

WHINFIELD RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

(inc. The Friends of Beech Wood)

whinfieldresidents@gmail.com

Minutes of the meeting of 18th September 2019 at Oban Court

Attendees: Judith Murray (Acting Secretary), Ruby Keir (Acting Treasurer), Jean Foster (Fundraiser), Ralph Bradley, Linda Davison, Alan Macnab, Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier, Mike Haw, Amanda McEwan, Chris Jackson, John Atkinson, James Eddy, Fred Greenhow, Liz Knight, Dave Clark, David Phillips, Barbara Reynolds, David Reynolds, Alan Hutchinson, Cllr Andy Keir, Cllr Jamie Bartch, Simon Bainbridge, Andrew Ward, Anne Rudkin (part), Cllr Jon Clarke (visitor), Rose McEwan (visitor), George Chan (visitor), Rachel Hird PCSO (visitor), Daniel Kempf PCSO (visitor)

Apologies: Chris Upton, Tom Watson, John Thompson, Chris McEwan, Jo-Anne Karim

Chair of Meeting: It was proposed that Ralph Bradley would act as chair for the meeting. All approved.

Approval of the Minutes: Prior to the minutes being put forward for approval the acting secretary explained that she was aware that there were some anomalies with the minutes and she would be correcting these for the record.

The chair asked the meeting for approval of the minutes. Alan Hutchinson raised a point of order with regards to what he called 'factual' errors and other anomalies with the minutes and they should therefore not be passed for approval. Mr Hutchinson said that he would discuss these errors with the acting secretary outside of the meeting at a later date as they would take up too much time in the meeting to discuss.

The chair invited Mr Hutchinson to inform the floor of these potential errors as the meeting was there to pass the minutes. Mr Hutchinson declined to do so.

Mr Hutchinson was then invited by the chair to state what these factual errors were. He said one omission was the passing of the minutes of the Special General Meeting. This was agreed by the acting secretary to be included. Mr Hutchinson then declined to offer any more examples of factual errors, categorically stating he would not discuss them at the meeting.

John Atkinson thanked Mr Hutchinson for finding the potential errors and stated that it was important that errors are raised and once more invited him to share with the membership his findings. Again Mr Hutchinson refused the invitation.

Mr Atkinson then proposed a motion that Mr Hutchinson share with the meeting the anomalies he had found so that they could be dealt with in an open manner and we could move on. The motion was seconded by Amanda McEwan. The motion was narrowly defeated.

Mr Hutchinson was invited to send his suggested amendments to the acting secretary using the WRA email address and not to her personal email address, as when he resigned as secretary he had agreed to delete all WRA related email addresses unless given permission to use them. The acting secretary had not given him permission to use her personal email address for any reason yet he has continued to do so. He agreed to send the amendments to the WRA email address.

It was resolved to roll over the issue to the next meeting and the minutes were not passed.

Matters Arising: Due to the minutes not being approved there were no matters arising.

Acting Secretary's Report

Since our last meeting the committee have been kept busy, most of which will be discussed under the appropriate Agenda headings.

We have again been approached by Bellway regarding the proposed Elm Tree Farm development and this will be discussed as part of the Local Plan.

We also would like to make the community more aware of the existence of the WRA and what we do and so we plan to design a leaflet and do a leaflet drop to promote the WRA.

Treasurer Report

The car boot sale raised £65.00 so the balance currently stands at £1,239.40. Insurance was not taken out as this was still to be explored with DOVES.

Fundraising Officer Report

The sale of the 35 poppies raised £110.70. Special thanks were extended to Mrs Atkinson for the knitting skills and the much appreciated help to supply much needed poppies to boost the stock numbers.

The funds raised will be split with £50 to the WRA and £60.70 to the Royal British Legion.

Thanks were also extended to Mrs Jackson who very kindly donated hand made soaps, face and hand creams to the car boot sale which raised £8.

The fundraising officer asked if anybody had any ideas on fundraising for the WRA to kindly let her know.

The acting secretary then mentioned that Friends of Fryers field had received a National Lottery Grant of £9,550 to install new swings, football posts, a ride on lawnmower and a storage container. The acting secretary explained that this could be something we could look into to obtain funding for Springfield Park and Beech Wood. Contact had been made with John Thompson of the Fryers Field group who had kindly sent a link. The committee will now be looking into this.

The acting secretary also explained that she had made contact with James Eaglesham at Banks group regarding funding for projects in Beech Wood/Springfield Park such as bulbs, an entrance sign, benches etc. She is currently awaiting a response from James to see if an application could be made to the fund.

Barmpton Lane Allotment Association was thanked for the loan of a table for the car boot sale.

Following on from the last meeting contact had been made with Lisa Locke with regards to exploring funding for play equipment in Springfield Park and a meeting is to be arranged shortly.

Insurance

The acting secretary contacted the secretary of DOVES, Ms. Weston with regards to public liability insurance to cover WRA activities, in particular whether we can join DOVES and do we need to adopt their constitution. She explained that DOVES were meeting that evening and will be discussing insurance so we should know the outcome of that fairly soon. John Thompson had also emailed the acting secretary regarding DOVES saying that he didn't think it would be a problem.

In the meantime public liability insurance will not be taken out until a response from DOVES is obtained.

Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier queried how we could proceed with insurance for litter picks when the insurance companies require details of all those who attend litter picks including their name, address and contact details. As our current GDPR policy stands we would be unable to retain records of addresses so it would be impossible to comply with the insurance. The acting secretary said that this would need to be looked into going forward before we could resume the litter picks.

Local Plan

The acting secretary explained that there had been no further developments and as of yet no dates for the statutory representation period.

Skerningham Strategic Development

The chair explained that as suggested at the last meeting the acting secretary wrote to the minister for Housing, Communities & Local Government to oppose the Garden Village status and question why it was granted.

The key points from the response from the minister were:

- There is an urgent need for housing in this country and they consider new garden communities play an important part in addressing this need.
- The announcement of Government support does not pre-judge the planning process.
- Councils can only adopt a plan that is sound, conforms to national policy, be supported by evidence and takes into account the views of the local people.
- It is for local authorities to interpret and apply the law and planning policy.

The chair said that they did not answer any of the questions put to them. Dave Clark and Alan MacNab said that they had also received similar responses when writing to query the garden village status for Skerningham.

The acting secretary said that she had also sent Jenny Chapman MP a copy of the letter but had not yet had a response. The letter will therefore be sent again.

Alan MacNab said that the Darlington CPRE (Council for the Protection of Rural England) were completely in the dark as to how Skerningham had been granted garden village status and were taking this issue up with the national office of the CPRE. Mr MacNab agreed to keep the WRA informed of the outcomes.

Mr Atkinson asked what the difference was between the Skerningham Masterplan and its now designation as a Garden Village. The answer is about sustainability and access to government funding.

Elm Tree Farm

WRA have again been approached by Bellway wanting to engage with us.

David Clark raised the point that Great Crested Newts had been suspected at Elm Tree Farm and Green Lane and further investigation was to take place.

Mr Fitzpatrick-Odahamier said that at the last meeting with Bellway, the developer had stated they were intending to put in parking bays along Sparrowhall Drive if the development was to go ahead.

Members agreed that the acting secretary should invite Bellway along to our next meeting to discuss their plans.

Northern Link Road

Tees Valley Combined Authority are currently consulting on the Tees Valley Transport Strategy, which includes the Darlington Northern Link Road (DNLR). The consultation closes November 20th 2019.

A couple of WRA committee members attended a consultation event held in Stockton with the key points emerging being:

- DNLR is currently at a standstill and awaits progression of the Darlington Local Plan.

- Funding of the DNLR depends upon the approval of the Skerningham Garden Village as this opens up more funding streams from different government departments which would be necessary for the road to proceed. The Housing Infrastructure fund was one funding source mentioned.
- If the Skerningham Garden Village does not proceed then it is highly unlikely that the road will either.

It would appear that there is indeed a link between the road and the housing and this is not what members have been told in the past by both DBC council officers and previous councillors!

Motion re: Whinfield Residents Association reaffirms its position to continue to strongly oppose a new road of any kind across Springfield Park and/or Skerningham

Proposer – Dave Clark

Secunder-Helen McIntyre

Dave Clark put forward a motion seconded by Helen

Mr Clark spoke in favour of his motion outlining the proposals for a potential access road through Springfield Park and how this would result in the loss of valuable parkland and local amenity.

The acting secretary explained that the WRA has stated in its objection to the Local Plan that we are opposed to any road across Springfield Park and the Skerningham development and that this position had not changed. She questioned then why a vote was necessary.

The chair said that a vote had been called for so one must take place. The motion to oppose a road through Springfield Park was passed. Mr Fitzpatrick-Odahamier questioned what this vote had actually achieved given that the WRA stance had not changed?

Beech Wood & Springfield Park

The acting secretary gave an update on Beech Wood with regards to the wildflower meadow and other work undertaken carried out. A significant amount of work had been undertaken on the wildflower meadow to keep it weeded and enhance its visual effect and numerous positive comments had been received. Strimming had also taken place in particular to remove very thick undergrowth around 2 young beech trees to protect and help precipitate growth.

A meeting with Pippa Smaling, Parks & Countryside officer at Darlington Borough Council had taken place in July to discuss future project both in Beech Wood and Springfield Park. The WRA is also to ask Pippa for advice on gaining an updated report on tree inspections.

The WRA had received a copy of an email sent to Darlington Borough Council, at the request of Chris Jackson, regarding anti-social behaviour in the wood and asking for 2 tree stumps to be removed. The acting secretary said she had also received an email from another member asking for anti-social behaviour in Beech Wood to be discussed at the meeting. Discussion then took place around the issues of anti-social behaviour both in Beech Wood and Springfield Park and Cllr Keir said he would raise these issues both at the PACT meeting and with our PCSO's.

Mr Atkinson then gave an update on Springfield Park and his correspondence with Dean Scott from Darlington Borough Council.

The incident of anti-social behaviour on 6th September had been reported to the Council's Enforcement team. The damaged bucket swing is awaiting parts for repair but should be operational again shortly. The issue regarding the wetpour surfacing is still to be resolved as the costs involved are high, as a stop gap measure the edges are to be filled with soil and seed to eliminate the gap.

Groundwork Northeast are seeking funding opportunities to obtain money to replace the park equipment that has been vandalised but so far no funding has been obtained. It was then discussed whether the National Lottery Grant may be able to cover this.

The issue of what young people can do in the ward was also discussed and whether grant funding could be obtained to help fund projects for young people. The acting treasurer knows of a lady who was involved with young people's projects so agreed to speak to her for advice.

Website

The website needs to be designed and built from scratch as the previous website was deleted without the committee having the opportunity to make copies of the information stored on it. Good progress is being made and the committee hope to be in a position to launch the new website before the next meeting.

Mr Hutchinson asked who was designing the website and whether the association would bare any costs for this. Mr Hutchinson was informed that it was being developed by QAK Designs and at no cost to the association.

Mr Clark asked about developing a facebook page for the WRA and the committee said that this was something they were looking into developing.

Community Speed Watch

Unfortunately the Police Traffic Officers were unable to attend the meeting but Cllr Keir explained what the scheme was and that he was going to undertake some training which could then be passed on to WRA volunteers.

PACT Meetings

PCSO's Daniel Kemp and Rachel Hird had attended the meeting but had to leave early due to an incident. Cllr Keir discussed the importance of the PACT meetings and reporting any incidents to the police so a log could be kept of all incidents in the area. He said that the PACT meeting was aware of various incidents across the borough which they thought were inter-linked and that it might be a good idea for our local PCSO's to attend WRA meetings when possible to keep us informed. Both himself and Cllr Bartch will also attend PACT meeting and report back to the WRA if necessary. PACT meetings are open to members to attend should they wish to do so and details of the meetings can be found on the police website.

Motion to minute management committee meetings

Proposer – Alan Hutchinson
Seconder-Fred Greenhow

Mr Hutchinson spoke in favour of his motion, seconded by Fred Greenhow, and claimed; given the state of flux with the new inexperienced committee and that the WRA was in a difficult situation, taking minutes of the committee meeting would be helpful. He suggested he personally could help to ensure they met the standard he thought they should meet.

The acting secretary informed members that minutes of management meetings were not currently taken and Anne Rudkin said that it has never been practice in the past to do so. Mr Fitzpatrick-Odahamier then asked the acting secretary if such a suggestion had ever been put forward before and the acting secretary explained that it had but the then secretary (Mr Hutchinson) had dismissed the idea as he thought it was unnecessary. Mrs Rudkin confirmed this.

The acting secretary went on to say that although the committee feel strongly that they should be open and transparent, matters discussed at committee meetings are basically the same as those discussed in general

meetings and that they were concerned that it would be duplication and information overload to send out 2 sets of minutes which would be virtually identical.

Mr Greenhow said that he was a member of the Royal British Legion who sent out both committee meeting minutes and general meeting minutes to their members. They needn't be onerous and a single page would suffice. Mr Fitzpatrick-Odahamier said that with all due respect the WRA were not the Royal British Legion and were in fact operating as per Darlington Borough Council and other Residents Association's guidelines. He suggested through the Chair that he was sure these organisations would be only too happy to reaffirm and validate this with Mr Hutchinson if he decided to contact them to seek reassurance about this point. Mr Hutchinson shook his head.

Mr Fitzpatrick-Odahamier also felt that imposing even more procedures may make it harder for the association to attract new committee members going forward, especially when we know that historically the association has always struggled in this regard. He also felt it was disappointing that Mr Hutchinson appeared to be criticising the experience of the current committee considering that it was he who point blankly refused to review the policy & procedures regarding membership even when it was brought to his attention that they were flawed and excluded those residents who were unable to provide an email address from joining the association.

The acting secretary then also questioned the duplication of what in fact would be the agenda sent out twice.

Mr Atkinson disagreed with Mr Hutchinson's view that the committee were in disarray stating that they were now on an even keel. He then asked Mr Hutchinson to explain to the membership his claim that taking minutes of the committee meeting would be helpful. Mr Hutchinson declined to elaborate.

A vote then ensued by which the motion was defeated. It was resolved that no minutes will be taken of the committee meetings.

Any Other Business

Mike Haw asked about road safety on Barmpton Lane with particular reference to cars pulling out from the allotments and Blairs. Vision is restricted due to parked cars along this area of road, and with there already being an accident in this vicinity some months ago, Mr Haw asked Cllr's Keir and Bartch whether double yellow lines could be looked at to help improve visibility pulling out of these areas. Cllr's Keir & Bartch agreed to look into this.

Mr Greenhow raised the issue of the speed limit on Barmpton Lane into the village and Cllr Keir said that this had already been brought to his attention by the acting secretary and that he was looking into it. Mr Clark pointed out that this road was earmarked as an access road to the Skertingham Garden Village development.

The Chair asked that anyone wishing to contact the WRA did so through its dedicated email address of whinfieldresidents@gmail.com.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 20th November 2019, 7pm at Oban Court.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm