

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

Minutes of Meeting held on 20 June 2019 at 8pm in the Geoffrey Hall, Leafield Lane

The evening began with an informal gathering of 42 members before the formal start of the Meeting. Before it began, Geoff Waldmeyer, former Treasurer and Committee member, took the opportunity to say a few words about David Phillips, the prospective Chairman. Geoff outlined a little of David's background as founder of the Sidcup firm Craymanor Ltd, Chartered Architectural consultants and Chartered Building Company; the expert advice he had been giving the Association over the years as an ordinary member and his participation in the famous *Clipper Round the World Yacht Race*. This was greeted with applause.

### **1 APOLOGIES & WELCOME**

David thanked everyone for attending this 74th AGM of our Association and said that some members had been unable to join us because of an unavoidable clash of dates with a Summer Concert taking place at St James Church. Apologies had been received from John Harrington, Joan and Nik Carter, Anne and Michael Kelsey, Cllrs Alan Downing and Alex Sawyer, Jacky and David Cook, Muriel and Peter Simmons, Linda Skinner and Freda Morris. David then took the opportunity to introduce himself, saying that he had taken over the Chairmanship from David Cook on his resignation earlier in the year, and had lived in Parsonage Lane and been a member of the Association for 12 years. He said that he was totally committed to preserving the very special character of North Cray and its precious Green Belt, and that he and his wife visited the Meadows often with their dog – so he knew at first hand the issues raised by members and expressed that we are all very lucky to have this open space and the NCRA will do all it can to protect it.

### **2 MINUTES OF LAST AGM (27 June 2018)**

David said that these had been distributed to members by *NewsMail*, with a few copies being placed on seats this evening for those members without a PC. He then asked if there were any corrections. There being none, their adoption was proposed by Trevor Jones, seconded by Richard Moon and agreed.

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

David said that since the last AGM, there had been 20 planning applications affecting North Cray, all of which were carefully examined in case any were prejudicial to our green belt. Six had caused us concern:-

- a change of use application for a building at **Manor Freehold Farm** in upper Parsonage Lane. Happily, our objection to this being converted to a residential dwelling was accepted.
- the rebuilding of a bungalow in **St James Way** without planning permission. Disappointingly, retrospective permission was granted by the Planning Committee on the recommendation of the planning officer - despite the adverse affect on neighbours. David hoped our objection led to protective conditions to the neighbours being applied.
- a renewed application to build houses on **garden land** between St James Way and The Grove, with a new access road from St James Way. David confirmed this was one of many applications that have been made over the years. This development was seen by adjoining residents as detrimental to their privacy and the enjoyment of their gardens, and we were all worried about the risk to the 200-year Cedar tree on this site. To fight this, we resurrected our **St James Sub-committee**, and their strong objection will be considered at the Planning Committee meeting on 1 August. David and Jean Gammons will meet with the sub-committee to see what assistance we might give prior to the planning hearing.
- the demolition of a stable block at the **North Cray & Sidcup Riding School** in Parsonage Lane and its replacement by a dwelling. We were concerned that this would set a precedent for other equestrian businesses in the Green Belt, but were re-assured when the Planning Committee agreed to tie the new house to the business. Welcome, too, was the council's first-ever acknowledgement of what we have been saying for years: Parsonage Lane is a sub-standard road which is too narrow to support safe two-way vehicle movements, suffers from poor forward visibility and has no pavements. It added had added, too, that it would resist any proposals likely to lead to an increase in vehicles using this road or the highway leading on to the North Cray Road.

David said he was pleased and hoped that this enabled the owners of the North Cray & Sidcup Riding School to continue with running the school for many years to come.

We were especially concerned about an application to build 67 houses on Green Belt land at **No. 139 North Cray Road**. David said this was a typical example of creeping development and how a smaller approved scheme can lead to much bigger schemes once the principle of development is granted. Through the efforts of our Committee and our brilliant Volunteer Collectors, who leafleted every single road in North Cray, over 170 letters of Objection were submitted to Planning. This Local community objection against the development led to the Head of Development Control making an executive decision to refuse planning permission. David explained to the members the difference on how planning decisions are made at the council. This shows what can be achieved when members come together as a community in this way to protect our environment and open space. Soon after, however, the applicant submitted a new application, this time for six large houses with basements on the site, land that we know has been flooded in the past. We still await the decision on this one.

Other major concerns were unauthorised building and activities being carried out on two other Green Belt sites in North Cray. One was Stuarts Topsoil at **57 North Cray Road**, where a house had been built without planning permission, Protected trees felled and a concrete-crushing activity introduced. The latter was something operating well beyond what had been authorised by Planning and the Environmental Agency. David explained to

members what a concrete-crushing plant was and how it creates an unacceptable level of noise and dust badly affecting the neighbourhood. The other was **Woollett Hall Farm** in Water Lane (more often known as Kelsey's Farm), where the land had been purchased by a used-car dealer. Here, several new buildings were erected and the farmland used for car storage – all without planning permission. David gave a description of the work that has so far been undertaken by the owners to demonstrate what has been done here, so detrimental to this very special part of North Cray, one adjoining the Village Conservation Area and part of the setting of Loring Hall, a Grade 11 Listed Building. Several meetings were held during the year by our **Stuarts Sub-committee**, who also addressed the worrying and unacceptable situation at Kelsey Farm. Their determined efforts led to Enforcement Notices being issued to both sites. All have been appealed against – but, due to a backlog at the Planning Inspectorate, it may be months before the final decision is given. David said this demonstrates that when communities come together they can and do affect decisions made by the council.

One planning application that we did welcome was that from the **Bexley Archaeological Group**, who wished to place two sheds and three tents on land in Leafield Land in order for them to continue with their work of giving their youngest members work experience and in training new archaeologists. Happily, planning permission was given.

David said that it is clear from the many emails sent to The Committee over the year that the one issue that continues to cause most concern to our members is anti-social behaviour on the **Meadows** - things such as dogs out of control, especially near the Lake and its wildlife; illegal fishing and quad bikes. These problems have existed for very many years; but earlier this year a dedicated group of our members who visit the Meadows daily with their dogs, got together to form a Meadows Sub-committee. They are determined to do what they can to resolve these long-standing issues, and to this end will work with our sister organisation: the Friends of Footscray Meadows. David added that he attended a sub-committee meeting last week and was particularly impressed with their enthusiasm and effort to improve the Meadows for all its users. David also added that as the chair of our Meadows Sub-committee, Muriel Simmons, had been unable to attend this evening because of a bad chest infection, he would be asking Raine Miller, one of the members of this **Meadows Action Group**, to say a few words later about what it was doing.

David said that the past year had closed with the Association submitting its views to the planning team who are working on **Bexley's New Local Plan**. David explained what the Local Plan was to members and why it was important for the committee and members to contribute to the consultation process, given its impact on what the council will consider acceptable in planning terms both in the normal street scene and Green Belt. Here, we had liaised with the Bexley Civic Society. The final Draft document will be put out for further consultation in the autumn. David encouraged all members to contribute with their comments to the Autumn consultation.

In closing this part of the evening's Agenda, David said that he would like to take this opportunity of thanking some of the people who have worked so hard for the well-being of our Association and its aims:

Our former Chairman, David Cook, who with his wife Jacky as editor of our *Newsletter*, served us well for some 10 years.

Our two councillors, Alan Downing and Alex Sawyer, who have been unstinting in their help with all the issues facing North Cray. They had been unable to join us this evening because of other commitments, but they had sent a message to us which he would read out later.

Our Volunteer Collectors, without whom the Association would be unable to function!

Reverend Ren Harding, who had made it possible for us to meet in St James Church in previous years.

Nicola Coppen of the 1<sup>st</sup> North Cray Scouts, who had made it possible for us to meet here this evening.

Christine Moon who organised this evening's refreshments, and Irene and Geoff Waldmeyer who served our guests.

And to The Committee – in particular:-

Nik Carter, our Webmaster, who was unable to join us this evening as he was unwell but who has worked so hard to ensure that we are compliant with the new Data Protection rules - and who rarely lets a day pass without sending out a *NewsMail* for the information or entertainment of our members.

Again, Christine Moon, recently co-opted to the Committee to fill the long-vacant post of Membership Secretary. She has worked tirelessly to assist Nik and the Treasurer with the daunting task of updating our record lists of members.

Jean Gammons, our Secretary, who works so hard throughout the year for our Association and its members. And who had given him an enormous amount of assistance since becoming Chairman. He recognised it was Jean who was the glue that held the NCRA together. Since becoming Chairman, he was astonished to learn how much Jean actually did for the Association and she deserved a particularly big thankyou.

And, last but not least, Chris Moon, our Treasurer, who has so carefully safeguarded our funds.

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

Chris said that copies of his Report had been placed on seats this evening (see appendix A) and he then went through this, pointing out that the total Income for the past year had been £845.27 and that the total Expenditure had been £1,314.13. Of this, Printing costs had been £665; but would be less in future as a result of looking into different ways of doing things in

future. The current Funds held by the Association totalled £3,577.05, which left us in a sound position. Adoption of his Report was proposed by Tony Morris, seconded by Mario Farrugia and agreed.

## **5 ELECTION OF OF OFFICERS, COMMITTEE AND AUDITORS.**

David informed the meeting that no nominations had been received, but all Officers and members of the Executive Committee had expressed their willingness to serve again for another year. Their Election was proposed by Malcolm Barr-Hamilton, seconded by Trevor Jones and agreed. The following being the elected Officers, Committee Members and Auditors for 2019-2020:-

John Harrington: President and Committee Member  
David Phillips: Chairman  
Jean Gammons: Hon Secretary  
Chris Moon: Hon. Treasurer  
Nik Carter: Webmaster  
Christine Moon: Membership Secretary  
Muriel Simmons: Meadows Action Group  
Tony Morris:  
David Jones

Michael Heath: Examiner of Accounts  
Tony Morris: Second Examiner of Accounts

## **6 75<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

David reminded members that this year was the Association's 75th Birthday, and said that the Committee thought that this should be celebrated in some way.

David Jones (known as DJ) had kindly undertaken to take this on and David invited DJ to say a few words to the meeting. DJ said that arranging a social event to bring members together was a long outstanding task. He had been investigating various options and the Scouts had kindly offered us the Geoffrey Hall free of charge for such an event. However, there was only a finite amount of money available in the Association's funds. His idea was to hold a Barbecue at the Scout Hall, selling tickets for a nominal sum, say £10 a head to cover part of the cost. Two quotes had been obtained, based on 100 people attending. DJ then invited the meeting to give their ideas, as doing this was important for a community event such as this. Ingrid Courtney said she had organised a social event for the Association some years ago and this had been very successful and had done much to bring members

together, which she felt was so very important. They had organised a Quiz, which had been a great success; and Raine Miller said that she would be happy to organise a Face Painting activity too. Malcolm Barr-Hamilton said that it was very important to try to set some dates now. DJ said that he thought the event should be a Family one from about 2pm on a Saturday or Sunday, and the meeting agreed the following target dates : the weekend of 24/25 August or the weekend of 7/8 September. DJ said that it was very important to get members' feedback soon.

## 7 RULES AND CONSTITUTION

Chris said that the Association's Rules & Constitution had last been reviewed in 2003, and were now out-of-date in several areas. He had been working with a small Sub-committee of Committee members, and their proposals were given on the reverse of the Statement of Accounts that had been distributed (see appendix B). Chris ran through several of the proposed changes. These included changing the start date for collecting subscriptions to 1 April and making the Webmaster (who carried responsibility for keeping us GDPR compliant and also ran our important *NewsMail* service) an Officer. Chris added that his recommendation was that the subscription rate should remain at £2 for 2019-2020 and for 2020-2021. Adoption of his recommendations was proposed by Tony Morris, seconded by Malcolm Barr-Hamilton and agreed.

## 8 CURRENT ISSUES

David first turned to the on-going problems with **Enforcement**, saying that the continuing lack of timely and vigorous action by Development Control had given the Association considerable concern last year, when it became increasingly clear that the unauthorised building and activities being carried out at 57 North Cray Road and at Kelsey's Farm in Water Lane were being allowed to continue, unchallenged. Ingrid Courtney added that the council's Enforcement officers had been blatantly ignoring for a very long time what was happening on these two sites. David agreed that this was sending out a dangerous message to our local businesses, and others, encouraging them to believe that they could ignore the planning process and do as they liked. Happily, the pressure brought to bear on the Head of Development Control (and on the Environment Agency in the case of Stuarts' concrete crushing activity) by our Sub-committee resulted – eventually – in the issuing of Enforcement Notices. David said that the Association did, of course, continue to recognise that Bexley has an insufficient number of Enforcement officers, and faces many problems throughout the borough. And that this situation is made worse by the current inability of the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol to clear its backlog. David asked the meeting to accept his assurance that the Committee, with the help of its Sub-committee, was doing all that it could in a difficult situation, Ingrid adding that everyone coming together made a real difference. DJ said, too, that it was very important that people remain vigilant, and that they should

report anything that they see. Again, David reinforced that when communities came together they can and do make a difference.

David then turned to the problem of **Anti-social behaviour on Footscray Meadows**, an issue that has been with us for very many years, and said again that our new Meadows Action Group was working hard to resolve this. He then invited Raine Miller to say a few words about what her team is doing to try to address this (see appendix C). Raine closed her address by saying that the Group would welcome any others who would like to join it, so that we can keep the Meadows as we would all like it to be.

## **9 ADDRESS BY CLLR. ALAN DOWNING**

David said that although neither Alan Downing nor Alex Sawyer had been unable able to attend our AGM, they had kindly sent us a message, which he then read to the meeting (see appendix D).

## **10 ADDRESS BY THE RT HON JAMES BROKESHIRE MP**

A warm welcome to James was given by David and the meeting. James thanked the Association for its invitation and also expressed a huge thankyou for its 75 years of work on behalf of the North Cray community, and for being so vigilant. He commended it for having a membership of 414 households and, through everyone pulling together, what they were doing to protect the very special place that was North Cray. He added that he did a lot of walking in its meadows and woods, and was very concerned about the need to protect the Green Belt that was so important for the environment, and the interests of communities by preventing urban sprawl; and he asked the Association to continue to keep him updated and for its members to continue to be vigilant.

James then mentioned the very important documents that were the National Planning Policy Framework, the London Plan and Bexley's own Local Plan. All these were very important to ensure appropriate planning and he urged members to participate in consultation on the latter, as their involvement was very important.

James then turned to the efforts being made in respect of other local issues: replacing the closed post offices in Bexley Village and Sidcup; improving train services, measures to deal with serious crime, which has such a profound effect on neighbourhoods; and the further extension of services at Queen Marys Hospital. James closed with another huge thankyou to

the Association, for its partnership and teamwork. He said again that North Cray was a very Special Place, one that mattered to him and which should not be taken for granted.

**11 492 BUS SERVICE** *The member who had asked for this to be added to the Agenda did not come forward.*

## **12 1<sup>st</sup> NORTH CRAY SCOUTS**

David thanked Nicola Coppen for all her help in arranging for us to meet in the Scout Hall and invited her to say a few words to the meeting. Nicola thanked everyone for coming to the Scouts' home, a community building built some years ago, saying that it was a pleasure to have everyone here this evening. "Community" is essential, it is what creates a place and friends, supporting and helping each other. She said that the Scouts were proud to be part of the North Cray Residents Association, and it was good, too, for their young people to know that other people come to their home, people looking out for one another. The Scouts now had over 20 people, and they had held some amazing events, supported by James Brokenshire, including their special Memorial event. She said that they were all proud to be part of the North Cray Community.

## **13 OTHER BUSINESS**

Members expressed concern about trees overhanging the North Cray Road and the grass along its left hand side that had become a metre high, dangerously blocking the view of motorists. The Public Footpath running alongside St James Church was also badly overgrown, and a Public Footpath running from upper Parsonage Lane had been illegally blocked for two years. David promised to pursue these matters with the council, and asked these members to give him their contact details after the meeting.

David then invited DJ to say a few words about his involvement with the Royal British Legion. DJ said that he had recently been appointed Chairman of its new North Cray & District Branch - "BR 4025" - something that had come into being thanks to the efforts of Bob Chapman and Nicola Coppen of the 1<sup>st</sup> North Cray Scouts. He was very interested in military history, his father being a former serviceman; and said that the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D Day was very important in educating young people. DJ said that he would love more people to join this new Branch, and that, with the working relationship between the RBL, NCRA and the Scouts, we could achieve a lot together.

There being no Other Business, David closed the meeting by thanking everyone again for coming and asking everyone to continue to bring matters of concern to the attention of The Committee.

*The meeting closed at 9.35pm*

