



Annual Parish Report 2011

Thankfully the preceding year has been one devoid of major incidents or problems in the Parish. Your Council has taken part in the Annual Parish Council Conference, Planning, Training and Parish Networking Meetings as well as the various meetings you would expect commensurate with the daily running of the village.

The Parish Council was, apart from one Councillor, re-elected without contest in May, and the elected Councillors have given their commitment at our AGM to continue with their unpaid work on behalf of the Parish. But as we see the Localism Bill roll out through Parliament in the coming year and, as the Prime Minister presses more and more for his Big Society, it is inevitable in the coming months and years to expect that more residents will be expected to get involved in the running of the community in some form or another. An example of this being the Speedwatch Group, all volunteers, who started their work in March this year to record and report speeding traffic in the village. We will look now to see what actual measured effect they have on speeding cars through the village.

In June last year, we published your Parish Plan, which the Parish Council is using on a daily basis as guidance on how you would like to see life in our community develop. The Plan was highly complimented by District and County Councillors and officers and has already been put to good use. Several of the suggestions in the plan have been adopted, with many of you taking part in the Barkway Forum. Now we look to revising and updating the plan in the coming months to ensure that we adapt it to current circumstances and new suggestions and ideas.

The Government's spending cuts, together with the increase in VAT, increased insurance and energy prices have meant that we have all had to tighten our belts in one way or another and that applies to the Parish Council too. It was with a degree of uncertainty in late 2010 when we looked at our budget and the full range of services and legal obligations we, as a Parish Council, are duty bound to manage in 2011, that we realised we would have to make the very courageous step of increasing our Parish Precept by a substantial amount. Our revised financial working practice has ensured that the precept is properly managed and that we will deliver best value practice at all times. Your Council has received many compliments at District and County level, about how constructive and proactive Barkway Parish Council has become.

Cllr Styles left the Council at the May election, which saw 6 councillors return in an uncontested election. Cllr Baker, however, recently announced his reluctant resignation as a Parish Councillor due to grounds of ill health. He will, notwithstanding, continue to support the Council in a reduced role with the management of the village website, editing the Barkway Bulletin and remain on the Pavilion Project and Reading Room Management Committees.

In the later part of 2010 we re-opened the historic Reading Room following a major investment to upgrade heating, electrics and insulation. Since early 2010 we have held regular Parish Council Surgeries to enable the community to bring any Parish related problems to our attention and, in an effort to improve these, we have recently combined them with the Police Surgery. Our quarterly Barkway Bulletin has ensured we have informed you of developments within the Parish.

Originating in the Parish Plan, several projects have been started by the Parish Council - the largest being the Pavilion Project. The new pavilion will serve as an additional facility to augment the village's ability to offer recreational facilities for the youth of the community but, additionally, to all members of the community in a way not currently available. So far we have raised around 50% of the build cost. However, we have a long way to go to find the remaining £80,000. So, I would remind you of the need for anyone who feels empowered to contribute to the build fund to please do so and enable us to make this project happen in Barkway for the benefit of everyone.

The Pavilion Project is just the first of several projects we have under way using planning contributions previously locked at NHDC. Unfortunately, we only learned recently that NHDC Planning Dept. had made a basic error in their calculation of the funds allocated to Barkway and we were informed the actual amount available is approximately half of that which we were led to believe. So we are urgently reviewing and prioritising the projects that we had for improvements in the village.

There is a shortage of homes in North Herts., including Barkway, which needs to be filled. We will ensure that Barkway can contribute to satisfy part of this need at an acceptable level proportionate with rural life without spoiling our lovely village with large developments. North Herts. Homes (NHH) hopes to commence work in August to redevelop Wheatsheaf Meadow, after delays

caused by Government cuts in spending. The redevelopment will part provide some much needed affordable homes but, due to economic reasons, will not provide as many affordable homes as originally intended. As plans are finalised, we will arrange for NHH and the contractors to meet with the residents around the site to explain how the works will be carried out and to answer any questions or concerns.

Our own properties, the Reading Room, the Recreation Area and the War Memorial are now registered with the Land Registry, a process started last year, and now completed, and are now protected by being registered.

So, going forward, there is still much to do. We must continually seek to find the best economic value for the services and governance items that we are required to spend money on but we too, as a Parish Council, must strive to better ourselves. We are always looking to improve the way your Council works, by examining our portfolio structure to ensure that every duty required to be performed by the Council is covered by a Councillor's portfolio. We recently carried out a review and the temporary allocation of responsibilities is shown below. We will publish also this on our website, thus enabling the community to know the responsibilities of each Councillor. However, the first port of call should always be to the Parish Clerk, who will redirect any enquiries to the appropriate Councillor.

Our website itself is proving ever more popular, with an increasing visitor count every month. As it is now the Government policy to move more and more to web based access so we too must follow, to ensure that we have up to the minute information available for as many as possible to access. Therefore, we aim to revamp our website over the summer, to make it more functional, attractive and newsworthy.

The coming year will be challenging. The Government's spending cuts, the Localism Bill and the proposed Big Society are already filtering down to us in one form or another. These are dynamic times but I am certain that, with the good of shape the Parish of Barkway and your Council, we will be equally dynamic and able to adapt and change to meet whatever challenges are thrown at us. I wish to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Councillors present and past and, of course, our Clerk, for their incredible commitment for the past year and for the hours of free time that they have given up on your behalf. They have made a difference to the Parish by their contribution and commitment. I now must ask you, the community, going forward and bearing in mind our elected Government's proposals for the Big Society and with two vacant Parish Council seats to fill, what part will you feel empowered to play in the future?

Parish Councillor record of attendance at Parish Council meetings for the year to 31 st March 2011						
R. Davidson 10/11	G. Baker 11/11	K. McCormick 8/11	T Terry 10/11	J Cockerton 8/11	S Alsop 11/11	V. Styles 8/11

Financial report for the year 2010-2011
(a more detailed set of accounts will be published on the village website www.barkway-village.co.uk)

	31/03/2011 Actual £
Balance b/forward from previous year	2758.93
Income	*25610.71
Total income	28369.64
Communication	872.83
Environment	1424.57
Equipment	152.89
Insurance, fees, etc.	*14746.14
Reading Room	200.00
Recreation and Pavilion	2497.36
Staff	4097.00
Administration	1333.28
Total expenditure	25324.07
Balance c/fwd to following year	3045.57
*includes a self balancing amount of £10,277.61 in respect of the Reading Room refurbishment	

Allocation of Portfolios

Councillor	Portfolio
Dr Robert Davidson	Highways, Planning & Corporate Governance
Ken McCormick	Community Liaison including Police
Tony Terry	Property & Leisure
Jo Cockerton	Youth Affairs
Steve Alsop	Environment

At the moment, there are two vacant seats on the Council. Once these vacancies are filled, the allocation of responsibilities and duties will be reviewed and redistributed accordingly.