number of parishes, and WBC is asking for expressions of interest. A fund of £400k has been set up.
- The sorts of areas of work which are supported are:
 - Drainage and maintenance.
 - Local grass cutting.
 - Cleaning broad signs.
 - PROW maintenance.
 - Street cleansing and litter picking
 - Vegetation trimming.
 - Volunteering in local libraries.

The Grotto – Councillor Nathalie Weekes

- The Grotto planning applications 17/00186 & 17/00187 propose 'the conversion and refurbishment of existing listed residential building into a 60 boutique bedroom hotel and private members club including Coach House extension, detached spa facility with outdoor swimming pool and enabling development in the form of 7 detached lodge units and 2 x 4 bedroom family houses.'
- Cheryl Willet is case officer at WBC and determination date is Thurs 30th March but there is as yet no decision been made.
- There were 4 letters against and in support.
- The main concerns were about the additional buildings, effects on its listed status, noise pollution and traffic.
- However there was also concern for the preservation and future of the Grotto building to retain all of its history.
- The Parish Council considered the application and had no objections. The Council noted the following:
 - WBC should ensure that trees on the site are protected as far as possible to screen the site with appropriate TPO's being raised.
 - All lighting should be both considerate (given other properties in the area) and ensure that dark skies are adhered to as far as possible.
 - Access to and from the site should be carefully considered given the extra traffic likely to be generated.
 - The proposal should ensure that the historical nature of the site is preserved (and enhanced) as far as possible.
- The Parish Council's decision as a letter from Historic England quoted 'accepted a degree of harm in order to preserve the viability of the building.
- Historic England objected to the application as it would harm the existing building and compromise its rurality.
- CPRE expressed concerns about the additional buildings and asked for permission to be requested in stages to prove that the additional demand for accommodation exists.
- We await a final decision from WBC.

Speeding in the Village – Councillor Barnes

- Basildon PC currently has 2 parish councillors who have been trained to operate the Speed Indicator Device (SID), there are 2 available across West Berkshire that Parish Council can have for a week at a time. The SIDs can measure the speed of cars in either a 20, 30 or 40 mph zone.
- Within the Basildons, we have pin pointed a number of 'hot spots' namely Maple Lane/Aldworth Road, St Stephens Church, Park Wall Lane/Bethesda Street and Main Reading road - between the cameras.
- We are currently working with WBC to load a SID, which does need to secure to some street furniture if it is to be left for an hour to gather data. The SID machines need a minimum of 50 yards to be able to accurately assess whether someone is speeding.
- Unfortunately a number of roads where 'speeding' occurs are actually National Speed limit roads and whilst we would like their limit to be reduced, this is not currently on the list of priorities for the council.
- Should anyone want to report potential speeding in the village they can use this link on the WBC website and if it is a matter for the PC, an email is sent to the Clerk, who in turn will advise the Speeding champion to review and report back to WBC.
- <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=31711>
- Please be advised it is everyone's responsibility to be aware of their speed when traveling through the village, especially as we have many people who are either walking, on push bikes or horses.

The Village Green – Councillor Tim Martin

- The refurbishment of the village green continues: wild flower patches have been sowed and are flowering for the first time; 6 young trees have also been planted.
- The cherry trees are approaching the end of their life span; in an attempt to keep them healthy as long as possible they will be pruned in the next few weeks.
- Other trees on the green will receive some attention at the same time.