

Great Langborough Residents' Association

Defending our environment  www.glra.org.uk

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Salvation Army Hall, Sturges Road

31st May 2017 at 7:30 p.m.

Attendees

A substantial turnout of 49 residents attended the meeting, plus 8 GLRA Committee members, 3 councillors and our guest speaker. Residents (44) who signed the attendance sheets, those who sent apologies and attending councillors will receive a copy of these minutes. A copy will appear on the Association's web site www.glra.org.uk

Committee Members:

Robin Cops, Paul Ibson, Philip Lawman *Treasurer*; Anita McPhilimey, David Nash *Secretary*; Andrew Pearce *Web Master*, Philip Robinson, Pat Smith *Chair*

Councillors:

Julian McGhee-Sumner, Borough & Town; Oliver Whittle, Borough; Bob Wyatt, Town

Apologies:

Sue and John Brenner.

Guest Speaker:

Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive, Wokingham Borough Council

Introduction:

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed residents, councillors and guest speaker Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive of Wokingham Borough Council. She outlined the agenda for the evening.

Annual General Meeting Business

Opening

The Chair summarised the Association's Activities for the past year. Slides at [Hypertext Link 1](#)

She also directed the meeting to the GLRA web site www.glra.org.uk for the 2016 Chair's Newsletter, the 2016 AGM Minutes and the 2016 Treasurer's Report. Copies of the 2016 draft minutes and a summary of the 2016 Questions put to our 2016 AGM guest speaker, Councillor Malcom Richards and subsequent Answers, plus developments to date, were distributed amongst the members present.

Minutes of AGM meeting 2016.

In relation to those questions asked in 2016, most of these would be addressed in the Chair's Report later.

However, regarding the delivery record on **affordable housing**, Pat Smith stated that we had been assured that the future targets would be met. We planned to continue to monitor them.

Regarding **aircraft noise**, WBC was a member of the **Heathrow community Noise Forum** where these issues were discussed. She reminded the meeting that there had been trials to assess noise impact. Concerns had also been raised and pursued by our politicians, particularly in relation to Heathrow's possible third runway. A decision about the third runway seemed to have stalled again.

There were no points further arising from the minutes.

Anita McPhilimey proposed that the minutes be accepted. This was seconded by Philip Robinson and Sophie Scott; approved unanimously.

Chair's Report – Pat Smith

Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration Update

The town centre was now in the process of Regeneration.

The GLRA Committee had been involved in earlier consultations and stakeholder meetings about the various developments. Plans were now coming to fruition.

Peach Place

Much of Peach Street retail was now missing. Rebuilding would commence soon.

Peach Street itself had been reduced to one lane but should reopen around the middle of June.

Market Place

The refurbishment programme begins in mid-June.

The Chair regretted the felling of the large trees in Market Place. She understood they were regarded as too large for their setting. The roots were lifting the pavements. The remaining trunks and roots would be removed as part of the resurfacing and redevelopment of the area. More appropriate trees would replace them.

The market would continue during refurbishment, but would be temporarily relocated to the Piazza.

Carnival Pool hub

The Phase 1 car park was well on its way and the bowling alley was to be added soon.

Carnival Hub Phase 2 was under discussion and a number of drop in sessions had been set up at the Library.

It had come as a bit of a surprise to many Wokingham residents to find that the council were considering moving the library into the hub. WBC had approved the move in principal. There was an impression that this had been without consultation. Subsequent discussions confirmed that there had been some.

A further drop in session on 30th May aimed to highlight the advantages and reasons why it should be included in that development. The Chair hoped some of the audience had managed to review all the information and contribute to the consultation. GLRA had submitted a response.

Meetings with Wokingham Borough Council

Committee members had set up and attended a number of meetings with WBC representatives. Reports on these were available on the www.glra.org.uk website. Therefore, she did not plan to go into much detail. Topics included: -

Regeneration - finances

In a series of meetings, we were able to explore the financial background to the Regeneration programme. Further meetings were planned.

Traffic planning

This meeting had been set up to explore the basis for and outcomes from current traffic modelling. There was specific focus on the Tesco roundabout and the twin railway bridges in Finchampstead Road. It was a positive and reassuring meeting. The time spent by Chris Easton of WBC Traffic Department in explaining this complex subject had been much appreciated.

Following the previous AGM, we had been made aware that there were plans to reconfigure the roundabouts around Denmark Street. The modelling to date indicated that the planned distributor roads would redirect a proportion of the through traffic away from the centre of town.

The Chair drew the attention of the meeting to the clear signs of traffic data collection throughout the town and surrounding roads. This would contribute to the ongoing traffic modelling. Data was also being collected around the Borough. The GLRA would continue to pursue the issue.

Parking issues.

Decriminalisation of parking was due to occur. This removed the responsibility for enforcement from Thames Valley Police. It enabled the local authority to set up Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE). It was hoped that this would stop some of the inconsiderate parking affecting Langborough Road, Sturges Road and other town centre roads in our area.

The option of resident parking permits in Fairview Road and other roads was an issue that needed further exploring after CPE was active.

South Wokingham Distributor Road

The Chair handed over to David Nash for an update on this plan.

David showed a slide of the estimated dates for completion of the main sections of the Southern Distributor Road that had been shown at the SDL Forum in November 2016.

The Eastern Gateway, including a bridge from Montague Park over the Waterloo railway, was due to be completed in the summer of 2019. Network Rail was to be the main contractor for this phase. A planning application and public consultation were expected in the summer of 2017.

At the Western Gateway of the SDR was the junction with Finchampstead Road at the existing Tesco roundabout. This included a major modification to the Guildford railway line bridge to widen and deepen it and widening and slight realignment of Finchampstead Road. This was a major engineering project. Estimated completion date was the spring of 2020.

The connecting Spine Road and other work at the Western Gateway was due to be completed by the spring of 2021.

Chris O'Donnell and Colm Lennon expressed concerns about the restriction on flow caused by heavy traffic at the Tesco roundabout. David Nash answered that this was the subject of detailed study and that several detailed designs for Finchampstead Road layout had been modelled. To ease flow further south, redesign of the junction with Molly Millar's Lane was also in plan. Traffic data showed that 80% of the traffic entering Wokingham town centre at peak times had destinations out of town. The SDR was designed to improve that pressure. Data collection from within the Borough and from neighbouring boroughs was ongoing. Modelling would continue.

Anita McPhilimey asked whether the resident preferred route for the SDR was yet firm. David Nash answered that the position would be clearer only when a planning application was presented for approval.

Election of Committee and Officers

All committee members and all existing officers had indicated their willingness to serve another year. It was proposed by Sophie Scott, seconded by Melanie Allen that the Committee and Officers should be re-elected *en bloc*. This was approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report - Philip Lawman

Philip picked out the main features of his report. He presented the details of the accounts in the GLRA financial year ending 31st March 2017 plus provisions for expenditure in the current year to date. The bulk of the GLRA funds (currently £351) were deposited in the Association's bank accounts at National Westminster. The largest expenditures of the Association were associated with the AGM – hall hire and printing of publicity – plus expenses associated with the GLRA web site: a total of over £100. The only source of revenue was from voluntary contributions by members and guests at the AGM. Philip encouraged the attendees to give generously to support the continuing work of the Association. The statement of accounts to 31.03.17 will be available on www.glra.org.uk

Note: There was an exit collection which raised £231.80. Many thanks to those who contributed.

Any Other Business – Pat Smith

Elizabeth Ramsay raised an issue about vehicles parking in the turning area in Gipsy Lane at the foot of the footpath on the eastern side of Langborough Recreation Ground. Often, this prevented access for mobility scooter users, of which she was one. There was no road marking prohibiting parking on the area. Philip Robinson reported that he had observed large vans parked in the turning area. Pat Smith suggested that this and other problems would be alleviated only when Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) was implemented in the Borough in November 2017. Chris O'Donnell confirmed that he had contacted the Thames Valley Police at a senior level to discuss the almost complete absence of parking enforcement in central Wokingham. He had been told that TVP resources were not prioritised to cover this issue.

David Nash committed to discuss the CPE measures and resources with Councillor Oliver Whittle and report back to members via the GLRA web site.

This was the conclusion of the AGM business session of the evening.

Presentation and Discussion: “Wokingham: A View From The Top” Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive, Wokingham Borough Council

Robin Cops introduced Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive of WBC for the last 6 years. Andy had recently been appointed to the new role of Chief Executive of the Birmingham Children’s Trust, responsible for a budget bigger than that of WBC’s. Before his departure, the GLRA committee had asked him to reflect on the current state of Wokingham and where it would be in the future.

A copy of the slides are available on the Association’s web site at [Hypertext link 2](#)

In his presentation, he gave us a view of the following: -

- his time in Wokingham Borough Council;
- the key issues and priorities for our local authority;
- the sources of finance and how the Council manages the budget;
- the key current challenges and opportunities;
- future possible scenarios

He typified Wokingham as an attractive area in which to live and work. He had entered the Authority as Head of Children’s Services in 2009. In that job, he had delivered at a level that had secured his appointment to Chief Executive in 2011. He outlined the key issues that he had found at that time.

The core of the mission had been to deliver high quality services to the community in the face of tough and increasing financial restraints. Central Government support amounted to only 23% of Wokingham BC net expenditure, contrasted with 46% paid to the average Unitary Authority. WBC had made cumulative savings of over £36 million over the last 6 years – a 32% cut in the Net Budget. Despite these constraints, an Independent Peer Challenge review this year praised the progress achieved in many services.

The desirability of Wokingham as a location in which to live would continue to drive an inevitable growth in housing demand. This would impose more loads on infrastructure and public services. Central Government would continue to decrease financial support, with the threat of a negative support grant by 2019/20! New homes would deliver some additional Council Tax revenue. However, further streamlining would have to be delivered under the 21st Century Council initiative. In addition, the Council would have to establish further revenue generation sources, such as town centre regeneration and further council owned enterprises.

Future growth and demographic trends would bring a rising demand for services to children and older people. Local government might experience fundamental structural changes. However, Andy Couldrick was leaving Wokingham with this appraisal: *“Wokingham is well led and well run, by committed and able members and talented and skilled officers”*.

Questions to Andy Couldrick & Answers

Q: Chris Singleton: With a planned 900+ additional houses per year, how bad might congestion become before the NDR and SDR roads are completed in 2021?

A: Andy Couldrick: How bad? Probably worse than it is now. WBC is working with developers and Network Rail to co-ordinate efforts to complete the distribution roads as quickly as possible.

Q: Is funding a constraint to progress?

A: Andy Couldrick: There is an upper limit to what the local authority can borrow at any one time. However, WBC has set a high rate of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to maximise the level of contribution by developers to infrastructure.

Q: Colm Lennon: How firm are the dates for the SDR?

A: Andy Couldrick: They are current best estimates. WBC is still talking to developers to establish firmer commitment to the mile stones.

Q: Sophie Scott: Have you thought of Park & Ride?

A: Andy Couldrick: Park & Ride is in the plan for a site by Coppid Beech.

Q: Elizabeth Ramsay: Why is Wokingham at the back of the queue when it comes to getting central government funding?

A: Andy Couldrick: Funding is decided by applying a set of formulae that do not play to WBC advantage. Some of the data is not current and does not reflect the real situation. For example, school funding is affected by the data on the proportion of ethnic pupils reported at the last census. Unfortunately, the census data says 10%; the actual current percentage is nearer 25%.

Q: Chris O'Donnell: What is our local MP doing to help obtain additional funding? What assurances can we have that our MP is lobbying hard on our behalf?

A: Andy Couldrick: This is a difficult area on which to comment. The Chief Executive has to remain non-political, especially in the run up to a General Election. However, I have more contact with him than other local MPs.

Q: Colm Lennon: Is there a map of the cycle ways in the Borough? There are bits and pieces, but no comprehensive map.

A: Andy Couldrick: There is an emerging plan for cycle ways and green ways in the Borough.

(Note: maps of routes can be found here: <http://www.myjourneywokingham.com/discover-wokingham/cycling/>)

Q: Philip Lawman: Pressure on roads and medical services increases from new homes around existing settlements. In filling causes more and more problems. Are new villages the way forward?

A: Andy Couldrick: The Grazeley proposal was not designed for public consumption. There was an approach to local authorities by the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG). The Grazeley Garden Settlement expression of interest was a confidential response to this approach. The Local Plan (2016 – 2036), which is currently being developed, is the key document.

Q: Philip Lawman: Can local residents help to put pressure on central government?

A: Andy Couldrick: Consultation on the new Local Plan should be out in the next 6 months.

Q: Pat Smith: Do we as residents have any power to resist development?

A: Andy Couldrick: What central government is doing is profoundly disingenuous. Opportunities to influence the centre are hard to find. We'll be talking after the election.

A: Cllr. Julian McGhee-Sumner: I'd like to revisit these questions after the General Election.

Q: Andrew Pearce: Would you comment about the WBC relationship with revenue generating companies?

A: Andy Couldrick: One of the planks of future financial success for WBC will be its ability to generate income. Local authority operating companies, joint enterprises with other authorities and outsourcing are all options for economies of scale and generating revenue. For example, the move to private rental or growing affordable housing.

Q: Andrew Pearce: Wouldn't that limit WBC accountability?

A: Andy Couldrick: No, in all these areas, accountability cannot be outsourced – it stays with us.

Meeting Closure

Pat Smith closed the meeting by thanking Andy Couldrick for his open and straightforward presentation and wished him well in his new appointment of Chief Executive of the Birmingham Children's Trust. She also thanked attending residents and guests for coming to take part

Mildred Clisby proposed a vote of thanks to the GLRA Committee for its work on behalf of residents – approve by acclamation.

Members of the GLRA Committee will actively follow up the issues raised by our members at the AGM and provide information via email and our web site as it becomes available.

The meeting closed at about 9:00 p.m.