



Leatherhead Residents' Association

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 could not be here this evening, you pass on my best wishes and tell them that we are thinking of them all.

The period since our last AGM in April 2019 has certainly been an eventful one, both for our community and for us in the LRA. So, before moving on to the body of my Report I would like to mention Cheryl Allen, one of our directors, who succumbed to cancer aggravated by Covid-19 and also her husband, Roy, who also died shortly after her from the same infection. 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 is sorely missed. However, quite amazingly, Cheryl and Roy's memory will be forever assured by virtue of the establishment of a Memorial Fund which will provide funding to the LRA for many of our activities that were dear to their hearts. Set up by Cheryl's daughter and step-son, the Fund was financed by an online auction of some of Cheryl and Roy's possessions, as a result of which many houses in Leatherhead (including my own) now have permanent reminders of these two warm hearted people.

And now, I understand, the financial fruits of the auction are about to be handed over.

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. As I see it, there are 4 areas of activity which now need to be brought up:

The first is **Transform**, where action does seem a little slow. By a cruel twist of fate, Covid has finally hastened the loss of parking even on Sundays by necessitating a wide berth between pedestrians. Delivery vehicles are permitted both access and parking between 4pm and 10am ~~the next day~~, but general customers cannot park until 6 in the evening. I understand that all vehicles are allowed to park from 6pm until 8am. A business consortium in Dorking (known as BID or "Business Improvement District") is financing free parking there on Friday afternoons. A similar scheme is being looked at for the north of M.V., but I suspect the usual financial hurdle will be hard to overcome. Officers at Pippbrook have been working hard to try to alleviate the economic problems of our businesses and three schemes have been highlighted: one involves the offer by shops of

very special, unusual goods to tempt people on to their premises, another is a Christmas Window competition – with the same aim in view - and the third is the last of the Coast to Capital loan schemes. A little booklet will be produced to explain and advertise these ideas.

The fate and future of the unexpected planters in our High Street is uncertain, but I have written to Rod Shaw asking for the emptied ones to at least be given some bulbs and not be abandoned. An application to put lighting around the car park by Claire and James house has been made but any re-design of the Swan Centre/Bull Hill is unlikely to appear before well into next year.

This brings me to the next area of interest, the ongoing saga of the **new Local Plan that most of us looked at in February this year, aka Regulation 18.** 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 was often referred to as "Bull Hill" which is rather confusing). The response to this was so enormous that the Department is still working through all the comments and, apparently, are anticipating answering each one. A new version of the Plan is expected early next year, some adjustments are proposed and a timetable for all this should appear in November. The next Draft Plan should better reflect trends that were emerging before Covid and have since been emphasised by it, 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.

In fact, at the moment there are two Consultation Papers before Government: One concerns changes to the Planning System, i.e. how housing needs are calculated and changes in the designation of various parts of the landscape, and the other to put the whole country into a "zoneable" base system in terms of the use of land. Some G.Belt sites may have difficulty protecting that distinction, and will need to produce evidence of Exceptional Circumstances, Community Benefit and Impact.

Incidentally, as a result of this new thinking, the land around Gatwick is now going to be re-considered.

My third area of interest is the idea **of Unitary Authorities.** Whitehall wants to promote devolution and power from Central Government to local areas. Each such area would be a "Unitary Authority," led by a Mayor and significant funding would be given. As is well known, Surrey jumped on the bandwagon to be recognised as such but, as yet, has received no answer. Meanwhile, the 11 District and Borough Councils of Surrey have also written to the Secretary of State to see if they too could be invited to submit a bid. If Surrey's bid is successful, County Council elections will not go ahead next year and the Government would have to announce this by 7th of October.

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. As I am sure you have all heard, Surrey has promised to plant 1.2 million trees by 2030. In the Environment Department of SCC there is Group Manager called Katie Sergeant with £40,000 in her pocket all ready to be spent on trees 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 but failed on account 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. Someone to follow up the planting of trees would be most useful. Someone with an eye for that kind of thing would be of benefit to us all. A sort of Tree Monitor. 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 fears for the future

Caroline Brown (Chairman)

AT THE END OF THE MEETING;

AOB: On Saturday, 7th November, there will be a stall in the Swan Centre selling all sorts of Christmas decorations. If you would like to take a turn in manning it - it can be quite fun chatting to different people – and of course you would not be alone, do let me or Susan Leveritt or Hilary Porter know. They have it all organised.