

Whinfield Residents Association

(inc. The Friends of Beech Wood)

www.whinfieldresidents.co.uk

Minutes of the meeting of 21st March 2018 at Oban Court

Attendees: David Milner (Chair), Alan Hutchinson (Secretary), Judith Murray (Treasurer), Simon Bainbridge, Ralph Bradley, Eric Davison, Linda Davison, Cllr Helen Crumbie, James Eddy, Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier, Dix Binks, Val Binks, Graham Foster, Jean Foster, Peter McIntyre, Carol Milner, Barrie Newton, Pat Newton, Tyler Nixon, Allannah Robinson, Joan Thompson, John Thompson, Peter Voss, Jackie Brichard, Dave Clark, Cllr Chris McEwan, David Hand (DBC).

Apologies: Alan Macnab, Frederick Greenhow, Cllr Tom Nutt.

Approval of the Minutes: It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 17/01/2018 be signed by the Chair as a correct record, proposed by James Eddy and seconded by Ralph Bradley.

Matters arising from the Minutes

Damaged grassy areas: No repairs have yet been carried out by DBC. Cllr Crumbie stated that this was in hand and she would pursue it.

DBC consulting with WRA: Further email sent to Dave Winstanley but reply again received from John Anderson who was unaware of B&SPG's Facebook post about meetings with developers and planners but insisting that only Cllr Chris McEwan had met with them. Cllr McEwan stated that any group can make representations, and if engagement is not happening he will pursue this.

DOVES affiliation: A response received via John Thompson suggests that WRA would have to adopt the DOVES constitution and Health & Safety policies, which were grey areas, to qualify for their public liability insurance. The Chair proposed the Committee's recommendation that WRA continues with its own public liability insurance for this year, and this was agreed.

Springfield Park: Notification had been received via Alan Macnab that our application for designation as an Asset of Community Value had been successful.

Asda trolleys: Judith Murray had had ongoing correspondence with Asda Head Office re. our concerns about trolley dumping in the area and had talked to the local manager, with the emphasis on preventative measures. Asda may look at 'gatekeeper' technology to prevent removal. Ward councillors are awaiting feedback from Jenny Chapman MP and Asda and advice is for residents to complain in-store about trolleys they see dumped. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier observed that Asda employees are themselves taking trolleys away.

Seat in Springfield Park: Cllr Crumbie explained that it was hoped to source a wrought iron seat to be refurbished. The gap in the hedge is still a problem which she will pursue.

Wildflower seeds: Judith Murray is awaiting a reply from Pippa Smaling re. DBC doing preparatory work before WRA carries out planting of meadows outside of Beech Wood itself in the same location as before. A Co-ordinator is still needed for the Beech Wood Sub-Committee.

Yellow lines, Oban Court: Cllr Crumbie explained that the DBC Highways Manager has this in hand and that ongoing problems with parking at Whinfield School are being monitored.

Chair's report

David Milner mentioned that because of an ongoing problem with the Secretary's hand a voice recording of proceedings to support this was being made. He reported that DBC had invited nominations for Local Green Space designations to go in the Local Plan, and the Committee had devoted a lot of time and effort to produce applications.

Secretary's report

Alan Hutchinson reported that:

- The Committee had submitted WRA claims for **Local Green Space Designation** to DBC as follows: Springfield Park (Alan Macnab), Green Lane (Alan Macnab), Beech Wood (David Milner), Muscar House Farm (Judith Murray). After consulting and co-operating with Barmpton & Skerningham Preservation Group, it had been agreed that both groups should make applications in their own right for Skerningham Countryside Park (Alan Hutchinson). After further discussion with the WRA Committee, Alan Hutchinson had also made a claim for the public open space next to Sparrowhall Drive.
- Because some Committee members had difficulties getting to meetings on the first Wednesday of the month, it had been agreed to hold future Committee meetings on the Tuesday instead, and Oban Court has been informed and agreed. General meetings for members are unchanged on the Wednesday dates already published.
- The issue of many streetlights on Whinbush Way being off for several weeks has been taken up with DBC who will fix it soon.

Treasurer's Report

Judith Murray reported that:

- In the absence of fundraising, balances still stood at £1308.
- The 700 daffodil bulbs planted on Whinbush Way so far are starting to show through and funding is being sought from local businesses with community funds to complete the job.

Local Plan & Northern Bypass – Q&A with Cllr. Chris McEwan

David Milner introduced Cllr Chris McEwan, cabinet member responsible for delivery of the Darlington Local Plan, then put the following prepared questions to him in turn:

“(1) Why the huge variance in housing requirements between DBC (492) and Government (177)?”

“(2) One of the indicators of housing need is rising house prices. In Darlington house prices have in real terms decreased over the last 10 years with many households facing negative equity suggesting a surplus over need. Why have Darlington Borough Council not included this when estimating housing need?”

David Hand (DBC planner) distributed a paper presentation and spoke at length to it [copy filed with minutes]. Key points: this is the draft stage of the Local Plan; there will be formal consultation in the summer and a second chance before adoption; residents need to be registered at <https://forms.darlington.gov.uk/forms/darlingtongovuk/planning-policy-public-consultation/form-link/> to be kept informed; the Plan needs an objective assessment of housing need for 20 years on a 5 year supply basis; the government approach sets the baseline, is regarded as a minimum, with an adjustment for affordability; local authorities will have differing housing needs and some may plan for more for economic growth; the change in the methodology caused problems for some; with no census there are flaws in the ONS data which plans for a declining economy e.g. 2500 fewer people of working age predicted and only a 60 person increase in population in 5 years; DBC chose to use data from a consultancy firm, ORS, commissioned to produce a housing need strategy; past housing completions only twice fell below 177 and Stockton is similar; the methodology includes adjustment for older people not going into institutions (33), NHS registrations, school place registrations, migration, market signals, economic growth trends; DBC hopes to produce 7000 full time equivalent jobs, producing new households; the plan will prevent random development and will be reviewed every 5 years. Apparently a factor was included in the assessment re. negative equity and surplus over need.

Cllr McEwan concluded that there are justifications for the 492 figure and the ONS data has flaws which he has written to them about. This is a plan in case of future need and 10,000 houses will not necessarily be built. Even with a static population more dwellings of various types are needed because people are living longer and a factor is built in for economic growth with a range of opportunities. The Brexit and TVCA effects are unknowns.

“(3) Why is DBC continuing with its consideration of including the Skerningham Garden Village in its Local Plan when it is quite clear this will have an adverse impact on the Whinfield Area? The current road infrastructure in and around Whinfield is incapable of taking any more through traffic.”

Cllr McEwan replied that there needs to be zones for dwellings and employment, and highway modelling will cope with traffic problems. Current modelling indicates that the roads can cope. Planning must have infrastructure built in. Pinch points are not currently included. Allannah Robinson commented that by its very nature the A1150 cannot be improved and the plan should address this.

“(4) If proper consultation is to mean anything, and if the residents of Darlington most affected by the proposed development at Skerningham make it clear that they do not want it to go ahead, will DBC still include it in the Local Plan and proceed with it regardless?”

Cllr McEwan replied that the plan needs to look at the Town as a whole and that there will be a method to make representations. Development needs have to be looked at and where to develop. Formal representations can be made at the draft plan stage.

“(5) How can DBC justify contemplating the granting of permission for a private developer to hand over publicly accessible community woodland to a private golf club so as to benefit financially by building houses on the original golf course?”

Cllr McEwan replied that this is a private transaction and it is not for DBC to prevent it. Rights of way will be protected and enhanced. If the woodland had to be removed, DBC would seek to replace it by planting elsewhere. The Secretary asked where this could possibly be, and the reply was that DBC had not yet worked through the master planning for that area.

“(8) What, if any, are the planning changes that are already approved, or submitted awaiting approval, in respect to the A1150 in the Springfield park area?”

Cllr McEwan replied that he did not understand the question but the former Springfield School site had been approved (80 dwellings) and South Burtree land/Berrymead Farm was pending. Any planning application will have a traffic impact assessment.

“(9) Why has the Council included Springfield Park in its Draft Local Plan? You will be aware that the people of the area are solidly opposed to the developer's proposals for a road to go across the park and do not want an alternative park to be provided. Will you please support the residents in their efforts to keep Springfield Park as park and oppose the road across the park?”

Cllr McEwan's response was: “Yes”.

“(10) In respect to air quality on Whinfield Road, what are the latest council figures on air quality at peak times. If those figures are not available, how quickly can an air quality check be done, at peak time, to make the numbers available?”

Cllr McEwan stated that there is no air quality data for peak times and no plans to monitor air quality on Whinfield Road other than by diffusion tube, which collects all the time and does not differentiate between times. Results of 29.19 ug/m³, not bias-adjusted, were obtained in January 2018 which compare with the national average of 40 ug/m³, indicating good compliance. Previous monitoring on the inner ring road and Cockerton Bridge in 2015 showed compliance with national objectives and Whinfield Road is expected to also meet the standards. An air quality impact assessment will be needed with any planning application. A member commented that there are only 10 diffusion tubes around the town.

“(6) Route ‘A’ is the preferred route in the request for funding submission for the bypass, but to meet government requirements two routes have to be forwarded. What percentage of the total applications are ‘non-preferred routes’ selected and approved, rather than the ‘preferred route’, in the application process?”

“(7) At present the council position is that the new bypass and the Skertingham village projects are not coupled or linked. There is a concern that in order to secure the necessary funding for one project would require the coupling of the other project to make them viable. i.e. you can’t have one without the other. What is the council position on this? Will the WRA and the people in the area affected be advised if this position changes?”

Cllr McEwan dealt with both of these questions together, but not as an expert. The local plan is not linked to the bypass. The road stands alone as a strategic TVCA road network project. The preferred route is normally taken forward in most cases unless unforeseen technical circumstances prevent this. Judith Murray asked that if the road and development are not linked why are TVCA seeking funding for the road from the Housing Infrastructure Fund? Cllr McEwan stated that this fund has nothing to do with the bypass. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier confirmed that he had seen the papers and suggested that Route A was always the preferred route. Cllr McEwan stated that with the development of Teesport, Route A will be needed. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier asked again, to clarify for the meeting, if Route A had always been the preferred option and both Cllr McEwan and David Hand stated that it had. Roger then commented that it would appear then that our MP supported a campaign where the preferred route was never in doubt and had already been chosen. Roger said that he had researched local house prices from 2008 with local estate agents which indicated that areas of the town such as Whinfield and many others are suffering negative equity, but David Hand refuted this. When pressed further about this David Hand admitted there was negative equity in the town and they had just used an average from sites such as Zoopla.

In conclusion David Hand stated that there will be events to raise issues with planning officers and Cllr McEwan said he was willing to come back at any time to discuss concerns. The Chair explained that members can comment on the meeting via the WRA email address.

Litter

Judith Murray had arranged a litter pick for Sunday 8th April 2018, meeting at Asda at 10am. Areas to be cleared may be Springfield Park/Green Lane and Whinbush Way. The Secretary will notify members.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 16th May 2018, at 7pm in Oban Court.

The meeting closed at 8.26 pm

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