

Tidmarsh with Sulham Parish Council



The Annual Parish Assembly for Tidmarsh with Sulham

Held at Tidmarsh Village Hall, 2nd April 2025 at 7.30pm

Members of the public were invited to attend.

Parish Councillors Present:

Cllr Mark Farrington (Vice Chairman) acting as Chairman.

Cllr Sima Elliot

Cllr Jonathan Pearson

Cllr Bronwyn Wynne

Cllr Jon Chishick

Cllr Jon Dunn

Invited Guests:

Cllr Matthew Shakespeare

James Austen, Tidmarsh Flood Warden

Simon Barnett, Land Manager for East Berkshire BBOWT

Kay Lacey, Chair of the Pang Valley Flood Forum

Members of the public: twenty members were present.

PA/01 The meeting was opened by Vice Chairman, Mark Farrington who welcomed guests and members of the public to the 2025 Parish Assembly.

PA/02 1st Speaker: Councillor Matthew Shakespeare

- i. He gave an update with the planned changes to WBC to unify with other councils.
- ii. He spoke about the WBC budget constraints and the challenges with the budget for 2025. Cost of living crisis and rising costs.
- iii. Rise in the demand of social care and costs of social care. 65p in every £1 spent on social care.
- iv. Burden on the council to be able to meet the needs. Dramatic increase in the amount of money we need to provide.
- v. Many authorities gone into section 114 such as Nottingham and Birmingham. Central government appoints commissioners to come in and run the councils. No.1 priority for WBC not to go into section 114. WBC have just about managed to stay within their budget. Have made savings and efficiencies to stay within budget. Control staffing levels and costs, how they employ people using recruitment agencies and paying finder's fees. Have reduced those. In particular there are too many layers of management. There is a need to simplify processes.
- vi. Look at no. of people employed by agencies. Paying way over the going rate. In 2022, council spent £12m on agency this year only £7.5m spent on agency staff.
- vii. Reduced the number of senior highly paid agency staff. Encouraged people to come and work directly for WBC.
- viii. We have a balanced budget; the WBC website gives explanations of spend. In Tidmarsh, priority is to improve drainage, it is a big issue in many villages along The Pang Valley.

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- ix. Potholes along Mill Lane and Sulham Lane have been awful this year but now in a much better state that they were. WBC is spending 5% of its total budget on filling potholes. It shows the state on the infrastructure following a cost-of-living crisis and lack of investment from the previous government. The leader of Cambridgeshire council said it would cost £500m alone to improve all of their county's roads.
- x. Recycling is another important matter. Something WBC has really focussed on. Waste streams that WBC collects include paper and card, plastic trays, plastic bottles, glass, batteries, black bin (household waste) Looking to reduce the frequency of black bin emptying to every three weeks. Food waste is disposed of in a specific kerbside caddy. Waste fabric should be put in a clear plastic bag and labelled as 'fabric'.
- xi. Ministry of Housing and Local Government. The Government issued a white paper to reform local government across England. Get rid of district councils and make the function unitary. Unitary councils should have an average of 500,000 residents and bigger ones would have a mayor. Government can talk to maybe 15-20 people in a room to discuss and agree matters. Government offering money to councils to become a larger unitary authority. Reviews to merge with other local authorities to get more efficiencies. WBC has a population of only 175,000 residents. Discussions have been going on with neighbouring district councils. WBC is looking to unite with other District Councils. Proposal to form a new 'Ridgeway Council' including South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse councils. Would allow us to reach the 500,000 objectives.
- xii. Another proposal being considered is 'Greater Reading Council' which could include Tilehurst, Calcot and Purley and possibly Pangbourne.
- xiii. Proposal submitted at the end of March. There is a period between now and the end of November to investigate the details of an integration. WBC feel confident about how this will work. Likely that a new council will be formed in 2028. New Ridgeway Council with larger wards and fewer councillors. TWS need to think about what our ward and area would be? We do not know yet. Parish Councils remain as they are and are total unaffected.
- xiv. Reading Borough Council currently has a population of 175,000.
- xv. What is in it for Vale of the White Horse and South Oxfordshire in becoming part of Ridgeway unitary council? They would prefer not to merge into Oxford City or Swindon which are the alternatives.
- xvi. We need more houses – local plan proposal for twenty-four new houses in the graveyard in Pangbourne. 2,500 new houses going into NE Thatcham.

PA/03 2nd Speaker: Bronwyn Wynne – Parish Councillor

- i. Like any venue, many people and many activities are involved in ensuring that The Millenium Green can be used and enjoyed by the public.
- ii. There is a bi- weekly rota in place for all the present parish councillors to go to the Green and inspect it to ensure it is in good order and there are no safety issues or any other matters which need to be attended to.
- iii. There is a formal annual inspection of the play equipment which is required to ensure we comply with health and safety regulations.

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- iv. Councillors Mark Farrington and Jonathan Pearson have and are attending to the maintenance and sealing of wood in the play area.
- v. We had a Village Christmas tree planted a few years ago but unfortunately it did not thrive and was removed from the Green. Parish Councillor Sima Elliot did extensive research about which type of Christmas tree would be best to replace the first one. Based on this research it was decided to purchase a Nordmann Fir tree. That tree has been kept safely indoors as we wait for better weather before planting it.
- vi. For many years as I am sure many of you are aware Mr Brian Murby took excellent care of the green - mowing the lawn, pruning trees and attending to the hedging. Mr Murby has sadly passed away and his family have now had a tree planted on the green as well as a memorial bench as a tribute to him and his dedication to both Tidmarsh and the Green. Carrying on the family tradition of commitment to Tidmarsh Mr Murby's grandson Jonathan has now taken on all the gardening duties in relational to the Green. He is to be commended for his remarkable job he did with the hedging.
- vii. To ensure all the gardening maintenance is done to a high standard we have an insurance policy over the ride on mower and we have that mower serviced and repaired regularly.
- viii. The Millenium Green hosted the 80th Year Commemoration of D Day last year and - what we hope to be an annual event - Carols on the Green before Christmas last year. Stuart from The Greyhound Pub; Reverend Mark from St Lawrence; the Pangbourne Band; the Singaholics Choir; parish councillors and all those who attended are to be thanked for their support in respect of these two events.
- ix. Thursday the 8th of May is the 80th Year Commemoration of VE Day and another event commemorating this historic moment in time is going to take place on the Green. Notices will be going out shortly and all are invited to attend and join in. It will take the form of a bring and share picnic; the band will be playing; prayers said for the fallen; we are hoping The Greyhound will be able to provide refreshments. The evening will end with the lighting of a beacon - remembering all the fallen and to symbolise hope for a future free from war.
- x. A committee is about to be formed to organise village events on and off the Green and anyone interested in joining can contact me. All enthusiastic volunteers will be welcomed.

PA/04 3rd Speaker: Simon Barnett – Land Manager for Berkshire East for BBOWT

- i. Moor Copse – Floods all the time! Newly restored meadow. A mix of habitats. River Pang running through middle of Moor Copse. Part of Sulham and woodlands SSSI. Hay meadows ancient flood meadows. Large arable field to permanent pasture. Managed as a hay meadow. River Field often floods – ancient flood plain meadow. Normal that it should flood. Twenty-five hectares (62 acres) of hay meadows. Rich with a mix of plants that grow there. Meadows managed in a traditional way. Hay cut in July or late June. Dexter cattle graze there. Cattle take more nutrients out which suits the plants that grow there. This system is kept in place as has been the tradition. Unfortunately, there has been TB in the herd for a couple of years which has been a problem. Therefore, they will not be grazing cattle for the foreseeable future so having are sheep on the meadows instead. Will have several hundred sheep on there. A traditional breed.

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- ii. A major part is the woodland areas. Moor Copse and Park Wood have been coppiced for a long period of time. A lot of Ash trees. Have cleared a big swathe of trees along the A340 about 3 years ago because they were dying Ash trees. We must clear Ash trees from around public areas such as footpaths and car parks. Dead and dying Ash trees will provide food for the local animals and inhabitants.
- iii. Money provided by the government to clear Ash dieback and replace fencing to keep animals from going across the main road. Provide a water supply for the cattle. Having to bring bowsers to bring water in for the cattle so National Highways have helped to fund a water supply. A borehole has been sunk to provide drinking water for the cattle. Piping and a water supply has now been provided to supply water to most of the meadows.
- iv. Funding from Species Survival Fund joint with Bucklebury Common and NWDNL has provided volunteers with equipment and chainsaw training In Moor Copse. Made it possible to clear Ash Dieback and increase amount of coppicing. Has proved kit as well as bat features to improve habitat for protected bats. Took 3 years to get a water source sorted.
- v. BBOWT also manage the rides through the woods by cutting them in the late summertime. Create scallops back into the woodland to create 'wiggly lines' through the woods. Plans to do more hedge laying and tree planting. Ponds in Barton's Field where we now have great crested newts. Manage the deer population. Weed control (ragwort) in the meadows. Dormice, harvest mouse, otters on the River Pang.

PA/ 05 4th Speaker: Kay Lacey – Chair of The Pang Valley Flood Forum

- i. Very aware of the problems of flooding on Mill Lane and Sulham Lane this year. Site visits, walk arounds with WBC. It all depends on getting landowner agreement.
- ii. Kay also shared details of Englefield Estate and the PVFF who have successfully gained a £200K grant from Thames RFCC to do some NFM works on the reaches of the Pang immediately above the BBOWT reserve.
- iii. She also briefly explained how the project will impact local residents.

PA/06 5th Speaker: James Austin, Sulham, and Tidmarsh Flood Forum

- i. A lot of the flooding caused by the fact that there is a lot more water going through the system than ever before. Even when we had flooding in 2007. Trying to understand what has changed to cause this. The Pang has been breaking its bank for many years and has flooded through the woods which is a natural flood plain. The water now is travelling at a much great speed than previously. Water is getting to places that it has not previously got to. The only way to start doing stuff is to make changes with the parish. Start from the Mill House and down to Bere Leys. Water travelling across Moor Copse and Nightingales, there is a breach in the fields along Mill Lane filling up massively greater than previously.
- ii. The Pang is quite slow and high ground water causes Mill Lane to flood so frequently. Trying to work with Nigel Cope who has the equipment to make changes. We need WBC on board to get water course consent to make changes to the flow of The Pang.

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- iii. We need to provide WBC with a proposal to make changes before the end of the summer.
- iv. We have a flood plain which does not have water in it and roads which do! Need to have a sit-down meeting with landowners, WBC to agree a plan. Need to find a balance between water going into flood plains and water running down the water course of the river. A lot of water has been falling in a very short period.
- v. Pang 10 Year Flagship funding to focus on key areas along The River Pang.

PA/ 07 Parishioner's Open Forum

- i. The application for a dropped kerb to cross the A340 at the junction of Mill Lane across to the Millenium Green.
- ii. The re-opening of the permissive footpath along the River Pang from the footbridge upstream into the Nature Reserve was raised as there is no circular path available. The landowner, Jenny Cope has said she hopes to re-open it in July.
- iii. The proposal for a public footpath at Nunhide Lane that has not progressed at all.
- iv. Request for a replacement post box at the junction of Mill Lane and Sulham Lane as the old one got knocked down.
- v. The subject of the average speed camera that has been promised for some time was raised and Matt Shakespeare assured the residents that it was in hand and in the process of being agreed.

PA/08 The meeting was closed at 10.00pm.

The minutes will be reviewed at the PC meeting on Wednesday the 9th of April and will then be made available for publication on the website.

The audited accounts will be available at a later date.

03/04/2025