

**Sandyhurst Lane Residents' Association**  
**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting**  
**Held on Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2008 at Sandy Acres, Sandyhurst Lane**

**Attendance:**

35 members attended, including Howard Preston (Chairman). Also present were Simon Cole (guest speaker, Planning Policy Manager, Ashford Borough Council); Councillors Michael Claughton and Neil Wallace (who arrived late, having been delayed at another meeting).

**Apologies:**

Received from County Councillors Richard King and Elizabeth Tweed, Councillor Rita Hawes, Anne Le Clercq (Chairman, Boughton Aluph with Eastwell Parish Council), Monica and Victor Berwick.

**Minutes of the last AGM:**

Proposed and seconded and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

**Matters Arising:**

None.

**Chairman's report:**

Howard opened the meeting by welcoming Simon Cole as guest speaker, Planning Policy Manager (Ashford Borough Council).

He updated the Association on the issues in which SLRA had been involved over the past year, and drew attention to the displays at the rear of the hall – these included the Sandyhurst Farm site, Eureka and Cadenza developments. Often this involved excellent collaboration with the parish councils of Westwell and Boughton Aluph with Eastwell, as well as our ward members Michael Claughton (Bockhanger), Rita Hawes (Boughton Aluph with Eastwell) and Neil Wallace (Westwell).

In addition SLRA had encouraged other interest groups such as The Warren Lane Action Group. Often these associations are formed following planning applications impacting on green areas such as the Warren and the green space adjacent to Warren Lane. The Association was not too successful with Orchard Heights but Howard suggested that perhaps the guest speaker may have more information. Lodge Wood Group green space appeared to have been saved from greedy developers.

Howard explained that, in the absence of a new chairman, he had been operating a 'fire fighting' service, advising residents what to do or who to contact. He realised that residents were rightly concerned about the lack of newsbriefs over the past year, but ill health and family reasons had prevented this. The Christmas edition was shelved due to changes in Bidwells management of Eureka and discussions on footpaths which have been ongoing – over 10 years in the case of AU1 and AU3, and since 1989 in the case of AE210.

It is hoped to hold a meeting with KCC, Ashford Ramblers and Bidwells on extinguishing AU1 – this footpath has not been walked on for 74 years, when no. 146 was built.

John Faulkner will be asking later what residents want from the association.

**Planning:**

Howard explained that the policy of SLRA was not to interfere with planning applications for extensions, but noted that in the present climate developers are buying small residences on large plots. He cited problems arising from plans to extend the late Cyril Peacock's bungalow (no. 168). Neighbours were concerned and SLRA objected to the plans, and also alerted the ward member. Where a planning application has been delegated to a planning officer, the ward member can insist that it go before the full

Planning Committee. In the case of no. 168, revised plans were submitted which were acceptable to the neighbours.

In several recent applications Howard noted that SLRA had consulted or advised neighbours, particularly for those parts of the lane in Bockhanger ward that were not in the parishes of Boughton Aluph with Eastwell or Westwell, and therefore did not have recourse to parish council planning meetings. He said that applicants generally discussed planning applications with neighbours, but SLRA offered advice to the applicants if the neighbours had concerns or were confused.

He described the application for 'Carpenders', which proposed the demolition of the house and erection of 3 x 2 ½ storey blocks, which would overlook Eastwell Towers (listed) and Eastwell Lodge. An emergency newsbrief was issued to residents in Sandyhurst lane (no. 350 upwards), Lenacre Street and part of Faversham Road. The initial application was withdrawn but a revised scheme submitted. The major concerns were access to the site - via a single track lane currently serving the 3 properties in Eastwell Grange which emerges very close to the busy Sandyhurst Lane/Faversham Road (A251) junction. This area is also heavily used by cars on the school run.

#### Warren Park and Ride:

SLRA was consulted and objected to the revised (Sainsbury's store) scheme for housing on site A, with gardens of the proposed housing backing on to the ancient Warren hedgerow instead of a service road. SLRA also objected to access from site A directly into the Warren instead of using existing routes next to 'Warrengate' or via site B. Howard said that the Association fully supported Ann Davis and Liz Walker who were trying to protect the Warren, but the position of Lois Jarrett re the Pentland Scheme was unclear. He noted an insufficiency of play area or public open space, and said that SLRA objected to the Warren meadow and ponds being considered by the applicant as part of site A public open space.

#### 3-Screen Cinema and 2 Restaurants:

SLRA objected again to the inadequate parking arrangements, and spoke at the Planning Committee meeting for the 3 minutes allowed. He said that although the planning officers had recommended refusal, the application was passed by the Planning Committee in spite of much discussion on safeguarding restaurants in Ashford, with the condition that the restaurants were only open in the evening.

#### Highways:

Elizabeth Tweed had provided Howard with an update, as she was unable to be present.

A251/A28 link road – raised by Councillor Tweed several times with the cabinet member for Transport (Keith Ferrin) who was adamant that requests for a new road had not been received. An Inspector's report stated that there was no justification for building on the land behind Ball Lane but ABC had asked for a review. A revised report was awaited.

Adoption of Trinity Road and Galloway Drive – raised by Councillor Tweed at a meeting of the Kent Transport Board on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008. Keith Ferrin had given an assurance that any adoptions more than 5 years old would be finalised by the end of the calendar year. Highways have been pressed to lean harder on developers to resolve outstanding problems.

Blacktopping of M20 – KCC had taken this up with the Highways Agency but told that funding would only be available when the motorway needed resurfacing. With current wear patterns this was unlikely before 2013.

#### Goat Lees Primary School:

No change from last year – would revert to housing if no school built by 2011.

#### Health Clinic, Plot 18/19 Eureka Park, Nicholas Road:

SLRA fully supported the outline application. Will provide a vital service to an expanding Ashford community without the need for patients to wait approval of treatment and transport to Canterbury, Dover, Hythe, Folkestone or London hospitals.



**Treasurer's Report:**

The Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007 was presented. Income at £256.32 was £0.65 down on the previous year. Income from subscriptions was down by £9 due to falling membership, which has been falling for the past 4 years.

Expenditure was £253.29, an increase on last year due to copying and stationery costs. David noted that the Association was not being charged for use of the hall for the AGM.

Assets stand at £419.42, a slight increase of £3.03.

On behalf of the Association and the Committee the Treasurer thanked the Association's honorary auditor, Mr Victor Berwick, for his kind advice and services to the Association.

**Election of the Committee:**

The existing committee was elected unopposed.

**Any Other Business:**

None.

**Open Forum:**

The meeting was addressed by Simon Cole on 'Planning Policy Affecting North Ashford'.

He outlined the current situation:

- Eureka Business Park. This is a mixed development but with the emphasis on office and employment uses. A local centre is planned, including a surgery, crèche, pub (relocated from site off Maidstone Road) and local shops. Considerable interest has already been shown in some of the units. An application for a private health centre is going to the Planning Committee.
- Eureka Leisure Park. New Travelodge, Beefeater and Costa Coffee units are under construction. Cineworld is being extended although it is not yet known when this will be built.
- Warren Park and Ride. Revised plans give a reduction in the number of parking spaces – down to ~ 950. 323 dwellings are planned and some employment space. Reconsultation will take place shortly, and the scheme is due to go before the Planning Committee in June.
- 'Centrex' site (Grosvenor Hall – former police college). Development brief prepared last year. Fairview homes are the preferred bidder although they do not yet own the site. Access to the site would have to be via Trinity Road, although it is not yet clear if there would be any other viable access, other than for the emergency services. Final capacity of the site and density, design and layout are still under discussion.
- Drovers Roundabout/Junction 9. Work is currently underway to install 2 new pedestrian crossings, together with a new access on to Templer Way. Improvements to J9 will begin later this year to increase its capacity, including the installation of traffic lights. It is hoped that this will provide sufficient capacity to cope with increasing traffic until 2031.

Simon then turned to 'The Future':

- 800 new dwellings and 2,100 new jobs have been proposed in the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) by 2021 in the Bockhanger Wood area – this includes the Centrex and Eureka sites and possibly takes in part of SW Kennington.
- Eureka may be extended but would primarily be for employment although there would be potential for some other forms of development.
- Informal proposals have been submitted for development around Sandyhurst Farm.

Ron Carden asked for more details on the 2,100 jobs and cited the Trinity College Science Park in which no new jobs were created. He felt that the proposal suggested an industrial site behind the houses in Sandyhurst Lane.

Simon replied that any proposal would have to be looked at, and the emphasis would be on new rather than relocated jobs. He asked what type of development could be undertaken here - mixed use or the same as before? In any event, there would be more flexibility than before when there were constraints imposed by the Science Park.

- Completion of the examination of the GADF Core Strategy by the independent inspector was delayed pending clarification on various points, such as transport and employment. No further hearings will be held and it is hoped that the inspector's report will be published in May.
  - Urban Sites Development Plan Document – will be produced when the Core Strategy is declared 'sound', hopefully by the end of 2008. It will include an Issues and Options Report - a list of potential sites. It will also include policies for the Eureka and Centrex sites.
- Sue Wood asked what decision the inspector was likely to make re the submission by Kier Property that Beechbrook Farm be included as a site for housing. Simon replied that he was 99.9% certain that this would be rejected.

Questions were then invited from the audience.

John Faulkner asked who was responsible for the cones in Ashford and why were areas coned off when no work was taking place. He further asked why there were yet more works on the ring road.

Simon Cole replied that he did not know the answer to the first 2 questions as the work was being carried out by KCC. He would pass the comments on to KCC. He stated that the ring road work was further work in Elwick Road and West Street, with completion not due for a few months. The works were being funded by the government.

John commented that this was 'our' money.

Simon asked that the scheme be judged after all of the work was complete. He said that comments could be sent to the project manager: Jamie Watson ([Jamie.watson@kent.gov.uk](mailto:Jamie.watson@kent.gov.uk)).

Simon was asked why the ring road had been made 2-way, as this had turned a 5 minute journey around the road into one taking 35 minutes.

Simon stated that the road had presented a physical barrier and there had been many complaints re boy racers. It had also encouraged more traffic to drive into the town centre. The aim was to change the town centre environment and change the perception of the ring road from a 4 lane motorway into a street. The 2 way road was also designed to slow the traffic.

Simon was asked if the Independent Inspector's report on the Core Strategy would mention the A28/A251 link road. He replied that the Inspector's report would be binding: if it says that the road is not a good idea then it will be deleted. If, however, the Inspector retains it then ABC and KCC will look at how/when the link road will be built and its exact route.

Frank Avery asked if representations could still be made to the Inspector, given Simon's comment that he would be receptive to public feeling. Simon replied that the Inspector would weigh up all representations. He was asked if submissions could still be made – Ashford had lost its identity and was becoming big, ugly and swallowing the villages. Simon said that it was too late to make representations, but there would be the opportunity to comment on the proposals in the LDF as they arise, in meetings such as this or through the SLRA.

Peter Coatsworth asked that, given its green and open spaces, what was meant by 'access to facilities' on the Centrex site. Simon stated that these were obvious potential benefits, and suitable new uses should also be explored for Grosvenor Hall. It would not be acceptable to bulldoze it and put up housing. Consideration should also be given to bringing the police gym and pool into public use.

Michael Cloughton agreed with the speaker who called Ashford 'ugly', and did not feel that it had an identity. He remarked that ABC always used the word 'vision', but this was ethereal and never materialised. The town had had many false dawns. He agreed with Simon that the ring road should be judged as a whole, in its present state it was a mess and not an advert for Ashford. Michael felt that KCC Highways' forward planning was non-existent – everything was happening at once, together with financial problems and slippage. He was concerned that this could also be a problem with the J9 works.

Michael noted that the only bidder for the Police College site was Fairview, who proposed 760 dwellings.. This should not be contemplated until the link road was in place – however Highways had stated that the 1<sup>st</sup> 150 could be built and accessed via Cemetery Lane!



He queried Simon's comments that there would be reconsultation on the Warren Park and Ride and wondered if there would be enough time for this before the Planning Committee's June meeting.

Simon replied that June was only a provisional date - as the consultation needs to be carried out the scheme could go before the Planning Committee as a later date.

Michael commented that the reason for the ring road being dug up again was that it was not right in the first place.

Simon was asked about Ashford Golf Club. Last year there had been talk of moving the club to Castle Farm, but tonight's meeting had been told that ABC would look favourably at any proposals from a developer for the golf club site. The club had been there for over 100 years - could it be moved?

Simon said that the Club committee wanted to relocate as they felt that the course was too small and lacked practise facilities. There was concern that as Ashford grew another, better golf club could be built and take away members. He added that ABC had looked at the 'developability' of the golf course in the future - it is close to the area where significant development is already going on. It would be difficult for ABC to say that it could not be developed and the golf club would need to identify a new site, which would be difficult. The golf club committee do not want to move for the next 10 years or so, by which time planning regulations may be different.

Simon continued that if the site were put forward for development ABC would have a difficult decision to make as it is not part of the Core Strategy. It may be an issue when the LDF is revised. What sort of development would be acceptable? Simon felt that it would probably not be housing because of its proximity to the M20. It could be an extension of Eureka Park although the capacity of J9 would pose difficulties - the new works do not include an estimate of any development here. Any development is effectively ruled out for a considerable time.

Howard commented that part of the golf course is rented from ABC as Public Open Space.

In response to a question from Brian Riddle, Howard said that the area in question is part of The Warren and is rented at an agricultural rate until 2011.

The comment was made from a resident that the talk was of more and more development, with ABC being under huge pressure to build more houses and industrial units. It seemed, however, that existing traffic problems had not been addressed. People will not go into Ashford until these problems have been resolved - it is a nightmare getting into Ashford in the morning, with traffic solid each morning and evening.

Simon replied that this was a fair question. A lot of work was being done on implications for traffic with the virtual doubling of the town's size. It is not possible to double the size of the road network - there is a need to mitigate traffic impact. Highway improvements are needed, such as those at J9 and Drovers roundabout to increase capacity. Better public transport is also needed - it should be fast and reliable and an alternative to the car. Modelling exercises have identified necessary highway and public transport improvements.

Peter Coatsworth said that planners should alleviate traffic going into Ashford. Simon agreed that through traffic should not use Ashford as a shortcut - it needs to bypass the town.

Simon was asked when the master plan had been drawn up, given the current shambles with all routes dug up. Simon agreed that the coordination of roadworks was not all it should be. He urged residents to look ahead to when the scheme was complete - he hoped that everyone would agree that it had been an improvement. The hope was for a better network, eg the improvements at J10.

Ron Carden said that mistakes made at J10 were being repeated at Drovers roundabout. It was initially a small road, but then building was encouraged and the junction could not cope. There was a lack of foresight and planning. Similarly, the barracks site is being smothered - there seems to be no vision. It had been acknowledged that Kennington lacks green spaces, so why not use the land as a park?

Simon replied that planning was difficult and of necessity a compromise between community, government and developers. Planners have to balance competing interests and hope to deliver common aspects. However, the risk is of having change imposed on us.

Brian Riddle asked that the ring road revert to a one-way system. Simon noted his comments.



A comment was made from a resident that our aspirations are not delivered, rather those of the council. Simon said he could not comment.

Simon was asked how many houses were to be built. Howard replied that it was 31,000 by 2031.

Frank Avery asked where all these people were coming from. Michael Cloughton felt that London commuters were moving in to avoid higher prices closer to London. He criticised the Crow report on housing, which stated that a certain number of houses be built or 'whatever can conveniently be fitted in'. Michael also said that the government continually fails to deliver the required infrastructure.

Simon was asked about the rationale behind the Warren Park and Ride, when 75% of residents live on the other side of Ashford. Simon replied that there would eventually be 3 - 1 on the south orbital and 1 on the Tenterden side.

Ron Carden said that the council should buy the land now rather than later, when there was the real possibility that prices would be forced up.

Sue Wood asked who ABC envisaged would use the Warren Park and Ride. Simon replied that shoppers would come from Canterbury and Maidstone. This was greeted with derision.

In response to a question Simon replied that bus lanes were under consideration. Frank Avery suggested an outer circular route for buses to collect and deliver shoppers and schoolchildren between a number of points.

Michael Cloughton said that the voice of reason sometimes prevailed, and cited the proposal to use Warren Lane for Park and Ride buses. This had been reconsidered in the light of representations and had been withdrawn.

A resident noted that with the replacement of the library a golden opportunity had been lost to make something good, eg an art gallery or theatre. This may attract more people to the town than Debenhams. Another resident agreed but said that Ashford did not have the attractions of, say, Canterbury which had the Cathedral and history.

Simon agreed with both comments and said that Ashford needs to be a cultural hub - more needed to be done - Debenhams was not the answer but it was a beginning.

Michael Cloughton said that Ashford had had some art work - Kent Art College and Nimby's elephant. He added that a professional theatre was unlikely as commercial management show no interest and because of competition from the Leas Cliff Hall and the Marlowe Theatre. There was an ideal site - the bingo hall in High Street, but Mecca would not release it. He felt that amateur theatre was more of a possibility.

At the close of questions Howard called on John Faulkner to take the floor and John proposed a vote of thanks to Simon. This was endorsed by the residents.

#### **Any Other Business:**

John Faulkner stated that he had only recently joined the Association committee and asked what SLRA was for. In the mid 1980s the Science Park had been proposed, followed by CTRL and then the M20. These were things that drew people together, however there was nothing like that at the moment. He was heartened by the comments on the need for a vision for Ashford. John then asked members of the Association what it should be for and what it should aim for.

As a founding member, Ron Carden explained that the terms of reference were to preserve the rural character of Sandyhurst Lane and its environs. John commented that this may not be an option under the current government.

Ron suggested that the committee consider redrafting the terms of reference.

A resident felt that preservation of the lane and surrounding area should still be a priority. Another resident agreed and said that SLRA was needed as a voice.

Brian Riddle commented that the quality of life in the lane was vastly improved when the lane was closed to through traffic during construction of the M20.

John said that he had heard of the need to preserve the lane. We need to pressurise borough and county councillors. Ron Carden spoke of the difficulty recruiting committee members.

Doug Harman spoke of his experiences running a Residents' Association in Bermondsey – the only way he attracted new members was by leaflet drops. He suggested social events as a way of involving everyone in the lane.

Ron stated that the SLRA newsbrief used to be distributed quarterly, but it was difficult getting help.

Doug wondered if an emphasis on the financial benefits would be useful - maintaining the character of the lane would affect property prices. He also suggested that a website for the association.

Michael Cloughton said that he was happy to meet residents on a regular basis, although the lane was part of 3 wards. The other 2 councillors were Rita Hawes and Neil Wallace. Current problems of concern to residents in the lane were noise problems arising from the concrete topped M20, and poor road maintenance – shown by the number of potholes - both affected by budget constraints.

Neil mentioned the complaints about a new wall that appeared to encroach on the highway. Howard stated that measurements had shown this was 18 inches over the boundary and was under investigation.

Peter Coatsworth updated the Association on the application for village green status at Sandy Acres. This had been submitted by Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Parish Council (BA&EPC) with the support of SLRA to protect the space. ABC opposed the application but BA &EPC set up a Trust with charitable status. The aims of the Trust are to improve the facilities for Sandyhurst Lane and Goat Lees and to safeguard green open spaces.

Peter stated that BA&EPC had agreed to buy new seats for use at Sandy Acres and for the land by Eastwell Towers.

Howard closed the meeting by again thanking Simon Cole for his presentation and the members for attending.

The meeting closed at 9.40pm.