

SANDYHURST LANE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
Held on Wednesday 25th March 2009
At Sandy Acres, Sandyhurst Lane, Ashford

Attendance

31 members attended, including Howard Preston (Chairman). Also present were the guest speakers: Mrs Christine Drury (Vice-chairman, CPRE South East) and Mr Simon Cole (Planning Policy Manager, Ashford Borough Council); County Councillors Mrs Rita Hawes, Mrs Elizabeth Tweed and Richard King; Councillor Michael Cloughton.

Apologies

Received from Mrs Joan Richards, Cllr Oliver, Mr and Mrs Fairleigh, Mr Betts and Mr Whitstone (Ashford Ramblers).

Minutes of the AGM Held on 10th March 2008

Proposed by Mr Carden and seconded by Mr Hilliger. Signed by the Chairman as a true record.

Matters Arising

The Chairman asked Mr Coatsworth (Trustee, Sandy Acres Trust) to brief the meeting on the situation at Sandy Acres.

Mr Coatsworth explained that concerns as to its future had been expressed by the Residents' Association, Ashford Borough Council and Boughton Aluph with Eastwell Parish Council. The parish council negotiated a 50 year lease with the borough council, thus safeguarding the site and preserving the rural nature of the area. Management is by a charitable trust, the Trustees being Mr Coatsworth, Mr John Ley and Councillor Neil Wallace (representing the borough council). The Trustees manage the finances, income being received from Sandy Acres and the parish council, money is also available from Section 106 agreements. Suggestions as to improvements, eg seating, would be welcomed and should be sent to Mr Coatsworth at 378 Sandyhurst Lane.

Chairman's Report

In the absence of a new Chairman, I have been operating a 'fire-fighting' service, advising residents what to do or who to contact when issues arise. I realise that residents are rightly concerned about the lack of Newsbriefs over the past few years, but health and family reasons mean that I can no longer carry on with the amount of work I used to do. However, we have circulated Emergency Newsbrief alerts to objections to 'brownfield' developments in order to protect the rural nature of our area.

Planning:

We work closely with Boughton Aluph with Eastwell, and Westwell Parish Councils. We have the ability to alert residents quickly, such as when there was an application for the brownfield sites at number 39 and 296/298 Sandyhurst Lane. As in previous years, the SLRA has consulted or advised neighbours, particularly those in parts of the lane in Bockhanger Ward that are not in the parishes of Boughton Aluph with Eastwell and Westwell, and therefore did not have recourse to parish council planning meetings. We are able to notify more than just the neighbours either side of an applicant (which is what the borough council would do) and let them know when the plans are due to be discussed at the parish council planning meeting, where we will support them.

Unfortunately, with the loss of David Rowlands of the Warren Lane Action Group, objections to the BUPA care home on the Cadenza site were ignored by the borough council planning committee with some 4 councillors abstaining (because access was from Warren Lane, thus preventing buses coming up).

Plans for some of the local applications are shown on a display at the back of the hall.

Footpaths:

- 1) AE210 is now open across the 'big field' and is well marked by the farmer concerned – Peter Howard.
- 2) AU1: discussions are taking place between Bidwells/SLRA/Ashford Ramblers/KCC Public Rights Of Way office re extinguishing this path under Section 118 of the 1980 Highways Act. It has not been used since 146 Sandyhurst Lane was built across it in 1934. Unfortunately there has been some confusion in the KCC PROW office, leading to a delay. This is in addition to the 12-18 months backlog. There will be costs involved: KCC charges a minimum admin. fee of £1350, plus £500 for each of 2 newspaper advertisements, advertising the opening and closure.
- 3) The route of many footpaths in Kent remains to be established after construction of the M20 and CTRL.

Ward Name Changes:

Some of us now live in Kennington Parish! These changes were introduced in 2008, and are shown on a map at the rear of the hall.

Tile Lodge – M20: changed from Bockhanger Ward to Kennington Parish.

M20 – A20: Bockhanger Ward now classified as Ashford.

What Do You Want From Your SLRA?

In the light of declining membership, the Chairman sought the views of the membership as to whether the Association should:

- 1) Be suspended for 1 year
- 2) Be closed, with Association funds going to charity
- 3) Continue, so as to 'protect the rural character of the area' as given in the Constitution.

Mr Carden said that as a founder member and former chairman he was disappointed that SLRA seemed to be failing. He noted the importance of communicating with residents: although there was an Association noticeboard, most residents seemed unaware of local issues, the names of their representatives etc. He spoke of the battles fought by SLRA – the success of the campaign to reroute the CTRL, but the failure to get the M20 blacktopped.

Mr Coatsworth stated that he had attended the last committee meeting of SLRA by invitation, and asked if the original objectives still applied in 2009 – was the rural character under challenge as it was 20 years ago? Alternatives were to wind up the Association or put it on hold for a year or so to see if the need for the Association still existed. He cited the success re Sandy Acres, green space now protected for 50 years. Mr Harman felt that lack of communication was a problem, and suggested a leaflet drop to canvass all residents.

Mrs Butcher introduced herself as a former chairman, and while she understood that the aim was to protect the rural environment, asked how wide was the brief? She cited the threat to Beechbrook.

Another resident said that development off Lenacre Street was a possibility, with regular applications being submitted.

Cllr King felt that there was a need for the Association to continue, or at least not to be wound up. He noted that Sandyhurst Lane is on the edge of Ashford Rural West, and is on the edge of 2 parishes. No one parish or councillor has the interests of the whole lane at heart. He said that the 40mph speed limit would not have been achieved without SLRA, and future traffic calming measures would be unlikely without its input. He felt that parish councils had different priorities. Cllr King went on that there was a lack of interest and difficulty recruiting new committee members, but no other organization could fill the gap. He said that the Association should try to recruit new blood first.

One of the residents agreed with Cllr King, and suggested a questionnaire to ascertain residents' current concerns, particularly as there had been little communication from SLRA of late.

Mr Wolfe-Murray felt that electronic communication would be preferable, and that a questionnaire would be an opportunity to collect email addresses.

Mr Hilliger (Treasurer) reiterated the need for volunteers, eg to deliver leaflets.

Several members offered their services at this point.

Mr Hilliger continued that much had been asked of the Chairman and his efforts should be applauded, particularly as no one had come forward to take over as Chairman in spite of continued efforts. He felt that the role could not be filled by someone in full time employment, because of the need to attend meetings etc. He agreed that the lane should be canvassed and asked for their interests, together with a request for helpers. In his opinion, the Chairman had carried the organisation.

Mr Carden asked if Hoads Wood Gardens and other side roads would be included.

Mr Harman said that these could be a source of potential recruits.

Mr Hilliger said that email addresses could be requested on the leaflet, but the Association must be aware of the Data Protection Act: all information was shredded annually.

The Chairman said that the Association covered a large area, approx 375 addresses. This formerly included Maidstone Road as far as Glenmoor, but with the death of David Rowlands this area was not covered and difficulties were being experienced recruiting. He asked members what action they wanted.

Mr Harman and Mr Hilliger said that questions for the leaflet should be drafted.

Mr Hobbs said that he had been a member of the Association for years, but did not know the committee members. He would, however, like the Association to continue given its past benefits and victories.

Mr Powell asked if Ivor Groves' help could be sought.

The Chairman informed the meeting that Mr Groves would, unfortunately, be moving to a new post round shortly, because of reorganisation: the lane was being combined with Orchard Heights and the post would be delivered by van. He added that leaflet deliveries could be handled 'in house'.

Cllr Cloughton agreed with Cllr King. He noted that a Residents' Association in Ashford Central was attended by only 6 members, from 90 households. This showed that the SLRA AGM was well attended, and posed the question, 'if the Association did not exist, would it be to the disadvantage and detriment of the area?'

The meeting agreed that it would.

Mr Hilliger added that there was also little communication from his borough councillor – he had only ever received 1 newsletter.

Mr Stocker told the meeting that he had moved to Sandhurst Lane in 2000, and had seen many changes in Ashford in the intervening years. He could see what SLRA had achieved, but felt that greater public participation would come if there were a focus, eg the large developments projected for the south. Scare tactics would make people sit up and take notice – overdevelopment of the area was not wanted. If there was no body to represent residents, they would be ignored, with big business spending large sums to achieve their aims. The Association was needed to protect the area.

Mrs Butcher asked how many leaflets had been distributed advertising the AGM. The Chairman replied that the entire lane, Lenacre Street, Westwell Lane, Faversham Road (from the lane to Trinity Road) and Maidstone Road (from the lane to the Warren).

Cllr King noted that there was higher attendance than at Annual Parish Meetings, showing that the Association had the support of residents. All that was needed was to mobilize this support.

Mr Carden said that there had been some good speakers and asked if any were willing to join the committee.

He was asked what would be involved.

Mr Carden replied that committee members learnt as they attended more meetings, and that problems would arise if there were no committee when a big threat arose.

Mr Gilbert suggested that the role of committee members and time commitment could be put on the leaflet. With regard to scare tactics, he noted that Ashford was earmarked for a large influx of newcomers, and recommended that residents look at the Chilmington Green website for a vision of the future. He noted that the borough council wanted to preserve the green spaces between Maidstone and Ashford, but these may not last.

Mr Thomas felt that it would be difficult to restart the Association were it to die, and said that it was listened to closely.

Cllr Mrs Hawes said that, speaking from a community point of view, the best way to promote the Association was for members to introduce themselves when delivering the leaflets. She did not favour scare tactics, and said that it should be kept going to communicate to residents. She added that there were no hard and fast rules for the committee – all did it differently.

The Chairman called for a vote.

The motion was put to the floor that the Association continue.

Votes for: 24. Votes against: 4.

The meeting therefore resolved that the Association continue.

Mrs Butcher recommended the personal approach, and said that when the Association was fighting the planned CTRL route, members knocked on doors and got to know people. She did, however, appreciate the difficulties re time – weekends were potentially better.

CLlr Cloughton said that on a day-to-day basis, the lane ran itself, but the importance of the Association was revealed when a major issue arose, eg CTRL. 4-5 years had been spent fighting on behalf of people blighted by the line.

Mr Coatsworth noted that volunteers were needed to run the organisation, rather than just attending an annual meeting.

Mrs Drury suggested another show of hands for volunteers to produce the leaflet/questionnaire.

The Chairman asked that volunteers gave their names to committee members at the end of the meeting.

What's Happening in Our Area in View of the Credit Crunch?

Simon Cole (Planning Policy Manager, Ashford Borough Council) addressed the meeting.

He began by saying that the economic situation had resulted in a significant decrease in activity: planning applications were down, there had been little work on some sites and housing completions were down. The larger builders were either in financial trouble or had slowed down or mothballed sites.

Developers and landowners were looking forward to the upturn and it was expected that developers would quickly accelerate activity.

Forward planning was still going on.

Mr Cole noted that the Core Strategy had been adopted in July 2008. This did not include Beechbrook but the Inspector had inserted a formal review date of 2014, and the Strategy had therefore to be reviewed by then.

Other planning documents were being brought forward and development sites investigated.

What's happening in 2009?

- The introduction of high speed rail services to London. Implications for the town's economy could not be predicted, but it would change the potential economy - Ashford is currently peripheral to London, being more than 1 hour away. This would reduce to less than 40 minutes. This was bringing enquiries from retailers, particularly food, and there was continuing interest in the ongoing development at Eureka.
- Police College. Little progress and the site remained unsold. Interest was being shown, but not always by house builders.
- Warren Park and Ride. Although this remained a proposal, it was not now expected until 2012 because the need did not exist due to the economic slowdown. It had originally been planned to develop the Park and Ride alongside residential units, but it was now not known whether only the Park and Ride would be built or if it would be part of a wider package of proposals.
- Junction 9 improvements. The timescale had slipped, with work not being started until later in 2009. The project could take 2 years but would result in increased capacity to accommodate the forecast increase in traffic for the next 20 years.
- Eureka. Mr Cole stated that there were no plans to extend the Business Park beyond the Core Strategy boundaries.
- Victoria Way. This would be joined with Leacon Road to make a through road, to be constructed in 2 phases. In the longer term there was a proposal to make Chart Road a dual carriageway.
- A251 Trinity Road/A28 link road. Part of the Core Strategy, but pressure for completion had been reduced by the housing downturn. The A251 end was likely to be at Trinity Road, but uncertainty remained as to where it would join the A28. In answer to a question, Mr Cole

confirmed that Bovis Homes was looking at the Hockey Club. This may affect the link road route, but Ball Lane would not be reopened to through traffic.

Mr Cole then took questions.

Mr Powell queried the 2 year timescale for the junction 9 improvements. Mr Cole explained that a significant amount of work would be done: putting in signals and widening. The 2 years was a probable overestimate, and it was hoped that the work would be completed in 15-18 months and with the minimum of traffic disruption.

Mrs Drury asked how many houses were being built at Repton Park – this would impact on junction 9. Mr Cole replied that no building was currently going on other than the Waitrose supermarket, because of the credit crunch. The site had planning permission for 1250 dwellings, of which approx 200 have been built. It was unclear when the work would restart.

Mrs Drury noted that there had been huge pressure to agree to the development at the Warren because of the £2,700,000 government funding at stake. Mr Cole agreed, saying that the associated housing would contribute to other costs, and that the government money would pay for the site (currently in private ownership). If the enabling development did not go ahead, an agreement with the landowner would be needed and all options remained open, eg compulsory purchase.

Mr Powell asked if there were any plans to improve parking at the William Harvey Hospital, and noted that there was a huge field adjacent to the hospital. Cllr Mrs Tweed advised that construction of a 200 space car park was under way. Mr Cole noted that the Trust was seeking to acquire some of this field for expansion of medical facilities and car parking. He added that the weight of traffic going to the hospital also impacted on junction 10.

Cllr Cloughton asked whether the Police College site was likely to remain residential, given that the preferred developer (Fairview Homes) had pulled out. Mr Cole replied that the Home Office owned the site and that if a quick sale was wanted then residential use was unlikely. If, however, the Home Office waited for the economic upturn and house builders showed interest, then this would be an obvious site.

Mr Carden asked the borough council's preference. Mr Cole said that this would depend on the proposals put forward. If an education establishment were mooted, then the borough council would have no control as planning permission for change of use would not be required.

Sandyhurst Lane: Town or Country?

Mrs Drury began by saying how pleased she was to follow Simon Cole, as he would have dealt with all of the really difficult topics!

Mrs Drury continued that she would declare her interests before speaking with her CPRE hat on: she is a Westwell parish councillor who lives off the lorry-filled layby at Potters Corner and uses the lane. She noted that she shared much of the noise nuisance from the M20, plus the A20 and high speed rail line.

She described the work of CPRE. The Council for the Protection of Rural England does what it says on the tin! It champions the countryside of England, and in particular promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of the countryside. It works with local associations such as SLRA and with the planning system (eg in the cases of 39 and 296/298 Sandyhurst Lane). Day-to-day work involves the monitoring of planning applications at local level and commenting where there is an issue of rural character at stake or where it is thought that the character of an area will be impacted significantly.

A constant dialogue is maintained with Simon and his colleagues on strategic planning, and Mrs Drury drew members' attention to the new website that the borough council is launching for planning. This enables you to ask all sorts of questions, and to discover how the new permitted development rights will work – what can be done without planning permission.

Mrs Drury noted that CPRE can be thought of as a 'nimby' organisation (not in my back yard), when what it is actually doing is trying to make sure that the development that is done – for any village or area to evolve with the times – is done well. This can cause problems: Mrs Drury reported that she was recently called by a Goudhurst resident asking CPRE to object to a development for some affordable housing in the village.

For an organisation trying to look after the countryside, Mrs Drury said that CPRE had a long list of issues:

- Everywhere one looks unspoilt countryside is making way for urban development, either to meet government housing targets or because of the huge pressure for housing and roads. Massive development is planned in Ashford, as we know only too well.
- Road congestion is another key topic, a topic members know all about with the rat runs along Sandyhurst Lane and the congestion on the A20 caused by Operation Stack. CPRE is supporting the quick, moveable barrier as an answer to Operation Stack and opposing the vast lorry park down at Sellinge. The issue of overnight parking remains unresolved.
- Noise pollution. Noise is now a statutory nuisance and this is a help, but mainly as regards noisy neighbours. We all know that ambient noise on the M20 is outside European limits but nothing is being done. Mrs Drury said that she found it unacceptable that M20 resurfacing happens where many people are impacted, but not where the noise nuisance exists just as much but for fewer people.
- Light pollution is high on CPRE's agenda. A few years ago CPRE ran a campaign with the Astronomical Society on Night Blight. Mrs Drury asked how many residents had seen the glories of the Milky Way recently. Happily progress was reported: more down lighting, with sodium glare becoming a thing of the past.
- In the overall balance between urban areas and countryside in Kent, green spaces become very important. Mrs Drury said that we in Ashford are fortunate in one sense that the massive scale of development planned here means that green spaces are being thought about carefully and consultations taking place. Ashford already has its green corridors and the Warren and Hoads Wood are an important part. What is more difficult is what could be called the 'border country' in Sandyhurst Lane. There is a tussle between those who feel quite justified in treating it as urban, and those who do think its rural character is very important.

No talk on environmental matters would be complete today without some mention of climate change. CPRE has started a debate about what the impact could be here in Kent: pulling together some of the data as it applies here. Not surprisingly some of the biggest impacts could be the shape of our coastline. Some of you may be climate sceptics, but we are all uncertain as to what will happen.

Last but not least Bill Bryson is our current CPRE President, and in his own inimical way has been extolling the beauty of England which we desecrate by being litter bugs. CPRE has an energetic 'Stop the Drop' litter campaign. In May last year Bill was here on Wye Downs picking litter and talking to the tv cameras. It was a good boost for Kent and for KCC's own Clean Kent campaign. There are other articles in the CPRE publication Kent Voice that may be of interest.

CPRE's main aim is to make a better environment.

Mrs Drury said that both she and Mrs Butcher leafleted the whole lane at the start of the Beechbrook project, and an update will be included in the next leaflet. All involved were delighted that the area had gone back to agriculture and was being well farmed.

There would be another attempt at completing the missing link in the footpath, and another look at the wildlife there to ascertain its wildlife value.

She said that all involved with the Beechbrook project were devastated that the Inspector had included it in the next planning review, but it had at least been declared greenfield.

Any Other Business

- Cllr Mrs Hawes said that she would like to mention road adoption, although it was Goat Lees rather than Sandyhurst Lane. She said that although only a fraction had been adopted work was underway and adoption would follow soon. Adoption would be good news as it would mean litter picking and better trimming. This may encourage use of Trinity Road rather than Sandyhurst Lane. The borough council was trying to resolve parking problems on Goat Lees, and a ½ hourly bus service from Trinity Road to the Designer Outlet via Ashford and the station would soon be introduced.
- Cllr Mrs Tweed said that the primary school at Repton Park had gone out to consultation. It would probably be run by Homewood School, and building would be triggered when occupancy

- levels increased. She added that the road adoption process was complicated by the fact that many developers were involved and several transfers had taken place.
- Cllr King reported on the primary school at Goat Lees. A meeting was to be held on 27th March with the District Schools Officer. KCC would not allow the land to revert to housing and it would shortly be going out to consultation so that building could begin before the end of 2011.
 - Residents from Hoads Wood Gardens (Gemma Hammond and Sandra Bunclark) said that there was a great deal of support for the Association in Hoads Wood Gardens and Potters Close but not all could be present.
 - A complaint was made about misuse of the bench in Hoads Wood Gardens: loud music was being played and litter left, and it was felt that its position close to the junction encouraged misuse. They asked if it could be moved further into Hoads Wood Gardens so would not be an attraction to passers-by. The Chairman thanked them for their comments and said he would see what could be done. Moving the bench would need planning permission.

The Chairman thanked all who attended and those who had offered help.
The meeting closed at 9.45pm.