

# Great Langborough Residents' Association

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Salvation Army Hall, Sturges Road  
23rd June 2014 at 7:30 p.m.

### Attendees

#### Committee Members:

Pat Smith Chairman; Andrew Pearce Treasurer; David Nash Secretary; Robin Cops, Anita McPhilimey, Terry O'Donnell, Phillip Robinson

#### Residents (those who signed the attendance list):

Melanie Allen  
Michael Andrews  
Barbara Brailey  
John Brenner  
Barbara Brown  
Roy Brown  
Harriet Carrivick  
Frank Clisby  
Mildred Clisby  
Claire Cohen  
Rosemary Cook  
? Ford

Gwyn Garrod  
Anne Harrison  
Thelma Hawke  
Margaret Hendra  
Lucy Herd  
Jackie Husk  
Elizabeth Manley  
Alistair Napier  
Catherine Napier  
R Nelson  
Elizabeth Ramsay  
Nick Ravinet

Christina Roper  
Sophie Scott  
Diana Singleton  
Ken Smith  
Pam Smith  
Malcolm Smith  
V Stepien  
Lena Webb  
Marcelle Williams  
Rita Wright

#### Councillors (including Guest Speakers and those who are residents):

Prue Bray, Julian McGee-Sumner, Philip Mirfin, Chris Singleton, Bob Wyatt

#### Apologies:

Phil Lawman (Committee Member)

#### Introduction:

Pat Smith opened the meeting and welcomed residents, councillors and guest speakers Prue Bray and Philip Mirfin. She explained that their discussion of the Town Centre Regeneration Plan would follow a standard Association AGM format.

## Annual General Meeting Business

### Chairman's Report

Pat Smith summarised the Association's Activities for the past year.

She also directed the meeting to the site for the 2013 Chairman's newsletter, the 2013 AGM Minutes (accepted unanimously), the 2013 Treasurer's Report and various reports on the Town Centre and South Wokingham SDL Forums from the past year.

The committee have had a busy year. We have been in dialogue with council members over the Town Centre Regeneration and the Strategic Development Location. We have contributed to the consultations about them and have also contributed comments and letters to the local press. This includes objections to the time scale for the planning application for the Town Centre Regeneration and a review of the application as far as was possible in the time allowed. You will know that the plans were actually withdrawn but we sent in our comments anyway.

All formal comments and letters have been posted on our website if you would like to view them.

Last year Prue Bray prompted a reopening of discussions around the plans for Elm's Field through her e-petition which resulted in the extraordinary council meeting held at St Crispin's school. Four of us attended that meeting and three questions were presented by Pat Smith, Robin Cops and Philip Lawman with subsidiary questions.

The final motion however was given to Alistair Corrie to present. It seemed at the time that the numerous questions had not been allowed to impact on the council's thinking.

Committee members have also challenged the suggested plan to alter the access to the library car park to Langborough road. This appears now to have been dropped.

You may be aware that the plans for the Southern Distributor road are now out for consultation and David Nash our secretary who attends the community forum relating to this is going to give a brief description of these but as they are only recently released we do not propose taking any questions about them.

### **South Wokingham SDL – Route Alternative for Distributor Road**

David Nash showed slides of the area of the SDL and the 3 alternative routes for the Distributor Road.

He informed the meeting that these routes were now subject to an 8 week period of public consultation from 23 July to 22 August. He also made the meeting aware of the exhibitions announced to support this consultation.

### **Election of Committee and Officers**

Terry O'Donnell was not offering himself for re-election after serving on the committee for many years. Pat Smith thanked Terry for his contribution to the Association's work. All other committee members had indicated their willingness to serve another year. Lucy Herd was offering herself for election to the committee and was introduced to the meeting.

Marcelle Williams proposed that the Committee, including Lucy Herd, and Officers should be re-elected en bloc. Mildred Clisby and Gwyn Garrod seconded and the motion was passed.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Andrew Pearce gave the main features of his report to be available on [www.glra.org.uk](http://www.glra.org.uk) He reminded the meeting that, in the absence of an annual membership levy, voluntary contributions were needed to support the ongoing activities of the Association. The AGM alone costs about £80 to arrange.

Note: There was an exit collection which raised over £100. Other contributions would be gratefully received.

### **Any Other Business**

1. Elizabeth Ramsay & Gwyn Garrod raised the issue of the poor state of repair and frequent flooding of the narrow middle section of Gipsy Lane.

Councillor Chris Singleton offered to take up this matter with the Highways Department of Wokingham BC. Chris reported back on 17 July that the drainage problem was a lack of storm drains in that part of Gipsy Lane, possibly aggravated by the embankment constructed at the back of the

new property in South Drive. Chris Singleton has committed to continue to follow up this issue. Some minor repairs of some but not all pot holes have been undertaken.

2. L Webb: could anything be done about the problems of foxes spreading rubbish from bin bags over night before collection?

David Nash replied that the refuse bags could be made more secure if put out inside a dust bin. Andrew Pearce reminded the meeting that a request to this effect is printed on the blue bags: -

"Please use a standard dustbin to prevent animal damage from where we will take the tied blue bag/bags"

3. Harriet Carrivick: What can be done about the speed at which cars are driven in Langborough Road?

This provoked a number of comments but no resolution was forthcoming.

## **Presentations and Discussion: Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration**

Councillors Philip Mirfin, Executive Member for Regeneration and Prue Bray, Leader of the Liberal Group in Wokingham Borough Council each gave a short statement about their respective proposals for the regeneration scheme followed by a lively Question and Answer session.

A report on this by Pat Smith is also available on the GLRA web site.

<http://www.glra.org.uk/#20140701>

## **Q&A session with Prue Bray and Philip Mirfin**

### **Initial Statements:**

*Philip Mirfin*

The review of the plans started in February 2014. What we have decided so far is a reduction of the developments planned for Peach Place / Plaza and agreements on residential developments on the West & North sides of Elms Field.

J Sainsbury withdrew from discussions to build a 60K square feet supermarket. Discussions are under way with another grocery business for a smaller 30K square feet store.

*Prue Bray*

We would have liked to think that the yearend withdrawal of the planning application would have instigated a much greater re-evaluation of the whole scheme. It would be a tragedy to build houses on the West side of Elms Field if this is not needed to fund the larger scale plans. The site previously occupied by Wellington House could accommodate housing.

All discussions have been carried out in closed sessions in the council. Informal discussions had been deferred until after the May elections.

### **Q&A**

*Question*

In answer to a question by Ken Smith of Gipsy Lane about the amount spent so far:

*Philip Mirfin*

£15M had been spent on acquiring land. This is currently yielding an income that is performing at better than break even after the interest payments on the loan. The budget for the whole plan as previously announced was £95M.

*Question*

In answer to a question by a resident of Crescent Road about the "eye sore" of Peach Street: The arcade and apartments in Peach Street have so many individual owners it would be difficult to purchase for redevelopment. There will be a new "gateway" development at the north end of Peach Street.

*Prue Bray*

We would be happier if the council had a plan of what to do next in this part of town. For example, Easthampstead Road car park is little used but there are no plans for its redevelopment.

*Philip Mirfin*

The team is working on all aspects of a revised plan: roads, parking, etc.

*Question*

Terry O'Donnell put a question about the development of better leisure facilities in Elms Field.

*Prue Bray*

We would mostly see Elms Field as offering the opportunity for facilities for a range of age groups.

*Philip Mirfin*

What would be left after regeneration would be better "sustainable" facilities. There would be installed services to support concerts and other events. The plans for the park are not finalised. They are still being reviewed.

*Question*

Julia Stanton of South Close asked why the council was not listening to the objections voiced by residents about the plans.

*Philip Mirfin*

The Council had gone overboard to give people opportunity for their comments. Over about the last 20 years there have been a number of consultations (3 to 5?). When the plans are ready for consultation a Planning Application will again be made – possibly by the end of the year. We will give as much information as we can on the proposed changes.

*Prue Bray*

All the decisions were being made in the Conservative Group; the Liberals were not allowed to engage in a meaningful dialogue. In fact she mentioned that this was the first occasion when she had been in a dialogue with Philip since his appointment.

*Philip Mirfin*

(Mel Allen, who Philip had brought along, tried to justify Philip's statement. The audience had no time for what went on historically but just wanted to hear that alternative views would be considered seriously.)

Philip said that when they (i.e. the Conservative Group) had written their new planning applications the residents would of course be able to make their comments as part of the planning process. (What Philip did not say was that alternative views would be listened to and that the plans were still open for modification.)

Philip said that the Conservatives had increased their vote. He was presumably trying to make the point that residents had voted back Conservatives with an increased majority of councillors (true) and therefore were showing support for their plans (i.e. the Conservative plans not the Liberal alternative). That is the Conservative line - some Conservative Councillors are unhappy with that line but others just want to get on with it.

*Prue Bray*

The council finds itself running in "tram tracks" that it cannot get off.

*Philip Mirfin*

Wokingham cannot stand still. There will be another 10,000 residents by 2026. We need to keep them shopping in Wokingham rather than in other nearby towns.

*Question*

David Nash stated that a supermarket of any size needed adjacent parking. Where would the car park places for the proposed smaller supermarket be if not in Elms Field?

*Prue Bray*

Our priority for Elms Field would have been as a leisure facility. There is no affordable housing included in the Wokingham BC plans.

*Philip Mirfin*

The opportunity to bring Carnival Pool site into the plans brings new options, including parking. There is a firm intention that in the centre of town there will be a leisure area. It is, however, too soon to come up with a definitive plan at this time.

*Question*

Margaret Hendra of Crescent Road: how will an increase in car parking in the Carnival Pool area affect footfall in town centre retail?

*Philip Mirfin*

There are opportunities for new retail outlets: for example, the derelict garages in Broad Street Walk could be converted into starter retail units.

*Question*

Anita McPhilimey of Gipsy Lane remarked that the refurbished statement building on the corner of Rose Street and Market Square (Clarks, Boots Opticians, etc.) had been unveiled to general criticism. Is this what we should expect for the rest of the retail development?

*Philip Mirfin*

This was primarily a new re-cladding of an existing building so the options were limited.

## **Summary**

*Prue Bray*

We are still hearing that the "tram tracks" are firmly in place. We shall keep fighting for substantial changes.

*Philip Mirfin*

Thanked the audience for listening this evening.

For further details and an opportunity to comment go to the redevelopment page on the Wokingham BC web site: -

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning/development/towncentre/centredocuments/wtctimetable/>

**The meeting closed at about 9:30 p.m.**