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MINUTES OF 41st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was held at 7.30pm on 24th May 2012 in the Ascot Authority Box at Ascot Racecourse.

The President and Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming Colin Rayner, Mayor, Dorothy Hayes, Councillor, the Press, the guest speaker, Clive Williams, and fifty members and guests.

The meeting then proceeded with the agenda:

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: From committee members G J Joyce, D F Marshall and S McDougall.

2. MINUTES OF 40th AGM: The adoption of the minutes of this meeting held on 26th May 2011 was approved and signed by R G Stubblefield.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THESE MINUTES: None arose.

4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS: the following were proposed and seconded from the floor and unanimously elected:

   President Mr S G Errington CBE, DL
   Vice President Lord Elibank
   Chairman Mr R G Stubblefield
   Deputy Chairman & Planning Secretary Mr G B Burgess RIBA
   Hon Treasurer Mrs K Webb

5. ELECTION OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: The following were proposed and seconded from the floor and unanimously elected:

   Mr P J Griffin
   Mr G Joyce
   Mr D Marshall
   Mr S McDougall
   Mr P E Standley
   Mr K D Streams

6. THE TREASURER REPORT (including ADOPTION of ACCOUNTS and APPOINTMENT of REPORTING ACCOUNTANTS): Rodney Stubblefield reported on the Audited Accounts which had been circulated prior to the meeting. Net income had reduced in the main owing to the investment in a new laptop computer and printer to support administration needs and to aid speaker presentations at such events as the AGM. The accounts were unanimously adopted and Porter Garland reappointed as Reporting Accountants at the fee of £120.

7. THE PLANNING SECRETARY REPORT: Brian Burgess reported that statistics for planning applications have followed roughly the same pattern as over the past two years. The applications have been predominately for extensions, tree pruning, gates and fences to existing dwellings. Applications for newbuilds are invariably for the demolition of existing sizable houses for much larger houses or apartment blocks. The effect produces a greater concentration of large houses of much the same visual character as ribbon development. This puts the infrastructure under further pressure.

   The terms of the Chobham Common Special Protection Area (SPA) have provided a long-stop to new housing within its boundaries to considerable effect. However, to overcome the current SPA embargo, developers have aimed to trade between sites that they claim to be surplus planning approvals within the SPA. They also seek permission for new schemes to be acceptable, which they contend will not harm the SPA because of the existence of Ascot Heath, Windsor Great Park, and Swinley Forest. SPAE has consistently argued that those areas did not provide acceptable mitigation. The Secretary of State agreed and stated that a new area of suitable accessible green space (SANG) was needed.
There have been two consequences in this decision. First, RBWM accelerated its attempts to find such an area and resolved to designate Allen’s Field as a SANG. Natural England has agreed in the meantime that this need not prevent the approval of new applications for additional housing providing these are subject to a legally binding condition that work on the development will not begin until Allen’s Field is upgraded and commissioned.

That dispensation has led to the second consequence, which has been to release a logjam of applications for new housing that the absence of a SANG was holding up. Since late last year, there has been a steady succession of applications for new dwellings. Permissions ready to be started once Allen’s Field comes into use already total over 50 and will continue to come forward as RBWM is proposing to regard the site as having a capacity that will provide mitigation for around 450 new dwellings.

This increases the importance of having in place a Neighbourhood Plan which can reflect the wishes of the local community as to the nature and location of new housing in the area and which the Society can argue for in responding to new applications at both determination and appeal stages.

In Bracknell Forest, 10,000 new homes will be required up to 2026 with most of the new housing being built around the Binfield area and resulting in heavier traffic through Ascot. Contentious developments in Winkfield are relatively low-level, apart from opportunistic sites in Fernbank Road attracting developers looking to build apartment blocks.

The team leaders Peter Standley, Keith Streams and Stewart McDougall were thanked for their time and effort put into appraising applications, and attending meetings, consultations and appeals with borough planners and local parishes. SPAE members were also thanked for keeping in touch with the visual impact that planning applications have on their immediate vicinity and their cooperation at appeals.

8. **THE CHAIRMAN REPORT:** Rodney Stubblefield reported on a number of key topics.

**National Planning Policy Framework** – the NPPF provides a framework for local planning decisions. However, the greater emphasis on presumption in favour of development is increasingly becoming a consideration in councils recommending for approval locally controversial planning applications, which has not assisted SPAE’s objections to such applications.

**Localism & Neighbourhood Plan** – the framework for local decisions under the NPPF gives added importance to Localism, covered by the new Act. In Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, the local community has been given (with Government financial assistance) the opportunity to produce its own Neighbourhood Plan with which SPAE has been assisting.

Whilst Bracknell Forest already has in place its Local Development Framework (LDF), RBWM does not and, in our view, will not for some time. For the latter, the most important aspect is the housing numbers, which need to be incorporated into seven neighbourhood plans across the borough (all of which are in different stages of preparation) and ideally need to be finalised and approved in draft in public consultations with the RBWM LDF incorporating the area Local Plan.

**Heatherwood Hospital** – NHS Berkshire has confirmed that health services will continue from Heatherwood for “years to come”. It is unclear exactly how long but they are likely to be no better than as now as it will be difficult to get back what is already lost. Local opinion is however crucial and members are encouraged to be proactive with local GP’s and expressed choice of hospitals. SPAE supports the Save Heatherwood Hospital campaign and continues carefully to monitor developments, which are still in a state of flux.
Defence Evaluation & Research Agency (DERA) – this is also still very much in a state of flux with Runnymede BC having initiated action to take both sites out of Green Belt. The council is now talking of 1,500 new high quality houses on the southern site, not 2,500 as originally mooted. Also, agents are now proposing light industrial and offices of 85,000 sq m plus 250 houses on the northern site. We are monitoring closely, even though there is no direct SPAE involvement.

Campaign for Rural England – CPRE was the foremost and most authoritative early objector to the originally developer-slanted drafted NPPF proposals and deserves great credit for their amendments. Our area continues to be under development threat, even with these changes, especially as the valuable SPA objection falls away. The concern and support of members are necessary for the protection of the Green Belt, trees and remaining local rural aspect in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Website, Membership & Tributes – members are recommended to confirm for themselves the recent improvements to our website, thanks to Ian Valentine, webmaster, and Patrick Griffin. Our greater profile has increased our membership to nearly 1,200 with many more indirectly through resident associations, and through the year we have improved our technology. A tribute was paid to all the SPAE officers and committee members for their sterling work during the year.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS: none arose.

10. GUEST SPEAKER: Clive Williams, author of The Nabobs of Berkshire gave a lively and informative presentation of the history of Berkshire dating back to the spice trade and the East India Company in India. We learnt that Berkshire was once known as the English Hindustan, where the term “snob” came from and the origins of many local stately homes and familiar surnames.

The Chairman expressed his thanks for the presentation and, with the meeting closing at 9.35pm, refreshments were served.