

PARISH of SHAW-cum-DONNINGTON

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held in the Village Hall, Love Lane, Donnington on Wednesday, 4th May 2016 at 7.30pm

140 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 29th April 2015 were approved and signed as a true record.

141 Chairman's Report by Councillor Bill Graham

Thank you for attending the Parish Assembly today. This is our opportunity to report on the past year to you, and for you to hold us to account. So please don't hesitate to contribute in due course.

As you know, we recently appealed for four new councillors, and we have been overwhelmed by your generous response, ten in all. Several potential new councillors are here today. Unfortunately, three not could attend for personal reasons. Because of these absences, and to be fair to all, John Austin, our clerk and legal officer, will oversee the co-option process from now until our next council meeting on May 18. John will explain his thinking right after I have finished speaking. To be clear, councillors will make the decisions to co-opt. John will ensure every applicant gets equal consideration.

I am going to present the 'year in the life of the council' on a monthly basis. That way you will get a feel for the variety and relevance of issues we have discussed at our monthly council meetings. It may help you to decide if council service is for you.

Starting with last year's PA in late April 2015, Arlene Kersley presented the case for "Affordable Rural Housing"

On May 8 we fired up our beacon on Donnington Castle to celebrate the anniversary VE Day.

At the council meeting in May, we elected our officers for the coming year. These included the Chairman and Vice-chairman, the Amenities Officer, the Planning Officer, the Webmaster (currently vacant), the Footpaths Officer, the Publicity Editor, the Village Hall Representative, the Snelsmore Common Representative, and the NAG Representative. We received the monthly parish correspondence and approved the parish invoices and payments. These include routine payments for the clerk, the groundsman, the litter picker, waste disposal, water and electricity for street lighting, as well as all ad hoc costs incurred (for instance firing the beacon). We also received all the relevant officers' and representatives' reports. We consider all these every month.

In June, we approved the Internal Audit Report 2014/15 and Annual Return for 2014/15. We initiated our grant application for the parish Walks Leaflet kindly produced by a parishioner. We prepared the required risk assessment for use of the Village Hall, and approved a grant of £500 to the VH for masonry repairs. We turned down a parishioner's application for a dog-bin in a new location as being extravagant.

In July, we received the Budget Report for the first quarter. We reviewed the Councillor's Code of Conduct. We began to get deeply involved in the churchyard, which as a 'closed churchyard' is now the parishioners financial responsibility. Unfortunately, the churchyard paths, the lych gate and three vaulted tombs will all require costly maintenance at the same time. We dealt with parishioners' complaints about intrusive Vodafone parking. Two councillors in our Planning Advisory Group attended a WBC Planning Road Show.

We do not meet in August.

In September, we reviewed our Insurance Arrangements and signed off the internal Audit

2014/15. Following the Insurance Review we found we needed to insure the recreation ground mower for use on the highway (because a public footpath crosses the rec!) and increase the frequency of inspection of the playground equipment. We arranged for volunteers from SSEB to kindly paint the outside of the pavilion. We made a WBC Members Community Bid for funds to assist with re-roofing the pavilion, to fully insulate the attic space and to replace the old set of thirty chairs. We ordered some new parts for the playground rotaplay. We appointed our Village Hall Trustee. We cleared a fallen tree from a parish footpath. We received a parishioner's complaint of speeding on the Oxford Road north of the Wantage Road/Oxford Road roundabout, and reported same to WBC. WBC has now set up a webpage where speeding complaints can be recorded, and on which they act.

In October, we received the Budget Report for the first half of 2015/16. We followed up on the Community Bid for the pavilion roof. We reviewed the parish clerks duties. We publicised the voluntary SSEB painting of the pavilion in the Newbury News. We received a complaint from a parishioner concerning dense growth on the bank of the River Lambourn damaging her garden fence. We needed to establish ownership of the land. It was WBC's finally, but we were able to persuade volunteers from the Lambourn Renewal Project to kindly clear it. We ordered a new bench for the playground, thus using up the remaining S106 funds owing to us.

In November, we solved the ownership of the Village Hall, which had been puzzling us for some time. It is vested in the Official Custodian for Charities and is therefore totally safe from unscrupulous development. We received a revised planning application for the development of 400 houses on the land north of Newbury. On 25 November we verbally presented our objections to the Western Area Planning Committee. A councillor attended the BALC 2015 AGM, where guidance was issued on pensions, the national living wage and zero hours contracts.

In December, we reviewed the budget for 2016/17. We are becoming increasingly concerned by the lack of response from WBC with regard to the repair of the churchyard paths. They are now dangerous in bad weather. We discussed what repairs were needed to the Lych Gate. We agreed to up-date the Emergency Plan for 2016. We agreed to lay stabilising mesh to control mud and erosion at the Oxford Road entrance to the recreation ground. We inclined favourably to the Village Hall Management Committee's intention to install a defibrillator. We have received complaints of uncontrolled dogs on the recreation ground. Councillors will ask the public to report offenders, so that we can act if we have to. Fortunately, dogs and their owners are generally well behaved.

In January, we agreed the budget and precept for 2016/17. The review of Governance and Management Risk Assessment Register was approved. The Walks Leaflet was published and distributed to local hostellers. (Our grandchildren walked the eastern route with us on Sunday and very pleasant it was) Parishioners had complained about the encroachment of laurel hedging on the Snelmore Common/Donnington Castle bridlepath, and parked cars blocking the access of emergency vehicles to Owen Road. Both instances were referred to WBC for their action.

In February, we reviewed the budget for the third quarter. We updated the Financial Regulations. The Lych Gate roof was repaired and a grant made to the church to cover the cost. Negotiations were concluded with a carver to repair the damaged woodwork. We made plans for a beacon on Donnington Castle to celebrate the Queen's birthday on April 21.

In March, we reviewed Standing Orders. We approved our final letter of objection to the 400 house development north of Newbury, and this was lodged with the Appeal Inspector on March 25. On 22 March the Chairman attended the District Parish Conference. Discussion centred on the financial difficulties faced by WBC and what services the parishes could contribute. We sought specialist advice on the state of three vaulted and decaying tombs in the churchyard. The Donnington Valley Action Group kindly agreed to organise a "Clean for the Queen" event on April 13 under the auspices of the parish council. Recreation Ground fees were reviewed for 2016. The website software is becoming difficult to maintain. A review of our website options was initiated. Along with

other parish councils, we have found it difficult to attract new councillors. It was agreed that we should write to all households directly asking for their help, as less direct methods such as the parish notice boards and Newbury News had been unsuccessful. The text was agreed.

In April, councillors delivered about 650 recruiting letters throughout the parish between April 21 and April 26. The carver completed the repairs to the Lych Gate woodwork. Council agreed a donation to the church to pay for them. "Clean for the Queen" was very successful. Our thanks are due to DVAG for taking the initiative and providing many willing litter pickers. The annual parish meeting was planned. Website investigations continue.

On April 21, 110 people attended the Donnington beacon in celebration of the Queen's birthday – a record.

That, in a nutshell, is a year in the life of the parish council.

May I finish by thanking all councillors and officers for their hard work on behalf of our parishioners. Our only aim is to serve you as carefully and efficiently as possible.

Paul Bryant, our ward member and chairman of the West Berks Western Area Planning Committee, has been constant source of timely advice. John Austin, our clerk, has been a steadfast rock.

Thank you.

142 **Planning Report by Councillor Chris Fenwick**

This is my first report since taking on the role in June 2015.

Planning applications have been steadily trickling over and dealt with by the PAG (Planning Action Group) and I thank them and my other councillors for their support.

I have summarised all the applications which are included in this report.

As you already know the biggest planning issue is the Land Adjacent to Hilltop, Oxford Road, Donnington, Newbury (also known as The North Newbury Development). This has been subject to an 'appeal' following West Berkshire Council's refusal of the application at their Western Area Planning Committee on the 25th November 2015.

The appeal is in September 2016 and we have made our own appeal which was included.

The total number of applications dealt with to date is 20.

5 Applications were adjoining area , 4 objections and 1 withdrawn.

Both Donnington and Shaw had the most applications 8 each while Newbury had 4(adjoining).

Prominent applications which submitted applications were Shaw House(WBC), Trinity School and 2 applications from Vodafone.

143 **Relief in Need Charity Report**

The Charity exists to provide help for needy people in the parish. It holds two statutory meetings each year in January and June. No bequests were made during the past year. £700 is held in current account with the balance of monies held on deposit. Chis Byng was welcomed back as a co-optive Trustee during the year.

Thank you for inviting me to address your Parish Assembly. I welcome the opportunity to report back to the Parish on what the West Berkshire Council has been up to and to receive any comments you have.

This year it is not a pleasant task and it will not take much guessing for you to realise that this is all about budget reductions and the resultant reductions to many services.

The Council's income next year will be £121.25M made up of £82.3M from your Council tax, £9.5M from the Revenue Support Grant (a return of some of the business rate perhaps) and £19.4M from various other sources such as part of the business rate, special grants and income from fees.

The problem is the reduction of the Rate Support Grant.

The Government policy is to reduce the Rate Support Grant from £34M in 2011/12 to £0M in 2018/19. The Council had been planning for the reduction to be in equal steps as in the past. However, In December, after a Council draft budget was in place the Government decided to make a 44% reduction from £16M to £9.5M instead of to about £12M. This is third worst settlements for any Unitary Authorities.

The savings were expected to be uncomfortable but with the additional reduction they are disastrous. Having only a few weeks to plan for additional reductions they are expensive and frustrating to residents who were given very little time to comment on proposals in a second consultation. As an example, we had planned for staff reductions by natural wastage but now we had to make further staff reductions that involve redundancy payments.

There are now very few discretionary expenditures left. Unfortunately, this is not the end of the matter as we still have the reductions up to 2018/19. Even then there is an expectation that the part of the business rate we retain of £17.6M may be surcharged. However, the Government will be repatriating the business rate to Councils but we do not expect this to help us since it is expected that the business rate will not go to the area where they are collected but will be redistributed and most will go to northern areas. What it really means is that the Council will collect the business rate and it will be surcharged rather than being sent to Government. Another kick in the teeth is that Bayer is leaving and Vodafone has re-registered its headquarters in Basingstoke so more loss of business rate.

We are putting up the Council tax by almost 4%. 2% is allowed by Government that has to be for social services plus 1.9% the maximum allowed without a referendum.

Since 1947 the government has tended to look after us from birth to death. This has become more and more expensive particularly in the health service with ever more expensive and advanced treatments and with people living longer - it is no longer affordable. So the party is coming to an end and many of the resultant reductions have been aimed at local government. This is likely to continue. Add to this that the country is in deep debt.

Many charities have come to rely on council grants that have now suddenly come to an end and they will have to look to other funding sources. We have some transitional funding - £1.4M for each of the two coming years - to help them. To receive this they will have to put forward business plans to convince the Council that they will be able to survive in the future. Greenham Trust is undertaking a similar exercise. Some services, such as libraries, will in future have to be run by volunteers and transition funding will help here.

Now to planning. The Site Allocation Development Planning Document is complete after a lot of work and a lot of consultation. Just about every proposed housing site had its objectors. Like most people I hate to see green areas built on but we have no option but to plan for 10,500 and more dwellings. I believe that we have a sound plan that is a good compromise between what we have to provide and what people want. Unfortunately the population is still rising and so we will have to build more and more houses in the future. We have had a long consultation with some 4,000 responses that have been of great help in improving the proposal. The proposal has now gone to the planning inspectorate and will be examined from September 13.

The North Newbury site is not in the DPD but you will be only too well aware that a planning application was put in and duly refused and is now at appeal. I have a measure of confidence that it will be refused but on the other hand you may be aware that refused Firland's site in Burghfield was won on appeal and a subsequent judicial review was lost. Nothing is certain! The appeal starts on 12 September.

We are often surprised at the decisions by inspectors. They have powers that we do not. An applicant can change his plans before an inspector adjudicates and he can also approve parts of applications and not others that we are unable to do.

We are disappointed with the speed of the Sandleford project. If it does not get going soon then the Council will not have a 5 year land supply. There are still problems with access to the site that are of great concern to local residents.

Developments in Shaw cum Donnington have been extensions and not much else. Even so, I grieve at the quality of some of the extensions that get put up. They must detract from the value of the house. Dene Way in particular used to be a well laid out spacious estate but has now, in my view, been spoilt by infilling and large extensions that have detracted from the original design intentions.

We have kept our roads in good condition. A couple of large projects are taking place. The junction into Savacentre is being upgraded, paid for by Ikea. The work will increase the capacity of the whole area from the junction with the M4 to Langley Hill. In Newbury the new junction into the London Road Industrial Estate is being produced to enable the area to be redeveloped. This had been financed by a government grant.

We are now starting to work on the roll forward of the development and transport plans even though the current plan goes up to 2026. This will be a roll forward rather than a start from scratch so will be quicker but will no doubt need further land to be released for development that will not be welcome. On the road front we are looking to define new roads that will be funded by new developments or windfall from Government or industry. I am unwilling to give examples of these proposals as I don't want to set off hares at this early stage. We recognise that the current main road system leaves a lot to be desired. Our secondary schools are now Academies and outside of the Council's control. The Government's intention is that primary schools will follow. In West Berkshire there is little enthusiasm for this in both the schools and Council. Individual primary schools are too small to go it alone and they will have to group together. How this is to be achieved is being looked at. I am no education expert but I fail to see how academies raise the standards in schools. The schools in West Berkshire in general provide a very good level of education. There have been one or two unsatisfactory OFSTED inspections but remedial work has been successful.

In the past disabled people were only helped by the Council if they had "severe" needs. The Government is now requiring that the Council also help those with "substantial" needs. This is an additional financial burden as no additional funds have been provided. Whilst the aims are laudable the money will be found from reductions elsewhere.

Newbury remains a prosperous area that was hardly touched by the recession. It has a bright future. There are a number of exciting developments in progress. The Sterling Cables site had permission for redevelopment and will provide a far better traffic route from Sainsbury's to the East. Unfortunately the rebuilding of the railway bridge is causing some disruption nearby. Plans for Market Street Development are well advanced and will provide housing and car parking and a better gateway from the railway station. There is still some work to do on how buses will use the area and the use of the Wharf area for bus parking. Faraday Road will be redeveloped over a fairly long period and the new road into the site from the A339 is currently being provided. By the way, this is not at the local taxpayers expense but by a grant from government.

Although this has not been the happiest of reports, I believe that West Berkshire Council provides a good quality of service. Good rubbish collection and high recycling rates. Roads are in good condition. Good schools with good educational standards.

Finally, it has been a pleasure to work with the Parish Council and I wish you every success in the future.

During the past year my Council responsibilities have not changed and are:-
Chairman Western Area Planning Committee
Chairman of Transport Policy Task Group.

and a member of:
Planning Policy Task Group.
Newbury Town Task Group.
District Planning Committee.
Licensing Committee

Governance and Audit Committee.
Joint Personnel Committee (Deals with staff council relations).
Snelsmore Common Advisory Committee.

Outside duties have been:-

A Member of:

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority.

Greenham Trust.

Donnington Trust.

Speen, Shaw & Donnington Neighbourhood Action Group.

Harwell Site Stakeholders Group.

I have attended meetings of Shaw-cum-Donnington, Speen and Boxford parish councils.

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145 **Resolutions**

No resolutions had been received

146 **Any Other Business**

A parishioner brought to Councillors' attention proposed sand and gravel extraction in the Long Lane/Fishers Lane area and asked the council to look into this.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.30pm