

**Minutes of West Byfleet Neighbourhood Forum Annual General Meeting
20th November 2015
St John's Church, West Byfleet**

Present

Penny Hoskyn, PH (Joint Chair)
Pauline Hedges, PA (Joint Chair)
Emma Davis, ED (Publicity Officer)
Chris Dougherty, CD (Secretary)
Nasrin Shahbazi, NS (Treasurer)
David Fisher, DF
Ross Goodman, RG
Roland Nevett, RN
Wade Pollard, WP
Sally Cantello, SC
Stuart Dick, SD
Richard Thomas,
Phil Wilson, PW

1. Welcome and introductions from the Chair, Pauline Hedges

PH welcomed everyone to the second Annual General Meeting.
Health and Safety notice.
Last year's AGM minutes and agenda on the tables.

2. Apologies for Absence

Mark Fuller, MF (Webmaster)
Rob McHattie, RMH (Membership Secretary)
Richard Wilson, RW
Gary Elson, GE
David Hastie

3. Report from the Joint Chairs, Penny Hoskyn and Pauline Hedges

Presented by Penny Hoskyn:

The main objective of the Forum is to produce our Neighbourhood Plan, which covers planning issues. Any policies or projects which are included within our Plan must have the backing of the community; we started with a blank canvas presuming nothing. This is why over the past 18 months we have been sending out questionnaires to you all and also sought your views at drop in events, Christmas, autumn and summer fairs and other public meeting. In July we were joined for a time by our MP Jonathan Lord at our stand at the West Byfleet LI:VE event.

All this is to gain an insight and understand how our village works we have contacted and spoken with local community groups such as the guides and scouts, talked to the school heads, Doctors at the Health Centre, the directors of Byfleet United Charity, who own a great deal of land in our village. We have met with Chris Hollingshurst, vicar here at St Johns and Father Malacly, the priest at the Catholic Church. We have spoken to or had contact with the Golf Club, the National Trust, The Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford Residents Association, the West Byfleet Business Association, our two adjoining forums of Pyrford and Byfleet....to name but a few organizations.

Each Forum is appointed a contact with WBC Planning Department and our is the very helpful officer Terry De Sousa who along with Ernest Amoako have met members of the committee on many occasions and who have been very patient answering our numerous questions while we get to grips with understanding not only how our village work but areas of responsibility of WBC: sometimes enlightening the council as to

what we have here in West Byfleet and at times persuading them to see our point of view, particularly over our green spaces.

We have met with Tom Hickman whose company West Hall Estates own the land that has been put forward for housing if it is released from the green belt. The meetings were very informal, Tom wishing to explain some of his proposals and explaining the topographic of his land. Notes of our last meeting with Tom may be found on our notice board, headed up West Hall. I would stress at no time did the Forum committee agree to any proposals put forward, it was for us a fact finding exercises.

As you will know Sheer House has now been sold to the development company Altitude Real Estate. Altitude have said in their publicity hand out they would like to consult with the community, and so we will be meeting up with them sometime early in the New Year taking along the many comments you have made about the present building and how you would like to see the area developed. They have informed us that they have employed Glen Howells architects and Grant Landscape to draw up plans which will take 2 -3 years. I will leave it up to Roland Nevett who heads up our Commercial section to fill you in with more information.

I will just touch on Broadoaks in that the planning application is with Woking Council and the public consultation date is now extended to 26rd November. From the Forums research our residents for the most part would be happy with a mixed development; homes and a school is seen as that by WBC. But we do have a large question mark over the traffic and safety issues along the Parvis Road.

Both the Sheer House and Broadoaks developments will generate CIL money, this is basically an Infrastructure levy paid by the developer. If we have our Plan in place the Forum would have a direct say in how 25% of this CIL money could be spent on local community projects. If the Plan is not in place it is 15%.

So it has been a very busy year for the members of the Forum committee. we have been meeting on a monthly basis, first over the shop at Waitrose and now in the committee room at the Social Club. Over the last couple of months our five group leaders, who research into our Open Spaces, Built Environment, Infrastructure, Social and Community and the Commercial Sector have been meeting with Sally, our Plan editor, on a weekly basis and will continue while we set about completing all the paper work required to go into our Plan. At most of our committee meetings we have had either Councillor Richard Wilson with us or Councillor Gary Elson. Some time we have even been lucky enough to have had them both!

Funding of the Forum, while we are writing our Plan, is met by a government grant. Out of a possible grant of £8,000 we were allotted £5,500 which will take us up to the end of this month. We can apply again for the rest of the grant which will take up to the end of the March 2016. Then we will have to look again for funding from April and also funding in the long term if the Forum is to continue.

The grant covers such costs as web and email facilities, public liability insurance, hire of meeting rooms and printing costs but most of the grant goes to meet the fees of employing our planning consultant Nigel McGurk. I should just mention here that Nigel has also worked with the Pyrford and Hook Heath Forums.

Over June and July the Forum became involved with promoting and informing our residents about the Site Allocation Document

While the Residents Association funded the cost of hall hire and met our printing costs it was a group of four Forum members Gill Luff, Angela Williams, Stewart Dick lead by Andrew LeonSon who carried out a great deal of research which was presented at the public meeting on the 9th July. This meeting was arranged by the Forum with both Ernest Amoako and Terry De Sousa speaking.

We are informed that the next round of consultation on the Green Belt Site Allocation will come out for public consultation in January next year. If we have your email address we will inform you as soon as we are told.

At our AGM last year we spoke of the many challenges we had faced setting up the Forum and this year different challenges have present themselves. The main challenge for us is that there are very few guide lines as to how to set up or run a Forum or what should not go into a Plan. There are suggestions from the government agency Locality but as each community is different they are only just that.. suggestions. For all the committee it's been a big learning curve.

When we set up the Forum we wanted and indeed needed to involve as many people in the community as was possible. We thank everyone who has taken the time and trouble to respond to our questionnaires. Our largest response, so far, was just under 400 replies to last November's questionnaire. The committee would like to thank Chris and John in Apples and Pears for their support and who are our village post box; Wendy Grimshaw and her helpful team at the library who have set up the community corner where all hard copies of our paper work may be found. To Waitrose who gave us a meeting room for free when we had no funds, and to Stella at the Social Club who makes us feel very welcome. The Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford Residents for their continuing support

To our printers Inprint on the Camphill Estate, who keep our cost as low as possible and meet our very tight deadlines, to Curchods and Waterfalls Estate Agents who have each provided some funding for our leaflets, to Wine Reach for tonight's wine. A thank you to Mark and Allen Fuller of Locally who sort out any problems with our webpage and emails. And a very big thank you to our team of 25 residents who deliver our leaflets, many of whom I know took to the streets, in the rain on Saturday. We have over the last 18 months delivered 4 leaflets to each household in our area. You are an important link between the committee and our residents.

But last but by no means least Pauline and I would like to give a huge Thank You to your Forum Committee for their continuing support, their investigation prowess and their many other skills that have been put to good use to get us thus far..... and quite frankly for just sticking with it!

That is the end of our report. Thank you.

Penny Hoskyn
Pauline Hedges

4. Election

Pauline Hedges lead the election process. She explained that the chairs would serve for one more year but would then step down as the constitution allows for 3 year tenure only.

The following who are the current committee have offered themselves for re-election:

Secretary	Chris Dougherty
Treasurer	Nasrin Shahbazi
Publicity	Emma Davis
Membership Secretary	Rob McHattie
Webmaster	Mark Fuller
Plan Editor	Sally Cantello
Leader - Built Environment Group	Wade Pollard
Leader – Commercial	Roland Nevett
Leader - Open Spaces Group	Ross Goodman
Leader - Local Infrastructure Group	David Hastie
Leader - Social and Community	David Fisher
Committee members	Stuart Dick, Richard Thomas, Phil Wilson
Joint Chair	Penny Hoskyn Pauline Hedges

Councillors Richard Wilson and Gary Elson are non-voting members of the committee

Committee There being no more nominations from the floor the vote was taken to re-elect the committee in toto, passed unanimously.

Joint Chair There being no more nominations from the floor the vote was taken to re-elect the joint chairs in toto, passed unanimously.

Pauline Hedges thanked the meeting.

5. The Plan

Vision Statement SD introduced the vision statement and asked if everyone was happy with it. A vote was taken and it was passed unanimously.

Built Environment

The village is evolving and it is not just about building houses, the Plan must see the community grow into a community which it is comfortable with. The Woking Design SD document is available in the Library and it is recommended that everyone look at it.

The Council must build a certain number of houses each year to conform to central government policy. So we accept that as part of our Plan when we are writing it. A new Core Strategy is being developed by the council. Issues regarding the Green Belt have been taken in to account by the sub group when writing their comments. The density of West Byfleet is the same as the rest of the Borough with the exception of Woking Town centre.

A show of hands to support the proposals was taken and it was unanimous in favour.

Commercial

West Byfleet village is the only District Centre in the Borough. It comprises some 70 shops and 13,000 sq m of offices – not only a shopping area but an employment location for over 1000 office jobs.

Survey responses have shown you appreciate the presence of independent retailers and service businesses but mourn the loss of a number of retailers who gave greater variety and depth to the retail offer such as fashion, shoes and hardware.

Two changes are occurring

Firstly under a Government directive and outside the control of WBC many offices are being changed to housing units. Not a bad thing in all cases as the buildings are not suitable for modern office use but of concern as it has become wide spread. A balance between employment accommodation and trading space is key to a thriving village environment.

Secondly Sheer House and the adjoining buildings have changed hands. The new owner Altitude is well respected in the industry and expressed a desire to engage with the community in formulating plans for redevelopment. This will include WBC, WBBA and WBNF.

The policies WBNF proposed seek to build on the Core Strategy of WBC which looks to increase the office content by a small amount and the retail offer by a large amount as well as introducing a 170 new homes.

Sheer House offers the opportunity to achieve this at least in part and discussions with it will be vital. We shall seek to ensure local businesses are not disadvantaged during the development period through phasing. Parking, access and improvements to the village environment will also be high on the agenda.

The policies seek bring back retail trades and stem the conversion of shops to service units such as nail bars, agencies and fast food outlets.

We see this as a very opportune time for the WBNF to come into being and influence the future of our village.

A show of hands to support the proposals was taken and it was unanimous in favour.

Infrastructure

WD being absent SD delivered his report. The Forum cannot suggest policies which involve agencies other than the Borough Council, Surrey Highways or schools for example nor can we prevent development just because infrastructure is currently lacking – that is for the developers.

A show of hands to support the proposals was taken and it was unanimous in favour.

Open Spaces

The Green Belt is not designated by Woking Borough Council as Open Space. We cannot stop development, only influence it and vigorously oppose what we don't want and seek to influence WBC if they want to remove land for the Green Belt. Currently very few Neighbourhood Plans mention Green Belt issues. Residents have already shown through the various questionnaires that they wish to retain every piece of open space in the village.

A show of hands to support the proposals was taken and it was unanimous in favour.

Social and Community

Within the proposed plan there are the policies (which we are discussing this evening).

For Social and Community they are derived from the positive responses to questionnaires in February and April of this year.

They are:

S&C 1 Proposals for the development of a new village hall will be supported.

S&C 2 Proposals for the improvement of built facilities for Scouts, Guides and associated groups will be supported.

S&C 3 Proposals for the enhancement of existing public recreation facilities will be supported.

S&C 4 Proposals for the provision of new sporting and recreational facilities will be supported.

S&C 5 Proposals for the enhancement of library facilities and provision of additional community facilities will be supported.

S&C 6 New community facilities should demonstrate access to car parking provision.

In addition there are projects that the Forum would like to see go ahead.

One project is for the subway under the station to be upgraded.

It would make a far more attractive welcome to West Byfleet for people arriving by train,

And a more attractive link between the areas either side of the railway.

Another project would be for a concept plan for the area of land from the Scout Hut at Camphill Road, down to the Infant School, Junior School, Recreation Ground, St John's and along the recreation ground to the adjacent sports fields and the school sports fields going back up to the allotments.

The current proposal, by Woking Borough Council, is for the school sports fields to be taken out of Green Belt. The school sports fields would need to have appropriate protection.

Woking Council's plans include housing where the scout hut and club are now positioned. The Scouts, at some stage in the future, will need a new home. The Guide facilities have served their time and something better is needed. The Pavilion in the recreation ground is due to be replaced.

There is an argument that improved sporting and recreational facilities could be built for the schools with access available to the wider public at non-school times. Goldsworth Primary School, for example, has an indoor swimming pool for school use that is used by the community at other times.

The population of West Byfleet is growing. We need clarification from SCC as to where the children from the expanded population would go to school?

A concept plan is needed to ensure that the area of the concept plan is used for recreational and educational uses but is protected from unwelcome development.

In summary, the policies are as listed on the questionnaire and I would ask for your support. The projects: an improved subway and a clear concept plan for the recreational areas are ideas that should be considered for inclusion in the plan.

A show of hands to support the proposals was taken and it was unanimous in favour.

The next steps are for the Draft Plan to be on display in the Library, on the Forum Web Site and at a future Drop In session for further comments. It will then be passed to the consultant who will write it in the format required by the council and submitted to them for a period of 6 weeks consultation and then back for further consultation with the residents before submitting it to the council for approval. It is then passed to an Independent Examiner, back to Woking Borough Council and then out for public referendum. If 50% vote in favour, then and only then, does the plan become a legal document, binding upon the council and any future developers.

Questions from the floor:

These related to matters already discussed.

The meeting closed at 9.35 with a vote of thanks to the joint chairs from Peter Hoskyn.