



Leatherhead Residents' Association

Chairman's report.(final version)5/10/20

The period since our last AGM 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, as did her husband Roy, who died shortly after her from the Covid 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 just now action does seem a little slow. By a cruel twist of fate, Covid has finally brought about the loss of High Street parking on Sundays in order to allow social distancing between shoppers. Delivery vehicles are permitted both access and parking between 4 pm and 10 am the next day, but shoppers cannot park until 6 in the evening. 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 difficult 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 Coast Capital loan schemes.

The fate and future of the unexpected planters in our High Street is uncertain, but I have written to Rod Shaw asking for the empty 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 locations 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 of this year. In the first draft, 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 or Gardens. (In the plan, this was often referred to a "Bull Hill," which is rather confusing). The negative response was so enormous that the Planners are 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. This 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, plus another one to put the whole country into a "Zoneable" base system in terms of the use of land. Some Green Belt sites may have difficulty in justifying their designation 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 reconsidered for a new settlement.

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 submitted an early application 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.

The final area of interest 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 and elsewhere. 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 a Group Manager called Katie Sergeant with £40,000 in her pocket all ready to be spent on trees. Unfortunately, in a town like ours, the streets are lined with pavements under which run pipes and sewers. Since SCC is unwilling to deal with these, we are left

with trying to find other “pipe-less” places. WE need to provide some locations. I have already suggested By-Pass Road which bisects Copthorne Road and which has several stumps from dead trees, but it has failed on account of what is 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. Most items are written and prepared in advance so there is no need for superfast shorthand, but it is the questions and their answers which 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. Also, 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.

Now I will introduce The Treasurer’s Report and the associated Accounts all of which are on our website. Has anyone any questions before I confirm their adoption? No? The proxies, too, all agreed with them so I will declare them adopted. I would also like to thank our hardworking accountant, Paula Sabine, for all her work keeping us solvent and keeping our membership lists up to date.

Finally, there are, so far, three items to be brought up under AOB:

1. On Saturday, 7th November, there is likely to be a barrow in the Swan Centre manned by the LRA selling all sorts of Christmas decorations. In the latest parlance, these decorations are “pre-loved” but in excellent condition. 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.

2. This next one is about traffic. On moving into his new house, a resident of Randalls Road, beyond the traffic lights, has been horrified by the speed at which many vehicles either approach or leave the traffic lights. The road surface on that stretch is very poor and the bumps over the drain covers are clearly audible. Over the past year he has recorded this both on video and webcam and he has sent his recordings and comments to Surrey C.C. requesting that they put in some monitored speed cameras. He lives in daily fear of a serious accident outside that stretch of housing. Tim, could you explain why nothing seems to be happening on this front?

3. And now, I fear another question I have received regarding roads, this time our High Street, and bicycles. Bicycles are silent and many people are genuinely frightened when one whizzes past while they are shopping. Could they not be banned completely from the

High Street? There is always the Crescent and, perhaps the shortcut round the “waterless” feature which cyclists could use instead?

Are there any further items people wish to bring up? No, then (as below), Yes (name + Q, please)

I now declare the formal meeting closed and I will hand over to our Speaker

, Councillor and Chairman of Mole Valley Council, Mary Huggins. Way back last April when the invitation was first sent, I suggested she recount her early days as a Councillor and about her hopes and fears for the future, but she may have had other ideas since then. Mary’s record of Community Service is almost without equal. She has represented large areas of Mole Valley – firstly, Mickleham, Westhumble, Boxhill and Headley and latterly Capel, Leigh and Newdigate where her particular interests are in Leisure Services, including the Arts Alive programme. We are very fortunate indeed to have Mary here to speak to us tonight.