

# Berrick Salome Parish Council

## May 2018 Chairman's Annual Report

Ian Glyn

Well I introduced my report last year by saying that we'd had a busy year. The pace has increased this year.

And, again, the driver for the activity has been what's proposed for Benson and Chalgrove and the effect of those proposals on us in Berrick.

But then overlaid on all that came the proposed Expressway. To say that we feel under siege is, perhaps, an understatement.

Before I go in to detail, I ought to refer to a "game changer " that occurred a couple of weeks ago. Over the last few years, SODC had effectively lost control of the Planning System as they were unable to demonstrate a five-year housing supply. The rules are that, absent a five-year housing supply, a Planning authority has to apply a presumption in favour of granting consent unless there is clear detriment. That's why so many Planning Appeals were won and SODC were reluctant to apply the value judgements that they had previously. A couple of weeks ago SODC announced that they did indeed have a five-year housing supply. Not only did that mean that I had to change the tone of this report at the last minute, but it changes many of the dynamics of what we have been facing. I hope that David Turner will touch on this and explain what's been happening later in the meeting.

Anyway -- detail first.

### PLANNING IN THE PARISH.

We have been asked to comment on 19 Planning Applications in the year. Of those, 17 were within the Parish boundaries, with the other two being in Benson. On those two, our views were sought because of their effect on the Parish (and Rokemarsh particularly). Let me come back to those later.

Of the 17, we felt content to recommend approval on 16. And of those SODC subsequently granted 13. We disagreed on Shepherds Cottage (which subsequently got permission at Appeal), Rose Cottage (which has failed at Appeal) and West Cottage where SODC considered a staircase to have more historic value than we saw in it.

From that record, you will see that your Parish Council has tended to agree with SODC's approach to Planning this year. Our presumption remains that house owners should do what they wish with their homes so long as there is no detriment to others.

### PLANNING -BENSON APPLICATIONS

The two Applications in Benson that directly affect us are Ben 3/4 and a recent Application to develop 19 houses on the field beside The Orchard in Rokemarsh. The Orchard sits within Berrick Salome Parish but the field (while it is owned by the Owners of the Orchard) falls within Benson Parish. The owners of the Orchard admit that their Application is driven by the prospect of Ben 3/4 being granted permission and the effect that that would have on their property. It is not supported by the Benson Neighbourhood Plan and flies in the face of statements made therein and in the Ben

3/4 Application: - Statements that a physical barrier will be maintained between Rokemarsh and Ben 3/4.

Who knows what SODC will think of the Application, but we shall oppose it with all the vigour that we can muster.

The position with regard to Ben 3/4 is clearer but not very palatable for us. It is supported in the Benson Neighbourhood Plan and, consequently, looks likely to be recommended for Approval by the officers in the SODC planning department. In fact, it almost went to Committee in January with such a recommendation. I am pleased to say we managed (with others I suspect) to stop that happening by using the argument that it would be absolutely wrong for an Application of that scale and nature, and one which relied so much on the support for it implicit in the Neighbourhood Plan, to be considered before the Plan itself had survived the scrutiny of the Examiner and achieved its legality through referendum.

The Benson Neighbourhood Plan has now been recommended by the Examiner and is due to go to referendum in June.

Other things being equal I feel that Ben 3/4 is moving towards getting Planning Permission. And I say that principally because it is a basic platform of the BNP. And it is a basic platform of the BNP because it delivers for Benson the Relief Road that they crave.

The Examiner of the Plan recommended to SODC that residents in Rokemarsh should have a voice in the Referendum on the BNP. I'm hoping that SODC will honour this recommendation and, assuming that it does, hoping that parishioners living in Rokemarsh will vote as they think appropriate. Because of what I've said above, I'm sure you'll appreciate the direct link between the Benson NP being approved at Referendum and Ben3/4 succeeding at a subsequent Planning Committee.

As a Parish Council charged with representing the interests of our Parishioners, we have a very difficult decision to take in this regard. On the one hand we have to respect the good people of Benson for producing an excellent Neighbourhood Plan which, apparently, delivers for them what they want. I say "apparently" because the Plan has yet to go to referendum.

But, on the other hand, Ben 3/4 has very seriously negative effects on us in Berrick Salome.

And the dilemma we face is that we are advised by Counsel, instructed by us, that there is a potential avenue for us to challenge the legality of the Benson Neighbourhood Plan through a Judicial Review. Such a challenge will only succeed if there is an error of law in the Neighbourhood Plan and Counsel tells us that there is such an error. Counsel also points us to several inconsistencies between the Benson NP and the Examiner's comments on it.

But such a challenge will be expensive and, while there are ways of limiting the cost burden, is beyond our existing budget without some significant fund raising. So, it is not a course of action that we can contemplate lightly.

And even if we could, I think we need to think carefully about whether it is the right thing to do. We have to balance the apparent will of the people of Benson with the disastrous effect that Ben3/4 will have on our Parish.

And, overriding all this, there is likely to be a very short window of time (arising very shortly) for us to decide what to do.

I do not feel that this is the right time or place to discuss this matter further, but I would be very happy to explain more in another forum if anyone wants to form or express a firm view on the matter and I'm sure your Parish council will cover the issue later this evening when it holds its Parish Council meeting.

Let me move on now to the other elephant in the Room.

## CHALGROVE

The proposed development of 3000 homes at Chalgrove airfield fundamentally underpins SODC's emerging 2033 Plan. That plan was important to us because it delivered the required 5-year housing supply and that put planning control back in to the hands of SODC. As I have already mentioned, that aspect of the Plan's importance has been watered down with last week's announcement.

The Plan was ready to go off to Inspection a couple of months ago but SODC have suffered a series of knocks in this regard and they are being forced to reconsider the Plan generally and Chalgrove particularly. While this is good news for us in the context of our concerns about Chalgrove, the delay involved in rewriting the Plan is worrying.

We cannot assume that Chalgrove is dead, but the resistance to moving shown by Martin Baker certainly makes it a less immediate threat. The one positive aspect of Chalgrove to report is that it seems to be accepted currency that, if it is to proceed, then Hollantide Lane needs to be upgraded to take any traffic away from Berrick Salome.

## EXPRESSWAY

If Chalgrove is the elephant, then how shall I describe the Expressway? Let's call it a dinosaur, for if it were to follow the southerly of the southerly routes proposed it would clearly be devastating for us all. We can only wait and see what Highways England say in the summer when they choose a preferred corridor. Suffice to say at this point that the tacit support that may have been in the back of Mr Cotton's mind when he first responded publicly to the news of it coming through SODC may not be so forthcoming absent Chalgrove (and Mr Cotton). I would expect SODC to campaign more vigorously in favour of a route going north of Oxford in future.

OCC, however, are now on record as saying there must be no question of the Expressway piggy backing on the A34 round Oxford as that road is now at capacity.

We are campaigning as one with others to persuade the current decision makers that a northern route is infinitely more sensible. But the one thing that is absolutely certain is that, if that initial campaign fails, then so will the unity amongst southern Parishes as we all retrench to fight our corners.

I cannot see the immediate threat to Berrick as being too serious, as I cannot believe that Highways England would countenance the route that so devastates our Parish, but the sooner the issue goes away the better -- for obvious reasons.

So, we wait till the summer for the decision of Highways England.

Let me now move on to more domestic issues.

## THAMES WATER

Until very recently we have been mercifully free of flooding issues relating to the drains. This is fortunate as Thames Water have moved us off the priority list for fixing the issue. Their reason for so doing is that the household survey which they conducted in 2016/2017 did not produce evidence of significant difficulties in our households and the issues that were referred to were undated and, therefore, dismissed by Thames Water.

I find that reason (the lack of date) absolutely inexcusable and a complete cop out on their part but it is disappointing to note that, so few parishioners replied to the survey. We will now rely on the Thames Water work implicit in Ben 3/4 (if that project proceeds) delivering for us an exit pipe of

sufficient girth to evacuate our sewage. The minute that Application is decided, David Bridgland will be on the case.

#### WATER COURSES

It is a few years since we excavated and cleared our ditches and ensured that all property owners were carrying out their obligations in this regard. I think we should make that a project for this year and will be looking for a champion to drive that through.

#### BROADBAND

I believe that the Gigaclear project has been very successful and that there is general contentment and satisfaction on that score and I propose to write to Gigaclear accordingly to congratulate and thank them -- unless you tell me that my regard for their work is misplaced.

#### BRIDLEWAYS

Similarly, I would like to commend the work that Caroline Tribe and her team have done to make our bridleways happier, more accessible places. We will continue that work. Thank you, Caroline.

#### PLAYGROUND

The Playground equipment is reaching its sell by date, but we continue to keep it safe and as sound as possible. Thanks to the Crump family, Ray Perfect, John King, Craig Tribe and Roger Smith for their efforts this year on that task. I think the equipment has got a few more years life in it yet, but only because we are taking creative remedial action to keep it going.

#### VILLAGE HALL

Stage 2 of the Village Hall refurbishment was successfully completed in the year and I believe that the relationship with the Bridge club remains in our best interest. I'm conscious of the concerns of some residents re the Bridge Club usage of our Hall but "you don't get ought for nought" and I firmly believe that the relationship is in our best interests. John Bird will talk later about the Hall and plans for the future, which might well involve a change to the constitution of it during the coming year.

#### NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Neighbourhood Planning team has continued to work hard on the project. If you think that it seems to be taking a long time to come to fruition -- then you'd be right. Delays have occurred in getting the necessary grants in place and the whole process is becoming more complicated -- the further we look in to the ramifications of the Plan the more certain we become of its worth but the more apparent it becomes that, to do it properly, is a serious project. We will take on professional help where needed - funded by grants-. We would hope to have the Plan ready for inspection by the end of the year.

## TRAFFIC CALMING

Similarly, the work to discourage the volumes and speed of traffic using our lanes is awaiting clarity re Benson and Chalgrove. We can't go about getting funds for any work until we know what the issue is that we face and where the funds will come from.

We are quietly working away in the background on this issue pending that clarity. Full discussion will be had before any proposal is actioned but, meanwhile the growth of tree rounds on the verges seems to me to be having the desired effect of slowing traffic down.

## 2019 ELECTION

We face elections for Councillors in May next year. I hope that my fellow Councillors will want to continue and will put themselves forward for re-election as they're doing a tremendous job. Many thanks to Steve, Craig, David and Ellie.

But, in any event, it would be good to have fresh input, so I hope that we can generate interest from others to stand. The government's push towards localism makes the activities of your Parish Council ever more relevant and important. I hope that you can see that the activities described in this report (even in this tiny Parish) are very salient and relevant to our wellbeing.

As for me -- I've been a Councillor for many too many years and I think you all need a new face at this table -- so I propose not to stand in the hope that there will be a queue of candidates to take my place.

Meanwhile there is one person who deserves very special recognition. Chris Cussens (our clerk) has been doing an unbelievably good job for two years keeping us all informed and in order. He has taken "clerking" to a completely new level. Fortunately, he's indicated that he is prepared to continue in that role -- which is very good news indeed. Many Many thanks -Chris - from all of us.

So that's it for this year. Let's hope we get some of the outstanding issues resolved soon.