

Bix and Assendon Parish

Clerk - Mrs. Jane Pryce, 56 Galsworthy Drive, Caversham Park Village, Reading, Berkshire RG4 6PP
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The minutes of Bix & Assendon Annual Parish Meeting held on 6th March 2017

Present:

Councillors: Ms. L. Thiesen (LT), Mr. R. Aitken (RA), Mrs. I. Chantry (IC), Mr. M. Beesley (MB) and Mr. W. Murdoch (WM)

Also present: Cllr. D. Bartholomew (Oxfordshire County Council), Cllr. D. Nimmo-Smith and Cllr. C. Bailey (South Oxfordshire District Council), Mrs. S. Tomlins, Dr. R. Tomlins, Mr. C. Chantry, Mrs. J. Pryce (JOP - Clerk) and 17 members of the public.

Apologies for absence: None

1. Confirmation of the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 7th March 2016

The minutes were declared true and accurate and signed by the chairman.

2. Chairman's Annual Report

Ms. Lisbeth Thiesen - Chairman of Bix and Assendon Parish Council

As each of the Parish Councillors have their area of responsibility and will report individually on their fields I will limit myself to introducing the members of the Parish Council. We have all served during the last two years:

Robert Aitken – Lower Assendon

Matt Beesley – Bix

Ina Chantry – Middle Assendon

Bill Murdoch – Middle Assendon

And myself as chair also from Middle Assendon

All superbly supported by our clerk Jane Pryce

All Parish Council Meetings are open to the public and held in the village hall. Notices of the meetings are sent out on email to the residents who have signed up to BAG, put on the Bix and Assendon website and posted on the notice boards in the villages.

The remaining meeting dates for 2017 are; 8 May, 3 July 4 September and 6 November.

In addition to the local matters dealt with at each meeting; representatives from both the District Council (SODC) and the County Council (OCC) provide updates on general issues for the entire county.

As a team, we have been engaged in the following over the past year:

Village Hall – The village hall is owned by the Parish council but managed independently by the Village Hall Management committee. Stephanie Tomlin is the chair and her report will follow. I only want to add that the Parish Council has extended its gratitude to her and her team for their excellent work.

Planning – Bill Murdoch will provide the details of the planning applications received and considered over the past 12 months. We would like to remind the parishioners that the Parish Council can only issue an opinion, SODC is the authority who either grants

or to refuse planning applications. All parishioners have the possibility to leave their comments on the SODC planning website.

Broadband – Over the past year Chris Chantry and Matt Beesley have kept abreast of the developments which should provide better broadband speed to Middle Assendon and Bix and Matt Beesley's report follows.

Bix and Assendon Website – According to the directive entitled the "Transparency Code" the minutes of Parish Council Meetings must be available to be viewed/downloaded by the general public; so, the website needed to be altered to allow this. Chris Chantry has carried out this work, and has made it possible to change the contents of the website easily. Matt Beesley is the backup should Chris Chantry not be available. Chris Chantry will provide a more detailed report on the progress.

Allotments -

Our clerk Jane has taken a special interest in the allotments and has improved the protection against deer and rabbits and improved the watering system.

Footpath Report

The Chiltern society has done a marvellous job continuing to provide the manpower to replace the old stiles with new kissing gates.

The council wants to thank Maggie Templeman for her contribution.

Litter Picking – Our annual litter picking event was yesterday. As usual we had a good turnout including some new faces. We filled fewer bags than last year and we hope this is because the message regarding littering is coming through. This provided an opportunity to meet other residents of the villages.

Public Transport – the Parish Council has been supporting the Comet buses initiative and will continue to do so.

I am confident I speak on the entire council's behalf when I say that we are looking forward to another year.

3. OCC Report from Cllr. D. Bartholomew

The Oxfordshire County Council annual report is attached.

Key Bix & Assendon Issues

Planning P16/S3853/FUL – Change of Use from Public Highway to Private Garden

The owners of Mayflower Cottage, Lower Assendon, have put in an application in incorporate an area of highways verge into their garden. Amazingly, this appears to be legal and no payment would be due to OCC. The Parish Council is opposed to this and I am giving them every support.

Highway Maintenance

I have worked closely with Bix & Assendon Parish Council to do what I can to expedite highways repairs. With ever-decreasing highways budgets, this remains a challenge.

Accidents on A4130 Between Bix And Nettlebed

The Parish Council contacted me with regard to the number of accidents that seem to occur along A4130 between Bix and Nettlebed. They observed that aside from drivers hitting deer at dawn and dusk, most of the accidents seem to occur roughly as the Bix & Assendon Parish borders into Nettlebed and asked if OCC would consider some extra signage to slow drivers down around this particular bend, or at least warn them of the bend via the placement of additional black and white chevrons. I arranged for officers to investigate the matter. One officer conducted desk research and advised that a check of the long-term accident record showed that specific site factors had not been contributory. A second officer made a site visit and judged that the severity of the bend does not warrant warning signs. In view of this - and bearing in mind the severe OCC budget pressures - I advised the work could only be undertaken if the PC funded the cost.

Bix Duals Kerbing

Following the resurfacing a large number of the granite setts edging the dual carriageway had become damaged or loose. I arranged for officers to get this repaired by the contractor as warranty work.

Third Reading Bridge

Berkshire councils and enterprise groups continue to push this proposal with vigour. The objective is to take 55,000 cars a day out of the centre of Reading. The bridge would join the M4 via the A329M to Caversham Park Road. From there traffic would only have two onward routes: via the A4155 through the heavily congested streets of Henley, or via the B481 through Nettlebed on to Watlington and the M40. Both these options are unacceptable to Oxfordshire residents and I am pressing the case that if the bridge goes ahead, a relief road must be built. The much-delayed traffic modelling study is due to be finally published this month.



4. SODC Report from Cllr. D. Nimmo-Smith

Unitary bid report will be considered on Friday 10th March. This will then go forward to Government by end of March.

DNS thanked the Chiltern Society for the work to replace stiles with kissing gates.

Biffa has invested in new vehicles.

There is now more planning applications and all year. This means more planning meetings and more planning officers. Enforcement officers have a difficult job with building works not going to plan.

RA asked about an abandoned vehicle which has been reported to police. The previous owner had been contacted but the car had been sold on. District sub-contractors job was to remove the car but were in the process of re-negotiating their contact and so nothing had been done. The car has been there since before Christmas but reported after.

WM mentioned the curb stones on Bix dual carriageway are coming loose again. It was requested to have this reported.

5. Village Hall Annual Report

by Mrs. S. Tomlins, Chairman of the Bix and Assendon Village Hall Committee

Chair's Report:

The Village Hall Management Committee consists of 5 members; myself as Chair and Bookings Secretary; Tim Osborn-Jones as Vice Chair; Melanie Walmsley as Treasurer and Lynn Stallworthy and Marjorie Hay. We would like to increase the membership, have advertised in The Link magazine and also on the Bix & Assendon Grapevine in the past, but unfortunately no one has come forward.

The Licence to Occupy contract for the Montessori Nursery School was renewed for a further 5 years last September and runs from 1st Sept 2016 to 31st August 2021. Terms of fees haven't changed since inception, but will be reviewed in May of this year. At present for a 40 hr week the charge is £300 per week+ £60 for the utility supplement. The nursery continues to run at full capacity.

Bookings:

Bookings remain buoyant; the hall is very popular for children's parties. The Philatelists continue to book twice a month with an additional monthly booking for their auctions.

I took over the running of the bookings, September of last year, when Hannah Burfitt stepped down. It's a full-on job but certainly helped by the on-line booking system that we adopted a few years ago. The only problem I have found is that the system can't differentiate between term-time and holidays, hence a loss of revenue during vacations. A note has now been put on the web-site informing hirers if they want to book during the day at holiday time they need to contact me directly. I then put their booking in a manual diary.

Maintenance:

There have been a few maintenance issues over the past year understandably, but nothing severe. The next large financial outlay, I believe, will be a thorough examination of the electrical system. There have been issues of the electrics cutting out when more than one or two large appliances are switched on. P J Sparks have come out and looked at the box and it seems the whole system needs an over-haul. I don't think we can be too careful in making sure that this is up-dated as soon as possible. Two appliances in the kitchen have had to be replaced; the dishwasher, £417.00 and the microwave £109.00, these two items are heavily used through term time. Repairs to the heating switches and electrics were carried out at a cost of £252.

Jo Hopping our cleaner resigned last November. The position was advertised in the Henley Standard and Lynn Stallworthy and I interviewed 4 candidates. Mr. Lewis Every was offered the position and he duly accepted. Mr. Every has also agreed to carry out minor maintenance issues for us.

Projects:

The Committee are in discussion with regard to making a donation to the proposed extension at St. James' church. We understand that this will be a project for the benefit of the whole community, consequently it was agreed to fund a certain area of this project. The amount of the contribution will be decided when further discussions are made.

Finance:

The balance sheet as of 31st December 2016:

Current Assets: £38,252.05

£18,684.77 in the current account

£20,285.32 in the savings account

To finish:-

I would like to say how extremely fortunate we are to have the Montessori nursery based at the hall. The funds coming in keep the bank balance healthy and when maintenance issues rear their ugly head we have the funds to seek professional advice to put things right. We now have enough in reserve to enable us to open a Fixed Maintenance Fund which gives us the peace of mind to rectify any large maintenance repairs on the fabric of the building, now and in the future. Alongside this, we can help fund projects for the community as we are doing with the church extension project. This is what the maintenance committee are here for, to make sure this hall is kept up to the high standards we have come to expect for our community.

LT thanked Mrs. Tomlins for all her good work and excellent running of the village hall.

6. Henley Municipal Charities Annual Report

by Dr. R. Tomlins, Bix and Assendon's parish council representative

Henley Municipal Charities 2016 – 2017

Henley Municipal Charities (HMC) comprises the following individual charities, The Almshouse Charity, The Relief in Need Charity, The Educational Charity, The Bridge Charity and the Church Charity. The first three charities offers assistance to people living in the areas of benefit by way of almshouses and grant allocations

The management of the HMC is the responsibility of the trustees, who are 13 in number and include 2 Ex-officio trustees (the Mayor of Henley on Thames and the Rector of St Mary the Virgin Church, Henley on Thames) 3 Nominative trustees one from each of the Parish Councils of Bix and Assendon, and Rotherfield Greys and from the Town Council of Henley on Thames, and 8 Co-opted trustees.

The day to day running of the HMC is carried out by the clerk who liaises with the chairman, treasurer and committees of trustees who oversee particular areas of activity i.e. grant applications from educational establishments, planning issues, property development. Trustees are responsible, by rota, for carrying out monthly visits to all the almshouse residents to report on the state of the properties and the health of the residents. Trustees meetings are held monthly.

Rents are received from 8 properties in Henley on Thames and the income is applied to meet the objectives of each of the named charities.

The areas of benefit for the HMC are the parishes of Bix, Rotherfield Greys and the Town of Henley on Thames

Almshouses

The HMC is responsible for the administration of 23 almshouses (10 for double occupancy and 13 single) that are situated in Church Avenue, Western Close and Vicarage Road, Henley on Thames. Eight properties are currently vacant awaiting renovation. Currently there are 22 residents.

As well as regular property maintenance recent activities involve upgrading and renovation, including turning adjacent small single occupancy properties into larger ones suitable for couples. Planning and listed building consent has been received for a major refurbishment of properties in Church Avenue. The work has progressed slowly due to the nature of the site, but will be completed by summer 2017

Grants

Grants were given to local state primary schools , the Henley Youth Festival , Music in the Meadows, Christmas grants to almshouse residents , the Mayors Christmas party , the Christmas parcels fund , and for the cleaning costs of several properties. The Church Charity gave its annual grant for the update and repairs to the Church Wardens of St Mary the Virgin Church.

Dr Richard Tomlins
March 2017

7. Roads and Townlands Hospital Report

by Mr.R. Aitken, Vice-Chairman of Bix and Assendon Parish Council

Roads

I have continued to deal with Highways matters in the Parish as they arose. Thanks are due to our County Councillor David Bartholomew for his assistance in this.

However despite Councillor Bartholomew's input, the state of the local roads and the responses to them are causing concern.

County matters

There appears to be a general failure to deal adequately with road surface issues. Mud is inevitably deposited on roads with high banks and hedgerows, and on hills, and is washed down into the two valley villages where it blocks the drains and silts the ditches. There appear to be no measures, as there have been historically, to periodically scrape the surface to avoid this.

Drains (badly affected by mud as noted above) only appear to be cleared when there is an actual emergency (as there was recently when a resident's home was flooded because of blocked road drains) and there is no apparent ongoing annual maintenance programme for them.

Surfaces are deteriorating with numerous potholes. A recent major pothole report exercise covering the B480 in Lower Assendon, Dobsons Lane and Old Bix Road produced apparent reasonably fast action with a number reported back by e mail as fixed. Full checking suggested that a not inconsiderable proportion reported as fixed weren't; or only part of what was reported was fixed; or were fixed so badly deterioration would clearly be rapid.

A parish resident reported seeing a road contractor vehicle with four personnel pull up in the parish, fill one pothole and drive off leaving a number of adjacent potholes untouched. This can surely not be a sensible use of resources.

Given the apparent failings in what are reported as fixed and in actions when actually attending, it would be good to be assured that control systems are sufficient to ensure that public funds are not being paid out for no, or poor, value and that failings are not systemic. There is a concern in the parish that the system is not being operated to ensure value is received for the limited funds allocation available.

Severe littering on the Bix Duals has been a problem for years and is currently particularly bad. We are unclear what the programme is to deal with this continuing problem.

Roads – District

Our limited experience in reporting fly-tipping has produced a good, prompt response. However there is concern that there has been no action on an abandoned vehicle definitely reported two weeks ago, and probably a few weeks early by another resident, has generated acknowledgement but no action.

The response to a telephone query suggested that no action could be taken as new contracts were being negotiated for the work. It seems unsatisfactory to have a contractual basis that does not provide continuity of service during overlap periods between contracts.

Townlands Hospital

In addition I have continued to represent the Parish Council on the Townlands Steering Group (a sub-committee of Henley Town Council with others co-opted on), and am also a member of the Townlands Stakeholder Reference Group (the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group stakeholder group) representing parishes more generally to monitor the OCCG on the development of the Townlands project.

The rebuild of the facilities on the Townlands site has continued to progress with:

- The Main building and the Care Home now complete and open;
- All planned facilities now complete and functioning;
- The step down/step up NHS beds within the Care Home operational; and
- The formal opening ceremony for the Main unit scheduled for 28 March.

As well as the NHS beds in the Care Home, facilities in the Main building include the Minor Injuries Unit, a wide variety of regular Consultant Clinics run by Royal Berks Consultants, and a specialist Rapid Access Care Unit staffed by a team of specialist nurses and lead by a specialist Consultant, with particular focus on geriatric care.

The site will continue to be active for some time as part is still being developed for housing for the elderly and for key workers.

8. Planning Annual Report

by Mr. W. Murdoch, Chair of Planning Sub-Committee

Planning - There have been a further increase in the number of applications over the past year which seems to be quietening down again after a rush in April/June and again in October/November. Amongst which there have been a couple of more contentious applications but these will be covered later in more detail.

In summary:

Planning Revue 2016/17

The policy of ‘in-fill’ development appears to have encouraged applications which again had led to an increase in the number of applications particularly in Bix.

Planning applications 2016 to March 2017

Total applications	41
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Applications by village

Bix	21
Lower Assendon	5
Middle Assendon	10
Fairmile	2
Fawley	2
Marlow Road	1
Applications granted by SODC	24
Refusal	3
Withdrawn	1
For information	1
Listed building granted	1
Pending a decision	11

9 Police Matters Annual Report

by Mrs. I. Chantry, Police Liaison councillor

Introduction

As part of the Thames Valley we are policed by the largest non-metropolitan force in the country. Currently the four year plan (2013 -17) is coming to an end with another to be drawn up and implemented later. Below are the first three priorities, with planned actions where they might be seen to have a relevance to the parish.

1. Cut crimes that are of most concern to the public and to protect the most vulnerable members of communities. This is hoped to be achieved by cutting the level of domestic burglary and improve the detection rate (outcome). To tackle rural crime through intelligence, enforcement and prevention. To protect and safeguard vulnerable adults, children and young people. To tackle domestic and other interpersonal abuse including child sex exploitation by identifying and supporting those at risk and bringing to justice the perpetrators. To reduce persistent and resistant anti-social behaviour. To tackle violent crime.
2. Protect the visible presence of the police and partners to cut crime and the fear of crime by increasing the contribution that special constables make to policing. Review crime hotspots to direct patrol and other resources to reduce crime. Ensure that anti-social behaviour teams and community wardens are working with communities and alongside police.
3. Communicate and engage with the public in order to cut crime, the fear of crime and build trust and confidence with communities. To ensure that all partners have effective two way communications with communities by maximising the use of new technology. To promote crime reduction and prevention activities. To obtain the views of communities and 'seldom heard' groups on policing and crime issues. To publish information about accessing, delivery and outcomes of policing and crime services.

Most Common Crimes

A detailed breakdown of crimes is available on the Thames Valley Police website. South Oxfordshire had 37.6 crimes reported per 1,000 of the population. These figures are for 2016. Violence against a person (2,077) which has increased since last year (1,068), burglary (961), however the numbers are lower than last year (1,031) and two thirds of these are burglaries of outbuildings and sheds rather than houses. Car crime (911) again with the majority of those offences being theft of property from a car rather than the theft of the car. The section “crimes against society” which includes drug offences all show a reduction in numbers. An area where there has been a rise is domestic abuse (1,015 from 929).

In terms of the parish, last year 4 crimes were reported in Lower Assendon and 1 each in Bix and Middle Assendon.

Identifying success rates are not so clear in the data.

Recently the police have been carrying out speed checks at Highmoor Cross and caught 10 people exceeding the 30 mph speed limit in half an hour. There has also been a spate of thefts from cars in Henley and Shiplake.

10. Broadband and Bix Church

By Mr. M. Beesley

Broadband

Over the last twelve months, the Parish Council has continued to liaise with BT and Better Broadband for Oxfordshire and made ongoing efforts to assert our needs for faster broadband speeds for the entire Parish. The new SuperFast BroadBand (SFBB) box that has been located outside the Smith Centre which went 'live' early last year has led to an uplift in broadband speeds towards 20mbps benefitting residents in Lower Assendon and to some extent residents in parts of Middle Assendon. Our efforts have been focused on similar uplifts in broadband speeds for the rest of the Parish.

The commitment from Better Broadband for Oxfordshire as we understood it, as part of BT Openreach's national service obligation, was to install a SFBB box in Bix by the end of 2017. However, encouragingly, late last year, via statutory notice provided to SODC, we were alerted to BT Openreach's intention to locate both a SFBB box in Bix but also one in Middle Assendon. As is currently planned, the box in Middle Assendon will be located next to the telegraph pole at Home Farm (by the Post Box you approach from Henley) with the Box for Bix to be located on the A4130 opposite to Leys Cottage.

Since this was last discussed by the Parish Council there have been no further updates from BT, but we will continue to update Parishioners with any new information when available.

Church

As part of the Parish Council's efforts to celebrate the 90th Birthday of Her Majesty the Queen, entry to this year's Bix & Assendon Village Fete which is organised by the church was free, paid for by a donation from the Parish Council. The event included all the usual stalls and attractions for which it is known, along with its ever popular Dog Show, but as part of the Parish's efforts to celebrate the Queen's birthday, also some intra-village games including a fiercely fought tug-of-war battle between Bix and Assendon. There was also a delicious lunch provided by Luscombes at the Golden Ball.

While some funds towards the cost of the event were offset by a small grant obtained from SODC, this important annual fund raising-event for the church relies heavily on

the generosity of the villagers. The church has asked me to pass on the appreciation to the parish council for their donation.

This year's fete is scheduled for Saturday 10th June at 1pm and along with other planned events, money raised this year will help with the plans to build catering facilities in the building as part of a wider plan to make the building more attractive to a larger number of community groups.

11. Bix & Assendon Grapevine (BAG) and website Annual Report **By Chris Chantry**

First started in Nov 2012 and now in its fifth year, BAG continues to enjoy great support in the three villages for the delivery of local news, information and planning applications.

There are currently **233 active subscribers** to BAG made up from the following six lists:

- 53 subscribers in Bix
- 32 subscribers in Lower Assendon
- 80 subscribers in Middle Assendon
- 20 subscribers in Local / Unknown Village
- 39 subscribers in General Interest
- 9 subscribers in Councillors

In over 4 years, only 21 people have unsubscribed from the BAG service, or about 9% of current subscribers. Most unsubscribe because they are either moving away from the area.

The “**open rate**” for emails is generally in the region of around **55%**, sometimes peaking as high as **68%** for planning applications. The open rate is when someone clicks on the email in their inbox and views the contents of the email.

The “**click rate**” on links within a BAG email varies considerably on subject matter, but tends to peak highest with links for planning applications with **63%** being the highest record click rate for a planning application on BAG. The click rate is somebody clicking on a link within a BAG email which takes them to a website or email address.

The open rate and click rate figures quoted above are exceptionally high compared to industry standards for email marketing, and illustrate a well-supported service by the local community.

BAG is also a valuable source of editorial material for the Henley Standard, as Phil Simms from the newspaper is a subscriber, and BAG items appear in the Standard on a very regular basis these days!

Bix & Assendon Website

After consultation with the Parish Council in late 2016, it was agreed to move the Bix & Assendon website onto a new development platform called website.com on the Doteasy hosting site.

Previously, the website was hosted on Doteasy, but the website itself was actually developed and maintained via software on my laptop and then uploaded to Doteasy as the hosting service.

It was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the website using very old software (originally bought 14 years ago!), and I expressed concerns that software failure, or me falling under a bus, would create problems for the Parish Council in terms of their website.

There was also an issue of compliance with new rules and regulations for Parish Council websites, which were proving increasingly difficult to easily change and update on the old website using the old software.

It was agreed to move the development platform onto Doteasy using website.com, which would remove the issues of the old software on my laptop, and enable someone else if necessary to easily take over the running of the website. It would also make changes to meet compliance issues easier to implement.

I am pleased to report that the website has now been completely moved and updated onto Doteasy, although a few pages still need to be finalised, and these will be completed by the end of this week.

The new site is now much easier to maintain, and I will arrange a date to get together with Matt to show him how things can be updated and changed using the online Doteasy website building service (website.com).

The new website is also automatically backed up now by Doteasy, so in the very worst case scenario of things going wrong, we can now “rollback” to an earlier version of the website to recover it (so no pressure Matt!)

LT thanked Chris (on behalf of the council) for his continued support and work on this very important service for the parish.

12. Footpath Annual Report

By Maggie Templeman, Chiltern Society Area Secretary

There is an annual report from the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers attached.

LT thanked the Chiltern Society for helping maintain the paths for the benefit of the parish so we can all benefit from the lovely countryside around us.

The full Parish Council meeting followed the Annual Parish Council meeting.