

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Leatherhead Residents Association at the
Letherhead Institute on Monday the 7th of September 2009**

Apologies: Ray and Caroline Brown, Roy Allen, Anne Brodrick, Flip Cargill

Minutes of August 3rd Meeting: Minutes were accepted with the following change: Leach Grove is not in the Green Belt. It should be changed to 'Leach Grove is the only remaining truly wooded area in Leatherhead.'

Matters arising: Retroactive planning permission for commercial use of the buildings at **Brook Willow Farm** was denied by the MVDC because of harm to the Green Belt, noise and nuisance to neighbours, and the limited access to the site. Failure to pay the required tariff for change of use was also given as a reason for refusal but this objection could have been overcome with proper payment.

There is still great concern about **Leach Grove**. Although the children are no longer on site perhaps because school has started, the damage they have done is considerable. (Pictures taken by Hilary Porter were available). At the most recent Committee meeting Hilary Porter was assigned to deal with the matter. Two residents' letters seeking our help were passed to her. They will be forwarded to MVDC's Chief Executive Officer, Darren Mephan along with our letter requesting that he direct our concerns to the correct MV department. Residents are not only concerned about the harm to the site, designated as a natural area, but to health and safety issues for several reasons:

- The potential for injury to the young people involved in dangerous manoeuvres on bicycles on muddy surfaces
- The danger to pedestrians who may be in the path of bicycles
- The paths that are obstructed with rubbish and made unsafe for walking due to slippery mud.

An alternative cycle or skateboard area in the Park on Forty Foot Road have been suggested for the children's enjoyment and safety.

The conservation and maintenance of this area is a chief goal of our members.

Hilary Porter's research has determined that the land belongs to the NHS Trust for Epsom Hospital since 1993 when SCC relinquished responsibility for it. This fact was verified by a document from the Land Registry Office provided by Flip Cargill. The NHS Trust will be contacted before the next open meeting.

After refusal of a planning application and an appeal the MVDC Development Control Committee approved the recent proposal for flats to replace the house at **1 Church Road**. Careful attention has been paid to the style and materials used in the construction on this sensitive site in a conservation area.

Special Guest Presentation

The focus of the meeting was a slide presentation and talk billed as "Leatherhead: Creating a Sense of Place" by Principal Conservation Officer, Rod Shaw. Because he has spent many years helping to create our environment he stated that the emphasis was actually on 'enhancing and conserving a sense of place'.

We were reminded that the thing that distinguishes one town from another is the combination of buildings and natural features, plants and animals. We were treated to carefully selected slides that illustrated features of which we can take pride. The recently

refurbished Council Chamber in the Wesley House was an excellent example of a restoration project by a responsible owner that one would seldom have an opportunity to see. Some pictures were taken from vantage points that we would not be able to access (the view across the Red House Grounds is lovely from an extremely high position). Many of us were probably surprised to know that cows graze on Common Meadow in the spring and summer as they did many years ago. Although the land belongs to the London Borough of Merton, the MV oversees a successful conservation programme on that site.

By the end of the talk we had a much better idea of how some of Leatherhead's Developer Contributions (Section 106 money) has been spent: the River Path, the Park Gardens, Red House Grounds, King George V Garden, Gravel Hill, the High Street name a few. We were also informed that the remaining £250,000 has been designated for the High Street. An additional £50,000 has been set aside for public art.

The complexity of working with two councils (MV and SCC) is making the progress on the High Street slow. Creating guidelines for the placement of tables on the High Street has taken a great deal of time but is nearing completion. When the guidelines are issued, each restaurant will have to decide whether or not to seek planning permission. When permission is granted SCC will decide whether or not to license the seating arrangements for each establishment.

Rod gave examples of the use of MVDC enforcement notices for the buildings at 22-30 North Street to keep them from becoming derelict. He also pointed out that the Council had required LIDL's to get an architect to design their building to fit into its setting adjacent to a park. Whether you love or hate the building, it is probably the most attractive LIDL's in the country since most of them look like warehouses.

Some decisions by the Council can be mildly controversial. Leaving a wildlife meadow in the Red House Grounds and strips of uncut wildflowers in other parks and roadways is sometimes looked upon as a way the Council is trying to save money. This scheme is actually a way of encouraging biodiversity in the area. A technique of mowing a metre wide strip is being used to show that some care is being taken. Careful management of the wildflowers makes sure that the seed have time to set. This means that this time of year the plants are in a disheveled state. If a plant becomes too prolific it is weeded out. We were informed that stinging nettles along the river path need careful management. This is because they are an essential part of the habitat of a rare species of plant that seems to thrive in Leatherhead. The MV has begun to cut the stinging nettles back some and clear some spaces so that people can come near the river in those spots but, of course, leaving in place many stinging nettles.

Following Dorking's recent Conservation Area Appraisal we were informed that Leatherhead will also have such an appraisal.

Rod kindly answered a few questions including a few about the High Street. We were told that the technique for dealing with the surface has not been decided. When asked if £250,000 would be the total budget for the High Street, we were told that SCC would also make a Section 106 Contribution. When asked about the fate of the statues on the High Street, Rod stated that this was a matter for further consideration. Hubert Carr

asked for a show of hands of those who wanted the statues discarded or left in place. There was no clear consensus. However, a further question asking whether they should be relocated and preserved in a safer place, showed a majority in favour of the latter. Rod was able to point out that one of the original purposes of the art was to provide reference points along the High Street for the blind. They were also there to channel vehicles along the central

carriageway as well as provide visual interest. Of course at the time there was no way of knowing how vulnerable they would be to vandals.

Reports from Sub Groups

Membership Paula Sabine reported that plans for the October Membership Drive are still in place. An appeal was made for volunteers to help in any way.

Planning In Caroline Brown's absence her report was read by Cheryl Allen. It included Brook Willow Farm (see matters arising) and change of use to A3 (restaurants and cafes) of some shop units on Church Street. In spite of the fact that the application has been withdrawn, Caroline has written to express our concerns to Jack Straw about the lack of balance in the variety of shops in our town.

Two houses are proposed in the grounds of the Old Vicarage. Although they are quite nice, there is some concern that they are on the edge of a flood plain.

A large house is proposed for Forty Foot Road in place of the White Lodge. We think the large house is most desirable but question the use of cedar shingles for the roof and part of the frontage.

Highways Hubert Carr has had the opportunity to take some of our feedback to Dekek Poole of SCC. There is a Highways meeting with SCC before the next public meeting. Hubert Carr and Ray Brown will attend.

Any other Business

Cyclist were reported to be riding in Church Walk where cycling is not permitted. A member has suggested that the signage could be improved. Hubert Carr pointed out that the sign is correct but the young people are not familiar with the Highway Code. Apparently it would be very expensive to change the sign but someone suggested that the words 'no cycling' could be added underneath the present sign that depicts a cycle with a red circle.

The intrusive nature of the music from Thorncroft Manor on 23rd August was discussed. Some people had looked upon it as a one off Charity Event that could be tolerated. Others had contacted the Environmental Health Department. Reports are being heard that this was the beginning of a series of events. This amplified music that could be heard over the entirety of South Leatherhead is not tolerable. We will investigate.

The next public meeting will be held on 5th October with guest speaker Linda Heath sharing part of Leatherhead's History.

The meeting concluded at 8:45

Submitted by Cheryl Allen in the absence of Ray Brown, Secretary