

PRESS RELEASE

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GRIT BINS IN NEWBURY

As the Highways Authority, West Berkshire Council has always been responsible for the provision of grit bins in Newbury, with 19 deployed in the winter of 2009/10.

During the summer of 2010, as part of the reaction to the severe conditions experienced during the previous winter, the Highways Authority executed a survey to see if parishes wished to take a more active role in provision and maintenance of grit bins.

In mid-October 2010, the Highways Authority interpreted the results of that survey as giving a mandate for responsibility for provision of grit bins to be passed to parishes, for the winter of 2010/11. This was well received by some parishes, as it meant they were able to provide grit bins themselves for the first time, possibly in places where provision had been refused before. For Newbury, it wasn't so clear cut as exact responsibilities relating to maintenance weren't clear and didn't become clear till mid-November 2010, just before the first snows arrived.

In particular, there was no budget (half way through the financial year), no process defined and no resources allocated. Over the next few weeks, Newbury Town Council received requests for 47 new grit bins. Some related to sites where the existing bins hadn't yet been redeployed by the Highways Authority; others related to the 6 sites where the provision had been removed by

the Highways Authority the previous year. Through negotiation with the Highways Authority, Newbury Town Council got those removed ones re-instated, bringing provision to 25 (although it later transpired that 4 of those are actually in adjacent parishes and 1 is agreed as no longer required).

Before accepting a new grit bin, the Highways Authority requested provision of maps and photos of each requested site. A process was put in place to execute site visits, prioritise the need and discuss with the Highways Authority. An alternative, cheaper supplier of grit bins from that recommended by the Highways Authority was established, and using the existing Environmental Improvement Scheme budget (primarily meant for benches, rubbish bins and dog bins), Newbury Town Council has been able to provide a further 12 grit bins at the locations presenting most difficulty in adverse weather conditions throughout Newbury, bringing total provision in Newbury Town parish to 32. These were deployed and filled with grit before Christmas. It is hoped that further provision will be able to be made for other less critical sites next year. There is also the option of individuals or groups, in discussion with the Town Council, paying for their own grit bins if there is deemed a sufficient demand. The bins will be probably left in place throughout the year because the Town Council currently has no means of transport or storage.

The grit bins are provided to enable the public to help keep roads and footpaths passable in severe weather conditions; they are not for private use.

Council Leader, Cllr Ifor Sheldon, said, "This is another example of the efficiency of the Town Council, which in spite of a very small team, already fully deployed on other initiatives, reacted to a situation and provided a timely and value for money solution to the benefit of the community".

Deputy Leader, Cllr Julian Swift-Hook said, "The fast reaction of the town council meant that the extra grit bins were in place in time to help with the recent bad weather. The grit bins will stay in place throughout the year, but I believe that the community will see them as an asset and ensure that they are well looked after".

END

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