

Sandyhurst Lane Residents' Association

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Sandyacres Clubhouse on Wednesday, 13 March 2013.

Attendees: 30 members

County Councillors: Richard King and Elizabeth Tweed

Borough Councillor: Winston Michael

Parish Councillor: Christine Drury, Westwell PC

Speaker: Nick Coslett, Palmstead Nurseries, Wye

Item 1: Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from:

Members: Sue & Denzil Wood
Desmond Henley
Grahame & Shirley Mountford
John & Jillian Burrell
Tricia Corkhill
Norma Devereese

Guests: Cllr Michael Cloughton
Cllr David Robey
Derek Anthony
Elspeth Watt

Item 2: Approval of the minutes held on 28 March 2012

Proposed by John Faulkner and seconded by Winston Michael. The minutes were signed by the Chairman as a true record.

Item 3: Chairman's Report

John Hobbs, the Chairman, presented his report:

I am pleased to report the association has had a successful year which has seen an increase in membership, the continued development of our own web site and the regular updating members of current issues in the area. On behalf of the association I would like to thank all of our committee members and in particular our secretary David for all the hard work they have put in over the past year to make all this happen.

During the past year David has updated members with all relevant planning applications for this area and when relevant Howard and other members of the committee have entered discussions and raised objections with the local authority on behalf of the members.

Last year saw us join the debate on two traffic issues.

The first has been our support to see the speed of traffic on the dual carriageway A20 junction with Sandyhurst Lane reduced by means of electronic speed indicators. We have been informed that if the final budget hurdles can be crossed this scheme has a very good chance of going ahead and I think everyone will agree a reduction in speed on that stretch of the A20 will be very welcome.

Secondly we have been in discussions to try to restrict parking at the other end of the Lane during school pick up and drop off times. Parents parking on and around the junction have become a real safety issue. We also opposed the scheme to increase the double yellow lines along the top stretch of the Faversham road and I am pleased to say we were successful in having this proposal overturned.

We have also got a representative of our association (Andy) on the M20 noise reduction committee. This committee comprises of all the interested groups along the stretch of the M20 between junctions 8 and 9 with the sole aim of reducing the noise of the traffic on this concrete surface.

We have close links with Westwell, Eastwell and Boughton Aluph associations and parish councils which enable us all to share information and improve the services we provide to you the members.

David has kept our member informed on a regular basis of break in's, refuse collections, road closures and everything else that is considered relevant to our community. As well as emailing all members David has continually updated the website.

We are currently looking to assist in the setting up of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme in this area to ensure that we as a community are helping and looking after each other.

The association is here to help give the local residents a voice in local issues. Let your friends and neighbours know we are here and what we do and see if you can get them to join. The more members we have the better we can properly represent and inform.

There were no questions on this report.

Item 4: Secretary's Report

David Porter, the Secretary, presented his report:

You may recall that last year was the first AGM we had held since 2009, having re-launched the Association in May 2011. I'm pleased to report that over the past year we have been very active, with the committee meeting regularly every two months to take forward the issues which are of concern to residents.

The committee meetings we have held over the past year have had an average attendance of seven and have addressed a wide range of issues, including planning, road safety, noise, refuse collection, the Ashford Local Plan amongst others.

We have tried to keep members informed in a timely manner by the use of email bulletins and our website. We try not to send too many emails, but even so there were 44 occasions during 2012 which merited a bulletin. We have also recently started using Twitter as an additional means of keeping members informed.

For those few members who do not receive our email bulletins, as promised at last year's AGM we have introduced a printed quarterly summary of our activities last July and we have delivered three issues so far to those particular members. We have also tried to publicise our activities by contributing articles to publications such as the Westwell Eye.

We currently have ten committee members, all of whom are all offering themselves for re-election. We welcome new blood and new ideas so any new nominations are always welcomed.

The statistics on membership show that of our catchment of about 340 properties around 20% are members of the Association. We are delighted that the majority of members now pay their annual subscriptions by standing order as this dramatically reduces the administrative burden and ensures that we have a stable core membership.

But however you pay, we greatly value your membership and ask members to encourage their friends and neighbours to join and give us their views on local issues so we can better represent the interests of all residents.

In conclusion, I would just like to record the fact that the SLRA this year celebrates its 30th anniversary, having been founded in 1983 as a response to the unannounced removal of sand in fleets of heavy lorries for the building of Junction 10 of the M20. Amongst the founder committee members was one Howard Preston and I am delighted to say that we have been continuing to draw on Howard's wisdom and experience as he still attends our meetings in an advisory capacity.

There were no questions on this report.

Item 5: Treasurer's Report

Don Murrell, the Treasurer reported that the SLRA bank balance currently stood at £552, compared with £311 at the 2012 AGM. 46 members now paid by standing order.

There were no questions on this report.

Item 6: Election of Committee

All of the existing committee members offered themselves for re-election. There were no further nominations. All candidates were duly elected unopposed:

Tony Bartlett	Desmond Henley
Norma Devereese	Don Murrell
John Hobbs	Andy Peddle
John Faulkner	David Porter
Doug Harman	Evan Thomas

Item 7: Any Other Business

There was no further business.

The formal meeting was followed by three presentations. Two of these were to be given by Elizabeth Tweed and Richard King, the two KCC Councillors responsible for the Sandyhurst Lane area. Both councillors had decided not to offer themselves for re-election at the forthcoming County Council elections in May, so were retiring as councillors. The Chairman took the opportunity to give a warm vote of thanks to both Elizabeth and Richard for the much-appreciated help and support which they both had given to the Association over many years.

Elizabeth Tweed, KCC Councillor, Ashford Central Division

Elizabeth opened with news of the latest position on the road safety measures for the A20/Sandyhurst Lane junction which had been agreed, subject to budgetary provision, as a result of lobbying by the SLRA. The works were now definitely going ahead and would commence early in the next financial year, i.e. after 6 April 2013. Christine Drury asked what measures were involved; these were new signage and two electronic 'Slow Down' signs, triggered at 55mph, to be installed on the north-west bound carriageway.

Elizabeth then gave an outline of 'a few days in the life' of a KCC Councillor. She pointed out that decisions about all local services were political, even though they were often not seen in that way. She herself had been active in the Neighbourhood Watch organisation when she was invited to stand as a councillor. Although it had proved to be very time consuming and it was also very rewarding. One problem was attracting younger people; the average age of councillors is 60. There may be a need to offer incentives to employers to allow younger people to become councillors.

The job was stimulating and thought provoking. Pre-election training was normally available, eg in the work of the different Directorates. A councillor would be asked to choose committees on which to serve; these could be very demanding. It was Council members who decided policy and the permanent staff who implemented those policies. Councillors also sit on Select Committees, which last for about nine months and then put forward recommendations to cabinet members and the County Council, having heard from a wide range of witnesses and visited appropriate sites. The recommendations were then reviewed annually until everything that had been promised had been done.

Elizabeth had herself served on a number of Select Committees, eg domestic abuse, which involved hearing from victims, perpetrators, experts, police, medical representatives, etc and visits including the Courts.

Richard King (KCC Councillor, Ashford Rural West Division and Chairman, Kent County Council)

Richard observed that he had been a KCC Councillor for 16 years, more than half the life of the SLRA. He was now retiring because he felt that younger councillors should be standing for election. He explained the method for selecting candidates could be a bit 'hit and miss' and was often left to a few activists with a limited short list. He strongly urged individuals to get involved with their local parties if they wanted to become councillors.

Although very time-consuming, Richard had 'loved every minute' of being a councillor and had never imagined that he would become Chairman of the County Council.

In discussion, Margery Thomas asked what response there was to the younger generation who are 'totally impatient' with party politics. Elizabeth Tweed said that it was the duty of councillors to 'get out there' and engage with youth and gave examples of what she herself had been doing in this respect. These included successful lobbying for a bus 'freedom pass' to use not just for school, but for all journeys. It had been their own idea. There was a Youth Advisory Group in each district.

Nick Coslett, Sales and Marketing Manager, Palmstead Nurseries, Wye

Nick gave a very interesting and informative talk about Palmstead Nurseries. They are the biggest employer in Wye, with 45-50 staff working on a 12 acre site. They are one of the largest growers of trees, shrubs and perennials supplying the landscape market in southern England. They are part of a £6 – 9 billion industry overall, but it is very diversified.

Palmstead won a major contract to supply plants to an 800m long part of the Olympic Park in London. This involved supplying 65,000 perennials (110 species) and 60,000 bulbs. These included plant species from all over the world – North America, Europe, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan – in a scheme designed by Sarah Price.

Nick described the exacting task of cultivating the plants, many of which had never been grown in this country before, and planting them in the Olympic Park in the Summer of 2011, to ensure that they were all in bloom at the London Olympics 2012. 75-80% of the planting is in the permanent part of the park (Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park) which will be open once the transformation works have been completed. Nick advised that the details of the park, including the opportunity to book for 'park in progress' tours from 29 March, were available on the website 'noordinarypark.co.uk'.

The project did much to raise the profile of Palmstead Nurseries; they are now being invited to tender for other large jobs.

In discussion, Elizabeth Tweed asked about the possible problems of plants, particularly those from the southern hemisphere, being sufficiently hardy to cope with the conditions here. Nick said that they were alright as long as the roots did not get too wet – the plants were able to cope with the cold.

The presentations were followed by the draw for the raffle, the prizes for which had been donated by members of the committee.

The meeting closed at 9.18 pm.