

Barkham & Arborfield Neighbourhood Action Group (BaA NAG) **Chairman's Report September 2010**

This will be our second AGM, for your local NAG, and I am hoping the inducement of a glass of free wine and a more central location will make the meeting better attended than last years!

I think it is worth recalling that a NAG has no power, other than the power of persuasion brought about by the weight of fact and intelligent comment which we can make as citizens about the issues we raise on your behalf with the various public and even private bodies or individuals we speak to. As a voluntary body we have enjoyed the full encouragement of Thames Valley Police and it is true to say it is unusual for them not to have a presence at our meetings. I would also like to, on behalf of the group, thank Allan Tiplady, our Area Manager from Wokingham Borough Council whose support help and advice has been very welcome to us. Sadly we as a nation we are all too quick to blame and very slow to praise the excellent work done by our public servants – Allan is a shining example of a first rate public servant. This is hard for me to say as he is in fact a Kiwi who is never slow in pointing out the short comings of English Rugby. Our thanks also go to Coombes School who continue to support our efforts by allowing us the use of a classroom for our meetings. I am pleased to say we have been promoted to KS2 where the chairs and tables are of a height which means at the end of the meeting you can at least stand up without getting cramp.

I would also like to say *thank you* to Louise Morris who as the leader of the Villages Youth Project for our young people has made such a difference, she moves on to bigger challenges in, I believe, the Tywford area.

During the year we have enjoyed the support of your elected members of the Borough Council, Pam Stubbs & Garry Cowen as well as having had dealings with Councillor Keith Baker in his Transport role and Councillor Rob Stanton wearing his Children's Services hat. I have also attended two meetings as your Chairman with the senior members of the local police chaired by Chief Inspector Denis Blackburn, the Local Area Commander, for Wokingham District who takes a great deal of interest in the work of the NAGs. I would also like to thank both the local parish councils for the support and encouragement we have received from them. The reason I mention all these names is to make the point that we do have the ear of the local authorities, they pay more than lip service to the NAGs and see them as part of the way to continually improve the area we live in.

The success of a local NAG is dependent on all the links in the chain being strong and the first one is the citizens in the area it represents being prepared to participate. We have a small group of individuals who have invested time and effort into our work over the last year, but I have struggled to find people prepared to take on the roles required in the group, I am grateful to Ian Overton, who will be speaking to you later as Treasurer who on more than one occasion has also been our minute taker, and all the members who have not only regularly attended the meetings but undertaken work between meetings, particularly Jan Heard.

I do have a very simple message, if you want things to change – get involved.

I would like now to move onto report what we have been up to over the last 12 months. Following on from the survey we undertook in the spring of last year of all the households of Arborfield & Barkham, we have concentrated our efforts, as agreed at last year's AGM, on the surveys top issue of speeding.

From the survey questionnaires we identified three areas of concern:-

1. Mole Road (B3030)
2. Barkham Street
3. Eversley Road (outside the British Legion)

I am going to take each in turn, starting with the road outside the Legion.

The NAG agreed that the best way to try to tackle this problem was to follow the example of the Finchampstead NAG who has claimed success in reducing the number of speeding offenders by frequent deployment of a device called an SID. The Speed Indicator Device has to be manned by one member of the Police force for insurance and health & safety, but requires local volunteers. How does it work? Speeding vehicles number plates are manually recorded, the owners are written to by the police on behalf of the NAG, and repeat offenders will be followed up by the traffic police. To make this happen we need local volunteers, and frustratingly it was only possible to mount one deployment of the SID device outside the Legion, due to a lack of volunteers.

Barkham Street despite its limited width is a major through route for traffic travelling North & South in the county. Two residents in recent years have had fences demolished or buildings damaged by cars travelling too fast ending up on their property. The speed limit is 40mph which is the correct speed for the road, but some 27% of all movements are greater than 40mph. Ian Overton has been pushing for some years to get both speed enforcement and reinforcement. Currently we have not been able to make much progress on either front. Local residents were unhappy with the SID approach after one go and what seems to me the very sensible idea, painting speed roundels on the road, was rejected by the council. Also, the proposal to erect poles for mobile unmanned SIDs on private land was refused for legal reasons, and frustratingly non-availability of officers with speed guns. Our work has also highlighted the issue of resource deployment, whilst more than a quarter of road users speed, only 8% at speeds greater than 10% above the limit, which makes this road low risk in the eyes of the authorities.

Mole Road has been our major project, which has tied up most of the group's time. From the outset of this project it was clear that speed was not in fact the dominate issue; the issue was one of user safety (car, bicyclist, pedestrian or equestrian). I do not want to go over it all tonight but to briefly summarise. The NAG submitted a report to WBC, with a 350 plus signature petition, including comments made by Andrew Luck (Thames Valley Police Traffic Management Officer) in a report he undertook on local roads. Meetings took place with an elected member and officers of the council, and Councillor Keith Baker came and spoke to the NAG at one of our regular meetings.

The only outcome of all this was that a warning road sign was re-instated just south of Copse Barnhill Lane.

Whilst this is an enormous frustration to the NAG, I have to report a remark made by Councillor Baker at the meeting he had with us. He said "*it (Mole Road) is unsafe and there is nothing I can do about it*" so frustrations shared all round.

Councillor Baker and I are considering our next move as we have to unblock the rules which are causing this frustration.

More recently residents of Barkham Manor and nearby housing have approached the NAG about speeding along the 30mph section of Barkham Road outside the Manor near the Bull. Shortly after the approach to the NAG a car clearly doing well over 40mph overturned along this stretch of road. The nature of the road makes it unsafe for a SID or even a Police man with a speed gun and for some strange reason WBC decided to undertake a

one week speed survey so close to the junction with Barkham Street to make the data valueless. A matter the NAG is taking up with WBC.

The NAG has also continued to be involved in the thorny issue of anti-social parking around the school, and recreational ground. I believe the NAG helped get the issue up the agenda of both TVP and the council. We focused our attention on the issue around the school as the Parish Council and WBC had several proposals to make the situation much better at the recreational ground – but (Allan) I did notice the mobile library still parked at the recreational ground the other week when I drove past, so still not yet relocated to the Legion? On the issue of parking around the school, we got Thames Valley police to, at first warn, and then ticket people for illegal parking, as well as becoming involved in the school. The school has taken a much more proactive approach, and some excellent work is on going spearheaded by them to encourage better use of drop off points, and the idea of a walking bus, as well as looking to encouraging older children to cycle to school. This project is ongoing and needs the support of the community.

In summary it has been a frustrating year for the small band who is striving to make life a little better and safer for all the residents of our two villages. Yes we have been and continue to bang our heads against constraints imposed on us by rules and regulations beyond our local control. We all wanted to achieve more. Yet we must not forget that all the issues which we are looking at are not about the police or council, they are about individuals often local residents, behaving in a totally selfish manner.

I will finish by repeating, if you want things to change get involved and make a difference. We are all part of Cameron's Big Society.

Robert Newman
30th September 2010