

# **NORTH CRAY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

## **Minutes of Meeting held on 13 July 2016, 8pm in St James' Church, North Cray**

The meeting commenced with an informal gathering of some 70 members before the formal start of the AGM.

Upon opening the meeting the Chairman, David Cook, thanked everyone for coming, and said how pleased he was to see so many members here this evening. He extended a special welcome to Cllr Don Massey of the Cray Meadows Ward, Cabinet Member for Finance & Corporate Services; to the Rev Ren Harding, our new Rector; and to any special guests from other residents associations or groups who had come along to join us this evening.

### **1 APOLOGIES**

As usual, James Brokenshire, MP for Old Bexley and Sidcup, had kindly agreed to come but this morning we received- understandably- apologies for his absence as it would be unlikely that, in view of this week's events in parliament, he would be able to get away to join us. Apologies for absence had also been received from Mick Doughty, Mary and Trevor Graham and Trevor Jones.

### **2 MINUTES OF THE LAST AGM (17 June 2015)**

These (which had been distributed) were taken as read, and agreed as an accurate record. Their adoption was proposed by Mario Farrugia and seconded by Nik Carter. There were no matters arising.

### **3 HON. TREASURER'S REPORT**

Geoff welcomed those who had attended the meeting and referred them to his accounts, which had been distributed. The sum of £766 had been received from membership subscriptions, which showed that we now had over 383 members – an increase on last year due to the hard work by our Volunteer Collectors. The balance was now £4,274.83, and it was recommended and agreed that the annual subscription should remain at £2. There being no questions, Geoff proposed adoption of the accounts, this was seconded by Mario Farrugia and acceptance given by Martin Thomas.

In closing, Geoff took the opportunity to say that although the chairman would probably thank those who had supported the Association during the year, it was unlikely- for obvious reasons- that David would include his wife Jacky (editor the Newsletter) in these, or himself. Geoff, therefore took this opportunity to thank them both for all their hard work. The meeting responded with unanimous applause.

### **4 CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR**

David opened his review by saying that there were a number of issues he would like to raise that evening and, indeed, mention a few positive results. Generally it had been a successful year for the Association, bearing mind its primary aim: the protection of North Cray and its environment for

the benefit of its residents – with particular emphasis on safeguarding its Green Belt and Heritage Land. This can, from time to time, bring us into conflict with individual members on personal ‘development’ matters and it is for this reason we try to avoid getting involved in individual planning application matters – but this is not always possible, especially where our Green Belt is potentially at risk. However, those same individuals often look to us for help when their own situations are threatened. But that’s life. David continued with a look at recent good news, particularly in relation to the Association’s ongoing efforts in protecting North Cray’s Green Belt:-

- The removal of shipping containers and a large number of vehicles from the temporary Gypsy site at Little Acre Farm. We had asked Planning for an update on what might be happening at Little Haven (i.e. containers? & outstanding application for permanent Gypsy site); but we had received no response prior to this meeting;
- Planning permission refusals for Manor Freehold Farm, Parsonage Lane (application to convert barn to houses); Orchard View Farm, Parsonage Lane (application to replace buildings by houses) and Homewood Stud Farm (application to convert garage to a three-car garage).
- The introduction of *NewsMail*. This was launched in November 2015 with the primary purpose of briefing members on non-urgent news items, including planning applications and outcomes - reserving the *GroupMail* service (introduced in May 2014) for urgent alerts regarding any significant issues that could affect members or where their input would help the NCRA with planning or other similar issues. The other reason for starting the *NewsMail* service was to save members having to keep checking the web site for news and possibly missing a scheduled event. To date 56 *NewsMails* have been issued to-date, plus 68 *GroupMails*, a total of 124. David then took the opportunity to mention that our webmaster, Nik Carter, did not have every member's email address and that if those who have not yet signed up for the *GroupMail* and *NewsMail* services would like to receive them they should email Nik through the Committee at [committee@northcrayresidents.org.uk](mailto:committee@northcrayresidents.org.uk), or speak to him or Jean after the meeting.

David then turned to the following issues:-

**Sale of Open Spaces** At last year’s AGM we highlighted Bexley’s plans for the sale of some 27 green sites within the Borough ranging from sizeable recreation grounds incorporating playing fields and sports pitches to small isolated pockets of land, two of which are in North Cray – a green verge outside 95 The Grove and a strip of land between St James Way and North Cray Road. The good news is that Don Massey advised us last week that a Public Cabinet meeting had been scheduled for Monday 11<sup>th</sup> July with an Agenda Item concerning the 22 sites that were being considered, including two within the Association’s area. In short, the recommendation was for only six of the sites to be looked at further, meaning that neither of the plots of concern to us will be progressed any further, namely the land adjacent to 95 The Grove, and that between St James Way & North Cray Road. See also Don's Address below.

**The Meadows – Dog Attacks, Unlawful Fishing and Threats to Wildlife** David reported that all were on the increase, and expressed his disappointment at the significant increase in incidents relating to uncontrolled dogs – where both dogs and dog owners have been attacked as well as local wildlife. One of the key problems is the increase of dog-walkers with multiple dogs in their ‘care’, often off their leads, and there is a clear need for controls to be imposed, as is necessary in most parks. No-one wants any more restrictions on their freedoms – there are enough placed upon us in today’s world – but there is a patent need in this instance for many reasons. There is absolutely no way that these walkers can have control over these dogs and, whether on lead or not,

deal with the mess their dogs leave behind. David pointed out that multiple dogs can take on a pack mentality. Most dog owners are very responsible in this regard, but those who are not give the rest a bad name. He added that his wife rarely took their dog to the Meadows because she, too, has been attacked. Many of these dog-walkers, whether with a single dog or a group, come from some distance to use our Meadows because of the restrictions imposed in their own parks and local areas. They come to the Meadows as they feel they can do as they please here - BUT this is a nature reserve! The result is that we locals are driven out by people who come from other areas (some as far as Sevenoaks) to do what they cannot do in their own locality! David stressed that it is likely that it will take a serious incident or a tragedy before anyone in authority will take notice and do something about anti-social or potentially dangerous behaviour. As and when it does there will be a lot of 'hand wringing' and head-shaking from the 'health and safety' people before anyone decides to initiate some rules/by-laws to deal with the problem. It is bizarre that an amenity that we, as locals, should be enjoying and caring about are driven away by those who do not live in the near vicinity and who are not concerned about the Meadows and its users but are taking advantage of the 'freedoms' that are allowed here rather than sensible and necessary controls imposed by the council. We understand that Greenwich Council have banned dog walkers controlling more than four dogs - but our approach to Bexley Council on this subject in February was ignored. The swans, ducks, coots and moorhens around the Five Arches Bridge area are constantly vulnerable to loose dogs off-lead because they come up onto the banks where people feed them. We have tried to get Bexley Council to put up notices in this area asking people to keep their dog/s on a leash when near the Bridge but, again, nothing has been done.

**Wildlife Crime** On this issue, David said that it was very apparent that wildlife crime is on the increase and he read aloud the following emails recently received from residents of The Grove:-

7 July: *"We are seeing an increasing number of incidents on the Meadows always after 4pm when the Council's security is no longer available. We are told to ring 101 but that simply goes to voicemail and by the time there is a response the incident has finished. We have all noticed that the number of ducks and other birds on the lake have dramatically reduced and this weekend neighbours are reporting on a group of men using large fishing nets to remove the fish from the lake. They have been parked in The Grove every afternoon/evening from the previous week. The registration number of the red VW van was noted as DU10 DZF."*

A follow-up was received on 11 July: *"Last night my husband and I walked down to see if we could speak to the men concerned. We found them tucked into a small quite well-hidden area on the stables side of the river Just down from the swans nest but unable to be seen from the bridge and basically you would have to be looking for them as we were immediately recognised two of them as they are often to be found around the St. James Post Office, usually dressed in light hooded grey track suits and often carrying fishing rods. I have seen them stopped by Community Police Officers in High Beeches. We asked if they were fishing and one became quite aggressive demanding to know if we could see rods, which of course we couldn't. I explained that the neighbours in the Grove were concerned as we knew they were staying over there all night, believed that they were netting the fish and placing them in the red van, the number of which had been noted as there is an active 'Neighbourhood Watch' in the area. One of the men (not in the track suits) admitted the van was his and said he had been aware that morning that people were watching. The van moved within the next hour. I suspect that now they will simply find somewhere else to park as they need the van nearby carrying their camping gear and, as my neighbour has seen, the nets. Please, everyone, keep a watch for any such activity."*

David added that the Association had been asked by residents if there is anything it could do to help resolve the lack of security on the Meadows- stressing that the Association is anxious to

protect this lovely area and that it would be a great shame if the Council cutbacks resulted in the wild life being lost. He then asked if Don could comment on this (see his address below in 6)

**Thames Water's refusal to deal with continuing Mains leaks in Parsonage Lane.** David said that as this was an issue really only affecting people who use Parsonage Lane, he would keep this item brief. He then explained that water has been seeping from the road directly over the water main for nearly a year – between the North Cray Riding School and where the road flattens out at No. 29, i.e. mostly outside these two properties. It was coming up in three points. Last October the road outside no 29 came up like a giant Christmas pudding over the main and the middle of the road bounced up and down as traffic went over it. This had started a long dialogue with Thames Water, with some 30/40 calls between himself and Thames Water's customer assurance team. David then summarised the different things that had happened over the year, not least being that the road had been closed and dug up several times. An interesting outcome was that both Clancy Docwra and Thames Water employees had informed him that Thames Water will do anything rather than replace mains as the cost would then be down to them, whereas all repairs are funded by the taxpayer!! David said that he will now be sending a full Report and formal complaint to Thames Water's Chief Executive, and will be seeking James Brokenshire's support.

**Boundary Change update** David reminded the meeting that late last year the Association had contacted all members advising them of the proposals for ward boundary changes within Bexley Borough and providing details of the Association's submission to the Boundary Commission. In March the Association had received from the Commission its initial recommended findings, which were that there was to be a new ward named St Mary's and St James Ward, the boundary of which was to be as recommended by the Bexley's Conservative Cllrs. The Association was invited to comment on this, when we wrote a letter requesting two marginal changes – the key one being that *all* of the Meadows should be within the new St Mary's & St James Ward. A final decision is due any time now and details will be sent to members by *NewsMail*.

**Waste4fuel – The Heap** David reported that the Association had received an update on the position from the secretary of the Chislewick Residents Association, who is closely monitoring developments. This was as follows:-

*“The negotiations between the EA, Council and the Landowner are still very positive. I am being kept up to speed with events by the Deputy Leader of the Council and can confirm that everything is moving forward at a steady pace, however, in order for me to be kept informed on behalf of residents, I cannot disclose details until given the ok to do so. All that I can say, is that it is all moving forward very positively at this stage and whilst this is the case I am advising everyone that it is best that we refrain from holding any public accountability meetings that would put any such negotiations at risk. Negotiations are delicate matters which call for sensible dialogue and we must accept that the complex legal obligations attached to any such negotiation will require time to complete. In the event that negotiations come to an end with no positive result, we would then immediately call for a public meeting with the EA, Council and Landowner to explain any breakdown. As said though, all parties including the landowner, at this stage, are moving the process forward positively. Apologies for not being able to provide you with any more information than this, I hope everyone understands that the element of trust is crucial between myself and the Council and the other parties in order that I can be kept up to speed for and on behalf of residents to ensure it is going the right way.”*

**Betty Rae** David closed this section of the Agenda with the sad news of Betty's death. She had been a long-time resident of Ruxley Close and a long-standing member of the NCRA, being one of our collectors for many years until it became too much for her. As well as doing much for this

Association she also ran the Brownies. She was very well thought of locally. Her funeral is this Friday 15 July leaving the house at 9.30 for a service at Christ Church Eltham and thereafter at Eltham Crematorium.

## 5 ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

David reported that all existing Officers and Committee members were willing to stand for the coming year, and no new nominations had been received for any of the posts. He said that he was, therefore, seeking the AGM's agreement for the block re-election of existing officers. He then invited our President, John Harrington, to put this to the meeting, when John thanked everyone for coming to the AGM and supporting the Association in this way. The meeting demonstrated its agreement to this block re-election of officers. The re-election of the remaining members of the Committee was proposed by Samantha Thomas and seconded by Ian Higgs, and agreed.

The newly-elected Committee for 2016-2017 was as follows:

John Harrington: President & Committee Member

David Cook: Chairman

Jean Gammons: Hon. Secretary

Geoff Waldmeyer: Hon. Treasurer

Membership Administrator: Irene Waldmeyer

Webmaster: Nik Carter

Newsletter Editor: Jacky Cook

Other Committee Members:-

Mick Doughty

Michael Heath

Chris Moon

Tony Morris

**Examiner of Accounts:** Michael Heath.

Before moving on, David expressed his thanks to the Committee, with special thanks to Jean from himself and on behalf of her Committee colleagues. No-one will ever know how much time and effort she gives this Association. Her dedication and care is an example to us all, and that the Green Belt and Heritage Land is so protected in this area is mostly due to Jean's vigilance and hard work. The meeting responded with applause. David then extended his special thanks to Nik, for maintaining our website and running our invaluable *GroupMail* and *NewsMail* services and doing such a fantastic job. The meeting again responded with applause.

## 6 CURRENT ISSUES

**Inappropriate Residential Development on Garden land between St James Way & The Grove** David said that he was sure all members were aware of the application that had been made by Brookworth Homes to build six new houses in the small area of unused 'garden land' between St James Way and The Grove – including a new access road – by the demolition of No. 20 St James Way. The developers were given pre-application advice that Planning considered this garden land as previously developed and therefore a brownfield site and appropriate for housing development. The Association disagrees with this view as the site was previously part of the North Cray Place garden and has never been developed. David stressed that this development would cause loss of privacy and security to affected residents and damage to the environment. A new

NCRA Sub-committee has been formed under the leadership of Eddie Chadwick to fight this proposal and, to date, well over 30 objections have been submitted including ones from our MP, Kent Gardens Trust, Bexley Civic Society and Bexley's former Heritage Officer (ret'd). He added that he understood that Helen Acton had visited the site and been surprised at how small the area was and at the amount of mature trees that would need to be felled. Worse, was the probable damage to a 200 year old Lebanese Cedar planted by Capability Brown and to the ancient Grade 2 listed wall. She seems also to have taken note of the fact that the ground level was such that the new development could overlook some of the adjacent properties. Don added that this application would go to the Planning Committee unless it was refused at Officer level; but he was hopeful that we would win this one, and promised to let the Committee know quickly if he had any news.

David then pointed out that, interestingly, the nature of this proposed development on high ground, rammed in tightly to existing properties creating loss of privacy and security, begs the question – does this infringe neighbours' human rights? He went on to say that in March 2016 the *Evening Standard* had reported on a retrospective planning application that was refused by Chelsea and Kensington Council for a tree house (14ft) after objections from neighbours who urged the Council to consider its responsibilities under the Human Rights Act- which states that people have the right to peaceful enjoyment of all their possessions including their property. The development would have a dominating impact (as Brookworth Homes' application would) and would impact on other residents' rights to the quiet enjoyment of their property. Article 8 of Act was cited.

**Local Authorities to create Registers of Brownfield Sites** David explained that the recent Planning & Housing Act (signed 12 May) requires Local Authorities to establish registers of brownfield land for housing development. It is hoped that Bexley's register will exclude any land in North Cray. Worryingly, however, is that Planning's recent definition of brownfield land has been expressed as "*any site within an existing Urban area as opposed to Open Countryside...not excluded are houses with large gardens in the Green Belt, nor Parks...all a target for housing...*". The case officer for the Brookwood Homes application (covered above) had further explained that the Government is putting pressure on local authorities to identify brownfield sites for housing – hence her dubious pre-application advice to Brookworth Homes which is contrary to Bexley's own planning policy CS17 – which promises to protect our green infrastructure by "resisting harmful back-land development". David added that this goes hand-in-hand with concerns over the increasing threats to London's Green Belt, reporting that in April the chair of the London Green Belt Council had written to the prime minister reminding of his Government's pledge to protect the Green Belt, and setting out the LGBC's views on what needed to be done – amongst which were:-

- Call a halt to further release of Green Belt Land – there are already 218,00 permissions yet to be built and they are not necessary;
- Strengthen Planning system – 'Brownfield First' needs to become reality;
- Correct housing target assessments which are forcing encroachment into Green Belt land. Assessments are flawed and have created targets higher than the Government's need assessment'

David then read out to the meeting the Housing minister's recent letters to MPs (7 June) and to the LGBC (10 June), which affirmed the government's commitment to maintaining strong protections for the Green Belt and stating that recent consultation on possible amendments to the National Planning Policy "*included a proposal that starter home developments be permitted in Green Belt, but only if included in an approved neighbourhood plan approved at local referendum, or if on brownfield sites where sites where there would be no substantial harm to the openness of the land*".

David said that this still did not resolve the question of 'What is a Brownfield Site' as viewed by Bexley Council. So, we need to be vigilant.

**Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO)** David said that members might be aware from the recent *Newsshopper* article, that changes to planning legislation now allow landlords to change their properties from a Dwelling House (C3 Property Class) to a HMO (C4 Property Class) without the need for planning permission, i.e. under permitted development legislation. A number of properties in Bexley have already been affected by this and local residents are extremely concerned that such converted dwellings are being/will be used as emergency council accommodation for homeless people which might include released offenders, drug addicts, and possibly worse. He explained that a HMO is a property where at least three tenants live forming more than one household (it can be up to 6) where the toilet, bathroom or kitchen are shared – i.e. tenants just have a room – it's a Hostel. As you can imagine living conditions can be less than desirable – but landlords are making lots of money. However, local authorities also have the power to remove this automatic permission by means of an "Article 4 Direction", meaning the landlord would have to apply for planning permission which would then be assessed as usual. But this is likely to increase the number of applications the Council have to deal with and they cannot charge for this type of planning application. Bexley are saying they "are gathering evidence for a possible Article 4 direction" but the cost implications may influence their approach. David further explained that an Article 4 Direction can cover an area of any geographic size from a specific site to any/all parts of a Local Authority-wide area, but it cannot be applied retrospectively so people should be aware of any potentially suspicious development activity. The Article 4 Direction needs to be in place borough-wide to ensure any such development proposal is properly assessed in the interest of the local residents. Many such incidences throughout the Borough have been reported in *Streetlife* – a blog/forum for local people to comment, seek advice, advertise, report lost pets etc. David added that Don Massey had managed to get the Leader of the Council (Cllr Teresa O'Neil) to provide an update on this matter, which included confirmation that:-

- They were bringing evidence together in order to apply for an Article 4 Directive as they did not have any evidence there was a problem.
- They were also going further in considering a localised licensing scheme (the Government mandatory scheme is for larger HMOs of more than 2 storeys) as well as lobbying the Secretary of State to take action to allow Councils to inspect the changes.
- It was untrue that Bexley have lagged behind other boroughs and Bromley have not applied for an Article 4 Directive. However, Bromley Council's site does show that it has Article 4 directions in place in dealing with Offices to Residential – but it is not sure where they are with dwellings (C3) to HMOs.

See also Don's Address below.

**Starter Homes in the Green Belt.** David reported that a consultation is in progress as a part of the review of the National Planning Policy Framework and which includes a government proposal to allow starter homes to be built on Green Belt land. Starter homes are new homes for a first time buyers under the age of 40 which are sold at a 20 per cent discount from the market rate. They are properties worth no more £250,000 outside of London and £450,000 in the capital. If the proposal is accepted, it would have a profound effect on the Green Belt and our environment in general, both in Bexley and nationally. The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England and the London Green Belt Council are leading a campaign to fight this proposal. We have nothing further to report at the moment – it is a case of waiting for further developments and keeping vigilant.

**Address by Cllr Don Massey:-**

Homes of Multiple Occupation: Don further explained the background to these, stressing that an Article 4 Direction can only be obtained with evidence, and that it could take a year to put in place. There was no evidence of much in Bexley and, as far as was known, none in the North Cray area; but residents should be vigilant and, if anything of this kind is seen, it should be reported to him, to the Association or to the Council. Don added that Bexley was lobbying for legislation to be tightened. He then referred to recent press coverage about a house in Penhill Road, Sidcup. This had led to a staged demonstration stemming from the *Newsshopper* website, aiming for sensationalism. He added, however, the vast majority of HMOs were intended for people with genuine need, and this was a very complicated subject.

The EU Referendum: Don pointed out that now the UK had voted to leave the EU there would be an enormous change, nationally and locally; and change to legislation – although there was a shortage of Civil Servants to do the work. We would have to wait and see...

Thames Water: Don reported that Bexley has a dreadful relationship with them. He advised David to approach its Chief Executive directly about the continuing and unresolved problems in Parsonage Lane, when he and James Brokenshire would give their support.

Footscray Meadows: Don reported that last week the problem of Enforcement action was looked at, and it had been suggested that a team of licensed wardens armed with cameras be engaged. He promised to come back to the Committee on this as soon as possible.

Waste4Fuel site: Don reported that James Brokenshire, with his colleagues in Bromley and Orpington, had been working hard on this issue and the question of costs had now been sorted out and money to clear The Heap was now available. Don would let us know as soon as he knew anything more.

Open spaces: Don explained why the plan to sell off some sites had been considered and adopted. Some had substantial value, and four of them would be sold. However, some sites (including the twin in North Cray, had proved too difficult to be developed commercially and so the question of selling them would not be pursued. He added that the purpose of the sell-offs was to maintain the grass-cutting programme in parks, which was a very expensive operation.

Garden waste collection: the paid-for service introduced last year had been controversial, but Don pointed out that waste disposal cost Bexley £8m a year, and there was no legal requirement to collect garden waste. However, Bexley's new service had proved to be the most successful operation in London. He added that renewals for this were imminent.

Street lighting: Don reported that an experimental turning off the lights overnight had taken place in Welling. Despite fears over safety, the incidence of crime had gone down! However, rather than pursuing this option to reduce costs, it had been decided to opt instead for the replacement of existing lights with LEDs. This would take about four years to complete, but would save Bexley £300k plus.

Brookworth Homes site: Don explained that with the reduction in funding from central government, Bexley did need to focus on planned growth in housing; but he assured the meeting that Bexley was looking at places connected with the High-Speed train link, eg Thamesmead and Slade Green etc.- and not at the area around North Cray. He did point out, however, that any would-be developer was free to look at a site and attempt to develop it for housing, and there was a need for more housing.



## 7. OTHER BUSINESS

**Organisation of a social event** David reminded the meeting that this had been raised last, when he had put forward a few possible ideas with one in particular. Members had been invited to contact the Committee with their view/suggestions, but none had been received. However, the Committee had agreed that we should go-ahead anyway – low-key to start with. Probably for a Friday in October to proceed with the idea floated last year: an Audio Video presentation (camera club) entertaining and amusing – plus an illustrated Talk on some aspect of North Cray's history by the Sidcup & Lamborbey History Society. All this followed by a sumptuous buffet and drinks. David promised that details would be flooding out to members soon.

**Policing** David reported that our Cray Meadows Neighbourhood Policing Team had today reported that, although Bexley is one of the safest boroughs, there have been some recent crimes locally such as break-ins and theft from property and vehicles. They asked the Association to stress to its members that they should be vigilant and report anything or anyone acting suspiciously, and that they should ensure that windows, doors etc are properly locked and keys kept out of sight.

**The Learning Centre (TLC)** David said that one of our members, Trevor Jones, had asked him to mention that the TLC (formerly the Adult Education College, Bexley) has distributed its new brochure but it does not seem to have reached our part of the borough. Trevor had also asked him to mention that there is a branch of the TLC in Sidcup High Street in what was the Old Black Horse public house. David then added that someone had kindly brought in to the meeting some copies of the new brochure, which would be available after the close of the meeting.

**Further thanks** David then said that there were further thanks to make:-

To our VIVs – Very Important Volunteers who, between them, cover the collection of subscriptions and delivery of Newsletters and the AGM Notification to the entire membership of the Association. He added that, however, we still need Volunteers to cover Honeyden Road, Cornell Close, Maidstone Road and Upper North Cray Road. If people could help, would they please see Jean after the meeting. We would be most grateful.

Our grateful thanks to Anne and Michael Kelsey for kindly providing the catering and for setting up the Church for tonight's meeting. The meeting responded with applause.

And our thanks again to Don for coming along and answering our questions. Again, the meeting responded with applause.

There being no questions from the floor, David then closed the meeting by thanking everyone again for attending. At Don's lead, the meeting responded to David with applause.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.

JG 14 7 16

