

## **January 2011 Parish Report**

### **Financial Settlement**

Finally we got the actual financial settlement announcement from central government in the middle of December. There was very little good news mixed in with all the bad news. In particular the bad news was the amount of money the County Council expected to receive for concessionary fares was about £8 million, in fact we have been allocated around £4 million leaving yet more money to be found from our budget. The rest of the settlement was about what we had predicated so it meant that the papers going to the scrutiny committee meetings on 20<sup>th</sup> December did not have to be revised.

### **Roads**

On Friday 17<sup>th</sup> December the night before the snow, the gritters were out and gritted all priority 1 & 2 routes. That weekend they were out on a 24 hour basis returning to the road once they had refilled. Then as the week settled down we were able to move resources to clear routes to villages and assist the District & Town councils on clearing streets. The County Council does not have the resources to clear all 2,825 miles of road and 3,415 miles of pavement. The level of salt supplies that we hold remains good however the situation could change if we do not receive the planned orders. I would highlight that we are proposing to maintain the current level of expenditure on winter maintenance despite the fact that we have had to find £13 million of in year savings and savings of £60 million in the next financial year.

### **Berinsfield Library**

The County Council's heritage services have inevitably had to take their share of the budget cuts. In particular the Library service has received a major blow. Twenty libraries are now faced with the withdrawal of their funding from the County Council. The twenty-three library hubs that the County Council will continue to fund provide 82% of library visits (excluding mobiles). It is proposed that the Central Library in Oxford will open 7 days per week to improve access for users.

Regretfully, Berinsfield Library is one of the twenty that we can no longer afford to fund. I am aware that across the county in those communities affected people are coming together to try and keep their cherished libraries open. I applaud their intentions and hope that as many of them as possible will be successful. The County Council is providing a pump priming fund of £200,000 and will allocate grants to the communities that provide the most robust and credible management plans.

In the coming months help and advice will be provided by County Council officers on how best they can lead their library action groups towards a successful outcome. To that end a public meeting is being held at Berinsfield School at 11.00 am on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> January. I have invited Councillor Judith Heathcoat who is the Cabinet member for Safer and Stronger Communities, and the budget holder for the library network. I trust that as many people and organisations as possible will be able to attend, not to criticise, but to contribute to a solution that will save the library.

### **Motorcycle Training**

The County Council's commitment to motorcycle safety has also fallen victim to the cuts. Our information officer and the mobile information unit we used for attending shows and events have been withdrawn. Our two main activities Operation Pit Stop (young rider awareness training) and Be a Better Biker (advanced post-test training) will continue, but without having the ability to present a public presence, it is bound to become more difficult to reach a significant number of riders. There is a chance that we can support an independent organisation of trainers across the county in the future, but as the road safety function will come under the wing of the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service from the Spring it will be for them to determine what level of engagement can be provided.

### **Energy from Waste Plant**

The Secretary of State has granted Viridor's appeal against the County Council's original refusal of planning permission for the energy from waste plant at Ardley. He is also minded to grant their second application. Under these circumstances a judicial review of these decisions if requested is not likely to be successful. So it is now certain that an energy from waste plant will be built at Ardley. WRG have agreed that they will not contest the decision and have put in an application for a plant using alternative technology at Sutton Courtenay. The County Council will now work towards closure of the contract with Viridor which should be signed off by the end of January 2011.

### **Culham Primary School**

After many attempts over the last three years to put the Culham Church of England Parochial Primary School on a firm financial footing, the Governing Body, the County Council and the Oxford Diocese have reluctantly begun the two-stage public consultation process necessary prior to closing the school on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2011. This, of course, is the absolute last resort, and if during this consultation period an alternative way forward is found then it would be welcomed by all concerned. I have attended public and private meetings about the situation and would like to encourage anyone who feels they could help the Governors to find a solution to get in touch.

### **Speed Limits**

The proposed buffer 40 mph speed limit on the A4074 at the southern end of Nuneham Courtenay from the Arboretum to the 30 mph limit is due to be confirmed on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

### **Heritage Champions Conference – November 2010**

On 15<sup>th</sup> November I attended a national conference for Heritage Champions hosted by English Heritage at the Foundling Museum, Russell Square, London. It was an opportunity to share ideas and experiences with people from very different areas of the country. It was, as expected overshadowed by the public sector funding cuts which are also affecting national organizations like English Heritage who are having to make some very difficult decisions about what they should, or should not be doing.

**PAGE**

One of the things English Heritage are not doing is scheduling ancient monuments. This is a disappointment to the PAGE campaigners who were hopeful that the Roman settlement we discovered at Overy would be granted national protection. However, we are assured by EH that it is recognised as nationally significant and it would receive emergency protection should the occasion ever arise. The County Council report containing robust evidence of diminished gravel supply and demand in the county is due for publication in second week of January. It is likely to confirm our case that there is no need to open up new areas for gravel extraction before 2026. I will be able to give you more news on that in the next issue.

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County Heritage Champion  
County Motorcycle Champion