

The Parish Council 2014 / 15 Summary

Lets start with a brief introduction of both myself and the rest of the Parish Council. My name is Robert Greasley, I've been a Parish Councilor for a couple of years and have held the office of Chairman for the last 9 months. I'm married to Melanie, have two children at the local school, work in IT and have lived in Upper Basildon for the last 7 years. I took on the chairman role at the end of last summer in the hope that I could make a positive difference to the community, using experience from work and a general enthusiasm to make things happen. Today, I've still got the hope, but have been encouraged by the progress that we as a council have made in the last year. Before we move on, I'd like to place on record my thanks to the previous chairman – Jeremy O'Brien, who held the position for 2 years and worked hard to keep the Basildon parish on an even keel and get us to a position where we could start moving forward. I'd also like to thank Alan Law for his support during my time as chairman and offer my congratulations for his victory in the election earlier this month.

Lets now introduce the councilors. Most of them you will know, however, I'll ask them all to introduce themselves to you in turn and tell you how long they've been a councillor. We'll then talk about finance and planning before covering the last year and the future.....

PLANNING

We faced the usual challenges in planning matters namely striking a balance between pressures from developers and keeping the character of the village.

In summary:

Additional Houses – 4 out of 11 applications were successful.

Replacement houses 1 successful application

Extensions, Conservatories etc - 43 were processed

Tree Works 6

There were 30 other applications (including planning conditions)

Let me add a few comments behind these numbers.

*The total number of planning applications was 84. This was a reduction from earlier years.

* Many dealt with minor changes, details, conditions, tree work etc which would have been mostly dealt with by administrative action in the past and would not have required a separate planning application.

* As an Overall figure, 85% of planning applications were approved by WBC and 15% were refused, withdrawn or not determined for various reasons.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.

* The Parish Council objected to 4 housing applications of which 2 were approved and 2 refused and objected to 10 other applications of which 6 were approved and 4 refused.

* The 2 refused planning applications for a total of seven dwellings have gone to appeal but neither has yet been determined.

And so onto the PARISH ACCOUNTS.....

Let me start by confirming that the full accounts for 2014/15 are available from the Parish Clerk upon request. However, the headline figures are as follows.

Bank Balance

We had a Starting balance of £39K

An Ordinary reserve of £22K

The S106 reserve was £2K

The Parish Plan reserve was £10K

Our Broadband reserve was £5K

Income for the year was £27K and this was made up entirely of our Precept.

Based on the above we did the following...

Expenditure was £31K for the financial year giving us an ending balance of 35K.

Of this, there were a number of Significant Expenditures

Administration including insurance and audit fees £5K

Clerks Salary £7K

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

Small capital projects £5K

Grants and Donations inc Village Hall, Outreach Post Office, Summer Show, etc £7K

The precept for 2015/16 will remain at £27K but a very significant amount (over £25K) of S106 Open Spaces funds has become available to the Parish Council during the year. As you can imagine, I'm very keen for us to make the most of this additional money.

Lets now talk about what we as a council have been doing over the last year:

Have all of you had chance to see what's going on with the phone boxes yet? The hardest job seemed to be getting them re-painted, however, once we'd found someone suitable to do the work, we were able to give the phone box at the triangle and by Red Villa a new lease of life. For those that haven't seen them, the Red Villa Box is now being used as a village library and the Triangle one has been set up as an information point. Feedback has been positive and the plan going forward is to develop the Triangle phone box further and showcase interesting projects from clubs and societies.

We've had a push in the last year to improve our Footpaths. Thanks to a grant from West Berks Council which Alan Law negotiated for us, the footpath 5 gate area has been re-surfaced and mowing and tidying of areas leading to the local school has occurred. Additionally, we've re-surfaced footpath 16 near School Lane and removed the quagmire that was causing school children issues throughout the winter months.

On a slightly lesser note, we've tried to step up our presence at wider council meetings. For instance Geoff and Ian have regularly attended the Eastern Area Planning meeting which covers planning applications which need further consideration. Additionally, we've attended the NAG – or neighbourhood action group as it's called, to ensure we are represented and pass on issues we have such as speeding, crime etc etc. All of this has ensured the village is better represented. There's also been a better connection established with the local school with a parish councilor joining the ranks of Governors. This has given the Parish Council a much clearer understanding of the schools issues and aspirations and has given us the opportunity to help them. One area we were able to make a real difference on was the Mini Bus. The school's current minibus is nearing the end of its useful life and the Parish Council used money saved from a number of areas to come up with the required amount to allow the minibus to run for another year. This gives the school time to raise money for a new bus whilst not worrying about the old one and I'm pleased to say that progress there is good. Additionally, the school is actively looking into making it available for other groups as per the Parish Councils request which can only be a good thing.

Having hunted around unsuccessfully for one of the Parish footpath leaflets, we've reviewed, updated and re-printed the old Basildon Footpath one. It's needed a few changes to both the layout, maps and also some fairly major surgery on the text due to

the changing nature of the village. However, we've got there and it's now available from the pub, church, village hall, both phone boxes, Newbury Council offices and hopefully by now Pangbourne Library. Thanks to all of the councilors who were involved.

Lets quickly whiz through some of the smaller achievements which have been completed in the last year. We completed the flooding survey for West Berkshire Council, highlighting problem areas for them to investigate further - we've purchased and installed a road sign for Church Lane in Lower Basildon, something that people have been asking for a considerable period of time. We've co-ordinated the car park resurfacing at St Stephens church and are really pleased with the results, as were the church. Additionally, we worked with the village hall to get a defibulator installed by the entrance, something that only has be used once to be the most important thing that we have done in the last year. Talking of the village hall, we've financially supported projectors at the village hall by putting in a members bid to Alan Law who then secured the money for us. Hopefully, these will be put to good use in the months and years ahead. We've also kicked off a project to bring new life to our village green, this is still in its early stages but hopefully over the next few months you'll see ideas of what we would like to do.

Local clubs are something which interest me and as chairman I plan for the council to be much more supportive to new and existing clubs going forward. To help this along, the Parish Council have agreed on a £1200 pot which will be available on an ad hoc basis to clubs and societies in the Parish. Our hope is to encourage more clubs and this financial support will hopefully give people a helping hand. One success I'd like to share is the local childrens football club which has blossomed since starting earlier this year. Basildon Badgers FC offers free football to primary school children in the Parish and within a couple of months it has grown from nothing to 35 children. The Parish council have supported the club through section 106 money for goalposts and kit sponsorship and the village hall have kindly allowed use of the field for free. Feedback has been terrific and we now have an asset that families are enjoying. The next steps here will focus on better training and maximizing the facilities more, all supported by the parish council. We can do more though and if you have a club or society (or you want to start one) why not get in touch with us and we'll see if we can help you. One club we are looking at is the Scouts and whether we can get a pack (or packs) back to the Parish. Progress here is good, likewise, we've been approached about backing a quarterly disco for primary school age children and early discussions have gone well. However, this is a start only.....

On Bank Holiday Monday I dragged the kids out for a walk down Adders Lane and around to home via Kiln Hill. As I stood in knitwear getting soaked, I thought about the need for some sort of bus shelter half way down Adders Lane that could be used for ill prepared walkers. Unfortunately, this isn't something we can do, however, we have co-ordinated the design and installation of a new Bus Shelter for Wakemans which will

hopefully serve the residents in that area well. Having had a look, I'm really pleased with the design and the installation job which West Berks Council were able to arrange. A special thanks goes to Sarah Barnes for her tireless work in making it happen.

One area that people talked about at this meeting last year was the village website. Infrequently updated, unattractive and lacking detail were three of points raised by residents. By now, I'm hoping that the majority of you will have seen the new look website, complete with the Parish Council logo which we hope you like too. We are currently reviewing the text and adding areas such as Parish Council meeting minutes, details of previous annual assemblies and more details around village clubs. The process of getting a new website has not been easy and has involved considerable effort working with an external supplier and getting involved in the design, layout and overall presentation. I'd like to thank Jeremy for his tireless efforts and for making it happen. I know it has been an almost labour of love for Jeremy, however, I think its been well worth it and the website gives the Parish a real asset which I hope can be fully utilized going forward.

I think one of the most enjoyable events of the last year was the Parish Plan launch event which we held in March this year. For those who don't know, the Parish Plan is a formal document which outlines the hopes, aspirations and future projects the Parish wishes to follow. It can be used as a means of securing funding from West Berks Council and as a result its' important to parishes likes ours. Towards the end of last year, we decided it was time to review the 2007 Parish Plan and as a result we had a number of meetings with West Berks Council to understand what we needed to do. The result was the parish plan launch event, which we put on for the princely sum of £49 (the savings here went to help pay for the mini bus.). The output from this we collated and then took to the church for the clubs and societies day which was also good fun. We are now in a position to call the steering group, which is made up of local residents, to begin the process of reviewing and working towards completing the refresh. From my point of view, this event was far more than a Parish Plan meeting though, it was an opportunity to find out what people really want and start working towards making some of the extensive list happen. One example of this covers conservation. We had a number of residents express concern over the protection of trees and wildlife in the Parish. As a result, we are nearing completion of a survey of the larger oaks (measuring over 4 metres in circumference) around the Parish. This was a little more time consuming than I expected, however, we are now sharing the results with WBC with a view to obtaining Tree protection orders and ensuring these lovely oaks will be enjoyed by future generations. We've also kicked off discussions to celebrate our oldest, well largest, oak tree with some sort of plaque and hopefully some sort of old tree trail for children to follow.

More recently, last weekend in fact, we ran a litter picking event in the parish. Let me take this opportunity to thank Helen for all of her efforts organizing this. I think we are all

in agreement that it was a real success and the village looks better for the work people did. If you did attend, thanks for backing the project. We will run it again for sure and in the meantime will encourage people to be responsible with litter and also continue our push to have a number of new bins in the Parish.

Finally, Emery Down wood. We have contributed to the pot to help buy this for the community and plan to have a councilor on the board of trustees to ensure we fully support the preservation of this area. Fundraising has gone well and hopefully they'll be positive news in the short term.

Hopefully, what I've covered illustrates our efforts to make things better in Basildon. However, not everything has gone to plan. We are still working for more bins with West Berks council and its disappointing that we haven't secured one by the bench on Bethesda Street yet. Additionally, Broadband. Lots of you talked about it last year and as a home worker myself its something I'm very keen on. As things stand we await a decision on whether we are going to get it going forward, however, it seems that short of offering a large amount of money we are only going to get this when it is convenient for the service deliverer to make it happen. There are no timescales on this but we will keep asking and lobbying. We are open to paying an amount to get it, however, I am not going to held to ransom for this.

Elsewhere, we've installed and promptly removed a horse barrier at the bottom of Emery Acres as it effectively blocked the path. If you were inconvenienced please accept my apologies. There was also disappointing news following our traffic calming plan for Kiln Hill. We wanted West Berks to consider re-painting the road to include a pedestrian section and therefore make things safer. West Berks refused the suggestion, however, they have got involved on the corner by Yew Tree Cottage on the Aldworth road and there are plans in place to hopefully improve things for people walking both up and down the hill with better signs and some sort of road line. More on this as and when we know it.

So where do we go from here?

We've talked about what we've done and issues we've had. So, as our Parish Plan header said.....where do we go from here?

We're going to carry on with the Parish Plan refresh – the steering group meets next week and begins the process of working through the comments of residents. Our target date for the completed refresh is the end of the year, a little ambitious I grant you, however, we need to get this moved on whilst there is interest in it. One area I'd

highlight from the plan which is guaranteed further discussion is a shop for Upper Basildon. This was one of the most popular items raised at the refresh launch event and we will be exploring solutions this year. These will then be shared and discussed with the wider Parish.

We are working through a review of the Visual Design Statement – preliminary discussions have taken place and work is now underway to update this important village document. This is at the suggestion of Gary Raynor from the planning side of West Berks Council who kindly met us in April to discuss how we as a Parish could get the most out of planning. Once completed in draft in the next month or so, it'll give West Berks council a firmer picture of the parish to consider against planning applications.

Now something close to my heart. I am desperate for Closer tie in's with the village hall and local clubs. This is really important to me and something that I'll continue to work on. As a Parish Council we want to support the village hall much more and understand any issues they have. I've already talked about clubs and the money available for new and existing ones, my hope is that we can inspire people to start or join clubs and financially support them to a point to make it happen. The more choices there are for people, the better the village will be for everyone. If anyone would like to know more about this, please see me afterwards or email the parish council. Additionally, I want us to support the local school and church as well; this has worked well to date with the school but it can be better going forward and we'll do this by being more approachable and spending more time with these vital local groups.

Moving on, we will continue to Work with WBC on the issue of affordable housing in the parish. We are going to get more involved with footpaths and recording and preserving the wildlife and countryside we have. As part of this, we have started a project to produce a leaflet to show the cultural, historical and natural layout of the village which will give new residents an idea of the village around them whilst hopefully offering new bits and pieces for existing parishioners. When combined with our footpath leaflet, we hope that this will give a real picture of the parish. I'm also hoping that we can develop the concept of the information point phone box and have more articles of interest for residents along with postcards showing the best our parish has to offer.

Footpath maintenance – we want to be smarter, keeping paths clearer when they most need it, eg those on the school run. We are also hoping to have the path between Emery Acres and Bethesda Street improved to allow for better pushchair and school children access.

Bike racks – we have received a grant and hope to have new racks in place at the pub and church in Upper Basildon by the summer, likewise we have a need for a new noticeboard near the school which is being replaced by a larger unit to reflect the number of adverts it attracts. The old noticeboard will be refurbished and is planned to be erected near the play area in Wakemans to ensure our news is spread wider.

Broadband.....I've already talked about the decision being out of hands. That doesn't mean we can't lobby for it and as a Parish Council we will continue to do this. If we are invited onboard great, if we are asked to pay for the privilege we will give it proper consideration and will try and involve residents as far as possible – more than likely via the website. Either way, we want it and will be pushing hard.

Section 106 spending – apart from considering a number of possibilities we are also going to bring in outdoor gym equipment to the recreation ground as that was popular at both the parish plan meeting and from general conversations I've had with a number of residents. Planning for this has kicked off and we'll provide more of an update when we have it.

Finally ad hoc queries. We will continue to try and help villagers with any ad hoc queries they have. Recently, we've had questions around the post office, exterior lighting, tree preservation, building and planning. All of these we've tried to answer to the best of our ability and in the future I hope we can continue to get involved and assist whenever it's required. We are there for you afterall and it's important you feel you can rely on us to help.

Hopefully, I've painted a picture of council and covered the good, the issues and most importantly the future. I'm pleased with the progress of recent months but realise there's lots to do. We have a lot of separate groups in the Parish that I'm trying to bring together but it takes time. However, rest assured we will get there and when we meet again next year, I hope to deliver more good news, illustrations of firmer relationships and positive steps with clubs, services and activities. In the meantime, I'll now move us on to Alan Law's report and then we will conclude with general questions.

Thanks.