

Berrick Salome Parish Council

Chairman's Annual Review. May 2016

Ian Glyn

I report on the first year of a new Council -- by which I mean a year when new Councillors were elected.

So the first duty, and pleasure, that I have is to offer sincere thanks, in this forum, to those who served so well and so diligently in the last Council. And most particularly to Derek Shaw who seems to have clocked up around 30 years of service and, as you'll hear later, he's still at it.

We set out to introduce youth, a balance of the sexes and a geographical spread in the new Council. We achieved two of those aims but not the geographical spread which left Roke sadly unrepresented. Luckily Ellie Cross agreed to represent the interests of the residents of Roke on an informal basis rather than as a Councillor. We will strive to address that issue as the Council matures over time.

Let me now turn to what we've been up to.

At the end of the last Council, activity centred around 4 activities:

- 1) The installation of the Defibrillator now on the external wall of the Village Hall. It's secured by a numerical code on the recommendation of the Ambulance Service who give you the code if and when you call them out so that you can send someone to collect the machine to use it pending the arrival of the Ambulance. For various reasons this is the favoured and recommended procedure.
- 2) The creation of "footpath" wardens to look after and protect the bridleways in our Parish.
- 3) Repairs to the structure of the Playground equipment.
- 4) Repairs to the verges throughout the Parish. We were grateful to Grundons for supplying FOC a lorry load of topsoil. I have to say that we're dispirited by the continuing degradation of the verges since this initiative. Maybe we're pushing water uphill given the size of the trucks now coming through the villages.

Those whose builders damage the verges outside their houses will, I'm afraid continue to be nagged by me to get them replaced after the work is completed. I'm grateful to those that I have spoken to up to now for obliging so readily.

During this Council:

- 1) We are working to improve the mobile phone reception in the villages. We're grateful to David Turner for his support in this quest -- but it's not an easy task and I'm not sure we can report any great progress.
- 2) We have made a strong representation on your behalf that the Oakley Wood recycling centre should not be closed. Here I'm pleased to report complete success. It's staying open for the foreseeable future.
- 3) We have regularised the position regarding the Allotments in the Parish. They are now run as an independent facility for the benefit of Parishioners and they will report in to this meeting on their activities like similar independent Parish organisations.
- 4) We organised an archive of historical Parish documents in a filing cabinet in this village hall. The Parish Chairman and the Treasurer have the key to this filing cabinet and anyone wanting to look through the archives is welcome so to do. David Langston has indexed them. Thank you David.

- 5) We continue to push for better Broadband connection to those parts of the Parish who do not have it. Like the mobile phone situation, I suspect that we are a small voice in a sea of dissatisfaction but Hannah, who has taken on the task, is pursuing some innovative ideas to help out.
- 6) We continue to liaise with RAF Benson in a very positive way while we await the effect of the arrival of the Chinooks on us to become apparent. We have established two seemingly cooperative contacts at the Base and it seems to me that there is currently no major issue with unnecessary noise.
- 7) We are in contact with the Highways Department re small improvements to safety on the Rokemarsh bend. Not much can be done here but certain existing road furniture can be renewed and a particularly malign pothole can be filled in.
- 8) We continue to push Thames Water for resolution of the unacceptable situation at the bottom of the Roke Road and in Rokemarsh when the water table rises. We are now on a list of 31 Parishes in the Thames Water area where things are agreed to be unacceptable. Consequently we're part of a 3 stage process that seems to be more about identifying the issue and prioritising its solution than about "fixing it".
It looks likely that the process will come to a climax in November 17 when stage 3 will, hopefully, be implemented.
What those Stage 3 works are will depend on a survey to be conducted this summer by Thames Water amongst our residents. I urge you to take this survey seriously as the replies to it will affect the level and the priority given to the work. For those houses that badly suffer from the rising water table, we would like to secure a personal visit from Thames Water, so please would those who are so affected advise the Parish Clerk.
It seems to us that the issue is created by the inadequate size of the pipe out of the pumping station in Rokemarsh but that position has not been fully accepted by Thames Water who claim that the system is properly balanced "until something goes wrong" Says it all really -- doesn't it!?
- 9) We continue to support PAGE in its efforts to persuade that there is no need for Gravel extraction in the area and that, if there was, the proposed pit near Benson is a flawed location. Rob Marsh will be reporting on this later.
- 10) We are considering the invitation from the Local Councils to join their "Oxfordshire Together" programme. This acknowledges that, in times of austerity, District and County Councils will not have the financial resource to fulfil all the tasks that they have done hitherto and invites Parish Councils to take on some of the work themselves with an inducement of a cash contribution to help.
Our position is to broadly welcome this initiative but not to involve ourselves at the outset until we see how it develops and on which (larger) neighbouring Parish Council we can "piggy back".
- 11) We are also revisiting the concept of a Neighbourhood Plan. This is an initiative that was proposed some time ago and, at that time, we decided not to become involved.
But the concept and importance of a Neighbourhood Plan has grown and it is appropriate for us now to revisit that decision. Derek has kindly agreed to head a steering group to look at this and he will talk to you about it later this evening.
- 12) We also watch with a certain amount of dismay the developing conversations between Central, County and District Government about the future of local Government and we expect to be canvassed about this in the future.
- 13) During the year we have been asked to comment on 11 Planning Applications ranging from minor works - small extensions to existing buildings - through demolitions of existing houses and rebuilds - to a completely new house on a new plot.
One or two have been mildly controversial and I hope we have navigated that controversy properly.
Our policy is to respect house owner's rights to want to improve / alter their properties, - to canvass locally to pick up any concerns in the immediate area of the Application and to recommend accordingly mindful of the constraints implicit in physical issues (the sewage

system, relationship with roads footpaths etc.) and mindful of our role to keep the Parish as a Country Village with all that that entails.

- 14) We have set the precept for this year at a level equivalent to previous years, subject only to an inflationary increase. We did so mindful of the expectation that continuing austerity will prevail for the foreseeable future and that having a modest financial resource available to spend locally gives us the ability to undertake tasks that would not normally have fallen to us to do.

So that's a summary of the year past in the life of the Berrick and Roke Parish Council. I am grateful to my fellow Councillors for their care, wisdom and efforts and particularly to Sarah White who was our clerk till November and to Chris Cussens our clerk since then. Sarah did a truly fantastic job disciplining and organising us and Chris has followed strongly in that mode.

We circulate minutes by email to all on our email list. We hope you find that helpful. If you're not getting the minutes -- then please let Chris know at parish-clerk@berrickandroke.org.uk.

And finally --- I've been on the Parish Council for many many years and I agreed to stay on last year as a handover to the new Councillors. I feel that task is now accomplished and I feel that new blood around this table would be a good thing. Accordingly if there is anyone who would like to join the Parish Council going forward I'd be pleased to hear from them. None of my current Colleagues relish the opportunity to chair the Council so the opportunity to give this review next year is open!!

I would say that I'd be happy to continue in the absence of any burning desire from elsewhere but I believe a fresh face would be a good thing.