

The following is a transcript of the Report which the Chairman of Beenham Parish Council gave to the Annual Parish Assembly on 21 April 2010

Many of the matters that concerned us when I reported to you last year are still with us. But there has been progress on some fronts. I will comment on a few of them, starting with that nearest to us.

The Community Room kitchen, which was looking very tired, has been completely refitted over the Easter break. We obtained a grant for about half the cost from West Berkshire Council, the balance coming from Parish Council funds. Our thanks to Alison Whittenbury who organised the refurbishment, consulted users on their requirements, did the planning and liaised with the building team. The result is a much improved facility which will be appreciated by the numerous users of the Community Room and School Hall.

Turning to external matters, there is continued concern about our roads. Potholes and speeding will I am afraid always be with us. However, some progress is being made. The worst of the potholes in Clay Lane have recently been filled. We know that they will reappear when we have some heavy rain, but at least there is some temporary improvement. The long term solution is to improve the surface, but because this is a byway open to all traffic and much of the damage to the surface is caused by local residents' use any such measure will require contributions from those who live down Clay Lane – probably about £200 per household. When we last canvassed local views a couple of years ago a significant minority did not want to contribute. I suggest that those keen to have the surface improved speak to their neighbours, try to gather sufficient support and contact me.

We are told that Admoor Lane should be resurfaced this year, and that the white lines should reappear down Bourne Lane shortly. We continue to discuss with the Highways Authority what can be done to improve the situation by the Six Bells, and to deter heavy lorries coming through the village - particularly those misled into thinking that this is the way to the industrial estate.

Grange Lane is also a problem area, with the road surface being damaged by a mix of heavy vehicles and flooding. It is believed that the flooding problem is now largely dealt with as a result of Thames Water taking action at last. The damage caused by heavy vehicles, particularly those accessing the scrap yard, is more of a problem. Indeed the way in which the scrap yard is being operated does give serious concern to those living nearby, in terms of noise as well as the traffic problems. We hope that as a result of recent discussions with officers at West Berkshire Council it may be possible to

ameliorate the problems, but it is not easy. One of the particular problems is that Grange Lane is not an adopted road, but a bridleway, and its ownership is not known. The result is that the police have no jurisdiction over it to enforce speeding or parking restrictions, and there is no landowner to turn to either. However, we hope that action by the local authority and the Environmental Agency may assist in reducing the noise levels and keep the scrap yard operations within their permitted opening hours.

Staying with environmental matters, the Berkshire minerals and waste plan has been further delayed. The Government inspector decided that the proposals put together by the local authorities did not satisfy the requirements in relation to the waste strategy, and a new document will be produced later this year for public consultation. We have no reason to think that the recommendations as regards the selection of new sites for minerals extraction will change, and we expect therefore that the Beenham sites will still be excluded. However, the frustration which I expressed in last year's report about the length and cost of this planning process is now even greater. So long as the process continues there is bound to be concern for residents all over the area about whether their neighbourhoods and quality of life are to be affected.

The other major environmental issue now of concern is the proposal by Grundon and their partners TEG (The Environment Group) to create facilities for the treatment of organic waste through In-vessel composting and anaerobic digestion. The new facilities would be to the east of the existing materials recovery facility, on the area previously used for green waste storage. They would therefore be outside the designated waste area and, until the tree screen had fully established itself, quite visible from Beenham Hill. Apart from this visual intrusion there will be concerns about noise and, particularly, odour. Representatives of Grundon and TEG addressed a well-attended public meeting earlier this week to explain the proposals and to hear residents' concerns. TEG will be arranging for a group of residents to travel to one of their existing operations in the hopes of allaying peoples' fears about the proposal. When the planning application is made – which is likely to be quite soon- the Parish Council and local residents will be consulted. I anticipate that there will be a preliminary discussion of the proposal at the Parish Council meeting on 17 May.

Staying with Grundon, you will be pleased to see that at long last the entrance onto Beenham Hill below Field Barn Farm has been dealt with, with a gate on the restored fence line to allow access for maintenance of the gas

plant. The potential for vehicles to be dumped there will therefore be eliminated.

The regular liaison meetings with Grundon have continued to be helpful. We are appreciative of their willingness to deal with issues when, or before, they arise, and to talk about their plans.

The Parish Plan is proceeding, albeit slowly. A presentation is to be made to the next Parish Council meeting and we will be able to report after that more fully. In the meantime the Padworth Parish Plan has progressed very rapidly. This is of direct interest to Beenham because linked with the Padworth planning is a separate exercise to create a plan for the entire wharf area, which covers three parishes – Beenham, Padworth and Aldermaston. The intention is that the relevant parts of the wharf plan will be incorporated in the respective Parish Plans, so that those parts affecting Mallard Way, Heron Way and Lockside Court will form part of Beenham Parish Plan. It is hoped that this will lead to the three parishes working together more closely in the future in the common interests of the Wharf community. Already the joint working party have been instrumental in initiating a number of highways improvements in the area.

One of the reasons for which the parish planning exercise is important is that the local authority and other agencies are more willing to fund initiatives which have been identified in parish plans. Until our own plan is finalised we will not be able to take advantage of this, but fortunately we do have some monies to spend on capital projects. These arise from developer contributions (often referred to as section 106 monies) from developments in the parish. There are sufficient funds to enable us to pay for the creation of the allotments site (see below) and also other projects identified in the planning process in advance of the plan being formally adopted. There are also some moneys available for highways purposes and the Parish Council is considering with the Highways Authority how these might best be spent.

When I reported last year I referred to the sudden interest in allotments. Some 25 households have indicated serious interest in taking an allotment. We have now identified a site –down the track off Back Lane- and agreed tenancy terms in principle with the landowner. The layout of the site has been discussed with a group of potential allotment holders, and a planning application made for the creation of parking and access tracks. There will be 23 plots each of about 96 square metres, some of which can be subdivided to create a few small plots for those wanting them. There may be a little space for a few further small plots if required. The installation of the allotments (parking and access, tracks, water, deer fencing etc) will carry a

considerable cost, but much of the funding will come from grants, with the balance from s.106 monies. I am hoping that the site will be ready for autumn digging.

Our finances remain in a healthy state. We have again kept the precept unchanged this year, and even without the s.106 monies we are holding have a reasonable reserve for contingencies. Apart from the precept our income comes from lettings of the Community Room and the School Hall, and we are grateful to Carolyn Main of the Women's Institute for her work in looking after the bookings and collecting the money.

My thanks as ever to my fellow councillors for all their work this year, to Bill for his unfailing support and guidance, and to Keith Chopping for his help; over the year Keith has been instrumental in arranging several meetings with WBC officers and his practical help in opening doors for us in this way has been invaluable.

I would like to say a particular thank you to Mike Berry who has now retired from the Council as he is moving from the area. He has been our first councillor from the Wharf, and in the two years he has been with us he has played a major role in getting the concerns of wharf area residents listened to and even sometimes dealt with, as well as contributing energetically to wider parish matters. He will be greatly missed. We are hopeful that we will be joined shortly by another Wharf resident to carry on his good work.

Dick Russell, Chairman