

NORTH CRAY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of Meeting held on 26 June 2013, 8pm in St James' Church, North Cray

The meeting commenced with an informal gathering of 40 members before the formal start of the AGM.

Upon opening the meeting the Chairman, David Cook, thanked everyone for coming, and extended a special welcome to Councillor Don Massey, whose wife Sharon had just become Mayor, with Don as the Mayor's Consort. David's congratulations to them both was marked by a round of applause. He then informed the meeting that James Brokenshire, MP for Old Bexley & Sidcup, would also be attending, but would be arriving later because of business in the House of Commons.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Bridget Harrington, who was not at all well; and from Nik Carter, who was recovering from major surgery.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST AGM HELD ON 20 JUNE 2012

These were taken as read, and agreed as an accurate record. Their adoption proposed by Angela Goodman and seconded by Mario Farrugia.

3. HON. TREASURER'S REPORT

In presenting his Accounts, an audited copy of which was on display in the church, the Treasurer, Geoff Waldemeyer, outlined their content and explained that the excess of expenditure over income (£690.34) in 2012-13 was due to donations for the History book coming to hand in the previous year. He reported that the NCRA's funds were in good shape, and recommended that the subscription for 2013-14 remain at £2, which was agreed. No questions were forthcoming and adoption of the accounts was proposed by Trevor Jones, seconded by Mario Farrugia and agreed.

4. CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR

4.1 David reported that he and the Secretary, Jean Gammons, had recently met informally with Susan Clark, Head of Development Control, and Cllr Don Massey to discuss our concerns about several issues and for the Association to be updated. David said that Susan Clark has always been willing to discuss our concerns with us, which is really helpful to our understanding of what sometimes can be done- and where it cannot. The meeting agreed that a big thank you should be sent to her on the NCRA's behalf for all the help she provides when we need guidance. David then outlined some of the current key issues, which would be covered again in more detail under Agenda item 6.

4.2 Relaxation of Permitted Development Rights A recent legislative change had come in the form of a Statutory Instrument taking effect from 30 May, and which would apply for a period of three years. This order gives residents the right to give notification of their intention, without the need for local Planning consent, to build single-storey rear house extensions up to

6m for sem-detached or terraced houses, and 8m for detached properties. Only if adjoining neighbours object can the local Planning department become involved, thus creating a potential for tensions between neighbours.

- 4.3 Proposals for the erection of Polytunnels at Honeydale Farm** A strong letter of objection raising many issues was submitted to Planning by the NCRA, supported by a wave of individual objections from the residents of Honeyden Road, Barton Road and Maidstone Road.
- 4.4 Stuarts soil grading operation** For years the noise and dust from these works have caused distress to nearby residents, ie those in Jaquets Court and Home Close Farm etc. The residents of Jaquets Court are working together under the team-leadership of one of the residents (Marion Brooker), strongly supported by our members in Home Close Farm (Mr and Mrs Horgan). At this point David asked Don if he could update us following our request that morning for his help in getting the requested monitoring of noise levels by Bexley under way. Don reported that he had insisted that the monitoring team visit the site that day! Stuarts had now been told that works must not begin before 8am and must finish by 6pm, 1pm on Saturdays. Meanwhile, Don stressed that it was vital that the residents maintain the log sheets provided to them, to serve as evidence of what was happening and to indicate the pattern of activity so that the noise measuring equipment could be set up at an appropriate time.
- 4.5 Individual Planning applications** David said that he felt it important that he clarify the NCRA's position, and its position when members requested its help. He pointed out that its Aims and Objective were quite straightforward, and included providing help and assistance to members where this fell within the scope of the NCRA's remit. It rarely became involved with individual Planning applications other than where it considered that they breached Green Belt policy or where in some other significant way they were detrimental to the local environment. However, there were exceptions. These were where (a) a number of residents had asked it to support their own objections and/or to act on their behalf and (b) where residents requested its help because they were reluctant to object for fear of reprisals or simply did not wish to become at odds with their neighbour/s. Probably most common was where residents were adjacent to commercial concerns. However, in all such cases the NCRA only became involved after it had personally established whether, in our opinion, the proposed application would, in some way, be deemed of major concern or unacceptable to the vast majority of residents – should they be the affected neighbour. Recently, the NCRA had been challenged on this (on behalf of an affected applicant) with the suggestion that it did not have the authority to object on such an application without first obtaining agreement from or sounding out *all* its members. David stressed that, in fact, the committee did have authority as it was the elected representative of all the Association's members – elected to act on their behalf. With Planning applications coming in at around one a week, and responses needing to be made within 21 days, it would just be impossible to canvas everyone's opinion. Also, at the end of the day, it is the Planning department, or the Planning Committee, that makes the decision as to whether an application is successful or not. However, the details of all letters of objection issued by the NCRA are posted on its website, and if any member feels at any time that it has not acted within the scope of its remit, we would expect to hear from you. David added that the NCRA had an excellent relationship with Planning Control which views its work as truly representative of the needs/requirements of local residents and that everything we produce – not just letters of objection or support, but reports, responses on local government papers (eg core strategy planning document is well considered and constructive. The committee would therefore continue to act as it has always done as the elected representatives of all members. The meeting indicated its agreement.

4.6 At this point, Mr Kyricon of No.54 The Grove announced his view that the tone of Jean Gammon's letter to Planning objecting [on behalf of members who had sought the Association's help in respect of an application from No. 78 The Grove] was “disgusting”, “rude”, “unprofessional” and “aggressive”, and that she had “no right” to do this and he did not want her sending letters on his behalf. He asked if he could meet with the committee to point out to it the “offensive” parts of her letter. The Chairman replied that he was unwilling to agree to this, but would be prepared to have Jean's letter posted on the website for the membership to consider the allegations Mr Kyricon had made and make their own independent judgement. Here, Mr Chadwick of No. 56 The Grove [the father of the applicant] asked if the NCRA would also post on its website his letter to Jean, on the grounds that her comments were “untrue”, “no one had objected” and “she had not investigated”. David replied that Jean *had* investigated the situation with another officer of the committee, when photographs had been taken. He agreed to post Mr Chadwick's letter on the website, adding that a copy of his letter had been sent to Planning Control.

4.7 **Joining forces with other Organisations** David reported that to add strength to the NCRA's submissions in relation to the protection of North Cray and its residents it now liaises closely with other bodies such as the Bexley Civic Society and residents' associations adjoining North Cray where we have mutual concerns, eg the industrial waste dump at Crittalls Corner. This collaboration is now more important than in the past because of the need for support to ensure that applications, where we have serious concerns, are put to the Planning Committee rather than just being dealt with on a delegated authority basis.

4.8 **Sub-division of residential plots within the Green Belt** David explained that there was a continuing concern over the incidence of residents seeking, and gaining, permission for 'change of use' in respect of garden buildings to allow such buildings to be converted for residential use. In effect, this was allowing single residential plots to be sub-divided for residential development thereby breaching Green Belt guidelines. We had discussed this issue in our meeting with Susan Clark and the answers we received to a number of subsequent questions seeking clarification were positive – in terms of the presumption against residential development.

4.9 **Thanks to all those who helped us through the year** In closing his Chairman's Review of the past year David expressed the NCRA's appreciation:-

To Cllr Don Massey who has again provided us with exceptional support and kept us fully-up-to-date with any new developments he thought we ought to know about.

On all our behalfs, to all the Committee for their help and assistance throughout the year.

Special mention to our volunteer collectors and to our Membership Secretary, Angela Goodman, for nurturing them and looking after them – their help is invaluable!

Most especially to our Secretary, Jean Gammons, who has again worked tirelessly through the year in keeping her eye on anything that could possibly affect North Cray and/or its residents and taking action wherever necessary.

5 ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

At this point, the NCRA's President, John Harrington, asked to address the meeting with a few personal words about Bridget. They have both been very touched by the amount of support they had received: offers of food, flowers, expressions of goodwill and visits. Their heartfelt thanks to everyone.

David then reported that no nominations for the election of Officers and Committee had been received.

Chairman: the re-election of David Cook as Chairman was proposed by Angela Goodman, seconded by Mario Farrugia and agreed.

Officers and Committee: their re-election *en bloc* was proposed by Trevor Jones, seconded by Vera Heath and agreed.

The newly-elected Committee for 2013-2014 was as follows:

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

David added that we were looking to co-opt people to help us, if anyone would like to be part of the Committee.

6 CURRENT ISSUES

The Chairman reported on the following several issues of concern.

- 6.1 Statutory Instrument 2013 No. 1101 – Town & Country Planning** This had been introduced by the Government presumably to boost building but against the advice and recommendations of possibly every local council's Planning department throughout the UK. Its key points are:

For a 3 year period residents can notify their council of their intention to build a single-storey rear extension across the full width of their property to a depth of 8m for detached houses and 6m for all others.

No planning permission is required

Planning must notify immediate neighbours only, within 21 days, and only if a neighbour objects can Planning assess the impact of the proposed development on those it considers would be affected.

If no neighbour objects within 21 days Planning will issue a go-ahead Notice.

Only immediate neighbours can object, and there is just a 42 day window.

There is no Planning application so it will not be listed and the NCRA will be unaware of it. In any case we cannot object since there is no application to object to!

Bexley sees this as a loss of control over what could be a free-for-all in the building of unsightly and contentious extensions – pitting neighbour against neighbour with the possible outcome of neighbours either receiving bribes or the threat of violence.

Relaxation has also been made for new permitted development rights for change of use (albeit perhaps subject to planning permission being granted) in respect of:-

-Office premises to change to residential use

-Agricultural buildings to change to a number of other uses including shops, restaurants/cafes, office, storage and leisure facilities

The London Forum had argued strongly against this relaxation of Permitted Development rights because it was “contrary to localism” by removing the right of council and communities to be involved in what happens in their area. It was now stressing the importance of civic and community groups lobbying their MPs to ask them to object to the way the government is going against its localism proposals by introducing “top-down” changes to the management of development that should be performed locally.

The minister has indicated that this summer he intends to consult on allowing shops and agricultural buildings to also be converted to residential use under Permitted Development rights.

6.2 Polytunnels-Honeydale Farm The formation of an NCRA sub-committee under the team leadership of one of the affected residents, Mick Doughty of Barton Road, has proved the effectiveness of the NCRA working together with its members in this way. Our case might fail, but it has certainly brought local residents together in a common cause, pooling arguments that might be used against the Application and demonstrating to Planning the strength of local feeling over this issue. The key issues here are: the owner of Honeydale Farm wishes to erect 10ft high polytunnels covering an area of 8.6 hectares of his land close to Honeyden Road, Barton Road and Maidstone Road – thus destroying the view across the Cray Valley -ie Green Belt/Heritage Land- to the dismay of local residents. *There is potential for up to 30 hectares.*

Initially, the Planning officer viewed the application as falling within Green Belt guidelines and so need for an Environmental Impact Assessment as required by an EU directive – as he did not see Honeydale Farm as a sensitive Green Belt location. However, documents we forwarded to him that showed that an EIA was appropriate. It was also pointed out to him that the Cray Valley was specifically mentioned in Bexley's core strategy document as an area that should be protected. The application was pulled from the January Planning Committee meeting as further discussions are needed. The proliferation of polytunnels is a major issue nationwide and so it is important that Bexley does not set an unwanted precedent.

At this point David asked Don if was able to update us on the current position. Don said that the work done by Jean and the sub-committee had made Planning think again! The application would not be put to the July Planning Committee and might be deferred to the autumn. Meanwhile, the applicant was refusing to consider a relocation of the Polytunnels somewhere else on his land – and so it had become a “stand-off” position.

6.3 Don was then invited to update the meeting on any other issues and to take any questions from the floor:-

Government Spending Review Over the last four years the Council in response to the reduction in its Government funding has reduced its expenditure by approximately £36m whilst freezing the Council Tax charged to residents. The announcements earlier in the day by the Chancellor of further substantial cuts in local authority funding meant the council would need to make more expenditure reductions, possibly up to another £40m over the next four years.

Sidcup High Street Waitrose were definitely going to open their store! Their decision to do so followed a vigorous campaign by Bexley and its residents, and by our MP, James Brokenshire, as the store was seen as crucial to the regeneration of this part of Sidcup.

Queen Marys Hospital. James had also been heavily involved in its future, working very hard to ensure that it was a viable campus and one that worked better.

Stuarts soil grading operation Referring to the advice given to maintain log sheets, Mrs Brooker asked what had happened to the log sheets already submitted. Don said that he would pursue this. Meanwhile she should continue to telephone the officer dealing with this matter whenever the situation became particularly bad.

Local fires Trevor Jones asked for an update on these. Don said that there had been no recent incidents at either the Klingers building or at the refuse dump at Crittal Corner. Re the latter, neither Bromley nor Bexley council had control of this, but they were maintaining pressure on the Environment Agency which did have control.

Local Policing Model: replying to Trevor Jones's question about this, Don explained that the Metropolitan Police were under increasing financial pressure. Although Cray Meadows now had a smaller SNT, reserve officers were available to assist if needed. A Ward Panel meeting was to be held soon when we would see how the changes are working.

Recent violent murder at Woolwich Don pointed out that this had been a random act of violence. No one is absolutely safe so we must all be vigilant. He added that a great deal of community work was taking place on this issue.

6.4 At this point, our MP, James Brokenshire, arrived. He apologised for being so late but he had been deeply involved in the debate over Crossrail and the Chancellor's Statement. The Chairman welcomed him and invited him to address the meeting:-

Threat from Terrorism Speaking as the Security Minister, James said that the recent barbaric act at Woolwich was shocking. However, we must not conflate this with Islam but recognise that it was carried out by individuals with a perverse view. We must all be vigilant! This is a matter taken very seriously and the Prime Minister has launched a new Task Force.

Queen Marys Hospital With effect from 1 October, it is intended to transfer its ownership to the Oxleas Foundation Trust. James said that he was very keen to see Queen Marys go into new ownership/organisation and he was seeking to secure and extend its services, eg a radio therapy unit. Also to further enhance its facilities and link with the Darent Valley Hospital. He saw all this as positive news – and a “new chapter for our hospital”.

Waitrose Yes- they are coming to Sidcup! Seventy new jobs will be created and their presence, with input from the Mayor of London's Fund, will improve this end of the High Street. This was the result of extremely hard work by Bexley council and the 6,000 Sidcup residents who had petitioned Waitrose. It was all this that had made the difference.

7 OTHER BUSINESS

Relaxed Permitted Development rights Philip Wood asked what would happen in the case of a Listed Building. Don explained that those Listed by English Heritage were not affected by the new legislation but it seemed that Locally listed buildings had no such status under the new Notification process. He pointed out that much would be open to interpretation and it is not yet known how this will work in practice, and there could also be test cases in the Courts. James undertook to take up the question of Locally listed buildings with the Communities Department for further clarification and report back to the NCRA via Jean.

Bus Stop/Shelter at Ruxley Corner Betty Rea said that this had gone after an accident and had not been replaced by TFL. Don promised her that he would pursue this quickly and report back to her via Jean

The meeting closed at 9.30pm