

CHARNEY BASSETT PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report 2013/2014

This is my fourth report as your Chairman. The report, as always sets out the way the Parish Council has conducted its business on your behalf. It is sufficient, at this stage, to say that it has been a busy year.

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 again sufficient to say that your Council has kept the precept for the coming year at its present rate. Much of this is achieved by good housekeeping.

As in previous years your Council was invited by the District to comment on a number of planning applications during the year. As you are aware in March 2013 an application was made by the landowner to erect four, four bedroomed houses on land off Longworth Road, Charney Bassett. The application was opposed by both residents and the Parish Council and on 2nd May 2013 was refused in strong terms by Planning Officers from the Vale of the White Horse District Council.

The applicant appealed against the decision and the matter was referred to the Planning Inspectorate. On Monday 17th March an independent inspector visited the site and carried out an inspection which included a walk through the village. The village was represented by local residents and a member of the Parish Council. I can now report that the inspector concluded that the appeal should be dismissed and her decision notice indicates that new housing will only be permitted as limited infilling within the existing build up areas. It is, however, important to note that the decision notice provides a clause that new housing will not be allowed outside the area unless it complies with other policies in the Local Plan. I will comment later.

At the time of writing this report the expected application from Pye Homes for building on land in Buckland Road has not materialised but we do know that as the result of strong opposition from CBAG, the village action group, the plans were amended. The planned meeting with the Parish Council to discuss the amended plans was cancelled at short notice with no accepted explanation being given. We were not impressed.

Whilst dealing with planning it is right that I make you aware that the Government has required the Vale Council to revise its housing plan in accordance with guidelines set out in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). As a result of this, the Vale has recently published yet another local Plan – Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies. Your Parish Council had previously advised the Vale that Charney Bassett should be re-categorised from

“smaller village” to “open countryside”. Together with your Clerk I attended a consultation exhibition relating to the plan and I am able to report that in the new draft plan – I emphasise draft – we are now classified as “open countryside”. This means that we should expect only modest development, such as in-fill and re-development of brown field sites, with an expectation of a modest increase in the size and the structure of the village. You may think, as I do, that this was in the Planning Inspector’s mind when making the decision on the Longworth Road application. Sustainability remains a key issue and works in our favour.

At the last Annual Meeting you were informed that your Parish Council had agreed to have a Community Plan as opposed to a Neighbourhood Plan with the intention of bringing influence to bear in the interest of the village. Initially Iain McGregor had undertaken to lead the group but sadly he had to stand down, and fortunately for us we were able to persuade Neil Dobson to take over. We sought advice from the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC) and at an early stage it became apparent that a Neighbourhood Plan would place us in a stronger position having Statutory Status. Neighbourhood planning is part of a new approach to planning introduced by the Localism Act 2011. The new system is designed to be collaborative and gives communities more power to shape the future of the place where they live.

Neil has been joined by Hugh Brookes, Ron Smith, Victoria Smith, Sheila Terry, Christine Trotman, and recently Iain McGregor has returned to the group. I am grateful to them and it is important to be aware that this is a plan for the Community, our plan, so they need all of us to be involved. Grants are available and indeed have been obtained. I must confess that the process is, in my view, a bureaucratic nightmare but Neil and his group remain above it all.

Earlier in the year, as part of the process, 120 Questionnaires were sent to households in the village and 57 replies were received. Over the coming months there will be further consultation processes by both public exhibition and further questions posed to the Community. Regular updates will be provided on the village website and e-mail messaging system. I can only re-iterate it is our plan.

The Village College continues to be run and co-ordinated by Lynn Brookes and, as last year, continues to flourish. Classes include Patchwork and Quilting with morning and afternoon sessions on Wednesdays and Yoga and Pilates courses remain popular with waiting lists, a healthy sign in more ways than one.

Last year I spoke of the new village E-Mail messaging group and the intention to extend its use to providing Charney Chatter as an electronic Newsletter. In September 2013 a working group was set up which included David Sibbert, John and Stephanie Wright, Roger Watson, Rosemary McClintock and Councillor Jane Fry. I am happy to report that the new Charney Chatter E-Newsletter has been set up and along with the village E-Mail messaging system is

working well and to good effect. I am grateful to the communication group for the work they have done.

Project Chaffinch (Challenge Avoid Further Flooding in Charney) has continued under the stewardship of the Parish Clerk. The plan submitted to the Environment Agency by Jim Gardiner has been accepted and through the Autumn of 2013 considerable work was carried out on clearing the causeway to the west of the village by the Charney Army. The next step is for Jim Gardiner and Keith Harris to mark the land to show where the ditch needs to be dug and the Causeway built up. The Clerk has obtained funding for the hire of earth moving equipment and the work will progress in early summer. It is worthy of note that despite the wettest winter since records were commenced and flooding in the area, no property in the village was flooded. Considerable work has been undertaken since 2007 but I, along with others, believe it is important to remain vigilant. To this end, a good deal of time was spent in sourcing sand and sandbags both commercially and through the Vale Council. Bags were filled by the Charney Army and distributed to vulnerable properties.

At the November Parish Council Meeting it was decided, after public interest had been shown, that the village would sponsor the purchase of a defibrillator by fund raising and support from the Parish Council. I am able to report that the equipment has been purchased at a cost of £2020 with £1000 from an Oxfordshire County Council grant, £300 from the remaining Jubilee Funds and a £720 loan from the Parish Council. I can confirm that considerable funds have been raised from activities within the village including a Folk Concert in the Church, proceeds from a Quilting Exhibition, Cream Tea at the Chequers Inn and a "Coin in the Jar" on the bar of the Chequers: an excellent example of self-help within the Community.

The defibrillator will be located in the Telephone Kiosk and twelve residents have volunteered to train in its use. This is an excellent project and I am grateful to Councillor David Roberts for his leadership and to all those who have supported him.

I have desperately tried to keep this report short and regrettably it is longer than I would have wished. That said, much good work has been achieved over the year and warrants mention. Sadly, this is my last report as I am standing down from the Council. Shortly I shall be seventy five and believe the village needs a younger person at the helm. It has been a privilege to be part of the village which in the early days made Yvonne and I so welcome. We both had the additional privilege of representing small Parish Councils at a Royal Garden Party held at Buckingham Palace in May 2013, a memorable day, Yvonne left the sole of her shoe on the Royal lawns.

I would like to thank the Charney Army for all its work, CBAG for its sensible and constructive approach to the concerns relating to the development within the village, to my fellow Councillors (2 are female) for their support, friendship and humour and last, but not least, Stephen Cowlam, the Clerk to the Parish Council. I didn't know Stephen until I

became Chairman but over the four years we have become friends, his guidance and advice have been paramount in my discharge of the duties of Chairman. Thank you, Stephen, for keeping me on the right track, and finally, to you, the village residents, for giving me an easy time. I tried my best.