

Minutes LRA Open Meeting 21 August 2023

Attendees: Caroline Brown (Chair) Paula Sabine (Treasurer) Martyn Williams, Louise Herrity, Frances Smith, (Directors of the LRA.) 32 members, including Cllr Bridget Kendrick, Cllr Jo Slater, Cllr Tim Hall and 4 non-members attended.

1. Apologies were received from eight members.

2. Chairman's report By Caroline Brown

-Caroline reminded everyone that the minutes of the last meeting are on the website and gave a quick recap.

-The CEO of MVDC has been asked by Leatherhead Councillors to help establish a Leatherhead Taskforce bringing together all interested stakeholders under a new movement called Towns Partnership that has been set up under the lead of MVDC officer, Ravi Sharma.

-Leatherhead Library is going to be refurbished at the end of this year.

-The creation of a banking hub in Leatherhead has not been able to proceed as the Town does not qualify as The Nationwide bank is still open. This bank is hoping to install an internal ATM. A member commented from the floor that she has heard that Sainsburys may also install an ATM.

-The new emergency hospital at Sutton has now had its funding approved by the Government and is scheduled to be built by 2028. However, planning permission has not yet been obtained.

-The LRA has supported residents in their complaints to Surrey CC about the far end of Fortyfoot Road being obstructed at the beginning and end of the school day by parents parking whilst they deliver/collect their children attending the schools located here. Nine of those attending agreed by a show of hands that they knew of the problem here.

-the mural on the underside of the waterway road bridge is now completed. On a show of hands 8 attendees had seen it, and one member expressed the view that he thought it was not an improvement.

The other project the LRA has been awarded funding to support, improving the Plough roundabout, has not progressed due to highway safety concerns raised by Surrey CC.

-There are government grants available for community and voluntary groups from The Community Capacity Building and Infrastructure Support Grant (CCBISGS) Eleven groups were successful resulting in a total of £50,838 being awarded to Mole Valley last year.

-The Art Club is exhibiting during Heritage Week in the Institute and in St John's school in the last week of October.

-Mole Valley COUNCIL is offering many free activities for the under 16s during the school holidays, details are on their website.

-The LRA is a Limited company with 5 directors and about 500 members, and the Chair is retiring at the October AGM. Three of the directors will continue, and one will stay on for a limited time to help a new Chairman. If no one steps forward, the Association will have to be wound down. Once again Caroline pleaded for volunteers to join the board. A member argued from the floor that he thought it very important that the LRA continue, particularly considering the changes that the town will see in the next few years. There was an offer from a previous chair, Hilary Porter, to be an interim chairman to keep the association going until a new chairman was found.

3. Report on the accounts by Martyn Williams on behalf of Paula Sabine.

-Martyn reminded the meeting that members will have recently received a notification that the LRA's 2022 accounts are on the website or if a member has no I.T. they will have received a hand-delivered hard-copy. Martyn summarized the accounts to the effect that the P&L account revealed that income declined some 6.5% relative to 2021, but expenses declined by about 16%. As a result a small profit was still made. As regards the balance

sheet. Members' funds declined very marginally (approx. 1%) so the LRA still has a healthy balance sheet. Martyn asked if there were any questions. One member suggested that the annual fee of £2.50p.a. was too low. Martyn said it has been kept low to ensure the price did not put people off from joining /renewing. It was suggested there could be variable subs levels, but Martyn thought this would be too complex to administer. In any event if anyone wants to pay more they can always make a donation, as some do. Paula Sabine said the LRA is a non-profit making organisation, and, at the current level of activity, the present income covers costs. Martyn added that he felt the time would soon come when the level of the subs would have to be reconsidered. Hilary Porter said the Leatherhead Society did charge much more many years ago, and she was able to get grants from various organisations she had contacts with to continue community activities she runs, such as using the barrow in the Swan Centre, and health forums, which require public liability insurance.

4. Report on Planning by Martyn Williams

-There has been quite a lot of activity since the last meeting at the end of May.

-As members may have noticed from recent publicity material, our Council has reached agreement with the development partner for the Swan Centre/Bull Hill (Kier Property) and with the development partner for Claire/James house (identity confidential at present).

Consultations with the public are to take place by the year end.

-There appears to be no progress with the formulation of the new Local Plan, as the Inspector's consideration of it has been paused pending an announcement by Michael Gove on housing requirements as was promised at the end of 2022. Unfortunately, the plan being in limbo may have serious consequences for Mole Valley (see later para.re Headley Road.)

-The LRA supported local residents by submitting a representation against an appeal lodged by the owners of Brook Willow Farm on Woodlands Road concerning the operation of a motocross track. A member concerned with this application and present in the audience confirmed that no date for the appeal has been set.

-The LRA has also supported local residents by lodging a representation against an appeal by the developers of a 7ha field on the south side of Headley Road (east) close to its junction with the A24. This is Green Belt land but because Mole Valley's draft local plan has been paused and because a 5-year supply of housing cannot be demonstrated, the developers are able to argue that the provision of housing takes precedence over the land's Green Belt status. The appeal is due to start at the end of September and if the developer is successful the case could become a precedent for the development of more Green Belt land. Opposition to the proposal is being led by residents of Headley Road (west,) (Chris and Irena Snowden) aided by other local residents and Surrey County Councillors Hall and Watson. Martyn Williams said he would ask Chris to say a few words on the subject.

-Martyn Williams asked if there were any questions. A member stated that this planning work demonstrates why it is important that the LRA survives and continues its work. Another member asked as to the position re the flats built on the old Buchanan and Curwen offices which are still empty after 4 years. It was explained that the property did have an enforcement order to comply with planning conditions, but that these issues have now been resolved and another person from the floor said the apartments are now being marketed.

5. Talk on the Headley Road (east) planning appeal by Chris Snowden.

He outlined the importance of this planning application for up to 125 extra care apartments and 54 houses on a Green Belt site off Headley Road, on the other side of the bypass to Leatherhead. In his view if this site gains planning consent, the whole of the Green Belt in this area could be lost with up to 1000 houses built and Leatherhead and Ashted merging. There were 57 letters objecting to the notification of appeal because of non-determination, which was a very good response, considering the lack of publicity and very short time to write. The developers then submitted further information regarding transport and ecology and

Chris and the residents of Headley Road (west) managed to alert over 250 people and a further 55 representations were made.

Aside from the loss of Green Belt land, other issues surrounding this proposal include the removal of large amounts of landscaping to improve sightlines at the A24 junction, installing a pedestrian crossing on the A24, widening the pavement in Headley Road (west) by removing the adjoining vegetation and installing speed bumps and imposing a 20mph speed limit. Chris also pointed out many apparent inaccuracies in the developers' reports, such as the time traffic will be stopped on the A24 by the crossing, the volume of traffic using the A24, and the claimed approval of the Headley Road residents to the changes to the road, when in fact they were not consulted. He also highlighted that the transport survey was carried out by consultants for the developers and not independently audited by SCC Highways.

The appeal is to be heard by public enquiry, starting 29 September and Chris hopes to speak representing the Headley Road residents. He is at present objecting to the first day being a virtual meeting and arguing that the whole proceedings should be in person.

6. There then followed the talk by Bill King on the Royal Coat of Arms in St Mary's Church, Fetcham. This very large wooden plaque, 7 feet by 4 feet, shows the coat of arms used by both Charles I and Charles II and is thought to have been in the church since it was painted in the 17th century. It is not sure for which king it was painted, but there is a very similar plaque in a church in Cornwall to commemorate the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

Bill talked about the historical events of the time that this plaque was painted and that it is perhaps no coincidence that it was placed in this church as a Rev Turner was chaplain to Charles I prior to becoming rector of St Mary's in 1634. He was removed by the Roundheads in 1643, but returned as rector when Charles II came to the throne in 1660. The plaque is in need of substantial restoration and approval for this has been given by the diocese and a restorer has been chosen. The appeal to raise the £10,000 needed will be launched during the upcoming Heritage Weekend. Grants from various bodies have been applied for to help with the costs, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, but all need to have demonstrative support from the local community before they will match funding, so any donation, however small, will help.

7. Meeting closed by the Chairman

Caroline Brown thanked Bill King for his most interesting talk and the audience showed their appreciation in the normal way.

Caroline reminded the meeting that the next meeting will be the LRA's AGM and will take place in the same venue and at the same time on Monday 16th October.

The meeting closed at approx. 9.15pm.