

BOROUGH COUNCILLORS' REPORT TO O.W.P.C., 11th MARCH 2009,
submitted by Cllr Malcolm Beer.

1. First of all, my apologies for absence on the evening of 25th February as I was attending the Parish Conference. I think that I had an obligation to attend that as I am Vice Chairman of the District Association of Local Councils (DALC) (i.e. the Parishes' Association) and I was in the forefront of the campaign to increase the number of such Conferences. This clash apparently denied our usual Parish representation although it could have been avoided if my email of 18/12/08 which suggested a few date changes had been taken up.

2. One or both Cllrs Beer and Wiles have attended and participated in the following Borough related meetings in the period 12th February to 6th March:
Cabinet, Planning site visits in Ascot and at Legoland, two Standards Board Inquiries, Audit & Policy Review, two Kings Court School Governors, Conservation issues in Windsor, Windsor Development Control Panel (WDCP), Full Council, Parish Conference, Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny, Sustainable Communities Act Seminar. Local Authorities Aircraft Noise Council (LAANC) Executive & Council Meetings and in the days immediately before the Parish Council meeting will also have participated in the Aviation Panel and the Heathrow Noise & Track Keeping Group.

3. There was widespread concern at the WDCP that the proposed new shopfront to Daniels department shop in Windsor was inappropriate to its Conservation Area location in Peascod Street. Nobody seemed to like the proposals, in conjunction with major internal work, but the continued viability of the flagship shop overruled the few of us who spoke and voted against the design.

4. The recent Borough Council meeting was a politically motivated volatile and bad tempered four hour marathon centred around the budget. Your Councillors could see some logic in some of what both the political groups were saying, but most of it was spent criticising each other.

It is difficult to anticipate how things will turn out. The 1.9% increase was said to be the lowest in the country apart from 8 London Boroughs. A number of services will get more money, but 5 pages of savings and reviews (all of which are projected to save money) inevitably raises concerns.

5. I saw the nightmare flooding in the Kingsbury Drive and Burfield Road areas of Old Windsor early in February as an alarm call to have another attempt to regenerate languishing official activity in the flooding problems which threaten our own and other riverside communities. I submitted a motion calling for restoration of the local Thames Flood Forum to spearhead action to reduce flooding problems (please see the attached copy of my submission).

The late night flood debate followed the budget wrangles and continued the theme of looking for savings. Specious claims by the ruling Conservative group that it would only be a talking shop and would cost a lot of money saw the proposal defeated by their block vote. This was a blatant case of predetermination as I was told before the meeting that they would be voting against it no matter what I said. Such is party politics that even those representing communities with flooding problems did as they were told. It is interesting to note that as far as I can recall, only one or two of their number had occasionally attended the TFF meetings on behalf of their residents or knew anything about the TFF. It is to be hoped that this money saving scenario does not impact upon too many other essential needs.

Since that meeting it has become evident that the EA had made a very poor job of publicising a new Lower Thames Flood Forum relating the river from Datchet to Teddington (which would therefore exclude the Jubilee River and probably our troublesome stream). I have been involved in flurry of emails which seem to indicate that the EA is now willing to take part in Windsor area meetings - but as the question of paying for running them may still arise it would

be helpful if the Parish Councils were to consider whether some financial support might be available.

My notes upon the causes of the many flooding problems which I observed while they were happening (much of it way past midnight) are nearly completed and will be sent to the appropriate Borough Cabinet member and Drainage Officers. Thames Water, the EA and others. A batch of photos taken the following day will accompany the notes and my suggested remedial actions - apart from proper watercourse maintenance by the EA and others, a flow diverter at the head of the main cross-village culvert appears to be an urgent priority.

6. The Seminar about the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 highlighted that it might be possible for the Borough to apply to take over duties such as the police and the fire service if a better and /or more cost effective service could be provided locally or with another Council. The Act would also allow Parishes to take over some Borough services, and either tier might take over post offices. The first tranche of applications have to be made before end of July. While these and other possibilities might exist, there was considerable awareness of the additional burdens this would impose upon Councils which took on additional services.

7. I chaired the two LAANC meetings in Staines at which the main discussions focussed on potential legal action against the recent announcements by the Government about future Heathrow expansion and activity, and also the new LAANC website. LAANC works closely via its Director with the 2M Group, which has now grown from 12 Borough Councils to 23 representing 5 million people (from the original 2 Million in its name). 2M is using top legal experts to unpick the contradictory and vague areas of the Government statements.

LAANC supported two of my suggestions.

Firstly that 2M should ensure that the cancellation of the Cranford Agreement will guarantee flight alternation over Berkshire. It is a real concern that some West London communities (and perhaps their Councils?) want to retain Cranford to avoid take-offs over them, and this threatens the harmony within 2M.

Secondly, that the decision to continue to regulate noise under 30 year old technology instead of that arising from a recent £1.4 million 6 year study is challenged.

It was noted that both flight and passenger numbers have decreased since the autumn, also that despite the aviation industry's claim that expansion was essential to compete with European airports, the total of the London airports was many times larger than any continental rival.

The early stages of the website www.laanc.co.uk are now operative. A presentation by the Aviation Environmental Federation highlighted that scientific studies indicated that technical improvements and "carbon trading" could not slow down the growth in harmful carbon and other emissions.

8. In response to a request from Mr Macrae, I presented a petition at the last Council meeting which called for the removal of the vandalised fences next to "the Parish Path" from the Recreation Ground to Straight Road. Some of the 25 signatories gave phone numbers instead of addresses. A report will be prepared by Officers and considered by a Cabinet meeting. I stated that I was not involved in the petition as I was and continued to be in contact with Officers to try to resolve the problems.

9. Cllr Wiles continues to be active behind the scenes as Borough rep on several Day Centres in the area including Old Windsor, where he is the Treasurer and has succeeded in getting additional grants from the Borough.

10. The recent rise in political tensions at Borough has resulted in Cllr Wiles being called in to help adjudicate in cases of complaints about Councillors' conduct brought to the Standards Board. The majority of the Board is composed of respected members of the public and Cllr

Wiles is called to take part in these closed door inquiries more often than most other Councillor nominees because of his length of service on the Council (joint longest) and independent status.

11. As the problems of the Straight Road / Church and St Peters Roads crossing are a Borough highway responsibility, I was able to take the opportunity to invite a senior Highways Officer to a public meeting being held and publicised by the Residents' Association in their Newsletter. Over 150 residents braved the foul weather to see and hear the Officer's presentation and explanations of their current thoughts, not the least being the huge costs of most options which far exceeded the £35k budget. He was assisted by the Council's Highways Consultant, and toward the end of the discussions by Cllr Colin Rayner, the Lead Member for Highways on the Borough Cabinet, who I had also invited to attend.

Estimates for various options ranged from £30k to £195k (the latter for a full traffic light system) but the meeting was told that many options were not available under national regulations if speeds in excess of 30mph existed. That prompted the response that Councillors had been actively seeking a speed reduction for well over 15 years but the police had blocked it on the grounds that they did not have enough resources to enforce it. Speaker after speaker spoke in favour of a 30mph limit as the first step to enable other actions to follow under future years' budgets. That was the only positive conclusion of the meeting, although some thought a slower speed would create other problems.

The Officer's suggestion that a change to a 30mph speed limit could take 6 to 9 months and cost between £30 -50K due to road narrowing requirements was soundly rebuffed by the meeting. I have since advised the Officer that most wide parts of Straight Road have "no go" central hatched markings already, and also requested that the speed limit change comes out of the road safety budget and not that for the Straight Road crossing.

The suggestion that the option of pedestrian crossings each side of the junction would create gaps for vehicles to cross the junction was not well supported. The concerns of horse riders have been made, and I will be passing on two residents' sketch proposals for traffic light sequencing. Several speakers asked for action to remove the roadside tree on Croft Corner as it dangerously obstructs vision since it was last pruned.

12. Although the present Borough ruling party dropped me as the RBWM rep on the Community Council for Berkshire (CCB) I was elected to its Board several years ago. It is the official body of a national network which supports the voluntary sector and carries out research projects for Councils and others. Late in February I attended its future planning "awayday" and a meeting the other side of Reading. CCB is about to launch a comprehensive website (www.actionforall.org.uk) which will economically host all manner of community bodies including Parish Councils.

Malcolm Beer. 8/3//09.

MEETINGS, ETC., ATTENDED ON BEHALF OF O.W.P.C. - Submission by Cllr Malcolm Beer.

1. Cllr Troughton and I attended a reconvened RBWM District Association of Local Councils (DALC) meeting early in February. I took the Chair and was somewhat bombarded with the expressions of discontent from the representatives at least two Parishes on the workings of the Planning Call-In system. A recent explanatory document from the Borough was the centre of the discussion. A Call-in transfers determination of application to Councillors in the Development Control Panels instead of the usual Officer delegated authority process. The Government targets at least 90%, preferably 95% determinations by Officers, so the Call-in system is seen as for special cases only. Various options for gaining the support of Ward

Councillors to Call-in on behalf of a Parish, and also if Parishes themselves could Call-In items, were discussed and it was decided to raise the issues at the next Parish Conference.

A range of other Parish issues was discussed, including a reminder that the Borough - Parish Charter which Cllr Troughton had redrafted would also be a Conference topic.

2. Cllr Troughton and I also attended a Berkshire Association of Local Councils Executive meeting last week. The transfer of the Secretariat to the Community Council for Berkshire and the rebuilding of a rapport with the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) are both working well. The training programme for Councillors has been revived. As he is the Vice Chairman I will leave it to Tony to add to this.

3. I took part in the "Future of the Thames" Conference along with our Flood Warden John Lee and the Parish Clerk at Henley on a recent Saturday. I was surprised and pleased that most of the high profile and knowledgeable speakers centred upon the anticipated increase in risk of flooding. The top brass from the EA and Thames Water both waffled on about their commitment to Consultation which goaded me into challenging the EA man about the demise of the local Thames Flood Forum and the TW man about their ever failing response when Councillors say that a proposed development will overload already inadequate sewers. Maidenhead MP Theresa May dodged my request that she sought more funds for the cash strapped EA to do its job properly - no doubt thinking that she might be in the government in the not too distant future.

I received an email a day or so later (John and several others have copies) which indicates that an EA Consultation about a proposed Lower Thames Flood Forum closes next week (!) and that it would deal with matters from Datchet to Teddington. This offers us the problem of avoidance of any more regular EA involvement with the Jubilee River. There is further comment in my Borough Councillors' Report.

4. Cllr Tony Troughton and I attended the Borough / Parish Conference two weeks ago in Windsor Guildhall. An over-full agenda caused many topics to be taken at a gallop, but at least it could not be accused of being a talk shop!

The Borough's commitment to accept a revised Parish Charter was potentially a big step forward, as consultation and co-operation with Parishes should improve substantially if Borough Officers and Councillors abide by its objectives. This had been rewritten by Tony and replaced the teeth which had been removed from the original Berkshire Association version which I had helped to create many years ago. It is the intention that the Cabinet will now endorse the Charter and each Parish will be able to sign a separate but identical agreement with the Borough.

News on other topics such as the ongoing Borough management restructure with Directors more closely involved in ongoing activities, Parish involvement in Section 106 contributions, a Bray presentation on their localised Community Plans, Planning Call-Ins (no significant changes), creation of No Cold Calling Zones, the Sustainable Communities Act, and Local Development Forum update.

Obviously, Tony may also wish to comment. The next Conference will be on Thursday 18th June in Windsor Guildhall.

Malcolm Beer, 8/3/09.