

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

## **Minutes of Meeting held on 4 July 2017, 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 and Deputy Leader of the council; and to PCSO Pauline Cimen and PC Phil Clark of our Safer Neighbourhoods police team.

### **1 APOLOGIES**

As usual, James Brokenshire, MP for Old Bexley and Sidcup, and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, had kindly agreed to come but this morning we received - understandably- his apologies for his absence as he would be unable to join us due to pressure of work. However, he had added that he would like to meet us at another time, perhaps at a local meeting or one at Westminster.

David said that we would be taking up his offer as it was fantastic to have such an interested and courteous MP. Our committee member, Mick Doughty, was also unable to join us this evening as he was on holiday. Also unable to join us was our vicar, Ren Harding, but she had sent us her good wishes for a successful meeting.

### **2 MINUTES OF THE LAST AGM (13 July 2016)**

These (which had been distributed) were taken as read, and agreed as an accurate record.

#### **Matters arising**

Little Acre and Little Haven Stud Farms, Bunkers Hill David reported that it was still proving difficult to get any update from Planning, in particular confirmation that Enforcement action was being maintained following the Inspector's Decision about the removal of shipping containers and that use of the mobile home and ancillary building temporarily allowed at Little Acre should be restricted to the owner and his immediate family. We last wrote to the Enforcement officer in February and Jean would try again to get a reply to our concerns.

The Meadows David reported that this year we have seen further incidents of dog attacks, especially on wildlife by dogs allowed near the lake off-lead; illegal fishing and continuing anti-social behavior such as bikers racing across the meadows. He then read out an email he had received that day from our member Marilyn Laurie detailing the incidents she had witnessed. Marilyn had also suggested a number of things that could be done to address these issues: clear signage around the park pointing out that it included a nature reserve, and advising how the public could best protect their environment; an enclosed dog walking area; and a restrictive planted-up strip built either side of the river to prevent dogs and people from disturbing the wildlife and their habitat.

David then invited PCSO Pauline Cimen and PC Phil Clark to say a few words on the subject to the meeting. Phil explained that the use of off-road bikes was not an easy problem to resolve as the Meadows had so many entrances and exits; but there had been some successful action as residents had been photographing offenders. He urged people to always try to take photographs, if they can do so safely and discreetly, and submit these to the team. Regarding the previous day's incident on the Meadows, this had been because a very valuable motor bike had been stolen in Bexley Village. Fortunately, it had a tracking device and this led the police to the Meadows and to bring out their dogs and a helicopter. Both suspects had been apprehended by one of the officers in his team. Regarding fishing, this was another issue they were often called about; but it was usually too late for his team to get there and apprehend the offenders as it had no transport. Phil urged people who witnessed any of this going on to try to get vehicle registration numbers and pass these on to the team. Regarding the Dogs issue, Phil said that, hopefully, some better signage can be put in place. He and Pauline would provide Jean with more contact numbers, for issue to members in a *NewsMail*.

Don then added a few words on the subject and mentioned Bexley's recent pilot exercise focusing on the problem of litter – perhaps one might be done for the problems in the Meadows. Don also recommended that the Association should try to bring all relevant parties together to agree a mandate on what *could* be done and what *might* be done, and possible funding. But he warned that there was no simple solution to these problems.

Ward boundary change David reported that the Commission had agreed with the NCRA that the new St Marys and St James ward in 2018 should encompass all of Fooks Cray Meadows and exclude the commercial area to the south of Maidstone Road.

Waste4Fuel-The Heap, near Crittalls Corner David said that our understanding was that the Environmental Agency had insufficient funds to finally clear the site. Don added that the Agency had under-estimated the cost of completing this work, and that it was now necessary to seek more funding. He undertook to report back on this to the Committee.

Water leaks in Parsonage Lane David updated the meeting on this continuing saga. Several more leaks had been found by Thames Water and the Road was to be Closed yet again from 10 July.

Adoption of the Minutes was proposed by Mario Farrugia and seconded by Martin Thomas.

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

Geoff welcomed those who had attended the meeting and referred them to his audited Statement of Accounts, which had been distributed. He added that our Association's income came from the over 90% of residents who were members – very few did not want to join it and pay our present annual subscription of £2 per household.

Geoff then recommended that our subscription should remain at £2 for 2017-2018. This was proposed by Trevor Jones, seconded by Geoff Wilkins, and agreed.

There being no questions from the meeting, acceptance of the Accounts was proposed by John Harrington and seconded by Chris Moon.

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

David said that it had again been a busy for the Association – especially for Jean who has been monitoring planning applications. It had also been a very busy year for our webmaster, Nik Carter, who runs our *NewsMail* service as we have been inundated with members' concerns, reports and information for publication through this service which had issued some 160 *NewsMails* over the year. David added that a big thank you was due to Nik for all the work he had done to keep members informed. Some 70% of our membership had signed up for this service – which was fantastic for instant communication.

**Planning matters** David reported that since the last AGM there had been 18 planning applications from the area covered by our Association. Most were for alterations and/or extensions where we submitted no views as we only do this where a number of members seek our help in opposing what is being proposed and/or the application has significant implications affecting local residents generally. There had been five applications where the Association strongly expressed its views, and these were covered in our AGM Notification. David then took the opportunity to update the meeting on two of the cases.

Brookworth Homes' proposal for the garden land behind Nos. 20-28 St James Way Very welcome was the Inspector's decision to dismiss the applicant's Appeal against Planning's refusal of planning permission. We have had no indication that any new proposal is being submitted to Planning; but we do have concern about the extent of the appeal dismissal report in that it opened the door for a possible new application on a reduced scale. Hopefully, it will not be seen as financially viable for developers to come up with a fresh scheme.

Private school at 48 Parsonage Lane Also very welcome was the Inspector's decision to dismiss this Appeal against Planning's refusal of planning permission – much to the relief of nearly all local residents. This was primarily that the site was an inappropriate location, with inadequate/safe highway network, lack of public transport and an over-reliance on private cars. We were concerned that the Inspector took some strange views regarding the National Planning Policy Framework and had incorrectly stated that Bexley's Education Department had supported the proposal. It had not, and this was then also confirmed by Don. We now await any further move from the applicant, perhaps for another change of use for the site from residential to something such as a Children's Farm – which would create a commercial site and set a dangerous precedent for similar sites and trigger the gradual destruction of North Cray's Green Belt.

Econ Construction's imminent application to create a larger recycling operation for building materials in old Maidstone Road Although this site is in Bromley, it is part of the Cray Valley Green Belt and there could be an adverse impact on North Cray people from additional and heavy vehicular traffic as well as noise and dust and even a possible second Waste4Fuel disaster. Jean is working closely with the Bromley-Bexley Liaison Group (comprising our Association and the Cray Valley West Residents Association) to co-ordinate our objection. On the subject of liaison with other like-minded groups, David added that we have built strong associations not only with Cray Valley West but also with the Coldblow Residents Association and the Bexley Civic Society (Jean and John Harrington serving on its Planning & Conservation Committee). All this helps us to take co-ordinated action where necessary to protect our environment.

## 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 the present Officers and Committee. He then invited our President, John Harrington, to put this to the meeting

John thanked everyone for coming to the AGM and supporting the Association in this way, which gave such encouragement to the Committee. The block re-election of the present Chairman, Officers and Committee was proposed by Ms Harrington and Samantha Thomas.

The newly-elected Committee for 2017-2018 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 all of the Committee, with special thanks to Jean for her hard work and vigilance in protecting our Green Belt.

## 6 CURRENT ISSUES

Turning to these, David said that the coming year would be full of Changes, taking the following in turn:-

**Bexley Growth Strategy** This public consultation document looks at Bexley's built and natural environment to identify what makes it such a special place – and it will lead to the framing of Bexley's Local Plan. The proposals focus on key areas, including Belvedere, Erith, Slade Green, Crayford, Welling – and, of course, Bexleyheath and Sidcup. Under these proposals, Sidcup will be made the focus for high quality leisure and cultural activities, supported by a vibrant high street and boutique hotels. Modest housing and commercial growth is planned – 400 homes and 1,000 jobs. Footscray is seen as providing an opportunity for expansion of the Thames Estuary Production Corridor – adding a further 1,000 jobs. Bexleyheath will remain the borough's strategic shopping and civic centre and the hub of the bus network – with over 1,500 new dwellings and 1,500 jobs. For the things we in North Cray care about so much, the aim is to value the natural environment to ensure that it remains an essential characteristic of the borough – and an improved

recreational, leisure, cultural and economic resource that enhances the quality of life of residents as well as providing habitat for a range of protected species. David added that similar work was taking place on a revised **London Plan**; and that the **Government's planning guidelines** (the National Planning Policy Framework) were also being reviewed this year. Currently, the latter provided protection for the Green Belt – but what might the future bring in the light of government pressure for more houses to be built?

David said that all this supports the argument being made by London's Green Belt Council (of which we are members) and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) that all the Green Belt surrounding London should be made a National Park.

He referred, however, to the previous day's national press headlines reporting “*Anger as councils approve plans for thousands of homes on the green belt*” and “*Debate of green belt land grab*”. following reports and analyses produced by the CPRE, a body we very much support as it works closely with the LGBC.

**Changes in Bexley's Planning department** David reported that at the end of March Mrs Susan Clark, the former Head of Development Control, had retired. She will be missed by our Association as she never failed to respond to our concerns. Honestly and quickly. We have heard that the new head of Planning, Robert Lancaster, will take office office soon. At this point, Don confirmed that Mr Lancaster would take up his appointment on 10 July and that the new name for his department would be Development Management.

**Ward change** Following on from what he had reported in Matters arising, David said that the change that would take place in under a year now is the replacement of the geographically large Cray Meadows Ward with a much smaller one, St Marys and St James, linking North Cray and part of Footscray with our near neighbour, Bexley Village. The new ward will have only two councillors, instead of the three at present. This means that the Association will lose the help and support of Cllr Don Massey who has given us unstinting support over the years. We will certainly miss him, but do wish him all the very best for the future.

So, lots of change ahead which will undoubtedly bring new challenges if we are to maintain past successes and protect North Cray from unwelcome or inappropriate development and any incursion into our precious Green Belt and Heritage land.

#### **Address by Cllr Don Massey:-**

Accepting David's invitation to say a few words to the meeting, Don stressed the importance of the **Growth Strategy** document, as little money was available. The aim was to get inward investment and more homes built, and more jobs. The proposals for new houses were mainly in the north of the borough, and none would be on Green Belt land. More financial resources were needed for Development Management, and for spreading the load; and he urged the Association to seek an early meeting with its new head. Turning to the recent dreadful events in London, Don stressed that these had put an incredible strain on everybody, some of our police officers helping out at the **Grenfell Tower** disaster etc. He was not aware of any cladding problems in Bexley; but more Fire Risk assessors were being employed, and this would take months of work. The pressure was hard on council staff and emergency services, and there had been much unfair and untrue reporting in the social media. Don then pointed to the many new developments at **Queen Marys Hospital**. **Bexley's Finances** were in good shape at the moment, and it was investing as much as it could into the Public Realm- but it was a difficult balancing act! Don concluded by saying that the

**Boundary change** was a welcome one, as it co-ordinated two similar areas, and then invited questions from the floor.

**Local broadband problems** Nik Carter sought clarification of what was being done here on the North Cray Road. Don explained that a council has to encourage investment, but could not do this direct. There had been some problems with BT. He further explained that it was the responsibility of utility companies to restore roads to their former state; but that in an emergency they could go ahead. There was a lot of tension between councils and utility companies!

**Coca-Cola building** A member asked whether planning permission had been given by Bromley or Bexley. Don replied that the site was in Bexley, and added that the planning application had followed the normal planning process. There had been no objections or complaints and so permission had been granted. Jacky Cook said that this highlighted the help given to Jean by Don, adding that her vigilance prevents even more loss to what we value.

## 7 OTHER BUSINESS

**Drug-taking on the Meadows** Eddie Chadwick reported his concern at seeing teenagers “ballooning” drugs there. David urged everyone to inform the Police – and to keep on reporting incidents to them.

**Summer Fair at Royal Park** Samantha Thomas asked if the Association could publicise this event. David said that he would pass the poster on to Nik for him to publish it in a *NewsMail*.

**Proposed social event** David said that there had been problems in arranging this for last year, as planned; but that we were now planning for one with an Audio Visual Presentation to be held either in the scout hall or the community centre in mid-September 2017. Full details would be issued in a *NewsMail* nearer the time.

In conclusion, David expressed the Association's thanks to–

- it's team of Volunteers who, between them, cover the collection of subs. and the delivery of the *Newsletter* and the *AGM Notification* to all members in North Cray. He added that one was still needed to cover Maidstone Road, and asked any one willing to take this on to contact Jean.

- Anne and Michael Kelsey for all their help with the refreshments and setting up the Church for tonight's AGM.

- and again to Don for all his help over the past year and for coming along tonight and answering members' questions..

He again thanked everyone for attending, and the meeting closed at 9.25pm with a round of applause.

