

BOROUGH COUNCILLORS' REPORT TO O.W.P.C. 29th JULY 2009

submitted by Cllr Malcolm Beer.

One or both Cllrs Beer and Wiles have attended and actively participated in the following Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead (RBWM) meetings and others as RBWM representatives since the last Report submitted to the last OWPC meeting two weeks ago:

Planning Windsor Development Control Panel (WDCP) site meetings (2), Local Development Framework Working Group, Cabinet, Sustainability Panel, full Council, Maidenhead Housing Assn and Shopmobility social "networking" functions (the latter provides electric buggies for disabled shoppers), King George VI Day centre AGM, and I will be attending Heathrow Airport Consultative Committee almost immediately prior to the Parish Council meeting.

The fallen trees were not removed from the Burfield Stream as promised to Cllr Wiles by the EA Regional Area Director and further contact has brought the promise that the stream will be cleared in the two weeks which started last Monday. I will try to check late this afternoon if anything has been done and report to tonight's meeting.

The last report referred to involvement in the Borough consideration of the Draft Floods and Water Management Bill which Defra is promoting to central government. My request that the Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny minutes should note that Riverside Parish representatives should be represented in any future Flood Forum was not recorded. It was particularly useful that I eventually managed to set up an exploratory Riverside Parish Councils Flood Forum (approved by Old Windsor PC some while ago) as this enabled me to inform the Cabinet of "grass roots" overall support and also some very real concerns. But despite the importance of the subject the leader of the Council did not exercise his discretion to allow me more than 5 minutes to express those concerns. High among them was how would Borough and Parish Councillors be represented under the Borough's proposal to place flooding matters under the Environmental Ambition Group of the obscure Community Partnership (CP). I was not the only speaker who highlighted the unknown nature of the activity of these groups (which seem to be composed almost entirely of corporate bodies and not community representatives!) as there are no reports or minutes of either on the Borough website, and although dates of the next CP meetings can be found, no agendas, time or place of meetings is given. I asked that further consideration be given to some other form of addressing flooding but, as usual with the Cabinet, this suggestion was brushed aside. However, after the meeting I did get the Officer and Lead Councillor to "beef up" the Borough's concerns in the letter to be submitted to Defra with its response.

I will give brief notes on the Parishes meeting and the joint response to Defra under "Meetings Attended on behalf of the Parish Council".

As my frequent requests for the setting up of a panel to discuss potential changes in bus services has not been actioned, I was going to put a motion to Council calling for a Bus Forum, but realising the reluctance to set up such Forums – coupled with Officer and Councillor "consultation overload" - I sought a resolution to include an update on bus operations at each Town and Rural Forum and Parish Conference. I had anticipated universal support as a number of service changes (including our own) had misfired and only 5 days beforehand the Cabinet had agreed on an enhanced consultation regime, but the Lead Councillor for Community Liaison & Consultation spoke against the motion saying that we could raise specific concerns about buses as and when they arose. Although I pointed out that I was trying to get consultation *before* being told what had been agreed, the majority group voted en bloc to defeat the motion. It is obvious that they had decided on this before a word was uttered on the matter.

Cllr Wiles has actioned a commitment from the Borough to repair the much commented upon hole in the paving and entrance to the Memorial Hall. He attended the Riverside Parishes meeting on flooding as he is the Berkshire rep on the EA Thames Region Flood Defence Committee.

We thank several current and one recent Parish Councillor for helping to assess the attractiveness of residents' front gardens as part of the Borough's Gardens in Bloom scheme whereby the better ones are awarded rosettes and certificates to acknowledge their efforts and encourage others. This year Cllr Wiles and I chose 23 William Ellis Close as the best in village, with always in the running 35 Church Road as runner up, and this time Bears Rails Gate Lodge missing that spot by a whisker.

Malcolm Beer, 29th July 2009.

MEETINGS ATTENDED ON BEHALF OF O.W.P.C. - Submission to O.W.P.C. 29th July 2009
by Cllr Malcolm Beer.

I was unable to attend the Berkshire Association of Local Councils Exec Committee meeting because of a clash with the Borough Cabinet meeting at which I delivered a response on behalf of the exploratory Riverside Parishes Flood Forum meeting which was held two days beforehand.

I have referred to the last mentioned meeting on Tuesday 21st July here in Old Windsor in the Borough Councillors' Report, but this is the place to record some preliminary notes in advance of discussion on this subject as a separate item later in the Agenda of tonight's OWPC meeting. Initially there was some confusion about the status of the meeting, but eventually most attendees seemed to grasp the fact that since there was a general consensus that something was needed to inform upon the subject and then co-ordinate the views of the Parishes, this was the starting point of doing so. Our Flood Warden John Lee and colleagues Cllrs Troughton, Brown, Mrs March and Borough Cllr Wiles attended.

It was obvious that some Parishes had done a great deal of work in analysing the content and proposals of the draft Floods & Water Management Bill, upon which Defra were seeking consultation responses by the end of that week, whereas others had little or no knowledge of what it was all about. There was discussion upon the way forward and the likely composition of a flood forum, a key recommendation being that it should be called a Liaison Group in order to secure a non-confrontational relationship with the Borough and other parties.

I will not dwell on the details as John Lee volunteered to take notes during the meeting, and the two of us have produced full notes of the meeting which have been widely circulated. As I had convened the meeting in accordance with an earlier decision of OWPC that such a body would be advantageous to all the flood risk Parishes, I was asked to Chair this exploratory meeting, and also send a response on behalf of the meeting to Defra. With our Chairman's approval, I also sent a modified version of this to Defra in the name of OWPC.

All of this has taken a great deal of time. I would ask that the Notes and a copy of the responses to Defra are appended to the minutes as a detailed record of the proceedings.

Malcolm Beer, 29/7/09.