



Minutes of Meeting for the Leatherhead Residents Association (LRA)

on Monday 22nd May 2023 at 7.30pm at the Methodist Church, Church Road, Leatherhead

1. Present: Caroline Brown,(Chairman), Guest Speaker, Richard Keel, Martyn Williams, Ray Brown, Louise Herrity, Paula Sabine, Tony Russell, Helen Tribe, Percy Hawkins, Hilary Porter, Bill Whitman, Gill Whitman, Paul Sutherland Waite, Ray Ward, Sally Saunders, Terry Richards, Sue Wood, Richard Wood, Maureen Conrad, Celia Thornhill, Alan Thornhill, Margaret Sims, Councillor Tim Hall, Tim Caffell, Alison Houslander, Geoffrey West (Minute Taker), Councillor Joanna Slater.

2. Apologies received from: Pam and John Wilson, Fran and Chris Barnby-Smith, David Woodhead, Stan Maiden, Jennie Christie, Pauline Russell

3. Chairman's Report:

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting but, before delivering her speech, informed the meeting that Martyn Williams had a request to make of members.

Martyn informed the meeting that while the LRA's accounts for 2022 had been prepared as usual by Paula Sabine, the LRA's insurers were now insisting that they be reviewed by an independent accountant. He asked whether there was anyone in the audience who might be able to do this. Cllr. Tim Hall suggested that LRA member Cllr. Jo Slater (not present at the time) was an accountant and that Martyn might like to approach her on the subject.

The Chairman then gave a quick summary of a meeting held with other Residents' Association representatives, along with Mr. Piers Mason, our Council's Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Head for Planning and Environment. Mr. Mason confirmed that suggestions are still being sought regarding projects that might make use of the £100m that the UK Government has set aside for Surrey ("Your fund Surrey"). Cllr. Hall clarified that this money is not from Government funds, but from Surrey Council's own resources and that it is specifically for community project and facilities, rather than issues like potholes in roads, which are the responsibility of the SCC Highways department. Martyn Williams suggested that many residents would probably regard "potholes" as a very worthwhile use of the £100m, given the appalling condition of the majority of the County's roads. Cllr. Hall confirmed that Surrey Council will spend approx. £188m this year on road repairs.

The Chairman then informed the meeting that there had still been no follow up statement from Government to the announcement made at the end of last year that Councils may be given more discretion as to how many houses they are required to build over the life of new Local Plans. Our Council has paused the consideration of the current draft Local Plan on the basis that this possible change in policy may work to Mole Valley's advantage. And it seems that Mole Valley is not alone in this respect as there are some 20 other Local Plans also being delayed!

Regarding Leatherhead in particular, the Transform Leatherhead team has appointed consultants to draw up plans for the Swan Centre's remodelling. Details are so far unavailable although it was thought that an escalator was under consideration to provide access to the first floor. It was hoped that our guest speaker Mr. Keel might perhaps be able to provide more information in this regard.

Another improvement in prospect is the plan to plan to paint the underside of the bridge on Waterway Road. Not only will it be colourful, it will also be finished with a sort of transparent coating or glaze which will enable it to be cleaned easily, should graffiti appear. Its location is such that not all will see this feature, but regardless, it shows a determination for the town to be seen in a better light in the future. And on the subject of bridges, the Chairman confirmed that the lights on the old Town Bridge are going to be restored by Surrey Highways but the work is proving more complicated than first anticipated and so will take longer than planned.

Lastly, the Chairman wished to say a few words about the future of our LRA. She repeated her intention to retire from her Chairmanship in October and confirmed that Martyn Williams intended to resign his directorship at about the same time. She stated that she is fearful that if new Directors are not found then it may prove necessary to liquidate the LRA.

The Chairman then introduced our guest speaker, Mr. Richard Keel, the Swan Centre manager and Chair of the Chamber of Commerce.

4. Guest Speaker: Mr. Richard Keel, Swan Centre manager and Chair of the Leatherhead Chamber of Commerce:

Richard informed the meeting that he has been a long-term resident of the area and has been involved with the Swan Centre for 40 years, initially employed at Sainsbury's, latterly employed as the Centre Manager.

Richard's staff is responsible for the marketing, maintenance, cleaning, security and environmental compliance, with an annual budget of some £630,000. It is security where the largest responsibilities and issues arise, dealing with theft (the whole centre loses approx.. £10,000 per month), anti-social behaviour and drug misuse. In recent times, 96 crime references have been generated but, perhaps in a reflection of current times, just 1 case has been resolved/closed! This has in turn resulted in an official complaint being made, but Richard acknowledged that, regardless of the good quality evidence being collated and presented, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is seldom in a position to prosecute. So, instead, certain individuals are banned from the Swan Centre, a trend that has been on the increase. Recently, a new CCTV system has been installed, although it does not include facial recognition.

In answer to a question from the floor, Mr. Keel confirmed that Mole Valley are the owners of the Swan Centre, with 22 shops, of which only one is vacant. However, lack of footfall remains an issue and, although it is hoped that Transform Leatherhead will eventually produce a dramatic improvement, the very slow pace of progress of the project is a problem. Hence, consideration is now being given to the formation of a Business Improvement District (BID) scheme, already implemented and apparently successful in Dorking. In his role as Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, Richard has convened a meeting to discuss the subject with the Town's retailers on June 21st. In response to a question from the Chairman, Richard undertook to provide a copy of

the 2022 programme of BID activities in Dorking, to show what might be expected from this initiative.

Richard confirmed that the town clock is an ongoing issue because the company commissioned to repair it went into liquidation. Solutions continue to be sought and Mole Valley is an integral part of this process, but is not yet committed to further funding.

The audience was happy to learn that although the Swan Centre is to be completely re-designed, (about which Richard has no information) the Town Centre Manager has managed to implement some eco-friendly Projects like the bird boxes, bee posts and meadow planting within the Swan Centre, plus he has now organised 100% recycling with nothing going to landfill! This achievement was recognised with 2 awards recently received.

Paula Sabine asked whether Richard thought the Town would be more attractive to shoppers if the Council introduced free parking for 30 mins. in the afternoons, when the schools close. Richard undertook to raise the question and the next Centre Management meeting. Paula also asked if shoppers would not be encouraged to stay longer if they could pay for parking upon exit, rather than upon entry. Richard said he thought that might well be the case, but it would involve considerable expense in adapting the existing payment machines.

Hilary Porter reminded the meeting that there is a petition to the Council for the establishment of a Banking Hub in the Town, and members should sign it to maximise its impact on the Council's decision-making.

5. Closing of the meeting by our Chairman:

Our Chairman gave a vote of thanks to Richard Keel on behalf of meeting and the audience showed their appreciation in the usual manner.

Our Chairman also gave thanks to Tony Russell and Helen Tribe for doing the teas, Geoffrey West for doing the Minutes, Martyn Williams for reviewing our written and spoken words, plus Louise Herrity for compiling the attendance register.

The meeting closed at 8.46pm.