

## **WHINFIELD RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION**

**(inc. The Friends of Beech Wood)**

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### **Minutes of the meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019 at Oban Court**

**Attendees:** Judith Murray (Acting Secretary), Ruby Keir (Acting Treasurer), Jean Foster (Fundraiser), Linda Davison, Alan Macnab, Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier, Mike Haw, Amanda McEwan, Chris Jackson, John Atkinson, James Eddy, Barbara Reynolds, David Reynolds, Cllr Andy Keir, Cllr Jamie Bartch, Andrew Ward, Anne Rudkin, Chris Upton, Rosemary Adams, Tim Ellis, Pat Newton, Tracy Atkinson, Steve Jackson, Gwylfa Rees, Brian Roberts (visitor), Mary Chow (visitor), Charlie Dunn (visitor), Frances Nicholson (visitor) (28).

**Apologies:** Ralph Bradley, Tom Watson, John Thompson, Kath Keogan, Chris McEwan, David Clark, Simon Bainbridge, Kim Bainbridge.

#### **Chair of Meeting:**

It was proposed that Amanda McEwan would act as Chair for the meeting. All approved.

#### **Approval of the Minutes:**

The minor amendments suggested by Alan Hutchinson and sent via email to the Acting Secretary have mostly been incorporated into the minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019. The Chair asked for approval of these minutes. The minutes were agreed as a correct record, proposed by Mike Haw, seconded by Jim Eddy.

The Chair then asked for approval of the minutes of 18<sup>th</sup> September 2019. They were agreed as correct, proposed by John Atkinson and seconded by Roger Fitzpatrick-Odahamier.

#### **Matters Arising:**

There were no matters arising from either of the minutes which were not on the Agenda.

#### **Acting Secretary's Report**

Further to our last meeting in September we were asked by members to invite Bellway along to our meeting to discuss the Elm Tree Development. Bellway have accepted this invitation and Francis Nicholson and Charlie Dunn are here tonight to discuss the proposed development.

Unfortunately, due to our working very hard on other issues such as the website and funding we have not yet been able to do the planned leaflet drop to promote the WRA, but we hope to do this in the near future.

#### **Acting Treasurer's Report**

The sale of poppies raised a total of £50.00 for the WRA with £60.70 being donated to the Royal British Legion. The balance currently stands at £1,289.40. We have applied to join DOVES and if successful we will look into how we can arrange public liability insurance through them.

#### **Fundraising Officer Report**

As the Treasurer has mentioned the poppy sale raised a grand total of £110.70 with £60.70 being donated to the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal. More ideas from members regarding fundraising ideas would be much appreciated.

An application has been submitted to Banks for an entrance sign to Beech Wood and a seat for Springfield Park. The decision for this application will be made some time in December.

The Acting Secretary also reported that she had received the details from John Thompson at Fryer's Field regarding the National Lottery Grant so we will be looking to see if this is something we can apply for going forward. The committee would like at some stage to submit an application to this fund for play equipment.

Dean Scott from Darlington Borough Council has also been looking into funding for play equipment in Springfield Park and has applied for Pocket Park funding – we will keep you updated on the outcome of this.

### **Elm Tree – Bellway**

The Acting Chair introduced Frances Nicholson and Charlie Dunn from Bellway and passed the meeting over to them to discuss the Elm Tree Farm development (aka Land North of Sparrow Hall Drive).

Ms Nicholson updated the meeting with regards to the new proposal from Bellway to increase the number of dwellings from 150 to 165. This is due to a re-configuration of dwellings with a reduction in the number of 4 bedroomed houses and an increase in the number of 3 bedroomed houses. Ms Nicholson also showed the meeting the original and new revised plans and layout for the proposed development. John Atkinson asked the chair if he could ask a question of clarity regarding the plans that Bellway had brought. Ms Nicholson referred to the maps stating that one map showed the plan submitted in October 2018, the original planning application, and the other the amended plan submitted November 2019 – she annotated the maps to distinguish them.

Anne Rudkin asked why, despite there now being capacity for extra housing, there were no bungalows being built? Some discussion then took place around the fact that it is well documented that Darlington have an ageing population and the development need is for housing to suit this – not more 3 and 4 bedroomed houses. Bellway responded that bungalows were less profitable to build.

Mr Fitzpatrick-Odahamier then questioned why it seemed possible for Bellway to build bungalows in new developments in Hartlepool, but it was not possible here? Bellway responded by saying that some Local Authorities have policies and requirements regarding bungalows in their local planning policy. However Darlington, unlike Hartlepool, do not therefore there is no requirement to build bungalows. If there is no requirement then generally developers will not build them as they are less profitable. Darlington's local planning policy would need to change to stipulate this requirement in order for developers to build bungalows. Mr Fitzpatrick-Odahamier responded by saying that in that case we weren't really building for the future and Mr Atkinson said that it was advocating 'elderly cleansing' for Darlington's ageing population.

Mrs Rudkin also questioned Bellway's sales record in Stockton. Bellway responded by saying that the demand for 4 bedroomed properties in Stockton had fallen and they were harder to sell, hence the reason why they have changed the mix for the proposed Elm Tree farm development.

Mr Atkinson questioned the number of documents submitted by Bellway on Darlington Borough Council's planning portal and the time given to members to read them all prior to this meeting. There were numerous documents and it was not possible to read and digest them all prior to this evening. Mr Atkinson asked when these documents were submitted by Bellway and Ms Nicholson responded by saying that they were submitted to Darlington Borough Council about 3 weeks earlier so she wasn't sure when they were uploaded to the planning portal. Mr Atkinson also pointed out that the website stated the last consultation was 20<sup>th</sup> November which was today and referred to this meeting. Bellway replied that it was just a coincidence of timing.

Ms Nicholson then moved on to the footpath diversion and said that it would be more attractive and Bellway would like to give residents the opportunity to suggest ideas for the open spaces on the site. She stated that the open spaces on the site would be sold to a management company and any ideas would need to be easily maintained.

Steve Jackson then asked if the trees along a specified path of the development would be removed and Bellway replied they would be. Mr Jackson responded by saying that the removal of these trees would severely impact on the wildlife corridor from the council owned open space. Bellway claimed that residents who currently live on the estate which would be adjacent to the proposed development had complained about the tree roots damaging the foundations, however, Mr Jackson said that he lived in one of those properties and that was certainly not the case. Mr Jackson said that removing the trees and replacing them with grass was unacceptable. Ms Nicholson stated that some trees would be replaced with saplings although not necessarily in the same areas.

Mr Atkinson then went on to say that the council owned green space and public footpath was a valued and much used amenity by existing residents who would like to keep it that way. He then asked Bellway why they were proposing to build on this open space and Bellway said that the council were willing to sell the land to facilitate development. Later Mr Atkinson asked how and when Bellway found out that the council wanted to sell the land but both Ms Nicholson and Mr Dunn claimed that he did not know as this was prior to them joining the company.

Mr Atkinson also queried why the green strip on the western boundary had been widened in the amended plans. After clarification and consideration of where exactly this area lay Bellway responded by saying that in the adjoining field Great Crested Newts had been found and therefore, legally, a buffer needed to be created in order for planning permission to be granted.

Mrs Rudkin then asked about access to the development and whether it would be via Sparrow Hall Drive. If so this would result in some serious traffic implications. Bellway responded by saying that Sparrow Hall Drive was the access route to the proposed development and mitigation work would be needed to help negate the traffic implications.

Mr Fitzpatrick- Odahamier then asked a question about visitor parking on the development and Bellway responded by saying that no provision had been made for visitor parking as this was not required by Darlington Borough Council.

Bellway were then asked what they could offer our area and a suggestion was made that perhaps Bellway could contribute towards improving the play equipment in Springfield Park. Tracy Atkinson also suggested a community centre as we are the one area in Darlington without such a facility.

Ms Nicholson responded by saying that Bellway would need to be careful about exactly what kind of contribution they could make for our area as this could be construed to be 'influential' to the planning approval. Mr Fitzpatrick-Odahamier responded by saying that Bellway had already agreed to building parking bays on Sparrow Hall Drive in order for their application to be approved, and one could argue that this was also 'influential' to the planning approval – what was the difference?

Mr Fitzparick-Odahamier asked if Bellway would therefore make a commitment to a contribution. Mr Dunn said that Bellway would indeed look into what they could contribute to the area be it improvements to park equipment or something else, it was certainly something Bellway would consider going forward.

The discussion around the proposed development then concluded and the committee and members thanked Ms Nicholson and Mr Dunn for attending the meeting.

The Acting Secretary informed members that a copy of the planning application could be found at [www.darlington.gov.uk/msp](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/msp) searching by application number or the address land North of Sparrow Hall Drive, Whinfield Road, Darlington. The planning application reference is 18/00988/FUL.

Further details on issues members may wish to comment on will be available on the website shortly.

### **Local Plan**

Councillor Keir was asked for an update on the Local Plan, he responded by saying that at the moment nothing was moving on the Local Plan.

### **Skerningham Garden Village**

Further to the letter we wrote to Jenny Chapman MP we received an invitation to discuss our concerns with her at her local office on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2019.

Ms Chapman told us that a transport assessment regarding Skerningham had recently been concluded and members had been briefed on the outcome but that this information was confidential and not to be shared with the general public.

The committee are obviously very disappointed with this decision and have written to the Leader of the Council, Heather Scott, to ask why this information is confidential as we see no grounds for it to be.

We have also asked for her to share this information with us, the electorate sooner rather than later, given the devastating effect this could particularly have on our community. We await her response.

Ms Chapman said that she was against the Skerningham Garden Village Development.

Alan MacNab shared with the meeting the questions that the CPRE had raised with Darlington Borough Council in relation to Skerningham's classification as a Garden Village. He reported that the CPRE were still awaiting a response from the Council. Mr MacNab also said that there is a risk that the longer the Local Plan is delayed the more developers with planning applications already submitted can appeal to the Planning Inspector to approve their developments in the absence of a Local Plan.

### **Northern Link Road**

During our meeting with Ms Chapman she told us that the bid for funding that went in recently had been turned down and the next time that funding could be applied for would be 2025.

WRA have contacted TVCA with regards to this and they say that they are still in talks with various government departments with regards to the funding and a lot of it will depend upon the Skerningham Garden Village development.

### **GDPR Policy**

The committee are currently working on changing the GDPR policy to ensure that nobody is excluded from joining the WRA. It is apparent from our existing policy that this is the case and will remain so until our policy is amended accordingly. The existing policy is also causing issues with regards to collecting information for insurance purposes on litter picks etc and contact numbers on the website so needs to be amended to address this.

We have also had to produce a Policy Notice in order to set up a Facebook page. This has been completed and will be reviewed by the committee before Facebook goes live.

### **Beech Wood & Springfield Park**

Continuation of the bulb planting in both Beech Wood and Whinbush Way is underway. Darlington Borough Council have again kindly donated approx. 3,000 bulbs towards this project with the WRA purchasing approx 1500 daffodil bulbs and a kind contribution of approximately 500 tulip/daffodils & crocus bulbs from a member. All being well come spring, Whinfield will again be awash with colour which will compliment our existing bulb programme.

Mr Atkinson gave an update with regards to Springfield Park and the play area. Dean Scott from Darlington Borough Council had been in contact with Mr Atkinson to say that the damaged swings should be operational again shortly and the gaps in the wet pour edging had temporarily been filled with sand to

eliminate trip hazards. This is a short-term measure and Mr Scott is working with other local authorities to identify a long-term solution to the shrinkage issue.

Mr Atkinson also went on to say that the problems regarding anti-social behaviour still remain.

Councillor Keir said that he will continue to work with PACT and our local PCSO's in relation to anti-social behaviour in the ward and again asked members to report any such incidences to the police. Councillor Keir also said that he had been in contact with Paul Branch from Darlington Borough Council's CCTV team and that if members see any anti-social behaviour in Springfield Park the CCTV room can be contacted on 01325 405999 or 01325 406112 and alerted so the camera can be focused on the incident.

### **Website**

The website is now up and running!

The website address is [whinfieldresidents.co.uk](http://whinfieldresidents.co.uk)

We thank our members for their patience with this, it was a massive undertaking as we were left in a position where we had to start from scratch. The Acting Secretary also thanked the committee members who were instrumental in getting the website up and running and those with the knowledge of Whinfield's past history. Thanks were given in particular to Mike Haw for his fantastic aerial photo of Beech Wood and use of his reference books.

### **Community Speed Watch**

Community Speed Watch events are now up and running with committee members taking part in these on a regular basis. At present we have been undertaking them along with our neighbours in Haughton.

### **PACT Meetings**

Unfortunately Councillor Keir was unable to attend the latest PACT meeting but will feedback to the next WRA meeting.

### **AGM**

The AGM is to be held on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> December, 7pm in Oban Court. A raffle will be held partly to raise funds for Oban Court bingo books and the monies remaining will go to the WRA. Prizes will include a 'Ringtons' hamper which has kindly been donated.

This will be followed by a few nibbles and drinks and a social get together to finish 2019!

Items for the agenda for the AGM should be received by the Acting Secretary no later than 21 days prior to the AGM.

Nominations for committee positions should be received by the Acting Secretary no later than 7 days prior to the AGM. Nomination forms are available either from our website or from the Acting Secretary.

### **Any Other Business**

Fly tipping/rubbish in between Dunrobin estate and Aberdeen Road to be reported to Darlington Borough Council.

Large tree on corner of Aberdeen Road has died, photo taken and will need to be reported to Darlington Borough Council.

Issue of cars, vans and trucks parking on verges of Sparrow Hall Drive raised again as they have churned up all of the grass verges. Mrs Rudkin asked if bollards could be put up to stop this. The issue of cost of this was then discussed. Mr Fitzpatrick-Odahmier asked if rough sawn timber fences could be erected instead as this

was a much cheaper option and had already been used in many other parts of the Borough to stop parking on verges. Councillor Keir to ask Highways department about options to prevent parking on the grass verges.

Mr Haw asked if there was any feedback on the issue regarding parking near to the entrance of the allotments and whether double yellow lines could be put in place. Councillor Keir will speak to the Highways department.

The issue of the speed limit on Barmpton Lane leading to Barmpton Village was also raised and Councillor Keir advised he was in discussions with the police and Highways department

**Date of next meeting:** Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2020, 7pm at Oban Court.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm