

Whinfield Residents Association

(inc. The Friends of Beech Wood)

www.whinfieldresidents.co.uk

Minutes of the meeting of 16th May 2018 at Oban Court

Attendees: David Milner (Chair), Alan Hutchinson (Secretary), Judith Murray (Treasurer), Graham Foster (Vice-chair), Simon Bainbridge, Ralph Bradley, Jim Chalk, Linda Davison, James Eddy, Jean Foster, Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier, Jeanette French, David Lyonette, Alan Macnab, Chris McEwan, Carol Milner, Pat Newton, Barbara Reynolds, David Reynolds, Allannah Robinson, Joan Thompson, John Thompson, Peter Voss

Apologies: Anne Rudkin, Cllr Tom Nutt, Cllr Helen Crumby, Peter Plant, Andy Keir, Ruby Keir, Barrie Newton.

Approval of the Minutes: It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 21/03/2018 be signed by the Chair as a correct record, proposed by Carol Milner and seconded by Peter Voss.

Matters arising from the Minutes

Damaged grassy areas: It is unclear if repairs have been carried out after hedge cutting but the growing season has overtaken events and it is less obvious. The Chair wondered what is happening re. damaged verges outside Oban Court and Sparrowhall Drive, but having spoken to Cllr Helen Crumby is aware that she is investigating this. Chris McEwan suggested that verge damage is town-wide and goes back a long way. He is investigating plastic stakes as are used in North Yorkshire and will feed back the outcome of his investigations. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier commented that Cllr Tom Nutt had once mentioned that Ron Hogg had said it was ok to park on the paths and verges and he had contacted Tom re. this but had received no reply. The Chair said that Anna Willey was looking at whether verge parking is an anti-social behaviour issue. More discussion ensued about Sparrowhall Drive. Allannah Robinson stated that it was easier for DBC to take no action and that they should use 'no parking on the grass' signs.

DOVES affiliation: John Thompson had sought clarification from DOVES, but WRA has already agreed to obtain our own public liability insurance for this year.

Asda trolleys: The Chair noted that the Asda collection truck was in Killin Road recently. Judith Murray had not had the opportunity to have a recent meeting with Rachel at Asda, who had requested gatekeeper technology but Head Office had sent more trolleys instead. Chris McEwan has a meeting coming up at Asda and will raise the matter again. Our councillors had also raised the issue with Jenny Chapman MP. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier said he had not received a recent reply from Jenny Chapman after initial correspondence some time ago. The Chair suggested that members should report abandoned trolleys to Asda every time they see them.

Yellow Lines, Oban Court: Cllr Tom Nutt reports that these are to be completed by the end of this month. Allannah Robinson queried whether this would also apply to Sparrowhall Drive.

Chair's report

David Milner commented as follows:

- He apologised for the lack of opportunity for members to ask questions at the last meeting because of lack of time, and hoped that this would be rectified this time.
- There had been an excellent litter pick, organised by Judith Murray.
- He gave special thanks to Alan Macnab for his efforts re. Springfield Park and Green Lane and to the Secretary for his work on data protection.

Secretary's report

Alan Hutchinson reported that:

- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is about to come into force and he had produced a WRA Data Protection Policy document which had been sent to all members with a request for their permission for their details to be used to contact them about WRA business.
- Several reminders had been sent to those who did not respond, and unless permission is received it seems that the data of about 20 members will have to be deleted by 25th May 2018.
- There had also been one resignation and 2 new members giving a confirmed membership of 74 to date. Reminders were put on Facebook, too. Chris McEwan suggested putting posters in Asda, but Judith Murray explained that this had not been allowed in the past.
- The website has been brought up to date with articles about the litter pick, bulb planting on Whinbush Way, the forthcoming Coffee Morning, and routine maintenance.

Treasurer's Report

Judith Murray reported that there was little change to finances. We paid £85 for Public Liability Insurance and the balance is currently £1223.

Fundraising

Judith Murray reported that:

- WRA is taking part in a car boot sale at Middleton-St-George and volunteers are needed.
- Local businesses are to be asked to fund more bulbs for planting around the ward.
- The Chair asked members to support the coffee morning and cake stall on Saturday 14th July 2018, at 10-12 in Oban Court. Baking contributions would be welcome. There will be a raffle and Oban Court are also to publicise.

Beech Wood

Judith Murray had talked to Pippa Smaling and DBC will cultivate the ground and WRA will plant the seeds. Cllr Helen Crumbie reports that DBC have begun preparatory work on the meadows outside of Beech Wood and that our councillors had advertised for a Co-ordinator for the Beech Wood sub-committee via their Facebook page. The Chair commented that the Friends of Beech Wood do not appear to be active and the Secretary queried whether they still exist as a group.

Springfield Park

Alan Macnab summarised recent progress. The Asset of Community Value had been registered and an application made to register it as a designated green space. The adult goalposts have recently been broken again and there has been no organised football for some time. He suggested that DBC could remove the posts during the summer and that a regular team is needed. The play equipment is old but the play area is well used. Something for older young people is needed. Having talked to Chris McEwan it seems that a road is not going across the park now, but may go up the side. Re. Green Lane, there is no registered owner and when the Church Commissioners gave up their ownership in 2001 Theakstons placed a caution at the land registry to be notified of any changes in the area. If DBC maintain it then they should take it over. Graham Foster explained that it is a bridleway, maintained to avoid horses being hurt. Ralph Bradley thought circumstances like this to be underhand since local people do not know about it. Alan Macnab explained that there is a concern about tree removal and encroachment onto the bridleway by any new road on the north side. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier said that most landowners have to pay for maintenance.

Litter

Judith Murray reported that 14 bags of litter had been picked up from Whinbush Way, Sparrowhall Drive and Springfield Park. The next litter pick is to be in July.

Local Plan

Cllr Tom Nutt had submitted a written report:

- No change on Muscar House farm. It will be part of the wider Skerningham Garden Village Master Plan Framework proposals to be consulted upon during the summer. Probably will not come forward without clarification on link road route.
- No further progress on Elm Tree Farm. No application or pre-application proposals submitted to date.
- Skerningham Garden Village is still in the draft plan to be presented to a Special Scrutiny on 31st May and then to Cabinet on 5th June. It will then be open to public consultation over the summer with the aim of reporting back to cabinet in December 18 or January 19.

The Chair explained that WRA had been an information hub to date but this was a chance for members to say what they think about Skerningham Garden Village and the Local Plan and perhaps decide if WRA should take a stance. He opened up comments from the floor. Jean Foster wondered whether people understand the Local Plan and how to get involved. Alan Macnab said that if it goes ahead, it will be done in phases and there is concern re. the estate road coming out onto Whinfield Road because of gridlock and its very poor condition, since it is sinking. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier said that 4000 houses is an aspiration for DBC, not a need, to gain income, and is not sustainable. He suggested asking Cllr Chris McEwan to come back to give people the opportunity to ask questions. Chris McEwan replied that the Local Plan is a process over 20 years and a draft will be consulted on soon. He was willing to go anywhere at anytime to talk to people and groups, with David Hand. Allannah Robinson said that if people can agree on a stance they could have a bigger voice.

Alan Hutchinson suggested it was too late to delay a decision until later and that WRA should take a position on the Plan, since once it was in place it opened the door to large-scale development in the countryside around Skerningham. Chris McEwan asked how WRA could decide on something that was not yet published but Judith Murray pointed out that the principles of the Plan were already well known and that WRA already had an established policy to oppose developments like Muscar House Farm. David Lyonette suggested that there was no chance of holding the Plan back, that the numbers are governed from outside Darlington and a decision could be made later after inviting DBC to another meeting. Ralph Bradley challenged the figures of nearly 500 houses per year instead of 172 and a 1500 increase in population instead of the more usual 800 per year. Chris McEwan said that the ONS figures are flawed and dwellings needed are about 7500 over 20 years as households are becoming smaller, but he welcomed a challenge to the figures. Graham Foster suggested that WRA could have impact as an association but that residents carry more weight if they comment individually using valid reasons, so they should register to be kept informed and WRA should tell people what is happening. Graham noted that the One Darlington article refers to plots of land rather than sites, which downplays the scale of development. Alan Macnab reminded the meeting that submissions have to be based on sound planning criteria, as given on the DBC website. Alan Hutchinson pointed to Cllr Chris McEwan's Northern Echo article in which he said that the Local Plan is very useful to say where developments cannot take place, and that this should be applied to the Skerningham Countryside Park area. Judith Murray said that people need guidance about the grounds for objection.

Jean Foster said that people need to be able to put their points over even if they have not had experience of formalities. Graham Foster pointed out that the Local Plan covers infrastructure, schools, transport and employment, not just development, with themes to objections. Chris McEwan accepted that if a resident submits a comment then DBC will have to back up their case. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier asked if there is a housing shortage in Darlington and Chris McEwan responded that there is 'churn' in the housing market but did not give a definitive yes or no reply.

The Chair urged individual members to make their own submissions but asked members what they wanted the Association to do about possibly taking a stance and what that view should be. David Lyonette raised a point of order that an Inspector could query how WRA could take a view before the Draft Plan is published, but it was pointed out that the main issues to be included in the Plan are already in the public domain via consultations by the developers in conjunction with DBC and other publicity. The Secretary then proposed the following form of words be put to the meeting:

“Whinfield Residents Association believes that the proposed Skerningham Garden Village and other related housing developments should not be included in the new Darlington Local Plan, and the Association will submit objections to any proposals for developments which would be detrimental to the Ward”.

Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier seconded and after further discussion the motion was put to the meeting for a decision. Chris McEwan raised a point of order that there appeared to be non-residents present who were able to vote, but the Chair dismissed this since the Constitution allows WRA membership to anyone with an interest in the ward. Chris McEwan and the Chair stated their intention to abstain, and on a show of hands there were no objections to the motion and it was overwhelmingly carried.

Northern Bypass

Judith Murray explained that she had gone back to the TVCA report about funding for the new road and had found a clear link to the Housing Infrastructure Fund.

Cllr Tom Nutt had sent a written report:

- The Northern Bypass is still at the outline Business Case Stage.
- The Local Plan will continue to have 3 scenarios, Route A (the preferred route), Route B or no link road at all.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 18th July 2018, at 7pm in Oban Court.

Any Other Business

Cllr Helen Crumbie had sent a written report about the other **work of our councillors:**

- A group of volunteers is being recruited for “Neighbourhood Community Speed Watch” and any residents interested in becoming part of this should contact them so they can provide the relevant information.
- WRA information regarding meetings and activities are available on the councillors’ Facebook page and have been included in the Ward Newsletter.
- Other forthcoming ward activities and updates will be published regularly on the councillors’ Facebook page.

Allannah Robinson mentioned that **garden thieves** have been operating in Killin Road.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.