

Sandyhurst Lane Residents' Association
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
Held on Wednesday, 22nd September 2004 at Sandy Acres, Sandyhurst Lane

Attendance: 42 members attended, including Howard Preston (Chairman) and Kevin Saunby (Vice-chairman). Also present were Andy Corcoran (guest speaker, representing Ashford Highways Unit), County Councillor Mike Angell and Councillors Neil Wallace and Mick Hubert.

Apologies: were received from County Councillors Richard King and Charles Findlay; Councillors Rita Hawes, John Kemp, Norman Ayres, Noel Greaves and Peter Davison; Graham Mountford, Eric Graves, Lionel Barnes, Stuart Clay, Jim Mather, Myrtle Butcher, Ron Butcher, Don King, Teresa Baker and Denzil Wood.

Minutes of the last AGM: were proposed by Victor Berwick and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

Chairman's report: The Chairman opened his report by stating that there was increasing pressure on the semi-rural surroundings of the Lane because of the search by Ashford's Future for sites for 31000 homes. Landowners had been asked to contact ABC Strategic Planning of any land suitable for housing development.

The Chairman then discussed planning matters:-

Eureka Business Park:

A new development brief was presented on 4th November 2003. Objections to the outline planning application (04/0044/AS) were lodged by SLRA, residents and Boughton Aluph and Eastwell parish council as the application did not comply with the relevant section of the Local Plan (S27). A workshop was held on 20th May 2004 at which quality of design and landscaping were emphasised – retention of existing tree belts, water features and surrounding meadows, footpaths and park like settings; graded storey heights.

Possible housing allocation – Sandyhurst farmland; Golf Course:

SLRA objected on grounds of loss of open space. Also contrary to S28 of the Local Plan: "Ashford Golf Course and land adjoining to the north east provides an attractive open green entrance alongside the major road and rail corridor serving the town. Development of this area will not be permitted, except for the following purposes:

- a) Small scale buildings in association with open leisure uses of the land which are compatible with the golf course use and do not generate significant amounts of extra traffic on Sandyhurst Lane.
- b) Revised layout of the existing golf course."

Eureka land adjacent to Sandyhurst lane above Molehill. SLRA view: no vehicular access to the Lane. 3m wide roadside strip for footpath again requested.

Tile Lodge Hill sandpits. Comments as for Molehill.

8 acres of agricultural land north east of Eureka track from Sandyhurst farm towards Molehill. SLRA view: developer to provide sewer with connection with existing Sandyhurst lane homes, eg as at 300-390.

Thurleigh Homes offered to buy nos 162, 158 and 164 – rear gardens abut Grosvenor Bungalow. Housing proposed on the Grosvenor Bungalow site. Access for emergency vehicles would be allowed from Sandyhurst Lane. The development would necessitate a change in Section 28 of the Borough Plan which restricts building in this area (see above).

Ashford's Future Workshop

More than 100 representatives from around the borough attended the 2nd Greater Ashford Development Framework Workshop at Eastwell Manor on 12th-13th July 2004. Consultants (Urban Initiatives) put forward 4 options to find sites for the 31000 homes by increasing building in: Chilmington Green (option 1); Kingsnorth (option 2); Cheeseman Green (option 3) or a compact option 4 (a canal district south of the Designer Outlet).

Proposals for north Ashford include:

'Kennington circle' – link road from Trinity Road/Faversham Road junction beside Towers School and joining Willesborough Road near Batchelors. Housing development behind Towers School - link road funding may come from developer .

Sandyhurst – This area is shown as proposed employment and includes Eureka upper terrace, Sandyhurst farmland and land bounded by the Golf Course, rear of gardens nos. 86-250 (Molehill) including 8 acre field and sandpit below Molehill. SLRA informed that Eureka Business Park had failed to attract new employers and that housing should not stop at the Duck Farm but be mixed with commercial business on Eureka. The increase in employment area beyond Eureka into Sandyhurst farmland may be due to the addition of proposed housing allocation offered by landowners.

Police College – likely to be sold for housing.

Further planning matters:

Eureka Leisure Park phase 3: 74 bed hotel, restaurant, filling station.

Land east of Eurogate Business Park: office development with parking and landscaping.

New roundabout proposed to service Eureka Science and Business Park, which is to be developed piecemeal. SLRA objected.

Hoads Wood Gardens: an application for 3 houses on land adjacent to 30 Hoads Wood Gardens was made in 1997 and refused. Another application for 5 houses has been made and refused by Ashford Borough Council. The developers, Kitewood Estates, have appealed to the Planning Inspectorate.

Land to rear of Hillyfields: ABC refused permission for bungalow. Developer appealed.

Warrengate: Developer appealed against ABC's refusal to grant permission .

Wards Phase 4 sewer:

Problems re installation mean that Wards unlikely to obtain approval for the sewer from ABC or Southern Water. Possible solution was provision of 2 new manholes but these installed incorrectly. Eventually resolved but 1 property still not connected to sewer.

Matters Arising:

1. Goat Lees primary school: Due to open in 2005/6. This is still the target date.
2. Neighbourhood Watch: Efforts are being made to set up Neighbourhood Watch in those parts of the lane which remain uncovered. Volunteers are asked to contact PC Paul Brosnan of Neighbourhood Watch Police or Howard Preston.
3. Speed limits: The proposal to reduce the speed limit at Faversham Road end of the lane from 60mph to 40mph will be discussed by the guest speaker.
4. Signage: Sandyhurst Lane signs for the junction with Faversham Road were requested. Unfortunately the signs at the A20 end of the lane were vandalised and the contractors mistakenly replaced them using the signs meant for the other end. This further delayed the installation of the Faversham Road signs. Although these are now in place apologies were offered to those residents who were constantly being asked for directions.
5. Footpaths: Thanks were given to Abi Mansley for her efforts in ensuring that footpaths across farmland are kept clear. This is now the responsibility of Louise Weller. Steve Godden (Ashford Ramblers' Association) also looks after the area. Any further queries re footpaths can be taken up with Steve Godden after the meeting.
6. The Warren/Hoads Wood is now Public Open Space. The Residents' Association has objected to the planning application to build at Warren Gate because it cuts into the 'green corridor'. The application was refused by Ashford Borough Council but has gone to appeal.

The Chairman then introduced Andy Corcoran, Transportation Engineer, Ashford Highways Unit, to talk about transportation matters.

Mr Corcoran explained that his job was to improve roads and road safety. He reported the following:

- 1 Improvements are to be carried out at the Potters Corner junction to reduce accidents.
- 2 The 40pmh speed limit was promised.
- 3 'Safe routes to school scheme': A temporary one-way system is in operation outside Downs View School. No decision has yet been made as to whether it will be made permanent.

- 4 Footpath along Tile Lodge Hill: On hold pending agreement with the landowners.
- 5 M20 resurfacing: potentially 2005/06.
- 6 Park and Ride scheme is being considered.
- 7 Potters Close was adopted in 2001, Hoads Wood Gardens has yet to be adopted and part of Trinity Road remains unadopted.
- 8 The potential for congestion in Sandyhurst Lane after completion of the Templar barracks site development is under review.
- 9 Mr Corcoran asked that he be notified of any outstanding maintenance issues in the lane.
- 10 After April 2005 all highways matters would be the responsibility of KCC.

Mr Corcoran then invited questions from the floor.

He was asked about the frequency of police speed checks in the lane and the possibility of a speed camera. Mr Corcoran replied that the camera would cost about £30,000 but government criteria laid down where such cameras could be installed. He was asked if the situation would be different were residents to pay for installation. He replied that it would not, as costs were generally recouped.

Mr Benstead congratulated Mr Corcoran on the promise of a speed limit. He explained that residents had been lobbying for this speed limit for 20 years. Numerous speed counts had been carried out by Ashford Borough Council and the Residents' Association. He asked for a date for the implementation of the limit. Mr Corcoran replied that it would not be during the current financial year. Highways matters would transfer to KCC in 2005 and there would then be competition for available funding, possibly delaying its implementation.

Mr Dowley asked about advisory panels to flash up the speed of passing motorists. He felt that these were successful in reducing speed. Mr Corcoran agreed but stated that these could only be installed on a straight piece of road with a verge and electricity supply and where there is an existing speed limit. It was suggested that these be installed in the lane where the 30mph limit is in force. Mr Corcoran added that these could be funded by organisations such as a parish council.

Mr Harvey asked about the incidence of injuries in the last 2-3 years given that there was no pavement along most of the lane and some garden walls were on the garden boundary abutting the road. Mr Corcoran replied that there had been no serious accidents. He felt that the walls would affect visibility when pulling out of the drive rather than speeding. The cost of providing a pavement is £5000 per 300m. There would also be physical constraints in some areas, eg from Hoads Wood Gardens to Potters Corner.

Mrs Marjorie Thomas related bad experiences with taxi drivers speeding along the lane. Mr Corcoran said that this should be raised with the licensing authority and Taxi Drivers' Association. Councillor Hubert added that although taxis had special privileges with respect to road lanes because they are classified as public transport, these privileges did not extend to breaking the law.

Mrs Thomas congratulated the service she had received from Highways' staff and asked about the implications for the staff of the move to KCC. These were unclear.

Mr Kevin Saunby asked if the only barrier to the installation of the 40mph speed limit was financial. Mr Corcoran agreed that it was. Mr Saunby then asked about Westwell Lane – a cul-de-sac but the speed limit signs had been removed. He was told that a 30mph speed limit was in force and that the signs would be replaced. Mr Saunby then asked for markings at the other end of Westwell Lane where only a chain link fence was in place to prevent vehicles crashing on to the railway line. Mr Corcoran said that this would be rectified.

The Chairman of the Kennington Community Forum reported that 2 hand held speed guns had been bought for use by residents. Information gleaned was passed to the Police who would write to the offender. These guns are, however, currently out of use pending a court case.

Mr Corcoran was asked to explain 'self-enforcing speed limits'. He said that speeds were found to be lower in some parts of the lane than others, in particular where the lane was built up on both sides.

Mr Peter LeClerq (Chairman, Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Parish Council) related that although the main gate at Sandy Acres was locked each night when the club closed, problems were reported with cars using the cycleway/footpath. He was also concerned that there was no gateway to prevent children running into the road from Sandy Acres. Mr Corcoran replied that bollards should be in place to prevent cars using the cycleway – he would investigate. He also stated that the 'pinch point' was to be reviewed.

Mr Corcoran was told that residents had been assured that a speed limit would be introduced when the footpath and cycleway were installed at Sandy Acres. He was also told that visibility was poor when trying to cross. He was asked to press for the introduction of the 40mph speed limit. Mr Corcoran said that he would pass on these comments, but funding was not currently available.

Mr Corcoran was asked about the costs of introducing the 40mph speed limit. He replied that with legal costs and the cost of producing the signs, the cost would be £3000 - £5000. In answer to a question he said that a contribution from the parish council or Residents' Association may bring the introduction forward.

Mr Steve Godden queried the costs and asked about Police consultation. He was told that the Police objected to a 30mph limit along the whole length of the lane but agreed to the 40mph limit.

Cllr Robert Oliver (Vice-chairman Boughton Aluph and Eastwell parish council) stated that money allocated under agreement 106 to the Goat Lees development remained. He asked if this could be allocated to funding the 40mph limit. Mr Corcoran was further asked why money had not yet been found when residents had been pressing for the speed limit for over 20 years. He replied that there was continual competition for funding and higher priorities at certain sites. He said that 13 village speed limits were being installed this year, but the allocated budget was only £50,000.

Mr Dowley stated that he had been counting skid marks in the lane since it had been resurfaced a few years ago. He had counted 20 of 30 - 40 feet in length and suggested that Highways look at these to demonstrate the number of near misses. Mr Corcoran replied that roads are inspected but because of budgetary constraints priority is given to sites where accidents had occurred. He said that all had been campaigning for years. Consultations are carried out with the Police, parish council, residents and geography and accident record taken into account when allocating funding, but budgetary constraints again apply.

Mr Corcoran was asked if Highways was notified of all accidents. He replied that the police database was used. He stated that although it is a legal requirement to report accidents, not all are reported. Highways can only go by police reports.

Mr Corcoran was informed by a resident of a recent accident in the lane involving a motorcycle in which a car overturned. A car belonging to the resident's daughter was hit and shunted a considerable distance along the road.

The Chairman thanked Mr Corcoran for his presentation.

Treasurer's Report: The income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 30th September 2004 was presented.

Expenditure over income was given as £166.63, a reversal on the previous year. However, no increase in subscriptions is required.

Balance sheet: Current net assets stand at £406.80, a reduction of £166.63 on the previous year.

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. Proposer: Mr Peter Thomas, seconder: Norman Leaske.

Other Business: Housing in the area had been discussed at a meeting on 29th September. Councillors were invited to comment.

Cllr Hubert said that almost all councillors and some county councillors were present at the meeting. Any decision would be made by councillors and the people of Ashford. Building on the golf course had been discussed but Cllr Hubert said that he was against this: the golf course should be retained on the expiry of its lease as a 'payback' for putting the M20 through the Warren. The maintenance programme for the Warren included the golf course. By the beginning of 2005 a consultation document should be available for public comment. Building was planned to continue over a 30 year period. Many options were under discussion.

Cllr Hubert was asked when the golf club lease was due to expire and answered that it would expire in 2010.

He was then asked why development was proposed on the golf course when there are many brownfield sites? It was suggested that commercial interests had a part to play as the site could be sold for a considerable sum.

Cllr Wallace said that John Prescott wants 31000 houses to be built in Ashford. All of the council wants to use existing sites and not greenfield. The initial plan is for the development of the town centre, however there are problems re the so-called 'canal' area: the idea is to develop along the lines of the Dutch model but this would upset the balance of the flood plain. The number of houses put here would, therefore, have to be reduced. He stressed the importance of the consultation process. The development of the golf course was controversial with the council split. However, brownfield sites in the centre can only take 11000 homes, so the remainder would have to go at the periphery of the area.

County Cllr Mike Angell said that he was restricted in what he could say as he lives in one of the affected areas. He declared an interest but agreed with Cllr Wallace that the town centre should be regenerated first and the infrastructure put in place. It was expected that work on the canal area would begin in November. He felt that the town centre should be regenerated before allowing out-of-town developments with their concomitant traffic problems. He also warned residents to avoid junction 10 during the redevelopment.

Cllr Hubert stated that the development would be spread over several years but no details re phasing were yet available. He was, however, in favour of the doctrine 'mend before extend'. In addition the following would be needed first: schools, health facilities, transport and facilities for leisure, the arts and culture.

Mrs Marjorie Thomas drew the meeting's attention to a public meeting to be held on 4th October at Charter House on 'Ashford's Future'.

County Cllr Mike Angell said that county councillors would be in attendance.

Mr Peter Thomas asked about developments beyond Sandyhurst Lane. Cllr Hubert replied that Beechbrook Farm had been suggested but the proposal rejected.

The Chairman then invited Mr Cliff Grieve to talk about the Tennis Academy. Mr Grieve said that a company had been formed to bring sport and, in particular, tennis to Ashford and its children. The company had already involved 4000 Maidstone children in sporting activities. The company is currently using the facilities at Towers School and running tennis programmes. It is felt that sport has benefits that help reduce antisocial behaviour. Alternative sites are being investigated, including Sandy Acres: this has 2 derelict tennis courts and the company has proposed building a 4 court indoor tennis hall in the corner of the site behind the trees. A site meeting has been held and with the parish council. Mr Grieve stressed that the facility would be for the benefit of the community, with no shareholders. A charitable trust has been set up, costs are kept low and all monies raised go to benefit the children. He added that other sites and other towns are also being looked at.

Mr David Harvey asked how much more money was needed given that Mr Grieve had stated that he had already raised £800,000. Mr Grieve answered that funding was being sought from Sport England, the National Lottery and that funding would need to be phased in.

Mr Harvey asked if squash courts would be provided. Mr Grieve replied that this was a possibility but badminton courts would certainly be, together with a small fitness centre.

In answer to a question from the Vice-chairman Mr Grieve stated that the hall would be a fixed structure. Mr Saunby then said that he was aware of the financial difficulties that such a project faced and asked if the fitness centre, possibly with a refreshment unit, was necessary to help the economics. Mr Grieve answered that it would, although the difficulties were eased because it was a charitable trust and could attract donations.

The Chairman then apologised that he had not, as hoped, been able to show the architect's plans for Eureka – these were unavailable, having been blocked by Mrs Lois Jarrett (Development Control Manager, Ashford Borough Council).

Any Other Business: Mr David Harvey asked if the Association could consider the possibility of asking residents to put house numbers on the verge, because of the difficulty of reading house numbers from the road.

The meeting closed at 9.40pm.