

CHARNEY BASSETT PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report

This is my third report as your Chairman. When I agreed to take the post two years ago I made the comment that the role was not a demanding one. Parish Council meetings took less than an hour with an audience of generally five members of the public. How things have changed.

Council expenditure comes from a precept on the Vale of White Horse District Council , and derives its income from Council Tax. In the period under review and, as last year, the precept was £3,800 per year which represents a tax of approximately £30 per year on a Band D property. Your learned Clerk is far better qualified than I to comment on receipt and expenditure of monies but it is sufficient for me to say that your Council has kept the precept for the coming year at its present rate.

At the last Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on 9th May 2012, casual vacancies had arisen caused by the resignation of Miss P Edwards and Mr D Hughes due to work commitments. No election was deemed necessary and two new Parish Councillors were co-opted, Mrs Jane Fry and Mr David Roberts agreeing to serve. Regrettably a long serving member of the Council, Jim Harper, resigned from his duties shortly afterwards and we were indeed fortunate to be able to co-opt Mrs Sue Dobson to fill his post. Jim Harper served on the Parish Council for many years and made a strong commitment to the Community. On your behalf I thank him for the contribution he made.

As always your Council were invited by the District to comment on a number of planning applications during the year. One application for the erection of 4 houses in Longworth Road was opposed and the matter is due to be dealt with shortly by the District Planning Committee. (*Since this was written the application has been refused*). Planning applications face us with a real challenge for the future and I will return to planning issues later in the report.

Project Chaffinch (Challenge Avoid Further Flooding in Charney) has continued under the stewardship of the Parish Clerk and Jim Gardiner. Additional work has been carried out and the findings were presented to the Environment Agency by Jim Gardiner, Stephen Cowlam and David Roberts at a meeting held at their Crowmarsh Gifford offices. They expressed a view that the work done was well researched and agreed that it contained more qualified, detail and analysis than the report they had issued after the flood in 2007. At the last Annual meeting three small projects were proposed and liaison is now taking place with local landowners to put work in hand. The Vale of White Horse District Council is offering flood grants of up to £1000 and we hope to take advantage of this. To sum up "it is work in progress".

The Village College is co-ordinated and run by Lynn Brookes. It continues to flourish with a whole range of classes including the following:

Patchwork and Quilting running morning, afternoon and evening sessions, with 25 students

Yoga and Pilates

Saturday Workshops for "Machine Quilting Fun days", Calligraphy and Singing (What next – the Charney Bassett Choir!!)

On your behalf I thank Lynn for the sterling work she carries out.

As many of you are aware the Parish Council has rented Ock Green and the adjacent field in Lyford Road from the Trustees of Charney Manor since 1973. The Parish Council had maintained the field as a natural habitat for the benefit of the community. In December 2011 the Trustees of the Manor indicated that they had received a request from a nearby resident to purchase the field and they sought our views on the subject. I can say there was no sinister motive attributed to the purchaser whose only intention was to preserve it as it was. After further correspondence with the Trustees it was agreed that the Parish Council should continue to rent the field and to develop it into an orchard in recognition of H.M. The Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

Money for the project was raised by a table top sale held on the village green, organised by Steve and Sue Champion along with Parish Councillor David Roberts, raising £311 (they won't give up the day job – it was hard work). Additionally the Jubilee Committee which raised funds for the village Jubilee celebrations donated £112.30p. A project team was formed, trees and bushes together with protection guards purchased prior to planting. David Godfrey rotovated the ground and removed the debris. I am happy to report that the orchard flourishes and is a fine example of a community working together.

A number of people were involved, too many to name individually but I will mention one person, John Daglish. The hand carving of the Oak Wood Jubilee sign is a mark of a craftsman.

Technology plays an important part in village life and some 90 residents have now opted into the Village e-mail messaging group which has been used extensively by our Clerk to keep you updated with planning issues. It is hoped to extend its use to provide news on other matters. The village website had become unworkable leading to the custodian John Wright, assisted by his wife Stephanie, spending considerable time in setting up an effective replacement. It is now up and running. Check it out, www.charneybassett.org.uk. The Parish Council will have to establish guidelines relating to read/write of the contents. I am grateful to them both for the contribution they have made.

Earlier in my report I indicated that I would return to planning issues and you will recall that last year I explained that the planning rules had been relaxed and I spoke of the V of WHDC

Interim Housing Policy. In November 2011 we were advised that it had been calculated that Charney Bassett should have ten additional houses by 2026. In February 2012 the V of WHDC advised the Parish Council that its new Interim Housing Policy now identified scope for ten to twenty houses that could be built on land owned by Oxfordshire County Council. The Parish Council responded in April 2012 that we would support 10 houses over the period of 14 years but not twenty, giving the reasons why.

This has now become academic; the Interim Housing Policy was not fit for purpose and is deemed unlawful. The National Planning Policy Framework requires Planning Authorities to demonstrate a five year supply of house building. The Vale can only demonstrate a 3.3 year supply of house building land and the local plan has lapsed. The National Planning Policy Framework contains a presumption in favour of development provided a site is sustainable and the Planning Committee should only refuse an application where it is assessed that it could cause material harm. Refusing an application without reasonable grounds leaves an applicant free to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. An Inspector could then approve the application awarding costs against the Council. The Council would also lose control of the development and Section 106 monies which are financial contributions to support community projects.

The Local Plan is being re-written in two parts – Part 1 has been published and will be adopted in 2014 after consultation. Part 2 will address the position of smaller villages with consultation in 2014. The VofWHDC have a points system for identifying the size of villages which impacts on the number of new houses that can be supported. At the present time we are classed as a small village with 7 points. We, along with the Charney Bassett Action Group (CBAG) are challenging the grading and if we can reduce to 6 points we are then classified as “Open Countryside” where future growth would simply be ‘natural’ growth’ i.e. 5 houses per decade.

We have to bear in mind that with no District Council strategy in place, difficulty is created in having valid objections to planning applications. In effect, whilst it is an expression the Vale of White Horse doesn't like “it is open season for the next 12 months” and this includes agricultural land.

I mention sustainability. This takes into account the economic, environmental and social impact of a proposed development. This is a key test and one we must contest. We have already objected to the four houses in Longworth Road. They would be outside the built up area of the village, they present a loss of privacy to residents in Longworth Road, they present an increase in traffic, noise and disturbance to neighbours and the access is too narrow.

The role of the Parish Council is to act as a conduit for concern and practical views of the community and we are grateful to CBAG for the role they play. At the present time plans

have not been submitted by Pye Homes but we understand that there may be changes to their original proposal to build 13 new homes in Buckland Road.

At our last Annual meeting the benefit of either a Neighbourhood or Community plan was discussed. It was agreed that our best chance of bringing influence to bear in the interest of the Community was to have our own Community Plan in accordance with the recent Localism Act. A Community Plan needs to be prepared and owned by the Community and accordingly a project team was formed to formulate a plan under the Chairmanship of Brian Hook. A considerable amount of work was carried out including the gathering of the views from the occupier of every house in the village. The response was analysed and a draft report prepared. There were differing views as to the direction the report should take. On 28th February a representative from the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council discussed with the Council and members of the working group the progress of the report and asked challenging questions. At the March Parish Council meeting it was considered advisable to continue with a Community led plan. Three residents agreed to join the Working Party and the Clerk undertook to organise a briefing meeting and to re-launch the project under the Chairmanship of Ian McGregor. I can inform you that the process has begun, it requires a structural approach and does need the ideas and support of the village – it is your Plan.

Regrettably this report is longer than usual but it is right and proper that your Council makes you aware of the difficulties that exist with planning applications being made and the challenges that we face. This year has been an outstanding one for community involvement, the Jubilee Orchard project completed, progress made with the Community Plan, not an easy task and the efforts of CBAG in response to unwanted planning applications. Work continues with Chaffinch in relation to flood prevention.

Finally, and he won't like it, I would like to place on record our appreciation of the work, support and advice we receive from our Clerk, Dr. Stephen Cowlam. His work this year has quadrupled and he has kept open our links with the Community and CBAG. A safe and effective pair of hands.

Michael Cox.
Chairman of the Parish Council.

8 May 2013