

Annual Parish Assembly

Report for the period April 29th 2015 to April 20th 2016

Presented by Alex Cother

I will start my report by marking again the sad loss of Councillor John Thurley whose contribution to village life continues to be missed by all who knew him and many that didn't, but unwittingly benefited from his actions.

2015 also saw the retirement of our former Clerk, Mr Bill Goudge, who provided a rock for the Council for many years and gave outstanding service. This prompted the search for a replacement Clerk and were delighted to appoint Mrs Lucy Rumens as his replacement towards the end of 2015.

Sadly, Councillor Sonia Buchanan decided to retire from the Council due to her move to Woolhampton in the previous year. The Chair thanked her for her valued contribution over the years.

We have also been fortunate to have been joined by two new Councillors in the past twelve months, both of whom may already be known to people in the village, Councillor Graham Bowsher and Councillor Glynis Snow. Future potential councillors are encouraged to introduce themselves to any of the Councillors or the Clerk.

As in previous years, the Council has considered a regular flow of applications, mostly for residential development in this and adjoining parishes. The significant residential developments have all been in adjoining parishes, notably in Padworth where development adjacent to the A4 continues. The Council remains concerned about the risks presented by slow moving traffic either entering or exiting the service road, despite the controversial lowering of the eastbound speed limit and lane restrictions. The Council has considered a similar volume of applications to last year including the significant construction of a new railway bridge at Ufton Nervet in an adjoining parish, work on which has commenced.

The uncertainty in respect of A4 breakers is resolved with a decision from the Planning Inspectorate overturning WBC's enforcement notices. It is very disappointing that the strong arguments put forward by residents and this Council in respect of noise pollution, increased traffic movements and the needs of the AONB were largely disregarded.

At several Parish Council meetings, we have heard first hand from our District Councillor, Mr Chopping, about the severe cuts to services by WBC as a result of a reduction in funding received from Central Government. The Council shares many of the frustrations felt by Parishioners in respect of the cuts being made, the library service and bus services being the ones most discussed. It is encouraging that many Beenham residents made their feelings known through petitioning WBC and no doubt contributing to the temporary reprieve of some of the services.

Being mindful of the likely increase in Council Tax, the Parish Council took the decision earlier this year to keep the Precept at the 2015 level so as to not impact on residents finances any further than was felt necessary. However, the Council gives notice of its intention to review the existing Parish Plan which may result in the requirement to fund new projects and refurbishments around the

village. The Parish finances show that we have a fair reserve but it should be understood that works such as installing or replacement of play equipment runs into several thousands of pounds and the Council has a responsibility to provide services that are useful to Parishioners but to also ensure that adequate reserves are maintained. This has meant that the Council have had to make some unpopular decisions regarding reducing or removing some of the services provided.

Regular dialogue with users of the Community Room and School Hall are about to commence and it is hoped that better use can be made of this valuable resource and steps taken to ensure that it is provided in the most economical manner.

WBC have made several noticeable improvements during the year including the long awaited resurfacing of Stoneyfield and the installation/replacement of street lighting in the Strouds.

Twelve months on, it remains disappointing to note that the Persimmon development at the Wharf has still not been adopted by WBC and the amenity space has further degenerated being used regularly for overnight parking by commercial vehicles as well as cars.

The Council has further considered the housing needs of the community and stated its intention to continue to look for potential sites and the implications. Repeating last year's minute from the Annual Parish Assembly, the Parish Council have not been presented with any planning applications to consider in respect of Ormonde Hamblin's former home, and would not do so without appropriate consultation with the community.

The Village website continues to develop and be regularly updated. Many thanks to Michael and Jackie for their stewardship of this important resource.

The situation in respect of Broadband services improved during the year for many Beenham village residents with the Phase 2 rollout of faster BT broadband services. Sadly, Phase 2 did not improve speeds for the residents in some outlying parts, especially those living within Aldermaston Wharf. However, the Council discussed the contract that WBC have entered into with Gigaclear which should provide faster broadband to those previously 'missed'.

Sincere thanks go to the Beenham Village Events Committee who have soldiered on despite the loss of Mr Thurley, their efforts should be heartily applauded.

Last year, I set out objectives for the Council for the next twelve months and I am pleased that we are making progress. These included:

Shared responsibility – delegating and calling upon experts when available to guide us.

Revisiting the Parish Plan, first published in 2010, confirming what has been achieved, what is left to do and what goals we should be setting through to 2020.

Broadening engagement with the Parishioners

Develop specialisms within the Council – Planning, Environment, Highways so that we can better deal with the issues presented to us

I'd like to thank my fellow Councillors for their hard work and to Parishioners who make Beenham the special place to live that it is.