



EMMER GREEN RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

serving the local community

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MINUTES OF THE 34th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held in St Barnabas Church on Tuesday 13th March 2018 at 7.15pm

1 Attendance. 70 Members were present, with apologies received from 9 others.

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 28th March 2017 were agreed by the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

8.2 Broadband Coverage Annette Fairweather (Chair) had been in touch with Cllr Clare Grasshof who had contacted the resident concerned.

4. Development Application – Land off Peppard Road (Gladman)

Mr David Woodward, Chairman of the group CAGE (Campaign Against Gladman in Eye and Dunsden) outlined the organisations making up the group and the history of the consideration of the planning application to date. He stressed the importance of this issue since it had the potential to undermine the strategy of avoiding development along the northern borough boundary that is supported by both Reading and South Oxfordshire Councils. The hearing of the appeal against SODC's refusal to allow the application is to be heard during the first week of May. David appealed for people to show support at the hearing and to contribute to a fund that had been set up to pay for the services of expert witnesses.

5. Annual Report

Annette outlined the main activities that had been undertaken in 2017:

Annual Event A very successful historical walk in the centre of Reading had been organised, with Stuart Hylton giving information on the sites visited.

Village Sign The Sign had been professionally cleaned. The bulk of the cost had been met by sponsorship from Farmer and Dyer that was much appreciated. Advice had been given on future maintenance.

Telephone Box A working Group had been formed and is studying the feasibility of adopting the redundant telephone box at the top of Courtenay Drive.

Planning Issues Comments had been given on the Gladman development proposal and the draft Reading Local Plan.

Buses Comments had been made during the consultation period on proposed changes to the bus services in Caversham and Emmer Green.

6. Treasurer's Report

6.1 Bill Harper presented to accounts for 2017. Income was reduced because the collection of member subscriptions renewals for 2018, which would normally take place in December, had been postponed because of the uncertainty about EGRA's future. The aim is to collect these amounts in 2018. The major items of income and expenditure related to the Village Sign. The normal annual running costs of the Association are around £350, which means that only some £100 is available for other spending. Spending above this amount would need to be met from the balance in hand (£1013) which had been reducing in recent years.

6.2 Bill thanked Janette Joyce for her work as accounts examiner. The meeting agreed that she be appointed to examine the 2018 accounts in due course.

7. Future of EGRA

Following the resignation of some office holders the Committee had been reduced to four members, and had come under pressure maintaining the work of the Association. An appeal had been made for more volunteers to join the Committee and take on some of the vacant roles. Happily a number of members had offered their services. A meeting would be held shortly to organise tasks and reconstitute the Committee. The hope is that this will enable EGRA to be fully functional again.

8. Election of Officers

8.1 Annette was willing to stand again as Chair and Bill as Treasurer. Both were seconded and elected.

8.2 The meeting thanked both of them for the exceptional effort they had put in over the year.

8.3 Liz Lyke was willing to stand again as Events organised and Linda Glithro was willing to remain on the Committee. Annette thanked them for their valuable support during the year.

9. Planning Issues

Bill reported to the meeting on the way the Committee approached the work of reviewing and commenting on planning matters. He outlined the present situation on possible developments at Reading Golf Club and Caversham Park. A summary of his presentation is attached.

10. Reading Buses

10.1 EGRA, together with many local residents, had made comments during the consultation exercise on changes to bus services. The impact on Emmer Green had been much less than originally feared, and this was appreciated. The introduction of refurbished buses is expected.

10.2 The changes had been proposed because the income from services had not been covering their costs. It now needs to be clearly understood that if usage and fare income is not sufficient in the future the services will be reviewed again. The message for local residents is "Use It or Lose It".

11. AOB

11.1 Annette thanked the Committee Supporters, Conservation, Website, Planning, Noticeboard and Newsletters for their continued support.

11.2 The CADRA AGM is to be held on the 17th April, 19:30 at Thameside School Hall, with a talk from the Chief Officer of the Board for the Chilterns AONB.

Annette then thanked everyone for taking the time to attend and noted appreciation from the Committee for the Members support over the last year.

EGRA'S ROLE and ACTIVITY on LOCAL PLANNING ISSUES

Resources

EGRA's work is undertaken entirely by volunteers, who are ordinary local residents. At present there is no-one on the Committee with special knowledge of town planning matters. To be able to be effective in understanding and in commenting on planning issues it is necessary to gain some knowledge of how things work. Planning decisions are affected by legislation and regulations, national policies and local policies. The EGRA web site has a brief guide to town planning.

EGRA'S Role

EGRA tries to represent the views of all its members. The fact is that within the membership there will always be a variety of views. The consultation with Members about the Gladman development, despite considerable communication effort, produced only a 35% response. It has to be assumed that the "silent majority" were not too worried. Within the responses themselves there were differing opinions.

These days major planning issues are the subject of public consultation and online facilities make the submission, recording and publishing of comments fairly easy. The use of social media to make the views of individuals public also reveals the variety of opinions held.

In this situation EGRA tries to focus on matters that are likely to be common to the whole community. The impacts of developments will differ for individuals. EGRA cannot know the detail of these, does not hold itself out to represent the interests of individuals, and cannot be relied on to do so. For this reason EGRA will not comment on issues affecting one property or a small area where there are no significant impacts on the wider community.

EGRA's Approach

Most development proposals will have some adverse effects. Even where there are strong opinions it is of limited use to say the plans are not liked and change should not happen. To be credible the reasons for the objections must be given. For housing developments the main adverse impacts on the whole community are the additional demands for local public services and on the physical infrastructure, mainly traffic. There may also be loss of public amenity. These are the issues that EGRA will normally seek to describe and comment on.

The dilemma that arises is that individuals who are totally opposed to changes will criticise EGRA for appearing to comment on how the proposal might be made acceptable.

Possible Development on Reading Golf Club's Course.

The possibility of development being proposed for a part of the course (the area around the 1st and 18th holes) has been rumoured for a long time. It became public and formal when the area was identified as having the potential for housing development in the draft Reading Local Plan. In the middle of 2017 the attention of Members was drawn to the consultation process that was taking place on this Plan. Members commented individually and EGRA made comments. These were concerned with impacts on services and infrastructure, principally health, education and traffic. The draft Plan acknowledges these potential problems both in principle and in detail.

EGRA did comment that there is some scepticism about whether promised safeguards are delivered in the light of failures to provide facilities in the Bugs Bottom and Caversham Park developments.

In a specialised "Pre Submission" consultation in January EGRA again drew attention to concerns about whether the scheme could deliver the safeguarding actions required.

At about the same time rumours were circulating about consideration being given by the Golf Club to its future. EGRA representatives met Golf Club representative who outlined the financial pressures on the Club and the options, including relocation, being explored. At EGRA's suggestion the Club issued a public statement which had the desired effect of bringing the issue into the public domain and attracted considerable media attention.

Any proposal to redevelop larger areas of the course would have greater local service and infrastructure impacts. Wider development is not, however, envisaged in the Local Plans of either Reading or SODC.

Caversham Park.

A somewhat similar situation exists at Caversham Park. It has been known for while that the BBC plans to sell the site. The Reading Local Plan has a section on Caversham Park pointing out the protections that exist on the parkland and anticipating only limited residential development. The information marketing the site, however, does mention a variety of possible future uses, including housing – all “subject to planning permission”. Again, it opens the possibility of development proposal being made at some stage that are not in accordance with the Local Plan.

Area Overview

It is known that proposals are under development for the land off Peppard Road, the Golf Course and Caversham Park, which should mean that the potential cumulative impact is looked at as a whole. Both Reading and SODC have linked strategies to restrict development. It would be wrong to undermine those strategies by making a series of piecemeal decisions rather than taking a strategic overview.

Local Plans

The Local Plans produced by Councils are substantial documents. The Reading Plan details the Borough Council's overall approach to development and has a specific section on Caversham and Emmer Green which includes the Golf Course and Caversham Park. Any resident interested in the physical future of the area should look at the Plan, which is available on the Council web site.