

RURAL FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Christine Bateson (Chairman), David Coppinger, David Hilton and Richard Kellaway

Also in attendance: Alan Keene (Bisham Parish Council), Anne Keene (Farmer, Burchetts Green), William Emmett (Emmett Bros), Russell Watts (HLFE Ltd), Philip Watts (HLFE Ltd), Paul Rinder (Rinder Ltd), Nick Philip (Daud Philp & Ptns), Michael Craig (Forest Green Farm), Andrew Randall (Randall Farms Ltd), Tim Parry (CCB), Amanda Gee (BCA), Liz Hadden (BCA), Vicky Beckwith (BCA), Aran Horlinan (BCA), Barbara Story (Sunningdale & Ascot Parish Council), James Copas (Copas Farm), Geoffrey Copas (Copas Farm) and Robert Bye (Farmer).

Officers: Harjit Hunjan and Shilpa Manek (Clerk)

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Forum and did round the table introductions.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from P. Sedgewick, H. Donaldson, A. Chalmers, Supt. Rai, E. Roberts, Jonathan Greaves and Rachel Jinks.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

UPDATE FROM THE FARMING COMMUNITY

The Forum received a presentation and update from Mr Randall. The points discussed by Mr Randall included:

- Not much rain this year, only four inches.
- Plenty of durum wheat grown, being used for pasta production.
- Farmers were very optimistic for the season, locally and nationally.
- Density of wheat, 10-15% better than expected.
- Internationally farmers have done very well.
- Sheep and cattle, livestock production down than previous years.
- Rape production down on previous years.
- Currently, many farmers battling with the beetle in crops, common to arable crops. Cannot eradicate since there are more and more control on using chemicals.
- Hedges cannot be cut in August anymore, all cutting now done in November, early winter.
- Filling pot holes in roads, a real waste of time, money and resource if filled with tarmac, since it is very soft and damageable.
- Mr Randall had had two burglaries this year.

Questions raised by the Forum included:

- Councillor Hilton asked if the prices of cereals were anticipated to go up, Mr Randall explained that the law of averages suggested that with the global population increasing, this would lead to increased prices.
- Councillor Bateson asked what non-farming things Mr Randall had on his farm, Mr Randall explained they had a telecommunications pole and model aircrafts.
- Barbara Story, Parish councillor asked Mr Randall about his views on the single farm payments and leaving the EU, Mr Randall explained that farmers are generally worried and don't want too many surprises.

RURAL CRIME

The Chairman read out the email from Rachel Jinks, summarising some of the things that had been worked on across Windsor and Maidenhead. Points covered in the email and the Forum included:

- Tack Marketing – a Forum member explained that this was marking horse saddles with postcodes and possibly adding electronic devices to prevent saddles being stolen. This would make it easier for the police to track where saddles had been stolen from.
- Farm Visits – the Forum discussed and many farmers had had visits.
- Visiting locations, same as above.
- Crime prevention at road shows – the police have been present at many road shows.
- Offered tool marking to local allotments – not experienced by any Forum members.
- ANPR operations re scrap metal thefts – not experienced by Forum members.

ACTION: Invite Senior superintendent to the next Rural Forum and invite officers on the ground to the next Rural Farm walk.

BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN AND STRUCTURE OF THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Peter Lerner, Interim Planning Policy Manager addressed the Forum with the following points:

- The borough local plan is the most important planning document that the borough has.
- The local borough plan has to plan ahead for the next 15-20 years.
- There are many pressures of developments and finding the balance.
- A study was undertaken in Berkshire where it was found that there is a need of 700 houses a year, currently we are building 300-500 houses a year.
- Not building in green belt.
- Pressures for employment and commuting and Heathrow and its third runway and CrossRail will make more business and add more pressure for housing.
- There is a fairly tight timescale to achieve.
- The local borough plan must be in place by 2017.
- Cooperation is vital, for the right plan.
- Small consultation took place in the summer but a larger consultation on the final plan will take place in April 2016.
- A sound final plan will then be issued working with our neighbours.
- An inspector will then check that the plans is sound.
- In September 2016, the plan will be sent to the Planning Inspectorate.
- A public planning examination will take place in early 2017.

Simon Rowberry, Interim Borough Planning Manager, presented the Forum with a planning organisational chart (attached). Simon Rowberry explained that Victoria Gibson would be overlooking the north of the borough, Sarah Smith would be overlooking the south of the borough and Daniel Gigg would overlook the strategic application project team. There will also be an enforcement lead, Victoria Goldberg and two conservation officers and a planning and technical officer.

The development control panel, now will be the development management panel.

Simon Rowberry advised the Forum that neighbourhood planning was a community plan and was not the borough's plan. However, the borough gave a lot of technical advice.

Geoffrey Copas congratulated the officers for the update, however, thought it more important to concentrate on the local plan. Two concerns raised were the cost of housing and green belt. Geoffrey Copas explained that the borough was short of development land. The people who designed the green belt areas were very sensible, they zoned large areas of white land for future development. The green belt land boundaries need to be looked at again.

Geoffrey Copas asked about the Maidenhead golf club being taken out of the green belt. Peter Lerner clarified that Maidenhead golf club had no decision yet. It was a reserve site, not an allocated site.

Geoffrey Copas was concerned as livestock space is maintained and human space is getting smaller and smaller. He felt that residents should be able to have decent accommodation with space.

The Forum discussed Brownfield sites and what they are.

BROADBAND INTERNET

The Forum received a verbal update from Harjit Hunjan, Community Partnership Manager, on behalf of Superfast Berkshire.

The Superfast Berkshire project started in 2011, as part of a Government subsidised national programme, to improve broadband coverage in areas deemed not commercially viable for the private sector.

The original aims of the project were to;

- Ensure all Berkshire premises could access basic broadband, at speeds of 2Mbps or faster
- At least 90% of Berkshire premises could access superfast broadband, at speeds of 24Mbps or faster.

Superfast coverage across Thames Valley is now set to rise from around 65% delivered under the commercial roll out of the private sector to in excess of 99% once Superfast Berkshire's contracted delivery is completed. The Royal Borough is expected to achieve around 92.7% superfast coverage.

In October 2013 Superfast Berkshire signed a contract with BT for Phase 1 of the project that is currently scheduled to deliver superfast coverage of 91.6% by the end of 2015. Further investment and a contract variation has increased expected superfast broadband coverage to 92.3% by the end of 2015.

The contract with BT has now finished its deployment and resulted in an upgrade of 120 cabinets that serve 24,000 premises across Berkshire. Within RBWM, there have been 19 cabinets upgraded that serve almost 3,400 premises, taking the district superfast coverage to around 92%.

Details of these cabinets and the areas they serve can be found on the SFB project website at www.superfastberkshire.org.uk

A second procurement for broadband services was initiated at the start of 2015 by 4 Berkshire districts (including RBWM). In July 2015, Superfast Berkshire signed contracts with Gigaclear and Call Flow Solutions to extend superfast coverage to 95.6% by the end of 2017.

A contract was awarded to Call Flow Solution in July 2015 to upgrade a further 11 cabinets in RBWM benefiting around 1700 properties. These are in the areas of Windsor, Wraysbury, Horton and Burchetts Green.

Work is well underway with surveys and the completion of installation activity. These cabinets are expected to be upgraded providing superfast broadband to properties they serve around mid 2016.

The project is backed by all six Berkshire unitary councils and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

The Forum were advised that the project was being run in phases. Phase 1 was completed and 92% of areas reached instead of 99%. Phase 2 started in July and will complete what was not reached in Phase 1. Harjit Hunjan informed the Forum that the borough would benefit the most as a further 11 cabinets were being placed around the borough. Phase 3 will improve things further.

Superfast Berkshire is in dialogue with a number of broadband suppliers who are interested to expand coverage across the region. This includes Warwicknet who focus on provision of broadband to business parks and industrial estates, Virgin Media who are looking to expand their existing cable network, Hyperoptic who look to target apartment blocks and similar residential areas and BT on new housing development sites.

In addition the project is assessing potential 'funding release' from the phase 1 contract and how this might be used to bring all districts up to 95% (or possibly 97%) superfast coverage depending on how far the money will stretch. RBWM are in line to benefit most from this exercise as they are currently expected to reach 92.7% coverage once Phase 2 has completed by mid 2016.

There is an initiative using a satellite solution that is expected to be made available to some areas under a set of strict criteria before the end of 2015. Again, details expected to be made available on the project website in December

For further information about the Superfast Berkshire project visit www.superfastberkshire.org.uk or contact

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The Chairman went around all Members and asked about the reception in their area and on their farm. Generally the coverage was poor and Members felt that it was not going to get better. They felt that there was lack of communication and were not informed of any progress.

ACTION: Invite Colin Batchelor to the next meeting.

BERKSHIRE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Amanda Gee informed the Forum that the Berkshire College of Agriculture had reintroduced the BTEC Agriculture course last year and currently had fifty students studying the course.

Amanda Gee and two students gave some background on the course and then requested assistance from the rural partners. Since there is no college farm, the students require practical experience. The college has 250 commercial partners but is currently looking for new sources.

UPDATE REGARDING THE RURAL WALK

ACTION: Clerk to organise the Rural walk for the last week of June 2016, starting at 5.30pm.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is on 3 March 2016 at 6.00pm.

The meeting, which began at 6.00 pm, finished at 7.50 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....