

Chairman's speech for the meeting on 22 May 2023.

First of all I would like to welcome you all to this Spring meeting. I hope you will find it useful and interesting.

However, before I give you all my news snippets, Martyn has a request to make and so I will briefly hand over to him-(Martyn makes the request for a qualified accountant to review Paula's year end accounts as required by our insurers) .

Thanks for that Martyn, and anyone who thinks they may be able to help can either see Martyn or me at the end of the meeting. Now going back to my talk. I will start by giving you a quick summary of the meeting I had, with other Residents' Association representatives, with Mr. Piers Mason, our Council's Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Head for Planning and Environment.

Many of you will have heard of a substantial pot of money, some £100m, that the government has given to Surrey for major projects in the County. Mr Mason said that suggestions for its use are being sought although many feel this money should be spent on filling up the 1000s of potholes caused by the Winter weather and currently making every car journey somewhat of a nightmare. However, the fund called "Your Fund Surrey" is unfortunately ring fenced for particular plans in each area and does not seem to lend itself even for a year or two to such wide ranging activity. Michelle Bradley from Surrey Highways is the person to contact, probably online.

There is still 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. As you will have heard, our Council paused the consideration of the current draft Plan on the basis that this possible policy change may work to Mole Valley's advantage. It seems Mole Valley is not alone in this respect, and there are some 20 other Local plans also being delayed.

Regarding Leatherhead in particular, the Transform Leatherhead team have commissioned one particular company to draw up plans for the Swan Centre's remodelling. Details of their thinking are scarce so far, although apparently there may be a big escalator to provide access to the first floor. Perhaps Mr. Keel will be able to provide a little more information.

One item to improve our town in a small way is the plan to paint the underside of the bridge under 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 happen to appear. It is not such a large and obvious feature as, I think, we would all have liked for Leatherhead, but it is at least something and shows that we are determined the town should present a better image of itself in the future. And, while talking about bridges, the town bridge's lights are definitely going to be restored but the work is proving more complicated than anticipated and so will take longer. Surrey Highways is the department involved and not Mole Valley.

Lastly, and before I hand over to Mr Keel, I would just like to say a few words about the future of our LRA. As I have said many times, I do intend to retire from my role in October and I know Martyn intends to do likewise. Other local RAs seem to be able to find new recruits, but so far we have not been able to do so. If no one comes forward, we may be reduced to liquidating the LRA which would be a real shame, especially with our Local Plan still unresolved.

However, after those uncomfortable words, I would now like to introduce someone most of you will have heard of but perhaps not all of you have met! This is Mr. Richard Keel, our Town Centre manager and Chair of the Chamber of Commerce. He has been in the job for over 20 years and so knows our town exceptionally well. I am sure you will find Mr. Keel's talk interesting and informative and there will be an opportunity to ask him questions at the end. He will also give an update on the town clock.

After Richard has spoken:

Give thanks and ask for questions, first of all about the town.

Then ask for any further questions and see if there are any councillors present.

Finally, wind up and thank all who contributed:

Mr. Keel whom we have just heard, Geoffrey West for doing our Minutes, Tony Russell and Helen Tribe for doing the teas, Martyn Williams for reviewing our written and spoken words Louise Herrity for compiling the attendance register.