

Littlewick Green Society

Preserving and improving the character of our village and local community

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Minutes of Littlewick Green Society Annual General Meeting & Annual Village Meeting held at Gilchrist Hall at 7.30pm on 26th April 2024

1. Welcome and introduction

Richard opened the meeting and welcomed everybody.

He mentioned that our guest speaker from Gigaclear had declined to attend in a rather surprising last minute telephone call to Andrew. As a result the meeting today would be much shorter and focus on giving an annual update, reselection of committee and some discussion around the recent appeals process relating to the planning application to redevelop the Maidenhead Business Park. Richard asked Andrew to provide some more context as to the Gigaclear situation and the reason behind them declining to attend our village meeting having posting their own flyers to everyone.

Andrew explained that it all started several weeks ago when the Gigaclear representative, the Community Officer, expressed concern about her commitment to present to the village due to delays in the build plan, which it appears had not been finalised after all, nor had the contractors been agreed on. Despite being unable to provide specifics about the plan, Andrew emphasised the importance of the representative's attendance to foster goodwill and demonstrate positive engagement with the community. She agreed to come. However, the representative subsequently contacted Andrew last week to convey that she had been instructed not to attend the meeting and was uncertain about the reason behind this decision. Andrew noted that Nathan Rundle, the former COO, has been promoted to the position of CEO, leading to several organisational changes, including the postponement of certain projects and the reassessment of relationships with contractors. Nevertheless, the representative declined to attend the village meeting despite Andrew's insistent requests. Andrew expressed scepticism regarding whether these changes were related to the representative's absence and voiced uncertainty about the underlying reasons and the intentions of Gigaclear to come good on their promise to rollout fibre broadband to our village.

2. Chairman's Report

Richard stated he was pleased to report that the Society is in good health and with the changes instituted over the last few years, well equipped for the years to come.

Planning - Maidenhead Office Park

Richard reported that the Committee has always taken an interest in all planning issues that could impact the village. He noted that the most notable issue during this last year has been the application to build industrial units in place of the office blocks at the Maidenhead Office Park site. The application was lodged at the end of 2022 and went before the Planning Committee in September. The Society, along with other groups including the two Parish Councils, prepared a robust objection culminating in hundreds of letters of objection being submitted and hundreds attending the planning meeting. With the support of the District Councillor Maureen Hunt, who Richard described as being "like a dog with a bone", the application was refused. Richard stated the meeting had already heard what followed regarding this issue.

Richard then read out a summary report written by Paul Martin of White Waltham Parish Council which outlined the application and appeal process to date. See appendix.

Maureen Hunt addressed the village explaining that in her experience the inspector will often surprise and make the right decision in favour of the community.

Richard confirmed there were no other planning issues of concern to the Society during the year.

Coronation Celebrations

Richard advised that the Society, along with others from the village, arranged a very successful party on the green to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles. He expressed gratitude to Seb, who alongside others organized this party.

Kick Off to Christmas

Richard stated the Society held another very successful, oversubscribed Christmas party for children. The children had a visit from Father Christmas, following which they completed a quiz on the way to St John's church for the Christingle service.

Wine Tasting Evening

Richard reported that just a few weeks prior, Simon organized a very successful and enjoyable wine tasting evening attended by over 50 people who sampled 10 lovely wines. He thanked Simon, stating his knowledge of good wines is exceptional. Although post year-end and not featured in the accounts, the evening raised much-needed funds for the Society.

Lost Friends

Richard sadly noted the loss of friends Kate Rowland, Paul Ripley and David Gilbert over the past year, with David having been a past Chairman of the Society.

Parish and District Councils

Richard advised the Society works closely with the two Parish Councils of White Waltham and Hurley. He thanked them both for their support, help during the year and kind donations assisting the Society's work. He specifically thanked Lynn and Paul for supporting the Society so well.

Richard also mentioned and thanked Maureen Hunt, stating she has always listened and supported the Society over many years. He noted George Blundall has now been added to the list since his election last year and has already provided help as the Society fights the Office Park appeal.

The Cricketers Pub

Richard thanked Rowena and Nigel, who allow the Society to use the pub for meetings, also thanking them for all they have done for the village over the years. He stated he had heard they may be moving on later in the year and wished them happiness for their future on behalf of all members.

Committee Members

Richard thanked Andrew, Geoff, Simon, Paul, Seb, Rob, Matthew, Lisa and Jane for their great support during the year. He welcomed Nick Pink onto the Committee, who will shortly be elected. Richard stated the strength of the 60-year-old Society is down to the villagers who serve and ensure the protection of the lovely village, thanking all.

End of Tenure

At the end of his report, Richard indicated that 2023/2024 would be his last year as Society Chairman after serving for 9 years. He stated it has been a privilege to serve the Society in this way and wished Simon every success as he takes over the reins.

3. LGS AGM

Treasurer's Report

Geoff presented the Receipts and Payments Report, expressing gratitude for Caroline Barker's review and positive assessment. Caroline's annual review, undertaken voluntarily on behalf of the villagers, was duly recognized.

The detailed 2023 Account was made available on the village website.

To summarize, the year commenced with a bank balance of £2,663 and concluded with £2,887, indicating a modest increase of £224.

Total receipts amounted to £923 from events held throughout the year, including the Coronation Party, the 2023 AVM, and the Kick Off to Xmas party, resulting in a surplus of £370 after deducting associated costs. Grants supporting events, totalled £350, including £200 from WWPC) and donations of £308 from LGS Gazebo borrowing, together with continued £5 Membership subscriptions, contributed to net receipts of £1,028.

Administrative costs, incurred to support the village's heritage, facilitate village functions, and maintain communication with members, amounted to £804, encompassing expenses such as insurances, web hosting, Gilchrist Hall meetings, and other miscellaneous items.

Consequently, a surplus of £224 was achieved during the year, with gratitude expressed to the donors whose contributions facilitated this surplus.

The signed-off schedule of accounts have been uploaded to the village website.

Review of Minutes from 2023 AVM

Andrew explained there are a few copies of the minutes from our meeting last year (21st April 2023) at the back of the hall. Copies can also be found on the village website (littlewickgreen.org) under the “Event Tab” and then AVM.

Andrew said whilst there aren't any particular matters arising, other than of course we did minute the ground swell of concern that the redevelopment of the Maidenhead business park redevelopment was causing for the village. But Richard has already covered that.

The minutes were formally approved by a show of hands.

Election of Officers and Committee

Andrew said with Richard stepping down as Chairman, we are delighted to have a nomination for a new Chairman in Simon Thirlby-Smith. In-line with our constitution, at least one-officer will step down every year.

Andrew thanked Richard for his contribution over the previous 9 years and mentioned the many aspects and initiatives over his chairmanship that had improve the standing of the LGS. Richard's leadership will be missed.

The following three officers have been nominated and agreed to present themselves for election/re-election:

Simon Thirlby-Smith – Chairman
Geoff Ormsby - Treasurer
Andrew James - Secretary

Seven current committee members have been nominated and agreed to present themselves for re-election namely Jane Durgan, Seb Moore, Rob Morse, Lisa Peacock, Matthew Smith, Paul Spencer and Richard Moores.

And we are delighted to have Nick Pink present himself for nomination to join our committee.

The officers and committee members were formally re-elected by a show of hands.

6. Closing Remarks from New Chairman

In his closing remarks, our new Chairman, Simon Thirlby-Smith, expressed gratitude to Richard for his nine-year leadership as Chairman. Simon acknowledged Richard's role in updating the constitution and including younger voices in the LGS Committee, ensuring broader community representation. He praised Richard's efforts in organising social events that enhanced village life and thanked him for continuing as a committee member, providing valuable continuity. Simon expressed eagerness to build on Richard's work, particularly in strengthening social ties within the community. He looked forward to collaborating with everyone to continue working to ensure our village remains a vibrant and community focused place to live.

Appendix

24th April 2024

Summary of Planning Inspection – Maidenhead Office Park

This is to update the Littlewick Green Society AGM on the status of the Maidenhead Office Park planning application.

Background

As background, in case anyone is not familiar with it, an outline planning application was made to demolish the current office buildings and use the A4/Westacott Way for access to a new warehousing operation at Maidenhead Office Park.

The application proposed that the jobs that it says will be created are Very Special Circumstances that outweigh the damage that will be done to the Green Belt.

The application was refused by RBWM Development Control panel, which disagreed that the jobs amounted to Very Special Circumstances that outweighed the substantial damage to the Green Belt.

The applicant appealed. The appeal was heard by a Planning Inspector on behalf of the Secretary or State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The appeal hearing closed on Tuesday 24th April.

The Parish Council presented evidence at the appeal hearing, as did the Ffienes Park Residents Association and the Burchetts Green Residents Association. The Littlewick Green Society did not present as it decided to rely on the the Ffienes Park evidence, which was supported by a solicitor that was hired by the Woolley Hall and Ffienes Park management company. This summary refers to these groups collectively as the 'objecting groups'.

It is very difficult to say which way the Inspector will decide. We will not know for 4 to 6 weeks while the Inspector considers the arguments and reaches a decision.

The Planning Issues

It is important to understand that the appeal will be decided on issues of planning law alone. It will not consider any local community concerns or campaigns that are not directly related to planning law.

It is accepted by both sides that:

- The development is in the Green Belt
- The development represents Inappropriate Development in the Green Belt
- The development will do harm to the Green Belt

There are three key issues being argued and on which the appeal rests.

The first issue is the extent of the harm to the Green Belt. The Borough argues that since the proposed warehouses are 2x the footprint and 3x the volume and will be visible above the tree line, they will have a substantial impact on openness and visual amenity, and as such are unacceptable in this location. Its case rests on this impact on the Green Belt being so substantial that the economic circumstances (the jobs) cannot outweigh it.

The appellant argues that the site is an established employment site, with office buildings that are already visible anyway, that the warehouses will be predominantly screened by existing or growth of trees and that people will hardly notice them as they walk or cycle past.

The second issue is the extent of the need for logistics warehousing space and the decline in need for office accommodation in the area. The Borough argues that these are new trends since the pandemic,

that this trend is not guaranteed, and that the Borough has not had a chance to revise its Local Plan to accommodate the change.

The appellant argues that the need for logistics warehousing is so great, and the sites available so few, that this need must be addressed now. Together with the failure of Maidenhead Office Park as an office location, the appellant argues that it is a perfect site to meet the need.

The objecting groups tried to present arguments that Maidenhead Office Park was in decline because it was too expensive, had not been well marketed and was being deliberately run down, and that there is a continuing need for office space. These arguments were strongly rebuffed by the appellant's legal counsel.

The third issue is whether the jobs that will be created outweighs the damage to the Green Belt. The Borough's argument was weak in this area as it relied on the argument about need for warehousing. This resulted in the appellant's argument seeming strong as it is hard to ignore almost 900 jobs.

Other Issues that are not Planning Issues in this Appeal

The objecting groups presented many detailed arguments relating to the impact of the proposed increase in Heavy Goods Vehicle traffic on the A4. The arguments include the difficulty in turning out of side roads, of safety in relation to pedestrians, cyclists and horses, of pollution and noise, and of congestion on the A4 and neighbouring roads.

Unfortunately, the Borough was silent on all these issues because its own Highways Officer's report had concluded that there would be no issues due to the increase in traffic. Further, its own Environmental Protection Officer completely failed to address the environmental impact of traffic, choosing instead to focus on the environmental impact of the warehouses themselves.

Consequently, it was easy for the appellant to ignore these topics as there were no issues in relation to planning law to be addressed. Consequently, the Inspector is likely to pay little to no attention to highways or environmental issues.

Learnings

There are two key learnings that might be taken from this process.

1. **The Borough Council outsourced too many key planning services**

The Council had outsourced some key planning work. Highways had been outsourced to a consultant who produced a pathetic report on this application, without considering the key issues and without consultation with resident groups.

The Planning Officer was also a consultant, who did not consult with resident groups and was too ready to ignore planning law to recommend the original application be approved. While the Borough's Development Control Panel did step in to refuse the original application, the fact that its own Planning Officer had recommended approval hurt the Borough's case in the appeal.

2. **The Green Belt continues to be under threat and this will not be the last time**

The land on which the Office Park is built was already Green Belt when the Office Park was originally approved. That decision has made it harder to resist the latest application. Every decision in the Green Belt impacts the ability to protect it in the future from further development.

Let's hope that the Inspector decides to refuse the appeal.

Paul Martin