

WARREN AND DISTRICT RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the AGM held by Zoom videoconference

Date: Wednesday 28th October 2020

Time: 19.30hrs.

Attendees: 30 members present and 8 committee members.

Apologies: received from 2 members, one of which was Phil Darlow from the committee, who is currently unwell.

Introduction

Elisa Miles, Chairperson, welcomed attendees to the meeting and explained how the Zoom webinar would work. Comments to be made by raising virtual “Chat” hand. Only questions received 7 days prior to the meeting to be addressed during the meeting.

1.Message from the Chair

Elisa opened the meeting and stated how honoured she felt to be unanimously appointed as Chair by the committee, replacing Robin Bentham who retires this month after 20 years as WADRA Chairman.

Elisa paid tribute to Robin who has been a WADRA member for over 30 years and who has led WADRA from being an informal organization, set up in 1963, to protect against inappropriate development, to a more formal organization with multiple interests, campaigns, events and initiatives. During Robin’s tenure as Chair he oversaw RBC’s recognition of their responsibilities as Trustees of MPF, scrutinized numerous planning applications, worked collaboratively with Reading Festival and WOMAD, campaigned on numerous issues to stop inappropriate development, and has finally seen his efforts come to fruition on the refurbishment of Mapledurham Playing Field Pavilion. Robin has led WADRA through some of its most turbulent times over the last 5 years, always with integrity, wisdom and a calm that eludes most others. It is difficult to thank Robin enough for his generous contribution of time, commitment and leadership. We are all thankful Robin has decided to remain on the committee, as his insight is invaluable.

Phil Darlow has decided after more than five decades of service to the community, to step down as a WADRA committee member. Phil has been a real asset to the committee and we would like to thank him for his work which includes studying the history of WADRA to confirm the details of our constitution, and his diligence concerning the development of the Tithe Barn area. Phil has made a long and great contribution to WADRA and we hope to continue to see Phil at our events in 2021.

2.Minutes of AGM 2019 – a digital vote was conducted using electronic voting system with 83% of members voting “yes” to the accuracy and sign off the 2019 AGM minutes.

3.Matters Arising – there were no matters arising and just one question from a member which the Chair advised would be addressed at the end of the AGM.

4.Elections of new committee members or those returning (digital vote) – there were no new nominees. Three returning members – Robert O’Neill, Alistair McLean and Martin Brommell, were all 100% unanimously voted for re-election.

5.Planning – Alastair McLean explained the role of WADRA in monitoring planning applications in the local area. He gave a small number of examples of recent applications where the committee have raised objections to the local authority, primarily because it was considered that the applications would negatively impact on the characteristics of the local environment. Examples included 8 Kelmscott Close, Chazey Road (Pump Station), Mapledurham Playing Fields (drainage scheme), Reading Golf Club, The Heights School, Chazey Tithe Barn and Footpath 43.

Alastair reiterated that if any member is concerned about a Planning Application within the WADRA boundary, and would like support from the committee, details should be sent to info@wadra.org.uk

6. Our Environment – Jane Bickerstaffe described a successful wildflower and crocus verge planting trial which took place last autumn in Hewett Avenue to improve the environment. WADRA is now in discussion with RBC to extend the area of wildflower and tree planting to fit with RBC's climate change work. Initial plans include planting of 3 Beech trees and groups of smaller trees on footpath 43 with crocus and wildflowers to be planted along the edge of this area and the opposite side of Hewett Avenue.

7. North Reading Safer Neighbourhood Forum – Martin Brommell, who represents WADRA at these forums, explained the role of the NRSNF which is a voluntary community group of residents working with relevant partner agencies, notably Thames Valley Police and RBC, to help resolve any community safety and crime related issues in North Reading. Martin detailed some of the topics covered during these meetings along with normal attendees and how to report incidents. Reporting for non-emergency calls should be made to 101, emergency calls to 999 and anonymous calls to Crimestoppers 0800 555 111 or to the website www.thamesvalley.police.uk
Anti-social behaviour (ASB's) should be reported to RBC's ASB team via asb.team@reading.gov.uk

8. Events & Funding – Elisa Miles, Chair, reviewed the limited number of activities WADRA was able to manage this year due to Covid-19 restrictions and the pavilion refurbishment, which has prevented us from holding our usual events. Amongst the successful events to date were the Yard Sale Trail in late July, a co-ordinated day where residents all across Caversham could sell off their usable, unwanted items from their front gardens. The Pavilion kitchen equipment was a major success with commercial equipment being recovered from the Happy Diner in Prospect Street for clean up and re-use in the pavilion. WADRA donated unsold camping gear to the organisation Care for Calais and on Saturday 31st October 2020, we supported the Caversham Halloween Hunt.

Future planned events include Caversham Winter Wonderland December 2020, community book sale/swap, Pavilion re-opening in early Spring 2021, community coffee mornings and a Summer Fete 2021.

9. Mapledurham Playing Fields & Pavilion – Martin Brommell outlined the role of the MPF Management Committee and went on to explain that RBC (trustees), have formally extended membership of the management committee due to increased pressure from residents and users of MPF. The committee now comprises : Councillors Paul Carnell & Jeanette Skeats, Ward Cllr Isobel Ballsdon, Jane Bowen Mapledurham Parish Council, Steve Brown Secretary of CTFC, Philip deSaumarez Chairman of MLTC, Daniel Mander representing major user groups, Esme Tiplady representing The Heights School Board of Governors & Martin Brommell representing WADRA on behalf of the residents. An Initial meeting was held on 13th Oct by webinar.

A Deed of Dedication was also discussed and it was explained that this would offer an added layer of protection to the Trust Deed. The DoD is currently held up with Veale Wasborough Vizards (VWV) solicitors due to minor licensing issues. We believe these issues are now resolved allowing the DoD to be presented to Fields In Trust to complete the application that will dedicate the ground and settle the DoD by Xmas'20.

Elisa Miles covered the Pavilion refurbishment and explained that WADRA was able to help restore the pavilion structure following 4 years of closure by giving a donation of nearly £50k to finance structural work. Refurbishment was not fully funded by RBC or the EFSA leaving the pavilion without kitchen equipment or sufficient storage area for users. Elisa, aided by a WADRA member, Shaun Tanner, arranged with the owners of the Happy Diner to donate the old kitchen equipment to help fit out the pavilion kitchen. WADRA is currently in discussion with Caversham Treants to share the cost of a refrigerator and oven plus hob. Overall refurbishment of the pavilion is anticipated before the end of this year with an official opening expected in early Spring 2021.

10. The Heights School – Martin Brommell presented engaging with the community and school streets. He began by saying that WADRA opposed the school being sited on MPF but acknowledged that it is being built and will benefit future generations of children with a first-class teaching establishment. The school is on track to open Spring 2021 with parents, teachers and children excited to see their new school close to completion. The building experience for many residents has been highly distressing caused by a total lack of consideration by Kier, especially for residents in close proximity to the site, many of whom have underlying health issues and were unable to leave their properties throughout lockdown. WADRA are extremely keen to meet with school representatives to start discussions about rebuilding bridges & establishing more positive relationships. To date we have not been taken seriously but there is one small glimmer of hope in that Esme Tiplady, from the Board of School Governors, did agree to a request from Daniel Mander to meet with myself and Cllr Ballsdon to initiate such discussions and we are pressing for this to happen.

School Streets - are roads in close proximity to a school with a temporary restriction on motorised traffic at busy school drop off & pick up times. The restriction applies to all school and through traffic resulting in a safer, healthier and more pleasant environment for everyone. Parking issues have already been experienced in roads surrounding MPF due to increased football training and matches. This has led to safety issues which, if unchecked, will almost certainly result in a serious accident. We predict this issue could become much more severe once school opens but the Heights are currently not willing to consider such an initiative until they move into the site. We hope they will see the enormous safety & health benefits and change their mind before the school opens.

11. Treasurers Report – Hayley Brommell, Treasurer, gave the annual treasurers report and was pleased to announce that the 2019/20 accounts, for the period 01/09/19 to 31/08/20, have been scrutinised and signed off by Steve Brown FCCA, an accredited auditor, as accurate and correct. Headline figures given by Hayley were:

WADRA Santander savings account opening balance 31/08/19	- £25,470.68p
• Interest paid	- £137.73p
• Closing balance 31/08/19	- £25,608.41p
WADRA Santander current account opening balance 31/08/19:-	
• Pavilion funds	- £5,243.50p
• WADRA funds	- £1,140.62
• Deposits/fundraising £565.00p Pavilion funds & £496.00p WADRA funds	
• Withdrawals including web hosting, RBC/Pavilion, van hire/petrol and Zoom account:-	
• Pavilion Funds - £1,461.75p and WADRA funds £570.94p	
Total balances at 31/08/19 :-	
• Pavilion fund	- £4,346.75p
• WADRA fund	- £1,065.68p
Petty Cash opening balance 31/08/19	- £30.00p
• Deposits £27.00p and withdrawals £0.00p	
• Balance	- £57.00p
GRAND TOTAL	- £31,077.84p

12. Members Questions – one question was received from a WADRA member and this was “Now that the school is a going ahead, what has WADRA done to help the community come back together?”

Committee Reply: WADRA have written to several people in an attempt to reverse the divisiveness in the local community that was a result of two very differing positions on the sale of Trust land. We have written numerous letters in an attempt to start the healing process in our community. These include:

1. Nick Waldon, Chair of The Heights (10, 27 March, 23 April) - Letters to The Heights reaching out to meet and work together to understand how the school would implement the promises made to the community in their campaign to have a home at MPF. We outlined / reiterated 11 promises made to the community and MPF users by the school. Mr Waldon refused to meet with WADRA, CTFC and MPFAG, even with the support of a local councilor and our current mayor, David Stevens.

2. Letter to Isobel Ballsdon (1 May, 11 May 2020) - we wrote a letter in response to Isobel's request that WADRA Committee members did not contact her as a member of her constituency. In this letter we requested a meeting to discuss how after all of the negativity between herself and WADRA, we can work together for more positive outcomes for all residents in the area, not just those connected to the Heights School. We also sent a follow up letter. We have received no replies to either letter to date.

3. Letters to CADRA and EGRA (22 September 2020) - to investigate opportunities or the setting up of mutual agreements where the residents associations can support each other on some of the most pressing issues in the Caversham area that impact our members. Particularly, the loss of green space, e.g., Reading Golf Club development. Helen Lambert, Chair of CADRA has come back to us and we will be setting up some initial meetings to discuss how best to create an agreement and collaboration.

4. Letter to Karen Edwards, Head of The Heights (25 September 2020) - a letter from WADRA outlining the vehicle parking issues already taking place in the streets surrounding Mapledurham Playing Fields was sent in September and WADRA offered our collaboration in working with The Heights, RBC, MPF users and local residents to ensure that the streets surrounding MPF are passable and safe for everyone at all times, but especially during school drop off and pick up. We asked them to let WADRA know how we can support plans to ensure that the School Streets Scheme is adopted in the Mapledurham area making it safer for everyone. No reply received but it was verbally agreed, with pressure from Daniel Mander (User Group rep), that the Heights would engage with residents to mitigate some of the demonstrated and expected issues when the school moves in.

13. AGM Closing Comments – Elisa Miles, Chair, closed the meeting by thanking all attendees for making the effort to join the AGM using the Zoom technology, which she declared to have been a big success. Elisa promised further updates on several important topics covered during the webinar and a newsletter in the new year to bring everyone up to date with what WADRA has achieved during the winter months. Wishing everyone a safe and healthy Covid free time leading up to and beyond Christmas, the meeting was closed at 20.45hrs.