

# ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This has been perhaps one of the most exciting years in the history of the Parish Council for some time, as last October, the Parish Council acquired the former British Legion Club in Shinfield on a long term lease at a peppercorn rent. Since then, we have been working with Wokingham Borough Council to develop designs for the brand new community centre. It is still very early days, but this will be a hugely important venture at the heart of our community, serving the increased population of Shinfield Parish as new homes are occupied.

We have also been working very hard to secure the best sport and leisure opportunities for all our local residents to enjoy. This is an on-going process that hopefully will become clearer soon.

In terms of our ongoing "business", we have focussed on delivering quality services in the best possible way. In the middle of all the changes around the parish, the Parish Council has remained at the forefront of ensuring the best interests of our local community are taken into account. I am delighted to report that during the year we retained our Quality Council status, and we are determined to show that we are amongst the best in the country for serving our local community. We are the only parish or town council in Wokingham Borough to have gained this award.

We try to spend our money wisely and keep the precept as low as possible but at the same time deliver quality services to our community. We expect to be delivering a wider range of services in coming years as central government

and Wokingham Borough drastically reduce the amount of money they have available and the changing face of the country forces major decisions on what local government money is spent on.

To help us deliver high quality services and focus the parish council on its key objectives for the forthcoming civic year we have produced a council vision and community pledge. This is available on our web site. By setting out these objectives we intend to achieve even more for the parish through the commitment of both our staff and councillors.

We are committed to playing a pivotal role in shaping the new landscape and associated infrastructure across the Parish. We have been very active in all the public forums and consultation events that have been held around the Parish, such as the Eastern Relief Road and the new Thames Valley Science Park. We have talked to a number of local developers, such as Crest Nicholson, Bellway Homes, Taylor Wimpey and David Wilson Homes, to understand their aspirations locally and view their plans.

As well as thinking about the future, we have worked hard with local partners to honour our heritage and tradition, such as through our annual Remembrance Day parade. We also have a wonderful army of volunteers, who are at the heart of our parish by helping others and supporting the local community in a whole variety of ways. These include running the voluntary car scheme and computer club, picking up litter, looking after our footpaths and the local

environment, and working with our young people.

Regarding the Parish Council itself, the Parish Elections last May saw the departure of a number of parish councillors, to whom we extend our very grateful thanks for all their hard work; but we have also been pleased to welcome three new Councillors onboard: Phil Emmet, Judy English and Akhtar Masood, who have already made important contributions to the council's increasing workload. We are still very keen to recruit more councillors and volunteers, especially those with particular skills such as accountancy, IT or PR and marketing expertise, who want to make a difference to their community – please let us know if you are interested.

Finally, I would like to thank our staff and councillors for all tremendous hard work and support to me throughout the year – I am very grateful to them all.



*Cllr Peter Hughes, Chairman of Shinfield Parish Council*

## Recreation and Amenities Committee

Sport, leisure and recreation are at the heart of promoting happy and healthy lifestyles. We have been working tirelessly over the last year, also engaging professional support to look at how our local sport and leisure facilities can be improved, and we will continue with this task on behalf of the whole parish in the year ahead.

The public open space known as Deardon Field is now open to everyone in the community to enjoy in their leisure time, and we have delivered improvements this year to the overall appearance of the site and developed it as a family environment, with more to come – watch this space!

This year saw the welcome return of the annual garden competition. Thanks

to the generous sponsorship of Henry Street Garden Centre in Arborfield, prizes were awarded for the best basket/container; best small contemporary garden; and best front garden.

Our allotments have also had a successful year, and we were delighted that the Co-operative Food store in Shinfield agreed to sponsor our annual allotment competition. The allotment holders' annual general meeting was as popular as ever, where we announced the winners of the best kept allotment competition for both seasoned gardeners and newcomers. Special thanks go to Angela King, our administration assistant for her efforts in managing the sites.

Spencers Wood Pavilion remains very busy, serving as the base for both the Chapel Lane playgroup and the Volunteer car scheme working from the meeting room three mornings a week. Our Friday Night Youth Club continues to thrive, and Spencers Wood Recreation Ground is very popular, offering play opportunities for children of all ages. We have invested to keep our children's playgrounds both exciting and safe for our children, and our adventure playground equipment is very popular.

We have also carried out a programme of repairs and refurbishment to our properties, including Spencers Wood and Ryeish Pavilions, and the Parish Hall. This will continue as we look at the exciting opportunities offered by the new community centre.

## Communication and Policies Committee

The Communication and Policies Committee works to promote the council and ensures that it communicates with residents and organisations across the parish in the best possible way. As well as providing information on the Council's services and facilities, including hall hire and special events, the committee strives to give residents the latest news on local developments as they happen. This includes via newsletters, notice boards, local press

and magazine articles, and of course via our websites, [www.shinfieldplan.org](http://www.shinfieldplan.org) and [www.shinfieldparish.gov.uk](http://www.shinfieldparish.gov.uk). We believe it's important for everyone to have the opportunity to get involved and have their say in local issues that affect or interest them. We are constantly looking at new ways to keep in touch with all our residents such as through social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, and council open days and surgeries. This year we were

proud to work with the local churches in organising the first-ever Shinfield Parish Pancake Day Race for schools, businesses, police, and other community partners

This year's Annual Parish Meeting is on Thursday 28th April 2016, at Shinfield Parish Hall, and the University's ecological team will explain the thinking behind all the plans for the Green Spaces in the new developments.

## Finance and Staffing Committee

The Parish Council receives income from a number of sources, but the main one is our precept, which residents pay as part of the Council Tax. Despite increasing pressures upon us, we have worked very hard to maintain a reasonable budget for 2016/17, and the charge this year will be £66.30 per annum for a Band D property, equivalent to an increase of approximately 12p per week. We

decided to make this increase so that we could meet the rising cost of running the council, whilst maintaining our reserves, as we anticipate some major costs in future years.

Whilst the precept income will increase as the parish grows, this increase is over a number of years. The council is investing in infrastructure now, to deliver

improvements in facilities for both current and new residents.

Our precept for the 2016/2017 year will raise some £317,000, against £278,000 in 2015/16. Of this precept, just over 50% of our total budget goes in administration costs. We have expanded our staffing to deal with the additional workload brought by the



new developments. The rest of the money maintains our buildings, land and allotments, provides youth services, small grants for local organisations, and all the other infrastructure we look after, such as the 120 street lanterns and lighting columns within the parish operated and maintained by the parish council.

From April 2016, all street lighting across the borough is being upgraded to LED. The parish has budgeted £40,000 to fund this upgrade, whilst also taking advantage of a central government grant, which will cover 70% of the cost. Some of our lighting columns owned by the parish council are over 30 years old and need replacement. The anticipated

return on this project is around six years, through reduced electricity costs.

We will be pleased to discuss any issues or concerns about council budgeting. Please contact us if you would like to attend a Councillor Surgery to raise these face to face.

## Budget Report

### Your parish council tax charge 2016-17

Summary	2015-16	2016-17
Precept	£277,919	£316,950
Annual charge Band D property	£60.14	£66.30

### What we spend our money on

Annual budget - expenditure		2015/16	2016/17
Finance committee	Administration, salaries, grants, building renewals, youth services, training and forward planning	£230,600	£182,900
Recreation Committee	Facilities management, sports grounds, waste services, allotments, countryside, playgrounds, grounds maintenance, bus shelters. Includes funds for hall refurbishment 2016/17	£122,050	£105,714
Planning Committee	Street lighting, street signs, village signs, including Neighbourhood Planning. Includes funds for LED street lighting project for 2016/17	£18,000	£58,250
Communication committee	Newsletters, website, information leaflets and walk leaflets	£7,550	£16,000
Development Board	RBL site works	£16,000	£0
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>£394,200</b>	<b>£362,864</b>
Development Board	New and existing community centres project	-	£278,186
Playgrounds	Deardon Field playground equipment – funded through Section 106	-	£40,253
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>		<b>£394,200</b>	<b>£681,303</b>

### Where our money comes from

Annual budget - income		2015-16	2016-17
Precept	Funds raised through council tax charge	£277,919	£316,950
Grant from WBC	Council tax grant	£8,518	£6,814
General income	Amenities and investments	£40,760	£39,100
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>£327,197</b>	<b>£362,864</b>
Met from balances	Taken from savings and reserves	£67,003	£278,186
Section 106 expenditure from WBC	For playground equipment	£0	£40,253
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>		<b>£394,200</b>	<b>£681,303</b>

# Grants to support local community groups

The Parish Council is very proud of its local voluntary and community sector, and tries to support local groups and activities where it sees real benefits to the parish and its residents. Grants to organisations serving the community as a whole take priority. The purpose of the grant should be in the interests of, and bring direct benefit to, the parish and its residents. The grant may be a contribution to the funds of a charitable body for the furtherance of its work in the local community.

A total of £14,075 was paid in grants during the 2015/16 financial year. Awards went to the following organisations: Shinfield Infant and Nursery School; St Mary's Junior School; Whiteknights Primary School; Lambs Lane Primary School; Oakbank Secondary Free School; Grazeley Parochial Primary School; 1st Shinfield Guides; 2nd Shinfield Brownies; 1st Shinfield (St Mary's) Scout Group; Homestart Wokingham District; Shinfield OAP Club; Wokingham Job Support;

Wokingham Citizens Advice Bureau; Berkshire Vision; Spring Gardens Lunch Club; Relate Berkshire; Berkshire Multiple Sclerosis Therapy Centre; Shinfield Rangers Youth Football Club; Remembrance Sunday; Spencers Wood Carnival; Keep Mobile; Readibus; Mobile Information Centre (MICE) bus; Reading Roadrunners; Cruse Bereavement Care; Shinfield Community Flat; Swallowfield Community Responders; and Heartstart Swallowfield.

## Planning and Highways Committee

The Planning and Highways Committee has had a busy year, meeting fourteen times and reviewing more than 120 planning applications. As the rate of the development within the SDL intensifies, the committee has scheduled more frequent meetings in order to manage the increased volume of work.

The committee has met with many local developers to review existing or proposed planning applications within the parish, including Bloor Homes, Boyer Planning, Farley Farms, Fraser retail and Linden Homes. The committee has additionally reviewed and commented on public consultations from both Wokingham Borough Council and West

Berkshire Council on issues such as identification of development sites and Gypsy and Traveller local plans.

The committee has worked on the project to identify all the parish council owned and maintained street lighting for replacement with LED and has committed budget over the next two financial years for this upgrade project, which will give considerable energy saving benefits.

Over the course of the last year, all committee members have undergone training in planning and highways matters, and many have attended talks delivered by the borough council on planning, planning enforcement and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

The committee continues to provide support and information to local residents enquiring about planning applications, and many residents have attended the committee's meetings to raise issues, particularly relating to traffic, parking and highways. The council is working to improve the technology available to the committee to assist in viewing plans electronically, and to adapt to the removal of paper plans for smaller scale developments. We report enforcement issues, comment on retrospective planning applications and appeals, and continue to be engaged in any issues resulting from the large developments already under way.

## Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan

Our Neighbourhood Plan has been submitted to Wokingham Borough Council for consultation and formal inspection. Following approval it will go forward to referendum later this year

as the first plan in Wokingham Borough Council's area. The process of developing this plan has allowed us to build stronger ties with both Wokingham Borough Council and the developers in helping us

to put our community at the forefront and ensure local residents' voices are heard. For more information visit [www.shinfieldplan.org](http://www.shinfieldplan.org).

## Development Board

The parish council created a development board last year to coordinate all the new developments and infrastructure that are now beginning in the parish and manage them across the various parish working committees. This board consists of a

number of parish councillors along with some lay members who have been involved over the past few years assisting with developing the neighbourhood plan. Current workload for this committee includes:

- Finalising the neighbourhood

plan, through final consultation to examination and referendum;

- Managing the parish's interests in the new community centre and the new sports facilities at Ryeish Green; and
- Working with developers to ensure the best possible outcomes on each of their sites, including transport solutions.