

Whinfield Residents Association

(inc. The Friends of Beech Wood)

www.whinfieldresidents.co.uk

Minutes of the meeting of 26th September 2018 at Oban Court

Attendees: David Milner (Chair), Alan Hutchinson (Secretary), Graham Foster (Vice-chair), Judith Murray (Treasurer) [part-time], Rosemary Adams [part-time], John Atkinson, Dave Clark, Simon Bainbridge, Linda Davison, James Eddy, Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier, Jean Foster, Andy Keir, Ruby Keir, Janine Lee, Alan Macnab, Carol Milner, Pat Newton, Barbara Reynolds, David Reynolds, Joan Thompson, John Thompson, Peter Voss, Andrew Ward, Kath Keogan.

Apologies: Allannah Robinson, Fred Greenhow, Anne Rudkin, Cllr Tom Nutt, Cllr Helen Crumbie, Barrie Newton.

The ward councillors wished to remind members that they can be contacted by telephone, e-mail and at Ward Surgeries on the first Saturday of every month from 10am until 11am outside Asda Foyer.

Approval of the Minutes: It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 18/07/2018 be signed by the Chair as a correct record, proposed by Carol Milner and seconded by James Eddy.

Matters arising from the Minutes

Asda trolleys: Judith Murray had sent communications to Asda HQ supporting the request for gatekeeper technology. She had spoken with Rachel at Asda who had said that while this was not financially viable the effect on the community had carried a lot of weight. The application for funding was successful and locks are being installed on all trolleys. WRA has been at the forefront of this campaign and Judith thanked members and residents for their support. The meeting congratulated Judith and everyone involved in the usual way for her exemplary efforts.

Cllr Tom Nutt's written report stated that most trolleys are now fitted with wheel locks which will stop them being taken beyond perimeter sensors, and once locked can only be re-opened by key held by Asda. Those that are recovered by van are sent for locks to be fitted, so eventually all trolleys will be secured on site. In the past Asda HQ have been asked many times to adopt this system but they always said it was unworkable. The local manager Rachel said she really pushed hard for this as at times there were not enough trolleys on site, and those having to use baskets were unable to carry all they came for which was not in their or the store's interest.

Damage to grassy areas: Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier had sent to the Secretary a copy of his correspondence with Cllr Tom Nutt about pavement parking. The Chair reported that Chris MacEwan had informed him that plastic stakes had been totally unsuccessful when trialed.

Treasurer's Report

Judith Murray reported on unchanged finances of £1271. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier was thanked for nominating the WRA bulb planting for the Asda Green Token Scheme, the winner will receive £500, and there are 2 other prizes of £200. Banks had been approached for funding from their community fund but a scheme of £2000 was too much for a WRA application, suggesting that this is the reason there have been few applications from smaller groups. Andrew Ward suggested groups getting together for a joint application but there are not enough Whinfield groups. A car boot sale will probably be held sometime. The Secretary noted that Asda had received Facebook publicity for their community involvement, even though they have proved to be unhelpful to WRA in the past, particularly re. our fundraising and publicity. Joan Thompson reported that The Friends of Friars Field had received a spade and secateurs. Judith will speak with Louise again in the hope of promoting cooperation.

Chair's report

David Milner commented as follows:

- Most of the recent WRA time and effort had gone into Elm Tree Farm and the Local Plan.
- There had been a very successful litter pick with an encouraging turnout.
- The Friends of Beech Wood are incorporated into the WRA but there has been no representation or apparent activity by the FoBW for some time. Everything re. Beech Wood has become integrated into WRA work instead and we were responsible for having it designated as a Local Green Space in the Local Plan. David Milner asked members what they thought about ending the incorporation of the FoBW and discussion ensued. Judith Murray said that there might be advantages to retaining FoBW because of community factors and seeking funding. Jean Foster stated that perhaps the FoBW should be asked their view. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier said that it was unfortunate that Springfield Park is not also included in the WRA name. The Secretary wondered whether the FoBW still exist, and despite the setting up of a Beech Wood sub-committee at a time when FoBW were wanting to leave WRA they have not been involved at all. It was agreed that the matter be placed on the agenda of the next meeting for a decision and the Secretary pointed out that if unincorporation went ahead this would be subject to appropriate Constitutional amendments at the December AGM.

Secretary's report

Alan Hutchinson reported that:

- After an influx connected to the Local Plan consultation we now have 90 members.
- The website has been kept up to date, including a new section about Elm Tree Farm.
- GoDaddy has been contacted about the cost of renewal of 3-year web hosting from February 2019, and the price has gone up considerably. It was noted that the Secretary would be paying 50% of the total charges for the hosting of his own personal website. Further investigation is ongoing and the meeting agreed in principle to these arrangements and to the Secretary pursuing it.
- An exchange of correspondence had taken place with Bev Hutchinson about the Local Plan and planning issues generally.
- Andy Keir had resigned from the WRA Committee to pursue his political ambitions, but he intends to remain as an active WRA member. A thankyou note has been sent re. his service.
- Nominations are required for the posts of Officers and Committee ahead of the December AGM. Nomination forms are available on the "Meetings" page of the WRA website. Some other Committee members are not seeking re-election and new people are needed to fill posts.
- 'One Darlington' magazine had printed an article ironically extolling the virtues of Skerningham Countryside Park, at a time when DBC are proposing the loss of at least part of it.
- Members have been informed about 'bat walks'.

Elm Tree Farm

The Secretary reported as follows: The day after the last meeting it was discovered that Bellway is proposing a development for Elm Tree Farm and Sparrowhall Drive and they held a presentation event at Whinfield School on the same day that the Local Plan consultation closed. At the request of the Committee, the Secretary had written to David Hand of DBC to ask whether or not Elm Tree Farm is part of the Skerningham Strategic Allocation and his response stated that it is not, that it was included in error and that this would be corrected in the next phase of the Plan. The Secretary had then written again to David Hand to ask how such an error could possibly have occurred, when all of the documentation showed it to be included in the Allocation and that this could not just be "*a slip of the draughtsman's pen*". He also pointed out that some comments by respondents to the Draft Local Plan would have been invalidated since they would have believed that what they had to say covered all of the Skerningham Allocation, including Elm Tree Farm.

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Elm Tree Farm (....continued)

The Secretary had also insisted that the WRA application for Local Green Space Designation for the Sparrowhall Drive public open space should be re-assessed without delay, because it was rejected on the basis that the land was covered by the Masterplan in the Draft Local Plan. A copy of the “corrected” Skerningham map in the Plan was also requested so that we can consider the effect on neighbouring land. A further reply from David Hand stated that he would respond in more detail before the next stage of the Plan and would endeavour to do so after 17th September on his return to work, but this has not happened to date.

Cllr Tom Nutt’s written report stated that no application has been submitted as yet, but one is anticipated at any time and he will keep WRA informed, and that nothing is happening at present at Muscar House Farm.

General discussion ensued, including the following:

Graham Foster - concerned that information in the Draft Local Plan is incorrect; DBC wanted people involved in the consultation but this calls into question whether the Skerningham part should be re-run; ‘One Darlington’ magazine says a report on comments received and DBC’s response will be presented to Cabinet and Council later this year; if the comments are incorrect how can they proceed to the next phase? He had written to the Northern Echo editor but there was no response and it was not published; Graham suggested that letters from many individuals may be printed and that DBC’s public information needs to be correct. John Atkinson - Skerningham is a large area and people have been denied the opportunity to comment on Elm Tree Farm, which is very serious. The Secretary - David Hand’s response is needed before we can decide how to proceed. The Chair - the timing and what we do next depends on this; the Echo may take notice of lots of letters. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier - we should be contacting DBC as well as the Echo. David Clark - DBC have to respond to Freedom of Information requests. Andy Keir - if we could put something together on the key points it might help. John Atkinson - it is clear that either the Local Plan is wrong or the statements by David Hand are wrong; the Town deserves better. The Secretary - inspectors have accepted in the past that local authorities are large organisations and they can make mistakes, so long as they put them right. The Chair - once we have the missing link we can make some comment to the Council. Pat Newton - concerned about how long to wait for a response. The Secretary - had pursued lack of response earlier and will do so again. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier - David Hand had suggested that he had a lot of experience when he came to the WRA meeting. John Atkinson - the last thing we should do is to wait for David Hand and we should write to the Northern Echo to flush out a response. The Chair - we need to be professional, transparent and credible but we can make a formal complaint if we get no response. Andy Keir – even without a response we should be able to urge our members to write to the Northern Echo. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier - we have no control over what the Echo prints. The Secretary - DBC may say that the consultation was non-statutory and that they will put things right during the next phase. Graham Foster - all local authorities are consulting on their local plans. Discussion ensued re. whether or not this consultation was statutory. Officers and members of DBC have stated to WRA that this one was not. The Chair said that individuals in the Ward are free to comment in their own right. He put to the meeting that the Secretary appropriately pursues a reply from David Hand, and this was overwhelmingly agreed.

Local Plan

As agreed, the Secretary had submitted the WRA response to the Local Plan consultation and all of the comments had been accepted by DBC as meeting the criteria for validity. According to a member of Barmpton & Skerningham Preservation Group it appears that 92 comments had been sent in about Skerningham, 90 objecting, 1 neutral, and 1 in favour by the developer’s agent. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier thought it was about 160 comments in the end. The Chair thanked everyone who had contributed to the consultation.

Northern Bypass

Cllr Tom Nutt's written report stated that there is no news yet but TVCA and the Mayor are still strongly backing Route A and are pushing Transport For North to submit it to the Department of Transport.

Beech Wood

Judith Murray submitted a written report:

It has been a difficult year for farmers and gardeners with a sharp decrease in yield and some plants simply not thriving and this has impacted on our own wildflower meadow which has not flourished as successfully as expected this summer because of the dry weather. It was hoped that the seeds purchased in 2017 and not used would be of sufficient quality to use this year but some had deteriorated which also impacted on the wildflower meadow, but some did come through alongside the seeds purchased this year. Pippa Smaling has advised that the adverse weather has also impacted on other wildflower meadows across the Borough although they have also changed the seed mix this year to include more annuals, which is different to the mix previously used and the one originally advised to purchase. A meeting is to take place with Pippa to talk about the wood and she has said that the Council will cut the meadow sometime in late October and they will continue to support us in the preparation of the wildflower meadow again next year, so all we need to do is sow the seeds. Also agreed with Pippa is the planting of a variety of small trees in Beech Wood which will hopefully take place in the coming months and the work will be undertaken by the Council.

Springfield Park

Alan Macnab had re-submitted our application to make Green Lane an Asset Of Community Value by supplying DBC with information from the Secretary about our Constitution and extracts from the minutes confirming the size of our membership and a decision made by members to proceed, as agreed at the last meeting. The developer apparently thinks that they own it and he has asked them for their intentions. Alan explained that Theakston have a Skerningham website which still shows a road through the middle of Springfield Park rather than to the east and he has sought clarification, but there was no reply. A reminder will be sent. Football has returned to the Park and the grass has been cut.

Litter

Judith Murray submitted a written report stating that It is hoped to organise another litter pick in November, weather permitting, and this will be advertised on the website and around the ward. The Chair explained that even though we pay public liability insurance and do the work WRA is receiving little recognition for picking up litter. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier said that litter fines will be issued by a private company from October. John Atkinson explained that the litter bags were not collected by DBC from Springfield Park as intended, but the bins were emptied, and this had to be reported. Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier said that proper protocol was followed regarding the reporting of the bags to DBC the day after the litter pick but we have to be realistic that rubbish will be collected as soon as possible by Street Scene; black bags around the ward also need collecting. John Thompson said that Street Scene have apparently stated that there will be prosecutions if orange bags are left out.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 21st November 2018, at 7pm in Oban Court.

Any Other Business

Graham Foster commented on a **metal container** unaccountably in place for weeks at Drummond Close. John Atkinson had supplied for the website a **DBC customer services email address** which is a 'one-stop shop' to report a variety of problems, giving DBC no excuse for addressing issues if they are told about them. He also mentioned that a **container lorry** had parked in Sparrowhall Drive while the driver went into Asda for his shopping, and this had been reported to the police who warned the driver. They also provided a **police 'one-stop shop' email address** which will be put on the website. Pat Newton had taken pictures of **parking on double yellow lines** on the corner of Sparrowhall Drive.

The meeting closed at 8.18 pm.

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