



## **Chairman's Report - 2020 AGM.**

Good evening and welcome to you all at this much delayed and somewhat unusual LRA AGM. Could I just ask that, if you know someone who couldn't be here tonight for whatever reason, you pass my best wishes on to them.

The period since our last AGM in April 2019 has certainly been an eventful one, both for the LRA and even more for our community.

For the LRA, we had a very successful "race-night" in April 2019 which raised £1355. Half of this was paid over to our joint sponsors, the Parish Church, while the other half went into our "Projects" fund.

Last October one of our members had the inspired idea of promoting ways of being happy and healthy without continual dependence on pills and medicine. She organised the Abraham Dixon Hall into sections showing activities and exercises to encourage sensible dietary habits and ways of living. Talks and demonstrations of some aspects were held in an adjoining room so there was full visitor participation.

Unfortunately, in the early part of this year, we lost LRA Director, Cheryl Allen who eventually succumbed to cancer, aggravated by Covid-19 and, shortly after, her husband Roy also died of Covid-19. As the organiser of so many of our events, including the "Open Gardens," the Litter Picks and the Newsletter, Cheryl was one of our most active members and her presence will be sorely missed.

However Cheryl and Roy's memory will be forever assured by virtue of the establishment of the Cheryl and Roy Memorial Fund which will provide funding to the LRA for many of the LRA activities that were dear to the heart of Cheryl. Set up by Cheryl's daughter and step-son, the Fund was financed by an auction of some of Cheryl and Roy's possessions, as a result of which many houses in Leatherhead now have permanent reminders of these two warm hearted people.

In respect of our community, the last 18 months have brought a very mixed bag of events, many of which we will still be reporting on at our next AGM.

The biggest of these has been the ongoing saga of the new Local Plan. The draft, issued in early 2020, was heavily criticised by both politicians and voters alike. In particular, few of the proposed sites for residential development found favour, especially the Allotments and the Town's only central area park, the Red House Grounds/Gardens. In the Plan, this is often referred to as "Bull Hill" which is rather confusing. The Planners are now working on a second draft and it is to be hoped that the next draft better reflects trends that were emerging before Covid, but have been further emphasised by the pandemic: namely, the finite demand for small flats and the rising demand for small houses with gardens, the decline in the demand for offices and the importance for any urban community of readily accessible open space for exercise and recreation.

By a cruel twist of fate, Covid has brought about the full pedestrianisation of our High Street, against which the LRA has fought so long and hard. It is being introduced on a temporary basis to provide sufficient space for shoppers to socially distance. It will be interesting to see what effect it will have on the fortunes of the retailers.

In July of this year, a very welcome decision was finally made as to the siting of our new "acute" hospital, in Sutton. The decision does seem the most sensible to us, providing the NHS hold to their promise to make the site more accessible to visitors by public transport. We will also benefit from a substantially refurbished Epsom Hospital that will continue to be our local centre for all but the more extreme medical needs.

Finally, and perhaps symptomatic of changing thinking as to the environment, is the proposal by Surrey and Mole Valley Councils to embark on a tree planting campaign along our roads. Surrey has agreed to undertake the below ground investigation relating to pipes and cables which was the stumbling block before. We need to provide some locations. I have already suggested By-Pass Road which bisects Copthorne Road and goes between the Plough Inn and the Junction 9 roundabout because we did try that one before and failed because of what was below ground. You could think of others.

Finally, a few areas where we are looking for help. Firstly, there is great need for a Minuting Secretary to share with Irene Seifert, who is here doing it tonight. Most items are written and prepared in advance so there is no need for superfast shorthand, but it is the questions and their answers that need slotting into the record of the meetings. Secondly, as you may remember, we were fortunate enough to have a volunteer, Caryl Gurney, to assemble our Newsletter, but we now need articles for it, plus, if possible, photos to accompany them. I would like the next Newsletter

to go out in February. We could also do with more people who like a little walk and would be prepared to deliver the Newsletters and, on occasion, other communications to members who do not have email.

I will now move over and leave the place free for our Speaker, Councillor Mary Huggins, Chairman of Mole Valley Council, to tell us about her early days as a Councillor and about her hopes and, possibly, fears, for the future.

Caroline Brown.