

Berrick Salome Parish Council

May 2017 Chairman's Report.

This is my second Report as Chairman of your Parish Council and I think it's fair to say that we've had a busy year.

The driver for much of our activity this year has been the effect on our Parish of proposed large-scale developments in Chalgrove and in Benson. In this statement I propose to deal with all the other matters that concern us first and then to cover Chalgrove and Benson at the end.

SODC have asked us to comment on 16 Planning Applications.

1 is due for consideration by the Parish council later this evening

2 are still outstanding at SODC but have been recommended for approval by the Parish Council

10 were recommended for approval by the Parish Council and subsequently approved by SODC

2 were recommended for approval by the Parish Council but refused by SODC. 1 of these was subsequently appealed to the Secretary of State and refused again at that level. And

1 was recommended for refusal by the PC but approved by SODC.

From the record above you will note that we , your Parish Councillors, don't always agree with the Planning Department at SODC but that , by and large , we seem to be on the same page.

You might also deduce that our approach is to respect house and property owners rights to improve and alter their properties so long as those improvements and alterations are not to the detriment of their neighbours or the rural nature of our community and so long as they do not overstretch the infrastructure on which we depend.

system was unacceptable when under strain. They promised to canvass us all in the Spring of 2016 to gauge where on that list of 31 we featured in terms of them prioritising their remedial work. Despite David chasing them on numerous occasions that canvassing did not happen till the late autumn and we await their response to it. They had previously indicated that work could start in November 2017 if appropriate. Meanwhile the year has been exceptionally dry and we don't seem to have had any problems. Meanwhile, also, the whole hornets' nest of the Benson Residential developments has been stirred up and

And that thought brings me neatly on to Thames Water. We left the story last year with Thames Water admitting that we were one of 31 parishes where it was agreed that their

what happens there will influence what happens to our sewage system both in the context of the overall capacity in Benson and also in the context of the route and size of our existing outflow pipe. This remains work in progress-- and progress is frustratingly slow.

We have maintained contact with RAF Benson and I feel, that the overflying problem has improved. For this we are grateful to those in authority at Benson. The fact that it has improved seems to me to confirm that sensitivity on the base to the overflying issue can deliver a favourable outcome for us.

The Playground equipment continues to be well used -- in one instance slightly too well used - but we are going to have to spend some more money this year to renovate the pits.

Caroline Tribe and her team have continued with their excellent work of preserving the accessibility of the footpaths and bridleways. They do a wonderful job nagging the landowners and have persuaded the Parish Council to set aside a modest amount out of the precept to undertake professional clearance work in some locations.

We have been encouraged by OCC to embrace their Oxfordshire Together initiative whereby Parish Councils get together to buy and undertake services that, historically OCC were responsible for and receive a cash incentive to do so. For us the interest was mainly in the area of grass and verge cutting where OCC cuts demanded a halving of their commitment down to a cut once a year only. We investigated this initiative but have not proceeded as its benefit was overtaken by other more urgent priorities. We will need to keep an eye on this, particularly in the context of overgrown grass at dangerous road junctions. Last year a working party with strimmers sprung up from the Parish to deal with a couple of junctions and I suspect the same will have to happen again later this year.

We have started the process of producing our Neighbourhood Plan having been persuaded that it was risky for the Parish not to have a Plan in the context of current Policies re Planning and Development. Brian Tracey heads this initiative which is being done under the auspices of the Parish Council. All parishioners will shortly be asked to feed back their views and thoughts and I would urge everyone to do so and to take this process seriously. It will certainly contribute to the future shape and style of our Parish.

We have created an archive of interesting historic Parish related documents in a filing cabinet in this hall. David Langston kindly indexed the archive and it is available to anyone who wants to look through it. It is held under lock and key so -- please ask me or the clerk or the treasurer if you want access. It would also be interesting to add to it if anyone has any interesting local documents in their possession.

We were asked to consider providing a tennis court for communal use on the parish field but our quest for a champion for such a project fell on stony ground and there was a murmuring of dissent from some living nearby driven by concern about noise. So the idea stalled.

The Parish Council, in conjunction with the VHMCC and the Bridge Club , have continued the process of renovating the Village Hall. Stage 1 was the new roof. Stage 2 has been the provision of new windows, insulation and external cladding. And Stage 3 is currently being contemplated.

The hall is now structurally sound and insulated efficiently. It should stand for many more years to come and, I hope you'll agree, looks great. We are very grateful to the Quarry Charity and to SODC for the grants that have made this work possible.

And, of course, we await with almost uncontrolled excitement, the final stages of the installation of super-fast Broadband throughout the Parish. Hannah has been driving this project for us with the sort of enthusiasm and commitment that only a young person with the absolute need to communicate in a contemporary fashion can bring to the table. It remains to be seen whether Gigaclear are as good as they claim to be but, I have to say, their installation programme to date has been remarkable in terms of the way they've "just got on with it". I hope and trust that the verges will recover and that those who were contemplating moving from the Parish because they couldn't work from home will now stay for ever!!

And so -- let's move on to the Elephant in the room. Chalgrove and Benson.

The Parish Council's position on the proposed Developments in Chalgrove and Benson was extensively debated at the Parish Council Meeting on 12/1/17 and set out clearly in the minutes to that meeting. I do not propose to go over that ground again here. But I do ask Parishioners to bear our stated position in mind in the event that anyone feels driven to make personal representations on either Proposals. Without repeating them parrot fashion it is very useful if their general thrust can be repeated often and loud.

Suffice to say that we are totally opposed to large scale developments at both locations principally because we see them as damaging the rural nature of our Parish and because of significant concern about their effect on the local infrastructure and services and the inevitability of increased traffic through the Parish. In the case of Chalgrove we also express the intellectual argument that it is simply in the wrong place to deliver what is expected of it. We will represent our position forcefully when the various Plans are canvassed and when the Applications are made.

But, on the basis of covering the " what ifs" we propose and are working on the following specific action so as to mitigate the effect of the Proposed Developments on the Parish should they be granted consent.

Re Chalgrove. We are engaging with the HCA (the developers) and OCC (Highways )to persuade them to upgrade Hollantide Lane and divert Chalgrove traffic heading for Reading, Didcot, Wallingford and all points South and West along it to avoid the traffic coming through the Parish.

Re Benson. We are engaging with OCC (Highways) to persuade them to countenance significant traffic calming and traffic discouragement facilities along the length of the lanes through the Parish to avoid Benson traffic travelling to the M40 north and the Oxford Ring Road (going east) using them as a rat run. If successful, this initiative might involve some major alteration to the appearance and ergonomics of our lanes. We are employing a consultant to advise and the objective will be to persuade SODC to demand a specific contribution to the cost of the works from the Developers.

Sandwiched between the two developments we are clearly under threat and I anticipate that a considerable amount of the time and efforts of your Parish Council will be devoted to defending our position in the coming year.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for their continuing commitment , wisdom and efforts but most especially to thank our Clerk Chris Cussens who has taken the art of clerkship to a completely new level this year in his quest to keep us in order. I said last year that Sarah White would be a very hard act to follow -- well Chris has done that -- in spades.