

## **RURAL FORUM**

**3 NOVEMBER 2014**

Present: Councillors Christine Bateson (Chairman), David Hilton (Vice-Chairman) and Wisdom Da Costa.

John Andrews, Robert Bye, James Copas, John Emmett, William Emmett, Superintendent Kate Ford (Thames Valley Police), Annie Keene, Tim Parry, Nick Philp and Andrew Randall.

Officers: Suki Coe (Development Control Manager), Rob Cowan (Clerk), Harjit Hunjan (Community and Business Partnerships Manager) and Dave Perkins (Head of Neighbourhood and Streetscene Delivery)

### **PART I**

#### **1/14 CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and those present introduced themselves.

#### **2/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Peter Lawless, Councillor Colin Rayner, Geoffrey Copas, Jane Jennings and Parish Councillor Barbara Story.

#### **3/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **4/14 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2014 were approved subject to the following amendment:

- On page x, the typographical error "aches" be amended to "acres".

#### **5/14 RURAL CRIME**

The Forum received a verbal presentation from Superintendent Kate Ford from Thames Valley Police regarding rural crime.

It was noted that Thames Valley Police were showing a 19% reduction in rural crime, whereas nationally there was a slight increase of 5%. Superintendent Ford stated there were three reasons for this which were education, improved understanding and better communication with the rural community. It was noted that the police were working as closely as they could with the rural community to better understand the community's issues. She noted that the police were always willing to hear suggestions to improve the situation further.

Superintendent Ford stated that when the figures for 2009-10 were compared

with figures from 2013-14, there was a 16.8% reduction across the force area in rural crime with rural theft down 40%. A combination of approaches was responsible for the reduction in rural crime, including the operational ranger, automatic number plate recognition operations and targeting areas which were vulnerable. It was noted that tool marking had been used as tool theft was the number one item that was stolen in rural areas.

Superintendent Ford also noted that there was an increase in courier fraud, where fraudsters impersonated police officers to obtain bank information. However incidents targeted vulnerable people such as the elderly rather than specifically the rural or urban community. Members of the community were encouraged to request a police officer's shoulder number and ask which police station an officer was based at. Furthermore, residents were advised to never give their PIN to anyone. It was noted that burglary had reduced but fraud had increased as fraud avoided physical danger for the perpetrator.

The Forum noted that the neighbourhood email alert was extremely good and Jeffrey Pitt was noted as responsible for its production. It was noted that funding for production of the email alert was secured for the 2015-16. Robert Barley noted that he received information from Surrey Police which he forwarded to Mr Pitt who included the information in his alerts within 24 hours. However it was suggested that the response from other forces to the alerts was less proactive. Attendees were encouraged to read the alert. Attendees also hoped that Thames Valley Police would not become complacent as local rural crime had reduced.

Councillor David Hilton highlighted the close cooperation between RBWM community wardens and the police. It was noted that Andy Allbridge attended the daily management meetings which considered crime which had occurred in the previous 24 hours.

Annie Keene questioned whether a force-wide update regarding rural crime was still being produced as she had stopped receiving one. Superintendent Ford stated she would look into this and report back to Harjit Hunjan, Community and Business Partnerships Manager.

**ACTION: Superintendent Kate Ford of Thames Valley Police to report whether the force-wide rural crime update was still being produced to the Rural Forum via Harjit Hunjan, Community and Business Partnerships Manager.**  
**25.16**

## 6/14 PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

The Forum received an update from Suki Coe, Development Control Manager, regarding the effect on permitted development rights on agricultural buildings.

It was noted that there had been a relaxation of permitted development rights as of May 2013. Thus allowing the use of agricultural buildings to be changed to

a flexible use within class A1, A2, A3, B1, B8, C1 or D2. The building had to have been in agricultural use since 3rd July 2012 or, if after that date, for a period of at least 10 years. No more than 500sqm of floor space could be converted to a new use under this new right. Before beginning the development, the Council had to be notified if it related to more than 150sqm. If it was more than 150sqm of floor space prior approval of the Council was required in relation to transport, highways, noise impacts, contamination and flooding. No other matters could be considered.

Mrs Coe also informed the Forum that Additional permitted changes had been introduced in April 2014. These were Class MA (where agricultural buildings became registered nurseries or state-funded schools) and Class MB (where agricultural buildings changed to residential use (C3)).

Mrs Coe offered clarification on Paragraph N of Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the General Permitted Development Order. She noted that local planning authorities could only consider the National Planning Policy Framework to the extent that it was relevant to the matter on which prior approval was sought; could attach conditions to grants of prior approval, as long as conditions were relevant to the matter on which prior approval was sought; could refuse the application if they were not satisfied that the proposed development qualified as permitted development, or if they had insufficient information to establish whether the proposed development qualified as permitted development; and could invite further information from applicants relevant to the matters on which prior approval was sought or to the question of whether the proposed development qualified as permitted development.

The Forum noted that the fee for prior approval (change of use with no alteration) was £80.00. The fee for prior approval (change of use to dwelling(s) with no alteration) was £80.00. The fee for prior approval (change of use to dwelling(s) with associated building operations) was £172.00.

**ACTION: Clerk to circulate Mrs Coe's presentation to the Forum.**

## 7/14 FLOODING

The Forum received a verbal update from Dave Perkins, Head of Neighbourhood and Streetscene Delivery, regarding flooding.

It was noted that numerous meetings had taken place between RBWM and the Environment Agency (EA), Thames Water and other partners where the Council asked a number of searching questions.

Mr Perkins stated that the Borough had a dedicated flood group which met quarterly. The group had representation from the Parish Councils. Mr Perkins noted that he had met with effected communities over the summer and captured the lessons learned. As a result of the meetings, the Borough had released its 'Community Resilience Plan'. The Plan allowed communities to build on the great work done locally to develop a bespoke plan for each area.

It was noted that in the financial year 2014-15, RBWM spent £3 million tackling flooding problems. Most of the funding came from a central government grant to repair damaged roads and infrastructure and survey bridges. £600,000 of RBWM's own money had been spent on a variety of flood alleviation schemes.

Mr Perkins referred to a 'Tracker' which offered further information and was available in the Cabinet report entitled 'Flood Risk Management: 6 Month Update'. The report could be accessed by the following link:

[http://www.rbwm.gov.uk/minsys3.nsf/2afdb4dab4d0de668025765b005eaf12/d5f30480cf8e6bef80257d9e0037dc64/\\$FILE/meetings\\_141127\\_cab\\_flooding\\_full.pdf](http://www.rbwm.gov.uk/minsys3.nsf/2afdb4dab4d0de668025765b005eaf12/d5f30480cf8e6bef80257d9e0037dc64/$FILE/meetings_141127_cab_flooding_full.pdf)

Mr Perkins also highlighted the progression of the lower Thames scheme. This was the building of 3 flood relief channels downstream from Datchet to Teddington. This was described as the introduction of 3 further Jubilee Rivers. Cost estimates for the scheme were placed at £300 million and would take a approximately 10 years to build. Mrs Coe noted that the channels would pass through existing lakes. Small changes would be made to levies to allow access to the lakes. RBWM had asked the EA for community benefits as payback for the physical changes. Further information was available at the following links: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-thames-flood-risk-management-scheme/river-thames-flood-risk-management-scheme> and [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/319835/RTS\\_map.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319835/RTS_map.pdf).

#### 8/14 DITCHES

The Forum received a verbal update from Dave Perkins, Head of Neighbourhood and Streetscene Delivery, regarding ditches.

Mr Perkins stated that the owner of the land was responsible for clearing of ditches. It was noted that the poor state of the ditches in the Borough had exacerbated the flooding problem therefore the Council had undertaken a 'one-off' programme of ditch clearing, with the consent of the land owner. Land owners were called on to uphold their riparian duties.

The Council had powers under the Land Drainage Act to undertake enforcement on landowners. It was suggested that the Council should come down harder on landowners who did not clear their ditches however Mr Perkins stated that the Council took a more pragmatic approach working with land owners. It was noted that enforcement through the Courts was a slow process.

Studies were taking place to look at solutions over areas rather than looking at individual ditches in isolation.

#### 9/14 OVERHANGING VEGETATION

The Forum received a verbal update from Dave Perkins, Head of Neighbourhood and Streetscene Delivery, regarding overhanging vegetation.

Mr Perkins noted that the owner of the property from which the offending vegetation had grown was responsible for cutting it back. The Council had obligations under the Highways Act 1990 to ensure the roads and footpaths were clear enough to allow users to pass by. The biggest challenge for the Council was the growing season from April. The Council had enforcement powers to force owners to cut back overgrown trees and bushes. The response of landowners to letters requesting they cut their vegetation back was described as mixed. The Council sent a nice letter requesting the owner cut the vegetation back which also highlighted their legal responsibility.

It was suggested that a service could be offered to a problem street or area where all the landowners be contacted and with their consent, cut back all the vegetation in one go. This would allow for the vegetation to be dealt with early, reducing the cost. Mr Perkins noted that the Council had looked at such a scheme before. The Chairman stated that this should be looked at and the Forum could consider the matter in more detail at the next meeting.

The Forum highlighted that vegetation on certain roads needed to be cut back as it caught the wing mirrors of larger vehicles such as farming vehicles. There were also safety concerns as it reduced the line of sight. Mr Perkins requested the rural community inform the streetcare team of the worst locations. The streetcare team could be contacted by telephone on 01628 683804 or via email at [streetcare@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:streetcare@rbwm.gov.uk).

**ACTION: The suggested Council service to offer to cut back vegetation for an entire street be considered as an agenda item for the next meeting.**

#### 10/14 UPDATE FROM THE FARMING COMMUNITY

The Forum received an update from Andrew Randall regarding issues affecting the local rural community.

It was noted that the harvest had been uncommonly early and fortuitously it was hot and dry which meant farmers did not have to dry a large amount of grain reducing diesel costs. Most people had a record yield, particularly wheat farmers. Following the harvest, farmers undertook the autumn planting phase.

It was noted that pesticides were coming under increasing pressure from the European Union. Ironically, this required a greater amount of spraying. Another issue had been the initially wet weather at the time of the flooding.

The Forum noted the effect of global markets. It was noted that a reduction in New Zealand lamb on the market would likely see an increase in price for UK lamb farmers. The need for a mixed portfolio of income streams for rural assets for highlighted.

The Forum considered a number of photographs which highlighted issues

affecting the rural community such as litter clearance, burnt-out cars and overgrown vegetation. It was also noted that the rural community were financing a Waterwell survey to allow them to put forward an application to de-silt the stream over the winter. The EA had also recommended a number of culverts be replaced as they were too small despite the EA having installed them originally.

It was requested that Mr Randall's presentation be forwarded to Mr Perkins.

It was decided that the Update from the Rural Community be the first agenda item at the next meeting.

11/14 UPDATE REGARDING THE RURAL WALK

The Forum discussed the Rural Walk which took place on 3 July 2013. It was noted that 10 Borough Councillors and 2 Parish Councillors attended. 60% of Councillors did not respond which was disappointing.

Copas Partnership, Royal East Berkshire Agricultural Association and Copas Farms were thanked for their involvement.

The Chairman thanked the organisers on behalf of the Council and noted that she thoroughly enjoyed the walk. The food was described as lovely and fresh.

12/13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that future meetings should remain at the new time of 6pm. Furthermore, the next meeting should take place in Windsor with meetings alternating between Windsor and Maidenhead.

13/13 MEETING

The meeting, which began at 6.00pm, ended at 8.05pm.

CHAIRMAN .....

DATE .....