

NORTH CRAY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of Meeting held on 22 June 2011, 8pm in St James' Church, North Cray

The meeting commenced with an informal gathering of 54 members before the formal start of the AGM.

In opening the meeting the Chairman thanked everyone for coming and extended a special welcome to Councillor Don Massey. He added that our MP, James Brokenshire, would also be attending the meeting; but would be arriving later because of business in the House of Commons. He confirmed that Mr Brokenshire had recently become Patron of the Bexley Borough Neighbourhood Watch Association.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Mr Laurie of Mount Mascal Farm, Tanya and Malcolm Barr-Hamilton and Krishna and Hari Sandhu of Parsonage Lane, John and Gill Burgess of Water Lane and Linda Moore of the North Cray Road. A letter of apology had also been received from Betty Rae of Ruxley Close, being only the second time in 40 years she had been unable to attend.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST AGM HELD ON 1 JUNE 2010

These were taken as read; their adoption proposed by Mario Farrugia, seconded by Bridget Harrington and agreed.

3. HON. TREASURER'S REPORT

In presenting his Accounts, an audited copy of which was on display in the church, the Treasurer outlined their content. He pointed out that, although the income from subscriptions was up, the number of households as members was down because of the difficulty in collecting subscriptions last year. On expenditure, he explained that its increase was due to the production of more Newsletters, which was important as these reflected what was being done by the Committee on behalf of members. No questions were forthcoming and adoption of the accounts was proposed by Mario Farrugia, seconded by Ken Moore and agreed.

4. CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR

- 4.1** The Chairman reported that there had been a number of issues where the Association had taken specific action on behalf of its members. These had mostly been covered in the Winter Newsletter, namely inappropriate Planning Applications and subsequent Appeals, the excessive prominence of the pedestrian area on the Swanley exit from the Ruxley roundabout and the lack of adequate gritting on the North Cray Road and the general removal of gritting bins.

However, the Chairman advised that there had recently been two significant issues that had caused concern to local residents, these being the planning application for a Buddhist Temple and the premises licence application for Foot Cray Meadows. These items warranted special attention and had been listed for discussion under Agenda Item 6 – Current Issues.

- 4.2** Turning to the Association's response to Bexley's 'Core Strategy Paper', effectively Bexley's Spatial Planning Framework for the Long Term, the Chairman reported that the Secretary of State had now appointed an Inspector to conduct an examination in public to determine whether Bexley's Submission was sound. This would take place at Wyncham House on 26 July 2011. As our Association provided its input to the Submission we saw no need to take part in the debate on 'soundness'.
- 4.3** The Chairman reported that the importance of timely Enforcement action remained an issue, and the Association was becoming increasingly concerned at the apparent lack of vigilance on Bexley's part, most recently in respect of Orchard View Farm (Parsonage Lane) and Honeydale Farm (Maidstone Road). Here, mobile homes had, allegedly, been on the land, unnoticed, for many years, paving the way for subsequent successful applications for Established Use certificates for commercial or residential status. The Chairman stressed how much the Association needed the help of its members – and their eyes - in alerting the Committee to anything suspicious.
- 4.4** The Chairman reported that a full list of current Planning Applications had been included in the AGM Papers and invited those with any concerns they might have to raise these under item 7, Any Other Business, or speak to a member of the Committee after the meeting.
- 4.5** Regarding Planning Objections, the Chairman stated that the Association had been very concerned to hear that there might now have to be a minimum of four separate letters of objection before an Application would be submitted to the Planning Sub-Committee for a decision. Moreover, any letter from the Association counted as only one Objection even though it represented some 800 members. The Chairman invited Cllr Massey to comment later on this seemingly nonsensical situation.
- 4.6** On a happier note, the Chairman reported that the Secretary, Jean Gammons, and the Webmaster, Nik Carter, had been working for some time on an Illustrated History of North Cray and it was hoped to have this on the website later in the summer. It was also hoped to be able to produce a full version of the History in booklet form. The Chairman then appealed to members with any photographs of North Cray, particularly any taken before the dual carriageway was built, to consider lending them to Jean and Nik for copying.
- 4.7** The Chairman repeated the Appeal for volunteers to help the Association in the task of collecting subscriptions and delivering Newsletters in those roads where we had none. Even helping by becoming a local 'postbox' where members could drop in their subscription would make a difference and lighten the load.
- 4.8** In conclusion, the Chairman expressed his thanks and gratitude to Bridget and John Harrington for their continued invaluable advice and guidance over the year. He also thanked Jean Gammons who has worked tirelessly in monitoring anything that could possibly affect North Cray and/or its residents and taking action wherever necessary; Angela Goodman, who spearheads 'Operation Membership' in the summer and is determined bring our membership back up to over 400 households; Nik Carter, for the tremendous amount of work he has put into our website; Councillor Don Massey, who has again provided exceptional support to the Association over the year and keeping us informed of any new developments he thought we should know about; and to James Brokenshire for again supporting us by his presence at the meeting. He also expressed the Association's gratitude to the Arch Deacon for again allowing us to hold our meeting in St James Church.

5. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

No nominations had been received for the coming year.

John Harrington proposed the re-election of David Cook as Chairman. This was seconded by Michael Heath and agreed.

Mrs Taylor proposed the re-election *en bloc* of the present Officers and Committee. This was seconded by Mario Farrugia and agreed.

The newly-elected Committee for 2011/2012 was as follows:

John Harrington:	President & Committee Member
David Cook:	Chairman
Jean Gammons:	Hon. Secretary
Geoff Waldmeyer:	Hon. Treasurer
Angela Goodman:	Assistant Secretary/Membership Secretary
Nik Carter:	Webmaster
Jacky Cook:	Newsletter Editor
Bridget Harrington:	
Michael Heath:	
Irene Waldmeyer:	

6. CURRENT ISSUES

6.1 The North Cray Road: The Chairman stated that, in the light of last year's debate on the problems for residents and other users by the lack of an additional roundabout or U-turn, an informal meeting had been held with Councillor Don Massey to determine the best way forward. Unfortunately, soon after this the situation was changed dramatically by a series of Government and local spending cuts to reduce the scale of Government Debt and it was clear to us that there would be no money available at this time. However, it is certain that the North Cray Road will come under review at some stage and so it is important that the Association should have its position fully considered and prepared. To this end, the Chairman will produce a draft proposal to Transport for London and make it available on the Association's website for members' comments. There followed a debate led by John Doughty in which he and other members expressed several concerns, including that of Works vehicles laying cones late at night.

6.2 Buddhist Temple: The Chairman reported that an application had been made by a Buddhist group to convert an existing barn at the North Cray & Sidcup Riding Stables into a Temple. This proposed change of use had caused considerable concern with local residents and the Association had submitted a strong letter of Objection. This cited a number of factors which made the proposed development totally inappropriate, e.g. traffic levels, parking/damage to grass verges, noise, absence of a local need, concerns about having a religious centre in an isolated position and the possibility of subsequent additional use such as a community centre, which would cause even more problems in terms of traffic levels, parking noise pollution etc. It was refused by the Planning Committee at its meeting on 28 April 2011 but it was understood that there would be a renewed Application.

- 6.3** Bexley's Application for a Premises Licence for Footh Cray Meadows: The Chairman reported that, in view of the very high number of representations received from local residents to the Association, it had sent a strong letter of Objection to the Licensing Team, copies of which were available in the Church and on the Association's website. Of particular concern was that a Licence in the terms applied for by Parks & Open Spaces (department) could give it virtually unrestricted use of the Meadows as an Event venue on a regular basis, causing significant distress to local residents, damage to the Meadows and a danger to wildlife.

The Application was to be put before the Licensing Sub-Committee and the Association would be invited to the hearing to support its representation. However, to do this the Association had to prove that its representation reflected the wishes of its members. The following Motion (proposed by John Doughty and seconded by Michael Fournaris) was then put to the meeting: "Do we have your support of the Association's action and letter of objection?" The response was a unanimous "Yes".

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 7.1** Constant Works affecting users of the North Cray Road etc: A member complained that there seemed to have been gas, water or electricity local roadworks every July for the past 26 years. Councillor Massey responded by saying that everyone was indeed fed up about this, a situation which was largely a result of old pipes etc. and their actual location being uncharted. He assured the meeting, however, that pressure was being put on the various undertakings to get it right this time.
- 7.2** Address by James Brokenshire, MP: Responding to the invitation to say a few words, Mr Brokenshire said how helpful it was to him to attend this AGM and get a sense of people's problems and concerns. Turning then to the future of Queen Mary's Hospital, he reported that this now seemed very positive. Meetings were being held to move forward the 'Campus' proposal, i.e. to put services back on to the site and to get other providers to bring their services on to it as well. It was hoped to produce a Final Business Case by the end of the year, one which would provide us with the service we need locally. To this end, he would be pressing the London NHS to strengthen its case for improved health care in this area and he said that he was determined to make this positive vision for the future come to pass. The meeting demonstrated its support of all that Mr Brokenshire had said by unanimous applause.

In response to questions by Michael Heath, Mr Brokenshire said that he was now a Home Office Minister, responsible for matters such as counter-terrorism, security, counter-terrorist policing and for planning for the 2012 Olympic Games to ensure that these were safe and secure. As regards the future of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams, this was a decision for the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. Current manning levels would be maintained but there might be a doubling-up of certain Wards. Everyone was concerned to ensure that front line services were maintained and that the Olympic site was adequately protected. Plans for this were going well and adequate policing was key to its success.

- 7.3** Address by Councillor Don Massey: Commenting on Bexley's spending cuts, Councillor Massey explained that there had been a desperate need to sort out Bexley's finances as its income mostly came from the Government and this was to be reduced by £36m over three years. There had been consultation on which core services people had wanted to be kept and this had meant hard decisions had had to be made on maintaining facilities such as Library Services etc. Happily, a number of volunteers had come forward from people willing to help run libraries but the future of the Mobile Library service was under review. He added that

Bexley would continue to spend money on Highways and that, in examining the 25% discount on the Community Charge for single occupants, many residents' entitlement to this discount had been questioned, following which a number of them decided no longer to apply for it. Bexley was also currently in the middle of negotiations with Tesco regarding the ex-Woolwich Building and the present Civic Centre.

Councillor Massey responded to the Chairman's invitation to comment on the Association's understanding of Planning Control's requirement for the need for a minimum of four separate letters (as well as the NCRA's) before an Application would be submitted to the Planning Sub-Committee for a decision. His understanding was that no such decision had yet been made.

Turning to the matter of the Premises Licence for Footh Cray Meadow, Councillor Massey said that, in his view, it was important to get our strategy right, e.g. to look at the example set by the Lesnes Abbey decision and to get the maximum number of potential visitors reduced (to say 500). Much consideration was needed to be given to the matter of parking and he added that no formal arrangements with Cleeve Park School had been sought by Bexley. Regarding the impact from noise, his view was that there were other venues in Bexley more suitable for large Events. In conclusion, Councillor Massey said that he would be willing to speak to the Licensing Sub-Committee on behalf of the Association.

A short debate led by John Doughty highlighted additional concerns. Stragglers (perhaps drunken ones) would likely be a problem in the area after the formal closure of an Event; the Meadows was a particularly special place, with its quiet character and nature reserve; it was likely that events would not be restricted to the summer months but might take place in winter causing severe damage to the ground.

Note: Although not strictly part of the meeting further concerns were raised in post-meeting discussions regarding the Premises Licence for Footh Cray Meadows. Two key issues were:

1. The need for the Council to make provision for the protection from damage of the Five Arches Bridge at each event because of its 'protected' position/status.
2. The health and safety issues of an event site which had 'open access' and therefore impossible to police and encompassed a river with no barriers – the latter point being of particular concern where there may be the possible sale of alcohol at evening events.

The meeting closed at 9.40pm.