

BEECH HILL PARISH COUNCIL

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MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF THE PARISH OF BEECH HILL HELD AT 7.30PM ON TUESDAY 11th April 2017

PRESENT: Martin Plank, Chairman of the Parish Council with 18 residents

Declarations of Interest: members are reminded that declarations of interest should be made where appropriate.

1 Apologies for absence

1.1 The Clerk, Helen Malyn had given her apologies in advance of the meeting. Mr Geoff Mayes & Mrs Alison Edwards took notes in her absence.

2 Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 12th April 2016

2.1 The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting were not available for signing and therefore will be approved and signed as an exception at the next PCM on 11th July 2017

3 Report of the Chairman: To receive a report from the Chairman, Martin Plank.

Good evening everyone and welcome to the Beech Hill Village 2017 Annual Parish Meeting.

As always I would remind you that the Annual Parish Meeting is not a meeting of the Parish Council, but instead the yearly meeting of all local organisations and volunteer groups to celebrate and record their achievements as well as to discuss any current issues.

During the course of the evening we will hear from various individuals who represent their own organisations. Although questions can be asked, via the Chair please, it should at all times be respected that the individuals are only representatives of their own committees and as such they will only be able to answer certain questions. If the details required are unavailable tonight or the representative feels they are more relevant to their committee, they can be followed up by either contacting the organisation direct or by attending one of their meetings.

I will commence the reporting aspect of this meeting by providing you with a summary of the matters dealt with by the Beech Hill Parish Council since the last year's Annual Parish Meeting, which was held on the 12th April 2016, as follows:-.

Beech Hill Parish Council - Report

During the intervening time the Parish Council has held six public meetings. The Councilors who have acted during this period have consisted of me as chairman, Chris Bridges as vice-chairman, Alison Edwards, and Geoff Mayes.

We have had a vacancy on the Council for the whole of this time, but I am pleased to advise that Hannah Callier has put herself forward to fulfill the role and unless anyone else is like minded she will be formally co-opted onto the Council at the next meeting.

Minutes of each of the Parish Council's meetings, together with details of its finances, are published on the village website which provide more detail of the individual actions, but these have principally been as follows:-

1. Reviewing and commenting on planning applications.
2. Maintaining the street lighting.
3. Liaising with other organisations concerning the use of WBC grants.
4. Communicating with the community on local issues.
5. Making representations to West Berkshire Council and our local town counsellors on relevant matters.
6. Supporting other local community driven organisations, including Swallowfield First Responders and the Thames Valley Air Ambulance.
7. Providing a representative on the Burghfield and Neighbourhood Action Group.
8. Organising for new village sign boards

Led by Alison Edwards considerable time was spent making representations to the Planning Inspectorate concerning West Berkshire Council's 'WBC' proposed final draft of their Development Plan Document or DPD, which included the use of a substantial area of land at Clappers Farm as an "area of search" for the possible siting of a settlement for gypsies and travellers.

Although tinged with some frustration given the amount of time and effort put in by so many with challenging the proposal, nonetheless the Parish Council was extremely pleased to learn that at the last minute WBC had withdrawn the proposal, citing that a recent change in Government policy had removed the previous requirement to find suitable designated land for gypsies and travellers. The proposal will therefore not be included within the DPD which is scheduled to cover the period until 2026.

The Council is mainly funded by its annual precept grant received from WBC and forming part of the local Council Tax. I would take this opportunity of reminding you that within this funding we make provision to spend monies on capital projects which were identified within the drafting of the last Village Plan. In this respect the Council is always open to suggestions as to what particular project these monies could be spent on.

Thank you for your attention.

4 Parish Council Income & Expenditure Accounts

4.1 To receive for information a copy of the Parish Council's Income & Expenditure Account for the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.

The Clerk had circulated the accounts summary in advance of the meeting, and published the details on the website. There was nothing of significance to report.

5 Report of West Berkshire Councillors

5.1 To receive a report from Graham Bridgman & Mollie Lock.

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR MOLLIE LOCK

At the Executive meeting on 30th March it was agreed to develop a shared service between the six Berkshire unitary Berkshire; this is the Emergency Planning Service. The total budget set for this service in the first year is £371k and the apportioned amount set for WBC would be £82k. Subject to Executive approval in all six unitary authorities this service will start on October 1st 2017, staff would TUPE to whoever is the Lead authority.

HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

The reduction in local authority funding from central government is affecting the most vulnerable people. In WBC there will be a reduction of 108 to 103 units by providers for the homeless and this includes one provider who will be providing 27 units for homeless young people.

PADWORTH WASTE SITE

The date for opening the site for household waste has now been further delayed until October/November. I had pressed again for the possibility of a permit for those residents who live in the east of the district to enable them to use the Reading site but this has proved to be unsuccessful.

FIRE SERVICE

There is to be a central Fire station in Theale and, when a site has been found and a building to house the fire engines and equipment built, it will be to serve the eastern area of the district. At Spencers Wood the building there will house the nerve centre for all calls. Mortimer retained station is to remain although two others will be closed.

HEALTH and WELLBEING

The aim is to give every child the best start in life, support mental health and wellbeing throughout life and help older people maintain a healthy, independent life for as long as possible. Mental health and delayed transfers (bed blocking) are the continuing focus of the Board. The Emotional Health Academy (EHA) is helping some children not to have waiting up to two years for help. Bed blocking costs the NHS £400 a night and the overall cost to the NHS in 2016 was £1.5m and this is expected to rise to £2m by 2017. By starting a discharge pathway involving both health and social services as soon as a frail or elderly patient is admitted to hospital a Care Package to return to their own home or go in to residential accommodation could be in place as soon as the patient is well enough to leave hospital.

BETTER CARE FUNDING

In 2015/2016 there was a government initiative to fast track integration with Health and Social Care. In WBC Better Care funding secured three stepdown beds to be available on strict criteria until June 2017. The guidance for 2017/2019 is expected this month.

AN FOR HOUSING SITES ALLOCATION (DPD)

The DPD has been approved by the inspectorate and will be presented to the full Council for approval on 9th May.

HOME to SCHOOL TRANSPORT

Free Home to School Transport regulations now stipulate that travel to the nearest school and not the catchment school is taken to qualify for free transport. This is proving to be a hardship for families, in some schools where children have attended their primary catchment school expecting to transfer with their peers to their catchment secondary school find that they do not qualify for free transport and the parent will have to pay £700 a year if they wish them to travel to their catchment school on the school bus. In rural areas there is no alternative public transport for children to travel to schools.

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR GRAHAM BRIDGMAN

Introduction

This report is an edited digest of my parish reports over the last year, with recent updates where relevant.

By way of an introduction, I am Chairman of the West Berkshire Council Licensing Committee and sit on the Eastern Area Planning Committee; Governance and Ethics Committee and Appeals Panel. I am also a WBC appointee on the AWE Local Liaison Committee and the Padworth Common Advisory Committee, and a substitute member of the Wokefield Common Advisory Committee.

West Berkshire Council

Roger Croft

I could not start this report with anything other than a reflection upon the tragic death of Roger Croft, Leader of West Berkshire Council, on Friday 24 March in hospital in Amiens, five weeks after the road accident that saw his wife Zelda's untimely death. He will be sorely missed.

Budget

The difficulties we faced in 2016/17 did not go away and there was a tough round of budget decisions to arrive at the 2017/18 budget, which saw further savings and an increase in council tax of 1.99% plus a ring fenced 3% adult social care precept.

In October 2016, WBC accepted a four year financial settlement offered by HM Government. Whilst this settlement commits the Council to a continued reduction in Government funding, it provides financial stability from 2016-17 to 2019-20 on which the Council can plan ahead and build other sources of income. The four year funding offer is based on the Government assumption that local authorities will increase their Band D council tax by 1.75% (CPI forecast) each year to 2019-20 and that all eligible local authorities will take up the adult social care precept each year. Revenue Support Grant (RSG) funding has been reduced accordingly. In 2017-18 we will receive 61% less RSG

than in 2016-17 and by 2019-20 we will no longer receive any RSG. New Homes Bonus and Education Services Grant are also being cut.

The Local Government Settlement announced the move to 100% retention of business rates by local authorities by 2019-20 but it is not yet clear how this will benefit local authorities. West Berkshire Council collects £85m in business rates, of which we retain £19m. Business rates collected are forecast to increase by £2m over the next three years, however, our retained business rates will decrease by nearly £1m over the same period as a result of increased tariffs. In effect, our retained business rates will reduce from 22.7% retention to 21.1% over the period.

The pressure on WBC finances is illustrated by a question I asked the WBC Finance team: “in round terms what budget spend would we have needed/need for 14/15, 15/16, 16/17 and 17/18 to match the level of services we provided for £122m in 13/14?”

The answer was that if WBC hadn't made any savings or service reductions as a result of funding cuts and could have continued to provide the level of service provided prior to 2013/14, the budgeted spend would have been:

- 2013/14 - £127.7m spend (£122m funding received);
- 2014/15 - £133.3m spend (£121m funding received);
- 2015/16 - £139.2m spend (£123m funding received);
- 2016/17 - £148.1m spend (£117m funding received);
- 2017/18 - £152.8m spend (£117m funding received).

WBC Boundary Review

In November WBC proposed, and the Local Government Boundary Review for England subsequently agreed, a reduction in the size of the council from 52 members to 42 (+/- 1), to take effect from the elections in May 2019. In March the council took the next step, by proposing a new ward pattern based on this number: (i) using polling districts as the smallest building block, but (ii) wherever possible sticking to parish/town council ward boundaries, and (iii) trying to limit wards to one or two members and avoid three member wards.

The council submission to LGBCE agreed at the meeting on 23 March would see the following changes to the current Mortimer Ward:

- Stratfield Mortimer and Beech Hill parishes would form a new, single member, Mortimer Ward;
- Wokefield would move into an expanded (still two member) Burghfield Ward (along with Sulhamstead – the existing Sulhamstead Ward would disappear, with Beenham going to Aldermaston and Englefield to Theale);
- Padworth and Ufton Nervet would move into an altered (still single member) Aldermaston Ward.

Local Issues

Planning

Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document - the DPD - and Clappers Farm

The DPD has now been agreed by the Inspector and will be put to the May meeting of WBC for agreement.

As part of the process, there was agreement to remove Policy TS3 relating to the Clappers Farm Area of Search (site ref GTTS6) for Gypsies and Travellers on the basis that “the evidence is now not sufficient to support the allocation, whose pitches were not profiled to be needed until later in the plan period, after 2021”.

West Berkshire Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) - Call for Sites

Following on from the DPD, we now have the HELAA, the purpose of which is to test whether there is sufficient land to meet objectively assessed need and identify where this land may be located.

As part of the process towards a development plan to cover the period up to 2036, and because it needs to maintain an up-to-date picture of the amount of land that is available for new development - including land for housing - WBC is preparing for a HEELA and thus invited landowners, developers and others to submit potential development sites for consideration (submissions closed on 31 March 2017).

Possible development at Grazeley

On 2 January the locations of 14 'Garden Villages' (1,500 to 10,000 homes) and three 'Garden Towns/Cities' (more than 10,000 homes) were announced by HMG (to be added to the existing seven garden towns already announced).

These announcements followed the prospectus and invitation to submit projects in “Locally-Led Garden Villages, Towns and Cities” (Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2016) and it would appear therefore that Grazeley is not included in this round.

So far as I can tell, the March 2016 prospectus did itself not include a timetable for any further round of bids. However, the DCLG press release says: “Due to the high level of expressions of interest submitted in July 2016, the government has made an additional £1 million available this year for further development of other garden village proposals. The government may run a further call for expressions of interest in 2017 for other places with proposals for new garden villages.” (Nb, that the Grazeley Garden Settlement would be a Garden Town, not a Garden Village, so this part of the release does not technically appear to relate to it.)

So, where does this leave the Grazeley project?

My personal view is that the Grazeley Garden Settlement is/was/would be dependent upon government infrastructure funding to be viable (from the January announcement: “The new garden projects will also have access to infrastructure funding programmes across government, such as the new £2.3 billion Housing Infrastructure Fund announced at this year’s Autumn Statement.”). Whether (and if so when) the promoters might bring forward similar or other high-level proposals, and whether relating to all of the land in question or some of it, is moot, but any project of this scale is, in my view, going to have to have government funding behind it. The other question is whether any of the land might be put forward in response to the call for sites in one or other of the councils’ HELAAs.

Mortimer Station

Statements in the Grazeley Expression of Interest referred to a need “to clarify ... the ability to procure commitment from Network Rail for a new railway station at Grazeley” and “Improve,

upgrade or move Mortimer station; or investigate rail provision in relation to Green Park”, plus a note from Burghfield PC note that this would necessitate the closure of Mortimer station: “it seems you cannot have two station as close together as this on the same line”.

Even if Grazeley is not progressing immediately (or not in the form proposed), I still wanted to know whether the Reading to Basingstoke line is capable of accommodating a new station (eg at Grazeley) and keeping the station at Mortimer (and, if it was said not to be so, to test that assertion). To this end I emailed Network Rail.

They gave a lengthy answer (see my January report) including: “I do not therefore believe there is a definitive answer available to your query with the information we have available but it is true to say that adding a further stop on this line will cause a capacity challenge which may require additional infrastructure to resolve. Relocation of the station at Mortimer so that it can serve a dual purpose may be one of the options to consider.”

Trunkwell House Hotel

Principal topics of discussion with the parish council have been planning applications by Trunkwell, enforcement notices issued by WBC and appeals against them, noise complaints, and a review of the Trunkwell premises licence.

An appeal against a WBC planning enforcement notice is currently adjourned and I await developments.

Padworth waste site

Following the 2016/17 budget and the removal of access for WBC residents to Smallmead, WBC introduced permits for residents to access the Padworth and Newbury sites. Subsequently there were planning applications by Veolia to allow the Padworth site to accept general household waste and to extend the opening hours but, following legal representations, these were withdrawn. Air quality, traffic and environment impact assessments are being undertaken, following which it is anticipated that there will be fresh applications.

Mortimer Library

As was widely publicised, budget pressures have led to a revision of the library service to adopt a new model of working, with volunteers taking a leading role in arrangements. As a result, eight out of the nine libraries in West Berkshire, including Mortimer, have been retained, as well as a continuation of the Mobile and At Home services

In March, Paul James, WBC’s Culture Manager, Culture and Environmental Protection, emailed all parish councils and library support groups with an update about the future of the library service in the district, including staffing, volunteering and financial contributions - a range of library volunteers are sought, and more information can be obtained from volunteerinyourlibrary@westberks.gov.uk.

6 Report of the Chairman of the Trustees

6.1 To receive a report from Hayley Sheridan, Chairman of the Beech Hill Allotment Trust.

The Trust has continued to maintain the Village Green and the playground area, together with the land at the rear of Park View, currently being used for stabling and grazing of the late Kim Goddard’s horse.

During the year, seating and a picnic bench were installed inside the playground area at the request of villagers. The Trust would like to thank Jack Bucknell for his help in treating the wooden seating and its installation.

Maintenance to the trees on the village green /Vale View Drive was carried out during the year. This consisted mainly of thinning out several of the oak trees and removing dead wood.

The annual inspection of the playground equipment was carried out by Wicksteed: the equipment was found to be in good condition but it was suggested that repairs to the grass beneath the monkey bars and the roundabout could be carried out during the year. The equipment was cleaned thoroughly during the village 'clean for the Queen' last year, which was organised by Hannah Callier.

The committee currently comprises:

Chairman – Hayley Sheridan (Manderley, Chapel Lane)

Clerk – Martin Plank (Manderley, Chapel Lane)

Trustees – Jack Bucknell

Margaret Bridges

The committee would welcome new trustees and any persons who would be interested in taking the position of Chairman.

7 Presentation of other reports:

To receive a report, if available, from a representative of the following organisations.

7.1.1 Thames Valley Police

Two Officers attended from Thames Valley and reported the following crime

Figures:

Burglary from dwelling – nil

Burglary non-dwelling – nil

Car Theft – 2

Theft from vehicles – 15

Criminal Damage – 3

Hare Coursing – 2

These offences refer to Beech Hill and adjacent parishes to J11 (M4)

7.1.2 Memorial Hall Trustees:

The Past Year

Over the past year we have seen a healthy use of the hall with repeat weekday bookings and strong weekend use. There are a variety of activities and organisations who continue to enjoy the use of the hall, hosting everything from Pilates, Ballroom Dancing and the ever popular Afternoon Teas. The hall has held a variety of events, with excellent support of the fete, Bonfire night and the children's Christmas Party. It would have been lovely to see more at the Brian of Beech Hill but everyone who attended had a brilliant time.

We are proud to say we donated the use of the hall, free of charge, to the Macmillan Hope course over the past year and we have extended that again for this year and we're very happy that they valued the facilities of the hall so much.

This Coming Year

As we continue to maintain the policy of no parties after 8pm and preventing two parties in a row, to support our neighbours, we are looking to extend our week day bookings with a marketing

campaign targeting local businesses and training centres. The hope is to get regular bookings for the hall as a meeting and training venue.

The marketing is currently under development and our aim is for this to be a joint venture with the Village Shop. The idea is sell the two as a complete bundle, so full meeting facilities within the hall and lunch/refreshments provided by the Shop.

The fete is already well into the planning stages with great support from the local businesses inc. The Elm Tree, Trunkwell and even Beech Hill Garage! Although we are aiming to make it larger than last year we are still keen to keep the traditional village feel... Think Midsomer Murders without the Murder!!

There are plans underway to improve the porch to the hall, designs have been drafted and the next step is to approach the planning office for permission to move forward with this. It will allow for better covered access and much needed additional storage.

A spring clean of the hall is also on the books, with an internal spruce up, external maintenance and a hard-core area being provided in the overflow carpark. All volunteers to help will be most welcome. Dates to be confirmed.

Our next event is the St George's Day meal on Monday 24th April and then our own AGM on the 2nd May.

The Hall continues to benefit from a steady regular income, and has built a useful rainy day fund to meet recommended charity reserve fund guidelines and part-fund projects such as the new porch. This has been achieved through a combination of containing costs and maintaining a steady income from regulars and one-off hires. The marketing plan is intended to build up usage in periods where the Hall is under-utilised, typically during weekdays.

All in all, we'd like to thank you for the continued support of the hall and hope you enjoy its' facilities over the next 12 months.

7.1.3 Beech Hill Baptist Chapel

Owing to the falling numbers the Elders of the Chapel approached Grace Baptist Chapel in London to "replant" their church ie. revitalise it.

These people sent representatives who have used some of the Chapel funds to do repairs and refurbishment. They have also started a service in the Chapel at 4pm on a Sunday.

Unfortunately their approach and the changes they have made have not been received well by the few remaining members of the Baptist Chapel who have voted with their feet. Only Keith Leedham remains, and he is over 90 and struggling.

Meanwhile we all pray for a satisfactory outcome to this situation.

7.1.4 St Marys Church : Reverend Paul Willis

As you all know I took over temporarily from Will as Warden following his tragic accident. There have been no major infrastructure issues with the fabric of the church. We have, however, had the woodworm treated, the kneeling rails removed and the floors beautifully varnished. We have various electrical issues with regards to the power tripping out and the church gate light malfunctioning, but these have now been addressed.

Additionally Dean has upgraded the power of the bulbs in the Chancel lights, which has approved lighting considerably. We are waiting to see if this is sufficient for our needs.

Repairs to the small glass panes in the Vestry were recently carried out by Sommerville Glass.

I have recently received a quoted from Andrea & Gerald regarding professionally cleaning the wooden structure separating the Naïve and the Chancel. We have yet to discuss that at the PCC meeting. We are considering it because the rest of the interior of the church now looks cleaned and cared for and we would like it to be at its best for the 150 year celebrations.

Gutters have been cleared out and minor repairs carried out at the Beech Hill Road end , following further prangs from vehicles.

We have held 2 major social events during the year, both of which were very successful in terms of attendance and enjoyment – the second was more remunerative.

We have more events planned in this our 150 anniversary year.

Our service attendance is rather erratic and I feel we would benefit from a little more consistency and reliability.

The subsidence issue has corrected itself completely and will be monitored next year.

7.1.5 The Shop in the Church:

Annual Shop Report

In 2016 the village shop continued to concrete itself into the heart of village life, with well attended special events such as gingerbread house making, Christmas shopping and Apple day. The average number of customers each day is in the region of 40-45 with the busiest period being lunchtime, when local businesses come to collect sandwiches or pre-order for business meetings. We try to stock and support as many local suppliers as possible and are always adding to our lines in order to do this.

The shop continues its alliance with local concerns such as the village hall providing lunches for hirees and Thrive who provide produce as well as order lunches for training sessions. The village hall kindly donated money towards a new fridge for the shop and Thrive have provided plants for our pots at the front of the church throughout the year.

We have been accepted onto the Plunkett foundations programme to aid the recruitment of volunteers. We currently have 24 volunteers at the shop and are hoping to recruit at least 5 more as a result of the programme.

The shop committee has changed chairman and has a lot of new members with various skills to help the shop structure become robust and help with the management. A new management structure will be in place by late spring with a new assistant manager and Jude taking on some more hours. Sam is resigning as manager and becoming vice chairman and volunteer instead in order to take a more permanent nursing position.

The shop has supported the church by providing lunches for the Lent course as well as providing the mince pies for the Carol service and helped to build the Easter garden, which will again be built this year. The shop and church flooring were recently mended, treated and varnished, this work was coordinated and assisted by the shop team. At the same time volunteers at the shop cleaned the church thoroughly from the ceiling to polishing the pews.

We enable the foodbank collections to take place and encouraged customers to fulfil the reverse advent calendar this year in order to make an extra-large donation at Christmas time.

The monthly craft group meeting continues to take place and prescriptions are collected from Swallowfield practice by some villagers.

7.1.6 Village Website: Peter & David Simpson

The Beech Hill Village Website at www.beechhillvillage.co.uk continues to provide news and information for residents of Beech Hill and the wider community. By registering on the website you can receive automatic email notification of anything new which is posted on the website, and you can tailor it to your own needs by choosing only the topics you are interested in. Your details are held safely and securely, and will never be passed on to any other person or organization. We would love to see more contributions from villagers with things such as reports/reviews of village events, clubs, societies and groups (however small) so that villagers old and new can get a flavour of what is happening in the village, and be encouraged to get involved.

One recent change to the website has been to remove the discussion board. After just four posts in four years, none of which got a response, it was clear that the discussion board was not serving a useful purpose.

Last year the village gained its own Facebook page. This was set up as a separate enterprise by Hannah Callier, and is already proving to be very popular. Hopefully, Hannah can tell us a bit more about it. You can find it by clicking on the link on the village website or by searching for 'Beech Hill Village Community' in Facebook. The Facebook page and the website are intended to run together harmoniously, each bringing its unique characteristics to enhancing the village community. We are not rivals, and neither is threatened by the existence of the other.

Finally, if you see something on the website which is incorrect or out of date then please let me know. There is a vast amount of information on the website and it is not easy to keep track of everything all of the time. Also, if there is anything you would like to see on the website that isn't there already please let us know, and especially if you can contribute anything to the website we would love to hear from you.

In addition to the report it was stated that there were 65-70 people registered on the website. About 80 email addresses are known to the webmaster.

7.1.7 Thrive – A representative from Thrive gave a verbal report

Building works are nearing completion. Tress were pruned along Beech Hill Road and 1 dangerous one felled.

Geoffrey Udall's birthday was celebrated in 2016 and the Thrive's Charity 40th will be celebrated in 2017.

Gates on Pathway (Long Walk) were damaged and were removed.

The Thrive Easter garden at St Marys Church was a success last year and will be repeated this year.

The Open days last year were a success and all are welcome this year.

8 Public Question Time

No public questions were asked and the meeting was formally closed for 2017.