

## **Chairman's OPENING SPEECH FOR LRA MEETING ON 21 AUGUST 2023**

First of all, I would like to welcome every one of you to this meeting which I had thought would fall into a relatively peaceful part of our year. I was very wrong. However, I am going to start things off with fairly straight forward items, like Apologies and a brief summary of our last meeting which was in May.

I have received apologies from David Woodhead, Bridget Lewis-Car, Pam and John Wilson, Pauline Russell and Geoff West (our Minuting Secretary) and Paula Sabine, our Treasurer.

The Minutes of our last meeting are on our website. They mentioned the lack of news about the Government's plan for housing, the possible use of large funds like "Your Fund Surrey," for big projects, the Mural and the Chairman's wish (i.e. my wish) to retire at the end of the year. The meeting's Speaker was Mr. Richard Keel who spoke eloquently about Leatherhead town centre.

But, moving on to this month, apart from the Planning situation, I have a small number of other announcements:

A new movement called "Towns Partnership" has been set up under the lead of Ravi Sharma. This is a new scheme and aims to get all local stakeholders working together. Our Councillors have asked Mole Valley CEO, Karen Brimacombe to help establish a Leatherhead Taskforce, and Transform Leatherhead will be a key opportunity. Introductory conversations will be held with groups like MV Skills and Employability Hub, Leatherhead Community Hub, Leatherhead Primary Care Hub and Central Surrey Voluntary Action.

Two of the latest projects are the Leatherhead Library refurbishment, planned to start at the end of this year and the possibility of a Banking Hub.

Unfortunately, it appears that, as Leatherhead does still have one bank, in the form of the Nationwide, it does not qualify for a Banking Hub. However, if Nationwide were to shorten their opening hours, there might be some hope, but I suppose there is no reason why they would want to do that. I must add, though, after a conversation with the local Manager, that they are hoping to install an internal AGM which would be useful but only within their time frame.

The first, some of you may know already, is that the government has at last promised that the new emergency hospital in Sutton will now proceed and be fully funded. At the latest, It is scheduled to be built by 2030 although Planning Permission has yet to be obtained. This means that significant improvements can now take place in both St. Helier and Epsom hospitals, where 85% of patients will continue to receive their care.

There is an area of concern around the two schools at the end of Fortyfoot road. Parents delivering and collecting their children at the start and end of the school day need to stop for 10 minutes or so, and this can create considerable parking congestion which prevents nearby residents from accessing their properties by car or on foot. The problem has been brought to the attention of Surrey Council in the hope that they can soon implement a solution.

As regards our town in general, I hope you have all seen the attractive mural which now adorns the underside of the bridge forming Waterway Road. This sketch does not do it justice, but you can get the idea of it. And now a frustrating piece of news: we have been trying for some months to get permission to plant up (attractively!) the Plough roundabout which, given its prominent place, should present a positive and inviting aspect to Leatherhead. We have even been awarded money to pay for the planting. However, the potential danger to those carrying out any work on the roundabout is preventing Surrey Highways from approving the idea and so the scheme has stalled.

Government grants are continuing into 2023/24 under the unforgettable title of “The Community Capacity Building and Infrastructure Support Grant Scheme” or CCBISGS for short! Eleven community and voluntary groups were successful in their application for a share of the £50,838 last year and so it is definitely worth applying if your group would like a particular piece of equipment etc.

And now a couple of announcements which I would normally have given at the end of a meeting: Our local Art Club is exhibiting both during Heritage Week in the Institute, and in St. John’s School in the last week of October in the old Chapel. Secondly, Mole Valley is continuing to offer free activities for the under

16s in various venues in its area. An online search will produce a wide choice. I was impressed when I had a look.

Finally, a word about L.R.A. itself. We are a Limited Company of 5 Directors one of whom is Chairman and that is me. We have around 500 members. I have been a member of the LRA since about 1996, secretary since around 2006 and Chairman since 2014. It is now becoming too much for me and I need to retire. Three of my Directors would be happy to continue and one would stay to help a new chairman settle in. I have produced a list of all the little jobs that add up to a Chairman's job. They could be divided up among the new volunteers. With Transform Leatherhead standing in the wings, the next few years should prove both interesting and exciting. If, sadly, no one comes forward, we will have to wind the Association down after the next AGM in October. Fetcham, Ashted and Bookham have all managed to find a new Chairman in the last year and it is such a shame that there appears to be no volunteers for the similar role in Leatherhead!

I will now hand the microphone to our Forward Planning Director, Martyn Williams.