

NORTH WEST FARNHAM RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

St. Francis Hall, Three Stiles Road

Tuesday 2nd July 2024 at 8 pm

1. **Apologies:** Penny Marriott, Heather Fox, Anthony Hook, Brenda Cannon, Miranda Taylor-Gooby, Richard Gunner.
2. **Minutes of the previous AGM:** The Chair asked the attendees to look at the Minutes of our last AGM held on the 19th October 2023, which have been distributed. He requested a proposer and seconder for approval of the minutes. Vivienne Miller proposed, John Willacy seconded.
3. **Chairman's Report**

David King welcomed everyone to the AGM. He said that Penny Marriott has been the Chairman of NWFRA for 10 years and now feels it is time to retire. He recognised the great job that she has done and asked everyone to show their appreciation, applause followed.

David apologised for the error in the most recent Newsletter, where it was incorrectly stated that Outline Planning Permission for the development behind the UCA and adjacent to Abbey View (identified as Land off Old Park Lane) had been granted when, in fact, it had not been granted. Yesterday we learnt that it is the first item on the agenda at the Waverley Planning Committee to be held at the council offices in Godalming on 10th July. There will be representations at the meeting by our local councillors to argue the case that it should not go ahead. A lot of diligent hard work by our local councillors, AVRA (Abbey View Residents Association) and OPLRA (Old Park Lane Residents Association) has taken place and they have raised several issues, including finding a suitable SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace), poor drainage and the development's locality.

Those who have given us their e-mail addresses will have received an updated copy of the Newsletter, as will those who have recently logged onto our website. The Chairman said he could not stress enough how useful it is to have e-mail addresses. A form was at the door for registering attendance at this meeting and for entering e-mail addresses. It is also being passed around. As he stated at the previous AGM, it is much easier having e-mail addresses available, rather than having to deliver things, such as the notice of AGM and Newsletters, by hand.

The NWFRA is here to assist and support residents whenever it is possible to do so and we are always looking for new committee members. He mentioned that it is noticeable from the agenda that NWFRA has the same committee members as last year, and for many years before as well, so we need new blood to keep the Association going. He asked if those present want the Association to continue. Committee meetings only take place for a few hours every other month and input from new members would be really valuable. Your views can then be made known through constructive letters to the Farnham Herald, as well as to your local councillors. The Chairman said that, as a steal from a much wiser man than himself once said, "Ask not what the NWFRA can do for me", rather, "What can I do for the NWFRA". Members of NWFRA plus volunteers gave up some of their time and delivered our Newsletter and Notice of AGM to you, and he asked if others present could do the same.

The Chairman said that he, personally, needs assistance as he has had to take on the Chairman's position from Penny Marriott and also has the responsibilities of Planning and maintaining the website. He appealed for help to relieve this pressure.

The Chairman mentioned some of the projects that the NWFRA has been involved with, apart from planning matters. These include, dealing with the problem of burglar alarms sounding off repeatedly when they should not at the UCA, pavement refurbishment in Crondall Lane and the replacement of the 20 mph VAS (Vehicle Activated Sign) in Crondall Lane, which is in progress and should take place in late July.

The Chairman said he was sure there were many burning questions which people wanted to raise with our local councillors so he brought his address to an end and passed on to the next item on the agenda, the Treasurer's Report. Our Treasurer, Richard Gunner, is on holiday and therefore the Chairman read his summary of the accounts, which, he said, should be considered in conjunction with the Income and Expenditure Account, a copy of which is on each seat.

4. Treasurer's Report for 2023-2024

Stripping out the exceptional costs involved in the mailshot, we are normally running a core deficit of around £200. This is sustainable in the short to medium term, with the deposit account at around £4,000, but it would be preferable to keep something like the current level of funds as a war chest against the costs of future campaigning. The deficit could be resolved by, either increasing our membership, and/or, increasing the annual subscription (payable on 1st January each year) to a, still very reasonable and affordable, £10.

It should also be noted that the more we can communicate by email, etc, the less we could spend on printing.

The Chairman commented that we need money in hand, especially bearing in mind the Old Park Lane proposed development. He asked for a proposer and a seconder for the Treasurer's Report and Accounts. Julie Russ proposed and Anne Pullinger seconded.

5. Election of Officers and Committee

The following have put themselves up for re-election:

Chair: Mr David King
Treasurer: Mr Richard Gunner
Secretary: Mrs Julie Russ
Committee Members: Mrs Vivienne Miller
Mrs Anne Pullinger

The Chairman asked for a proposer and a seconder for the Officers and Committee. Hilary King proposed and Pauline Banks seconded.

6. Councillors' Forum and Questions

The Chairman asked the Councillors to introduce themselves.

Graham White said he is the leader of Farnham Town Council (FTC) and a member of Waverley Borough Council, (WBC) representing Farnham North West, our Ward.

Andy Macleod is a member of WBC, representing Farnham Moor Park. At Surrey County Council (SCC) he is a member of the Residents and Independent Group and represents

Farnham Central – he is the SCC Councillor for our Ward. He said that Catherine Powell is the leader of the Residents and Independent Group at SCC and represents Farnham North.

David Beaman is the other WBC Councillor for our Ward and, until May of this year, he was Chair of the Planning Committee and is now a member of that committee. He is also a member of FTC.

David Beaman said that the Old Park Lane planning application will be decided on 10th July and comes with a Planning Officer recommendation for approval. He said that he and Graham White have been working hard against the application but Waverley needs a 5 year land supply for housing. They can speak about the application before and after the planning meeting but they cannot vote. However, there are 2 substitutes who can vote. If the application is refused by the Committee there is a right of appeal. He is hoping that the application will be refused but it is not the end of the story.

Regarding the Coxbridge development, there have been 2 applications, for: 1) An access road, which has been approved. 2) A reserved matters application which will take place in September.

Residents of Hazell Road have objected to the new layout of the development and David Beaman is not happy with Thames Water which, strangely, has said that the system can cope with the complete number of homes proposed (360) when originally they said that it could only cope with 120.

If a Labour Government is elected there will soon be a new planning framework in place, possibly within 100 days. This could abolish neighbourhood plans, which would be bad news. He is very hesitant about what will happen but nevertheless will press on with neighbourhood planning. A new local plan will not be completed until 2026. The current plan runs out in 2025 and therefore there will be one year without its protection. Responses to the Neighbourhood Plan Consultation from residents' associations are required. The neighbourhood plan needs to be robust and made stronger if possible.

A question was raised by Trevor Free about land and whether there has been a call for it. David replied that there has been a call for sites. More attention will be paid to supplying infrastructure such as schools, medical facilities, surgeries, etc. How can a council proceed with a plan if the infrastructure is not there? Trevor finds it baffling that infrastructure is not considered first.

Andy MacLeod said that WBC is responsible for planning yet they have no influence or control. They have no way of forcing infrastructure to be put in. In the past infrastructure was installed first, but it no longer happens like that. The point was made that long term planning would take care of infrastructure. The South East Regional Plan, which may have helped, was abolished.

John Willacy asked if there is protection because there is a 5 year plan in place. Andy MacLeod responded that WBC do not have a 5 year housing supply and therefore inspectors will override decisions on the basis of the lack of it. He went on to say that because houses are expensive in Waverley there is a calculation to build more houses and force prices down, but it does not work. He hopes that developers will build more affordable homes. Haslemere has a lot of protection, Guildford has a lot of protection because of the Green Belt and Farnham is being poached and is a kicking stool. We can only fight and do what we can. Graham White said the decision by an inspector to allow the planning application to build near Waverley Lane is being challenged in the High Court and a King's Council has been hired. FTC has driven this and is very unhappy about what is going on in our town. In the South East Farnham offers developers the best profit margins and there is a lot of agricultural

land close to the town. Another problem is that the Government gives priority to development.

It was asked who owns the triangle of land at the end of Crondall Lane next to Martins Garage. The response was that the Council owns it. It was suggested that Farnham In Bloom could perhaps put a display there?

A question was raised about the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan and whether individuals can take part. David Beaman said that they can and there will be an exhibition at some point.

Graham White said that 18 months ago WBC was in danger of having its planning powers taken away and David Beaman said the main reason was that too many applications were being refused. The planning officer is on a mission to correct these problems. Developers can pick and choose the sites they build on and so cherry pick the best sites.

A question was asked about objections to planning application, who considers them and are they taken into account?

Andy MacLeod responded that officers can only consider valid planning points.

It was asked if there will be time for residents to be consulted about reserved matters for Coxbridge before they are decided. Will there be a public meeting? David Beaman replied that he will try and ensure that residents are consulted.

A question was raised about houses being built on good agricultural and Green Belt sites and why they are not built on brownfield. It was agreed that developers have too much power and can build where they like. Graham White hopes that the situation will change under a Labour Government as it needs to. It is lucky that WBC have a high proportion of council houses.

It was asked why the Old Park Lane development was put forward early. Graham White said WBC are trying to deal with the relationship between elected councillors and officers. WBC are having great problems in filling officer positions. There are less qualified individuals but there are less of them. Old Park Lane may have been moved forward because it is ripe and ready for the taking.

Concern was expressed about the new plans for the roads in the town, there are no cycle lanes and narrow paths. It was suggested that there should be a town square in East Street instead of flats being constructed.

A question was raised about the road off of the A31 to the Brightwells development and whether this would remain. Andy MacLeod said it would not. He said that by Christmas it is hoped that about 40% of the retail units at Brightwells will be occupied. SCC have a 150 year lease on the site. He went on to mention the Farnham Infrastructure Project (FIP). The problem is that in Farnham everything has to go through the town centre as it is antiquated and it is not possible to improve things by removing listed buildings. The idea of widening the pavements and narrowing the roads is to make things more pleasant for people. It is hoped that the amount of traffic in Farnham will be reduced as, by allowing a right turn out of Castle Street, less traffic will go through the town centre. Potters Gate School will have a School Street which will be closed at certain times of the day, though cycling will be allowed.

Andy MacLeod said that the management of grass verges has moved from WBC to SCC and enforcement has also moved in the same direction. Work on the grass verges is sub contracted. SCC do not do such a good job as WBC and the verges are cut often, even when they are not interfering with sight lines. Long grass and flowers look much better and provide pollen and nectar for insects such as butterflies.

Andy MacLeod said Homes England hope to develop the Woolmead site and will have to submit a new planning application, which is likely to be residential.

A question was raised about Park Road – whether it would be closed in the FIP and why it is still one-way. It was felt that it helps to relieve pressure on Castle Street. Andy MacLeod said that this was an interesting point and he would take it back to the SCC officers.

Graham White made the point that the voters he has seen were all elderly. We all have a duty to think about the future of the town and money has been allocated to youth support. Some children are missing out as they are totally reliant upon the school system. The increase in council tax has helped to fund youth support and it pays for youth support officers. Certain initiatives, such as holiday activities, are taking place because of this funding. To help young people and first time buyers the new government must take on board that truly affordable homes must be built and he asked people to encourage this.

It was asked if there is a youth element in FTC. Graham White said that at present there is not but he hopes there will be. He said there is a young persons' panel and that Weydon, Heath End and possibly primary schools would be targeted to get them involved. It is hoped that children can be made aware of what awaits them at secondary school. He has also asked children what they want to see in Farnham. Potters Gate School have a children's council so there is already something in place there.

There were no further questions and the Chairman thanked the Councillors for attending the meeting and answering questions.

The meeting closed at 10.00 pm