

# BISHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Barry Malki  
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## Minutes of Bisham Annual Parish Council Meeting 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

### 1) Welcome

Cllr Alan Keene (Chair) opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

### 2) Apologies

None

### 3) Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 2016

Cllr Keene presented the minutes from the previous annual meeting.

### 4) Chair's Report

“Firstly an apology for the fact that this meeting was not advertised in the parish newsletter due to the illness of Margaret Cubley, who is our normal liaison. Our thoughts are with Margaret for a speedy recovery.

I will start this report by quoting from the one I presented to you this time last year:

Back in 2014 the Parish Council pressed the Borough for a 40 mph speed limit on the Henley Road from the western edge of the parish at Temple Golf Club to the eastern edge of the parish at Stubbings. Following a consultation, they decided to go ahead and plans were drawn up. These had to be shared with Highways England because some of the signs would need to be on their land on the A404 slip roads by Burchetts Green roundabout. This started an acrimonious argument between the Borough engineers and the Highways England engineers which has still not been resolved eighteen months later. In the meanwhile this much-needed speed limit has failed to materialise.

At the time I was optimistic that the speed limit would soon be implemented, but am very frustrated to have to report that it is still not in place a year later. I'm afraid that this sentiment sets the tone for much of this year's report. More about the speed limit later.

There are three major topics that continuously challenge us - Planning Applications, Highways and Flooding - in addition to taking our own local initiatives for the benefit of the parish.

Planning issues generally to fall into two categories - individual applications by residents, and an apparently endless stream of applications from a few major commercial institutions around the parish. As councillors we look in detail at all applications in the parish, and decide what comments we should make. Often we can agree a consensus position, but occasionally we can't all agree and a decision is reached by a majority vote. Personally I sometimes find myself in a conflict between my own views and those expressed to the council by residents. I have struggled to reconcile this conflict on many occasions over the years and have come to the conclusion that my vote should be based on my conscience but that my conscience should be guided by the views of our constituents. That's why it is essential that you let us know what you think about issues such as planning applications, because without you we can only judge based on our own opinions. So please do take every opportunity to come along to our meetings and make your views known.

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We recognise the important contribution made to the community by the large institutions in the parish, including Bisham Abbey, Apple Hill mental hospital and Berkshire College of Agriculture. But these organisations are continually developing and when considering planning applications from them we must take our commitment to represent our constituents very seriously. That is why we recently opposed the application by the Abbey for floodlighting the sports pitch, which would seriously affect many homes in Bisham Village. We also opposed the application for 150 new homes to be built at BCA, which although in Hurley parish, would affect many residents in the Bisham part of Burchetts Green, and those residents made their objections to the proposal very clear. Unfortunately when this application came before the planning panel at the Borough, all three of our local ward councillors spoke in support of it, and the important issues of Green Belt and Historic Environment were dismissed as "minute details of planning law". The application was approved but we hope it will now go to the Secretary of State for a final determination. Apple Hill already has an outstanding permission for a complete new floor of rooms in its basement and has recently applied for another in the roof, which would increase the mass of the building further to four storeys high, which we believe to be considerably in excess of what is appropriate for its restricted site in the Green Belt. My personal inclination is never to resist progress per se, but this relentless pressure to develop, coupled with the growing concerns of our residents, makes it impossible to support everything that is proposed. If you remember from last year, the Parish Council, representing its residents, fought against the building of a new private school on greenfield agricultural land at Stubbings. This fight cost a lot of money, and we faced a challenge over whether we had spent public money in a proper way. An external auditor investigated and found that we had in fact acted perfectly correctly. The result of the Beech Lodge School enquiry was announced last summer and it was approved in spite of our best efforts. Our thanks were again due to Councillor Mandy Robson Brown for taking the lead in this battle. To return to the Henley Road speed limit, events have unfolded over the last year as follows. In August, the Borough realised that if they didn't act, the whole process would fall apart because two years had elapsed since the initial consultation and they would have to start again. So they issued the traffic order to introduce the speed limit and this was announced in the local paper. They eventually abandoned their efforts to reach an agreement with Highways England over the placement of the signs and re-designed the scheme so that all of the signs would be on Borough land. Through the autumn no signs appeared, and this was put down to the pending appointment of a new electrical contractor. Earlier this month the new contractor arrived on site to install the signage, but only had details for less than half of the required work. So some, but not all, of the signs were installed, leaving the scheme confusing and potentially dangerous. When we pointed this out to the Borough they responded by sending workers to cover up the new signs with bin liners and sticky tape. We still have no target date for completion of the scheme - three years after the project started. To call this sorry affair a fiasco would be generous.

The temporary closure of Marlow Bridge last autumn, following the attempt by a large lorry to cross it illegally, was met with mixed reactions. Some residents welcomed the peace of their traffic-free road, while others accused the authorities, including the Parish Council, of

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negligence and threatened us with legal action if we didn't immediately re-open the bridge to traffic. Of course in fact we had no influence over this decision but anyway it was re-opened shortly afterwards. Unfortunately the parking problems in Marlow Road, which had built up during the bridge closure, have failed to resolve themselves and we have been trying to get support from the traffic officer at the Borough to review the parking restrictions, so far without a resolution. A welcome clampdown by the police on overweight vehicles trying to use the bridge does not remove the underlying problem. Currently the Parish Council could not support any proposals to close the bridge permanently because we don't have a clear mandate from our constituents one way or the other.

Traffic volumes and speeds, inconsiderate parking, fly-tipping, litter and broken and obscured road signs are constant issues, and ones for which we seem to receive variable support from the local and national highway authorities. Thankfully the various schemes for improving Bisham Roundabout for the benefit of through traffic, to what we believed was the detriment of local users, seem to have gone quiet this year. A proposal to give a street name to a private road in Stubbings was floated, but the Parish Council felt that this was inappropriate and opposed it.

During dry spells such as the one we are currently experiencing, flooding is not uppermost in our minds. But a lot of work has been going on behind the scenes to prepare for the inevitable next incident. Parish Councillor Jim Cooke, supported by Bisham resident Jim McFarlane has put together an emergency response plan to be put into motion in the event of any major local emergency, most probably flooding. This plan prepares a foundation for how the emergency services would be brought in to respond to an emergency. It proposes to use Bisham Abbey as what used to be called the "Bronze Hub", which is the central local liaison point for coordination of the relevant responders. Our thanks are due to the Abbey for agreeing to this. Jim McFarlane has also been working with the Environment Agency and the Borough to investigate how to create a scheme to drain the low lying residential area upstream of Marlow Bridge, to replace the lost "Fast Stream" that used to flow back into the Thames below the Compleat Angler.

We always consider carefully whether planning applications could have an impact on flood risk and comment accordingly. We have liaised more effectively with the Environment Agency than we managed to in the past, for example receiving advance details of the Marlow flood relief scheme that is currently being built on the other side of the river. The EA has identified areas where temporary flood barriers might be deployed, to protect Bisham Court for example. This required the clearance of a strip of vegetation at the back of the Orchard. There is still no indication of when the long-awaited raising of the footbridge at the end of Green Lane will take place.

On a more positive note, we have had some notable successes over the last year. We installed a magnificent new piece of equipment in the playground, and we have a shiny new web site, completely re-designed by Barry our clerk. Barry has also installed a number of new procedures, including a risk assessment and a transparency standard, and has managed our finances in a way which has allowed us to hit our targets for expenditure and reserves without a year-on year increase in our precept. Transparency, openness and accountability have been the values on which I have based my chairmanship.

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High speed broadband is now available in some parts of the parish, and I hope that the rollout of this will continue. We are in the process of adopting two redundant phone boxes, one in Temple and one in Bisham, in which we plan to install emergency defibrillators. We have reviewed the management of the Orchard with our maintenance contractor and are making plans to improve the landscaping behind the Eric Gill war memorial on the corner of Temple Lane, which, although it is not in our ownership, we have taken under our wing. Helen Belasco, who has generously supported our work in the parish lands over the years, stepped down at the end of the year. Thanks to Helen for her efforts and sensitivity. Your councillors freely give up their time to represent you on a number of external bodies and our thanks are due to them. We are a member of the District Association of Local Councils, and Mandy Robson Brown and Mary Cooper attend meetings and report back. There is currently a good deal of friction between the parishes and the Borough, and DALC is our representative body in our attempts to improve this situation. We have been represented on the Bisham Neighbourhood Plan steering group by three Parish Councillors - Mandy, Iain Steedman and myself. Tom Denniford took over the chair of the group from Henry Sless last year and will be reporting on progress in a minute. Thank you all for your support and other inputs to our proceedings over the years. Whether positive or negative these are taken on board and we always try to do our best for you our residents."

Cllr Alan Keene - Chair

## 5) Bisham School Report

No report submitted

## 6) Oxford Lane Alms House (Brinkurst) Report

"The residents at Brinkhurst continue to thrive and have had a very happy and healthy year. There has been no vacancies in the year and therefore no requests for nominations from the local parish councils have been required. There has been a normal number of maintenance issues including electrics, heating, and some roof repairs on the property, and all have been dealt with very quickly and efficiently. The organisation is in a very healthy financial position

The residents went again to the Harvester near Handy cross for their Christmas party and a great time was had by all.

Brinkhurst can be found on the corner of Oxford Road and Cambridge Road in Marlow and is within walking distance to the town centre. The Brinkhurst buildings used to be old almshouses for the poor which were replaced in by a modern block of 10 small studio flats with shared bathroom facilities. Each flat has its own toilet and kitchen and is quite spacious. There is a warden on site and some of the residents also have a personal alarm for when the warden is not on duty. There is a stair lift between the ground and first floor. The flats are for residents of Marlow over 65 or others with a connection to Marlow

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If you would like to know more details please don't hesitate to get in touch at [brinkhurstmarlow@gmail.com](mailto:brinkhurstmarlow@gmail.com)

Julie Greatwood - Trustee

## 7) Financial Report

BPC started the financial year with a total of £18,405

BPC ended the financial year with a total of £18, 894

There is also a VAT reclaim of £2,788 due from HMRC.

This means a sum of £21,193 being carried over into 2017-18.

A sum of £1,896 is ring-fenced for work towards the neighbourhood plan, bringing the effective surplus to £19,297

The Council's goal is to maintain reserves of approximately £20,000.

## 8) Neighbourhood Plan

Tom Denniford gave an update on the Neighbourhood Plan, and associated items.

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## **BISHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Neighbourhood Plans established under Localism Act 2011.

Intention: to involve local communities directly in the planning process for their areas. NP is a development plan under s.38 of Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and regard has to be taken of what it says in making planning decisions.

Some talk of preparing combined plan with Cookham, but different circumstances in Bisham. Bisham decided to go it alone.

Steering Committee set up summer 2014, chair: Henry Sless. Current members: Alan Keene, Anne Ferguson, Helen Belasco, Henry Sless, Iain Steedman, Mandy Robson Brown, Philip Kersey, Ricky Lambeth, Sheila Featherstone Clarke, CTD. Under Henry's admirable chairmanship a very large amount of important groundwork done. Stepped down last autumn.

Large amount of initial research carried out. Consultation exercise undertaken to obtain parishioners' views on issues important to them and to Bisham parish. Major issues were traffic through Bisham, the A404, Bisham roundabout, etc. However, NPs are a town and country planning exercise and issues such as traffic management do not fall within their remit. However, key issue was conservation of the built environment.

Always recognised a Bisham NP would be dependent upon

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what came out of the process of updating RBWM Local Plan. BLP has been very protracted process. Years late. Draft for consultation released in December 2016 suggested, as expected, no significant new development in Bisham parish.

Because conservation was key issue it was agreed with RBWM that Bisham CA be reviewed. Extg. CA appraisal 1995. Necessary to do this before taking NP further. Accordingly, Sheila Featherstone Clark and Iain Steedman undertook large amount of work last summer carrying out surveys, photographing buildings and putting this into a new draft CA appraisal. Discussed with RBWM, but Sheila and Iain had to say commitments were too great to continue. Spare money available from NP budget, but RBWM said this cannot be used for hire of consultants to complete this work.

Learned today RBWM has internal commitment to complete review of all CAs and their appraisals with next 2 years. RBWM has money set aside internally via consultants and 4 areas already reviewed and awaiting approval by Scrutiny Panel. Delayed by BLP process. Therefore recommend RBWM be pressed to come up with timetable for completion of work already undertaken by Sheila and Iain.

## 9) Guest Speaker

Craig Philander and Aaron Jewell gave a presentation on the work that Bisham Abbey National Sports centre undertakes in the community. They highlighted that they would like to improve their links with the local community.