

Report for NPC AGM from David Bilbé, Elected Brough Councillor

1. Introduction

The term of election expires in May 2023. I have been your elected councillor since 2015 and have served two terms. It has been a challenging period since the last elections when the voters of the borough returned a council with no overall majority. The Conservatives councillors moved from a strong majority to a third largest group behind the Liberal Democrats and the R4GV independent party. A coalition was formed between R4GV and the LDs and that has been the leadership of GBC for the past three years.

It has been a very challenging 3 years with the effect of COVID lockdown, Zoom meetings and the after effect of a substantial reduction in permanent staff numbers at GBC coupled with high staff turnover. The residents of Guildford have felt the effect of matters and have experienced a significant downturn in service. I receive regular complaints that routine enquiries are taking an extraordinary period of time to resolve, and it is very difficult to speak to a person. The biggest effect has been felt in Planning. Residents and developers are unable to receive decisions or planning allocations within the statutory time periods and there is an increasing number of refusals through non-determination meaning that an applicant must then seek an appeal for that refusal.

Fortunately, there are no major developments in Normandy following the decisions in the local plan and over the course of the last year I have seen 50-60 applications mainly of a minor size.

I have remained vigilant on your behalf and am wholly thankful and appreciative that residents do likewise and take the care of our village seriously.

2. Enforcement

Enforcement of planning transgressions remain weak at GBC. The past year has been significantly dominated by three specific cases. Wanborough Fields (not in Normandy and the Councillor is Tony Rooth – R4GV – and Tom Hunt – LD – who is lead councilor for planning. I am very thankful to NAG and Mike Aaronsen for his continued pressure on GBC and Jonathan Lord. Despite slow responses and inertia I am assured that WF will be restored to its pre-violation state. Palm Nurseries where travellers appear to have moved significantly beyond the 6 approved pitches. The house built opposite the motorcycle shop. All of these have my attention and will continue to do so despite the weakness from GBC.

3. Normandy Parish Council

The early part of last year was challenging with the resignation of the whole of NPC and the poor processes and audit which was apparent. I became interim Chairman of NPC until the election of your current and competent Council in May 2021. It was a steep learning curve for all and with the new team and clerk we can all have complete confidence going forward.

4. SCC and our MP

It is important that teamwork prevails at all levels of Local Government, and I am so pleased to say that working with all parties (including NPC) is essential for success. I have worked closely with Keith and Jonathan for many years, and this is important to ensure that Normandy is recognized. Thank you to each of them.

5. Other matters

I am delighted that under Bob Hutton's leadership that we have the foundation for a village shop which should put heart into our village. I continue to press SWT to improve access at Wanborough Station, but I have had little success.

On a personal note I am saddened to lose my colleague Richard Billington who died recently and to learn of the recent death of Steve White who was a Director of GBC up until his early retirement 3 years ago.

I reserve my last comment in thank to all of the residents of Normandy who have made the role as your councilor fulfilling and enjoyable. This is a great place to live and develop and we can look forward to a great Jubilee and great years to come.