

# **Kingswood Residents Association Minutes of Annual General Meeting Held at Kingswood Village Hall on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

The meeting was chaired and opened at 8pm by Mr Gary Whitney, KRA President, who introduced our guests Mr Jim Harrison, Tree Officer for Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Cllr. Joan Spiers and C. Cllr Mike Gosling. The meeting was advised that the agenda was slightly adjusted to allow Mr Harrison to make his presentation before the main agenda was proceeded with.

## **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

Mr J. Brett, Sir Brian Hill, Cllr. Ros. Mill, Mr Dave Saunders, Mrs Lynne Sinclair, Mrs Estelle Bibby, Mr and Mrs Paul Cox, Mr and Mrs John Griggs, Mr Roy Wilcox and Mr and Mrs John Phipps

## **1. APPROVAL OF THE 2009 AGM MINUTES.**

Copies of the minutes of last year's AGM were circulated to the meeting, followed by a brief overview by the President. There being no matters arising or proposed amendments, the meeting accepted the minutes unanimously.

## **2. TREE OFFICERS PRESENTATION.**

Mr Harrison outlined his job as tree officer in the north of the borough, having worked for the planning department for 22 years. In a presentation about the borough, he showed slides with trees of great interest and explained the importance of his role and that of the public in helping to conserve the beauty of our surrounding countryside. The borough now has 1200 TPOs (Tree Preservation Orders) which have been applied from 1947 onwards. All TPOs require statutory paperwork to be completed before any works on trees may begin and refusals can be appealed. Consents are valid for one year and the conditions applied are binding in law. All trees within a Conservation Area, which have a trunk over 3 inches in diameter and are over 3 feet in height, are also notifiable for consent to works. Contravention of a TPO is a criminal matter and will be pursued in court. In this borough, there are about 300 applications for works per year and the key role of the officers is the making and confirming of TPOs. About 30 additional TPOs are made per year. A local resident raised serious concern about the activities of developers who in the absence of any TPO have removed mature trees from the site prior to development and without any consultation which is very detrimental to the area. Even when this is reported to the Council it appeared that this practice cannot be stopped in time. Responding to this concern Mr Harrison urged local people to apply for TPOs where significant unregistered trees existed, in order that they be protected (even when not on their own properties), but reminded everybody that the TPO process needs time and the Tree Officers decisions are final. Mr Harrison suggested that an enforceable covenant for the area should be considered. Mr. Guy Kingsbury suggested that residents get the TPO forms and apply for tree protection ahead of developments taking place and that some sort of working arrangement to help support the local tree officers be looked at to speed up the process. Mr Gary Whitney agreed and stated that the KRA will investigate this further and produce some general tree advice for residents after further consultation with the Tree Officer.

### **3. PRESIDENTS REPORT.**

The President explained the work of the Federation which now comprises some 14 local affiliated associations. The president will continue to work with the Federation along with his colleague for this area, Barry Miles. The purpose of the Federation is to focus on the larger issues affecting Kingswood and the surrounding areas in the northern part of Reigate and Banstead. The Federation is informed from time to time, by external speakers and guests.

Within the Federation are smaller special working groups and one such group is the Planning Group This group have been working extensively on the (a) Consultation responses on The South East Regional Plan, The Local Council's new local Development Framework consultation on the Core Strategy and on the protection of the Green Belt and Urban Open Spaces generally. This special group comprises Mrs. Gillian Heine (the Vice Chair of the SE Branch of the CPRE), Mrs. Trish Canham, Mrs. Catalina Vassallo-Bonner, Barry Miles and Gary Whitney. The Council is producing a Local Development Framework (LDF) for a new statutory planning system which requires a tremendous amount of effort by the officers following extensive local consultation. The most important part of this has been the Core Strategy, but this has now been withdrawn following the Government Planning Inspector not being satisfied that the sites required to ensure a required minimum of 10,000 new homes can be accommodated. The Inspector wants more housing sites to be identified which would leave the Green Belt areas very vulnerable.

Of particular concern to Kingswood is the Green Belt comprising the Banstead Estate (formerly owned by Legal and General) The Federation have established a specialist working party which includes two former planning officers, to protect this land from extensive threatened development. The local MP, Crispin Blunt, has gone on record pledging his own vehement support to the preservation of Green Belt, which is viewed as highly beneficial to the cause. Mr Whitney appealed to all local residents to join him in supporting the Federation in this long and hard fight to protect our local Green Belt

### **4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.**

The Chairman welcomed all present and laid out the objectives of the KRA, being to work with the councillors, county councillors, Chairmen of the Frontagers and all local associations for the benefit of our community. He thanked his committee, and offered special thanks to our local Borough councillors and our County councillor for all their generous support and time. He then especially extended thanks to John Lang from the KRA, whose work on Planning is both tireless and extensive.

The recession has seen no discernible decrease in planning applications and these are becoming both higher and closer to boundaries than ever before. Kingswood is of an Arcadian nature, that being spacious and tree dominated which belies these applications. Use of the timeline feature of Google Earth on the Internet reveals the drastic changes to the Kingswood landscape which have occurred in a very short space of time. This makes the KRA task even more critical.

April of this year sees the "Love where you live" council initiative for all residents in the borough and with the increased wear and tear to our surrounds and in particular our verges, all residents need to be both vigilant and caring and take rightful pride in where they live.

The winter that has just passed, caused significant challenges to us all with particular disruption to our roads. The KRA is moving to improve information flows by working closely with councillors and frontagers associations.

Some examples of the work undertaken by the KRA were given: – monitoring and responding to planning applications, working closely with the Federation of Residents Associations, liaison with Octagon Developers re the development of the former BBC site, lobbying the county council re local amenities and particularly the state of Waterhouse Lane, creating a new membership database in preparation for extended email interaction and increasing membership.

In the forthcoming year, the new KRA website will be launched and this will have features such as: – sections for all aspects of KRA work, further sections with hyperlinks for other local groups such as KVCA, frontagers associations, Neighbourhood Watch etc., facilities for multiple editors, access for residents to see road specific information and alerts for members when pertinent information is added or changed. In addition to the website development, further work for next year will include contingency planning for next winter, further lobbying to improve local roads and investigate traffic calming and early initiatives in conjunction with the KVCA, on plans for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in June 2012.

The land formerly owned by the BBC (and now owned by Octagon Development), still has an outstanding appeal on the first planning application and a further, less attractive but still acceptable planning application has now been submitted. The KRA is acting as a witness in the appeal and close liaison with the developers and the council is ongoing in order to see an outcome which is of benefit to our community.

The Chairman closed by appealing to any present who are not members to join the KRA and encouraged other local residents to do the same, in the spirit of enjoying a stronger community.

## **5. COUNCILLORS REPORT.**

C. Cllr Mike Gosling outlined the current financial situation regarding credit crunch challenges. He reported that Surrey has a £680 million revenue budget and gets the lowest per capita grant in the Country from central government. He went on to explain how this has constrained expenditure on such things as roads as priorities for meeting demands for adult and child care were higher. He is planning to try to recoup about £70 million in savings but can only do so by making efficiencies, yet to come.

Street lighting is being addressed by a Private Finance Initiative (PFI), making it more energy efficient and individual lighting units can then be controlled allowing for greater efficiencies. This scheme is expected to reduce annual costs in terms of capital and revenue expenditure.

From 1<sup>st</sup> May, the section of Waterhouse Lane from the bridge to the A217 will be surfaced dressed. Early preparation work has already been completed.

Issues of speeding on Waterhouse Lane have been raised by the KRA. How this should be resolved is still undecided but funding is currently a major issue so this will remain to be monitored in the short term.

The collapsed bank on Outwood Lane is one of only two earthworks which are on the 2010 list. Addressing the problem is dependent on the compulsory purchase of land to the side of the road.

Cllr. Joan Spiers reported that a zero percent increase in council tax has been achieved this year. Many new strategies to make cost-savings have been imposed and now the Council staff have been fully pared back. As with many large companies, a project has been set up to investigate outsourcing certain support services such as IT and by June we could see the result of further cost reduction initiatives.

Having established the likelihood of the Inspector rejecting the council Core Strategy because it failed to come close enough to a required target 11,800 homes, it has been withdrawn by the Council. Had it been formally rejected, the effect would have been to move the LDF to the back of the queue for further consideration. However, following more investigation of potential sites Cllr. Spiers and her officers have found additional capacity without using Green Belt for an increased 1000 homes which may now be close enough to target for a revised Core Strategy to be resubmitted and accepted by the Inspector.

The audience were invited to address short questions to the councillors.

Road drainage issues in Waterhouse Lane (outside Khyber Restaurant) were raised and this question was passed to C. Cllr. Gosling who has committed to investigating further and responding to the KRA.

The wider issue of road funding was then discussed but C. Cllr. Gosling responded by saying that no promises were possible as the capital budget is very restricted. However, there are currently plans to improve the capital programme and further reports on this should be possible in about a year, which may then lead to village improvements being able to be addressed.

Comments were made about refuse collection services in Kingswood during the long spell of snow and subsequent ice earlier this year. Cllr. Spiers reassured residents that a refuse service at that time was not possible as the vehicles simply could not access these hilly areas. However, one of her own operatives had come forward with the idea of tractor assistance which was eventually what aided clearance of the backlogs. She also reassured residents that the same operatives did not shorten their working days due to the weather conditions and had shown willing to be redeployed in other areas, during the exceptionally cold spell.

C. Cllr. Gosling responded to various comments about better road conditions in other countries which suffer inclement weather. Surrey's lack of funding and the general poor state of Surrey's roads has meant a very large number of potholes appearing which are steadily being repaired. He requested that unfilled potholes be reported directly to him and he hopes to reveal further plans for more extensive future improvement in the next year or so.

Cllr. Spiers was asked if chains had been considered for council vehicles but she assured those present, that this idea together with several others were already the subject of ongoing planning for next year. She stated that she and the KRA Chairman had agreed to set up a small sub committee to discuss contingency plans for bad weather at greater length.

Comments were made about road repairs currently under way on Waterhouse Lane. Presurfacing had been done but the questioner felt that a great many holes in the same area were being overlooked. C. Cllr. Gosling responded by explaining that he was already aware of this and that the current road contract was not being implemented in the way in which it should be. This issue has previously been raised and is the subject of discussion at council level. He added that we have just had an exceptionally cold winter which has caused extensive road disruption, but his council were as prepared as they could be. They had a reserve of 9000 tonnes of salt when a normal winter demand would be 6000 tonnes and once this was used they still had an additional undelivered 1000 tonne outstanding order, when the weather abated. He invited any constructive comment on this issue to be directed to him at the council offices, so that future planning for inclement weather could be improved.

Cllr. Spiers was asked why the first BBC site planning application (made by Octagon Developments and with full support from the KRA and residents) did not gain approval from the planning department. She explained that better earlier

consultation by the developer with the planning department would have been prudent and the lack of this may have caused some problems. Mark Harbottle (Head of Building and Development Services) felt minded to reject the planning application and urged the members to reject it. Cllr. Spiers reassured all present that she had done her utmost in giving the planning application her full support and Simon Parnall responded by reiterating this and thanked her for the support. He then outlined the current discussions between Octagon and the KRA, commending Octagon as a most considerate contractor. He explained the extent of agreements made by Octagon with frontagers and the KRA which would include land covenants to protect the open spaces and other matters which are expected to be subject to planning permission conditions.

## **6. HON. TREASURER'S REPORT**

The Hon. Treasurer, Mrs Adrienne Light, presented the accounts. The surplus for the year 2009 is £1,027. She reported that the Balance Sheet shows cash on deposit at £16,018, a slight increase on last year but reflecting healthy funds. Accumulated reserves have risen to £8,826. She also reminded those present that the subscription for a 4 year period is just £20 – that is £5 per year per household, which is very reasonable.

Mr Gary Whitney proposed acceptance of the audited accounts for 2009 and this was seconded by Mr John Pollock. All present were in favour.

## **7. ELECTION OF HON. AUDITOR**

Mr Whitney thanked Mr David Buckley for acting as Honorary Auditor in 2009 and proposed his reappointment for the following year. This was accepted.

## **8. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE FOR 2010–11**

The President then took over the meeting and thanked all the Officers and committee members who acted in 2009. He also thanked Mr Dennis Cox who has acted for Gledhow Wood and Lilley Drive who is now standing down and will be replaced by Mr Richard Lewis.

The President also announced the following nominations for KRA officer positions:

- Mrs Sue Pollock – Honorary Secretary
- Mr Dave Saunders – Honorary Membership Secretary

A vacancy still exists for Communications Secretary but Mrs Estelle Bibby has kindly agreed to take on this position in an Acting capacity. A further vacancy for the Roads and Transport Sub-Committee still exists and an appeal was made to those present for further nominations.

All of the above named together with those existing committee members and officers as set out in the Meeting Agenda who have agreed to stand for re-election were then formally proposed by the President for election and unanimously accepted by the meeting by show of hands.

## **9. AOB**

There being no further business, the AGM was declared formally closed.