

Beenham Parish Council

Report to the Annual Parish Assembly on 20 April 2011

This will be a briefer report than in past years, perhaps because it seems to have been a less eventful year.

The major development on which to report is the successful completion of the allotments project. The allotments are now fully operational, under the management of the Beenham Allotments Association. All the plots are taken, and there is a small waiting list. The total cost of some £20,000 will be funded entirely by grants and by s.106 open space monies. The only continuing cost to the Parish Council will be the annual rent of £200, otherwise the allotments should be self-supporting. The site will remain available unless and until the owners decide to sell it and the adjoining land, in which case the Council has an option to buy the allotments site at valuation.

The major planning issues during the year have been the proposal by Grundon to create facilities for the treatment of organic waste through in-vessel composting and anaerobic digestion plants; and the retrospective planning application by A4 Breakers. As regards the Grundon proposal, this has not proceeded. Grundon have said that they do not propose to proceed with the in-vessel composting facility (which from an environmental perspective presented serious concerns)), but may want to pursue the anaerobic digestion idea. However, they appear to be concentrating their resources on a bigger proposal at Chieveley and perhaps Beenham will at least for a time be spared further concerns of this nature. Grundon's idea of creating a solar farm on the landfill site has, I suspect, fallen away in the light of the government's review of the feed-in tariffs for this type of project.

As to A4 Breakers, their planning application was essentially for retrospective consent to carry on business as a scrap metal yard, which over the last few years it has become rather than simply a breakers yard. The application was withdrawn at the request of the Planning Department in order for a new application to be made which would include the works carried out to the bridleway. The new application will certainly give rise to a number of material issues, as the intensification of use of the site over the last five or six years has caused great inconvenience and disturbance to those living nearby.

The only other planning matter I would mention is the gradual transformation of the south side of the Bath Road from light industrial and commercial uses to residential. A number of sites have been granted residential consent, and some have already been developed. The latest in this trend is the Comfort Inn, proposed to be demolished and replaced with 30 affordable flats.

I have little of note to report on other matters. The Parish Plan will be finalised I believe within a few weeks and this will allow us to spend more s.106 money on small highway and other improvements. Some of the objectives in the draft Plan have already been achieved- such as more dog bins; others such as the creation of a safe refuge in the middle of the A4 for those crossing from Grange Lane to Aldermaston Station, and the installation of grit bins in the Parish, are already arranged for this year.

I reported last year on the installation of the new kitchen in this Community Room. This year we are going to be considering renewal of this room, which is looking very tired – particularly the ceiling and lighting. We will also be having general discussions with the School about the arrangements between us for management of the premises and particularly the shared use of the School Hall and the adequacy of storage space. Those arrangements were made almost thirty years ago in very different circumstances and it is time that both parties looked at them afresh in the light of present needs.

Parish finances remain healthy. Despite the expenditure on the allotments we have kept the precept at the same level as in the previous two years, and have a healthy reserve for emergencies.

In conclusion I must thank all my colleagues, the clerk Bill Goudge and District Councillor Keith Chopping for their assistance over the last year. I would also like to mention the contribution made over a number of years by Linda Wright, who retired recently from the Council due to work and domestic pressures.

Dick Russell