

Manor Estate Residents' Association

Public Annual General Meeting

held at Two Waters School
Wednesday 8th October 2008

Committee members present:

Beverley Schramm (Chairman), Steve Bradley, Brian Burgess, David Jury (Treasurer), Neil Parker, Sue Prowse, June Wiggins (Secretary).

Also present: Brian Ayling (Ward Councillor), Graham Jeynes (Shendish representative)

Approximately 50 other residents attended and were asked to sign a register of attendees.

Apologies: Bob Buckell, Jude Hardcastle.

The meeting commenced at 7.35pm.

Welcome:

Beverley welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes and Matters arising:

The minutes of last year's AGM were posted on the website shortly afterwards. No one raised any objections, so Beverley agreed to sign them as a true record of proceedings.

Chairman's Report:

Beverley ran through the year's activities.

The litterbins installed by DBC have proved to be a great success, with a marked decrease in the amount of litter in King Edward St.

We have corresponded with the Planners, Natural England and Herts Biological Records to put the case for an Environmental Impact Assessment on the development site, but it has been judged that the land is not of sufficient ecological importance to justify this. However, protected species have been found on the site (definite sightings of Common Lizard and possible evidence of Common Dormouse) so mitigation measures will be required to avoid undue disturbance. A disagreement regarding the location of the badger sett has more or less been resolved.

As announced last year a footpath application was submitted, but we have yet to hear the outcome. Further evidence of its use may still be submitted.

We carried out a door-to-door survey regarding the possibility of a community facility on the new estate. Residents were overwhelmingly in favour of a traditional 'Village Hall' so DBC have been advised of this.

Public Liability Insurance has been taken out to enable us to hold more events. The last Quiz Night in April 2008 raised approx £400 and we have planned another for 21st March 2009.

A new MERA noticeboard had been erected within the previous week. This was manufactured by Brian Burgess, so Beverley thanked him on behalf of all residents. Anyone wishing to place a notice on the board may post it through the door of our Secretary, June Wiggins, at 7 Chipperfield Road.

Formal Adoption of Constitution:

Sue Prowse advised everyone present that the MERA committee wishes to adopt a formal constitution. This is very similar to the constitution used by Dacorum Borough Council for Residents' Associations in areas of mainly Council Housing. The only difference is that theirs includes an agreement between the residents and DBC as their landlord. Ours will just be between the committee and local residents. It sets

out details of how the organisation operates and includes undertakings to ensure that none of our activities discriminate on grounds of race, gender, sexuality or disability. If we wish to apply for grants in future it is necessary to have a formal constitution, which must also detail what will happen to any funds if MERA is ever wound up.

Sue proposed a motion that the public meeting should adopt the constitution with immediate effect. This was seconded by ?? and the vote was carried unanimously.

Election of Officers and Committee Members:

Beverley asked if anyone would be interested in joining the committee. No one wished to do so, so the current committee offered to continue in their current posts. Bill Leeden proposed a motion in support of this and Hazel Randall seconded. The motion was voted upon and passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report:

David Jury presented the Treasurer's Report to the meeting. Our financial year runs from 1st April. A bucket was available for anyone wishing to make a donation on the evening.

A copy of the accounts are available on request.

Notes:

These accounts have been professionally audited by a member of the 'internal audit' staff of Hertfordshire County Council.

Community Litter Pick:

June advised everyone that as part of 'The Big Tidy Up' campaign, supported by DBC, MERA will be holding a litter pick on Sunday 19th October between 2 and 4pm. This will start from outside 16 King Edward Street. Equipment and refreshments will be provided.

Ward Councillor's Development Update:

The Apsley Ward Councillor, Brian Ayling, very kindly attended the meeting to give an update on local issues. He began by offering congratulations to the committee for all the hard work carried out on behalf of local residents over the past year.

Referring to the new MERA noticeboard, Brian said that he was pleased to announce that he would be able to cover the cost of this from the 'Councillors' Community Fund'. He explained that each Ward Councillor now has £2000 per year to spend on projects of benefit to the local community. As there are 3 Councillors in the Apsley & Corner Hall Ward, this means that there is £6000 per year available for local projects. Any suggestions for how to spend this money are most welcome. He has already contacted Apsley Community Centre, Apsley Lock Residents' Association and Apsley Scouts. He also intends to contact local shopkeepers and traders.

The two main 'live' issues at present are the Manor Estate development and Gypsy & Traveller sites.

Brian reminded us that last year he had informed us that the long delay in starting work was coming to an end and that the 'Heads of Terms Agreement' had not yet been signed off, but it was likely that it would be soon. Further delays have ensued, but there is now only one legal issue still to be resolved.

The biggest issue for local residents is the installation of the new road bridge over the railway. This has been secured – the money has been paid up front in the form of a bond. The developers have made clear that it is also in their interests to get the bridge installed as soon as possible for two reasons: a) Traffic management during the construction process and b) marketing their new properties – the bridge will help attract new buyers to the development.

Brian reminded us that the new road layout at King Edward St/Featherbed Lane junction plus all the other road improvements will take place before any foundations are dug. These roadworks will take around nine months. The new building will then start on the top fields and – as he told us last year – will take place in five phases lasting 63 months.

We still don't have a definite start date – negotiations are still taking place between DBC, Network Rail and Herts County Council. He reminded us that the developers need to take possession of the railway, which has to be shut down while the bridge is installed. Network Rail can cancel this on the actual day if they wish.

DBC will have little involvement once works – they will just make sure that the new properties are being built correctly and according to the plans.

Until the bridge is installed there will be traffic lights on the bridge, but the end of King Edward Street will have been altered so we should find this an immediate improvement. Herts County Council believes that lights would work forever. The MERA committee took independent advice on this which agreed with this opinion.

Brian praised the MERA committee for all their work behind the scenes over several years which has gained some important concessions.

Gypsy and Traveller sites: A small article appeared on page 16 of the Autumn 2008 edition of Dacorum Digest and the issue has also been reported in the Gazette newspaper. The background to this is that several local councils – DBC, Watford, Three Rivers, St Albans (??) and Hertsmere – gave a brief to consultants Scott Wilson to investigate the number of pitches allocated to the area. DBC is challenging both the number of pitches allocated and a proposed 3% growth rate in requirements. Scott Wilson went ahead and identified possible sites – even though they had not been asked to! This process 'kicked off' in 2006, but councils now have enough information to decide how to proceed. The identified sites are all on Green Belt land, therefore there have inevitably been objections. These sites have not been proposed by DBC and are not endorsed by them.

By 2011 the Borough has been allocated an additional 15 pitches, which is the equivalent of half the current Three Cherry Trees Lane site. By 2031 the total number of pitches in the Borough is proposed to increase to 59.

DBC is about to have their own public consultation exercise on this and other planning issues. This will start on November 9th and will last for six weeks. As a community and as individuals we will have a chance to comment – it will be well worth looking at the DBC website for information. Site appraisal visits will be carried out and information posted on the website.

Questionnaires will be available, which will allow everyone to say what they feel and whether they support or object to various proposals. These will be obtainable from the Council and local libraries.

We feel that the Manor Estate developers could be an important ally to us on this. DBC have stated that there will not be any Compulsory Purchase Orders made. We understand that the owners of the Featherbed Lane site are Felden residents, so we are hopeful that they would not wish the land to be used for a Gypsy and Traveller site.

Brian then introduced our other visitor for the evening – Steve Holmes, who is County Councillor for the 'Hemel Town Division' and would be speaking about Traffic Management and other issues connected with development.

Steve remarked that he was sure that everyone had noticed that the main set of traffic lights on Two Waters Way/London Road had been removed. He was pleased to tell us that these are being replaced with a much-improved set of digital ones. They can communicate with a central control room if they develop a fault. If queues build up in a particular direction the phasing can be altered to improve the traffic flow at that time. The phasing will be altered slightly, with longer delays between changes, as traffic coming down the hill and 'jumping' the lights has caused numerous accidents.

Other news: Featherbed Lane is to be surface dressed. A resident asked why this work will be carried out now when the road will have extensive works shortly due to the new development. Steve replied that the surface needs attention much sooner than that!

Steve referred to the road works due to take place as a result of the new development. As well as the improved 'swan neck' exit from King Edward Street already referred to by Brian, there will be a new left-turn-only exit at the bottom of Featherbed Lane and a right-turn-only in the current one-way section of Orchard Street. All traffic coming up the hill will have to enter at the bottom of Featherbed Lane as at present, but will be sharing the road with the downhill traffic.

Problems with congestion at Durrants Hill Road will be addressed. The problem has been caused by the fact that the bridge had to be narrowed to one lane following the introduction of the increased EU weight limit for lorries. The bridge is very old and the cost of reinforcing it would have been prohibitive. A yellow box will be painted on the bridge to reduce the problem of vehicles stopping on it and preventing flow of traffic from the opposite direction. A resident asked why a weight restriction could not have been introduced in Durrants Hill Road to avoid all the problems that have been caused by the lights. Steve replied that it was possible that lorries would ignore the weight restriction and if two were on the bridge at the same time it could collapse.

Other development in Apsley will include a new 'Lincoln House Surgery'. There will be a new access road and the London Road end of Storey Street will be blocked off. This should also help to improve safety and ease congestion at the London Rd/Durrants Hill Rd junction.

Steve also referred to the proposals for Gypsy & Traveller sites. There has been a debate at County Hall, but as 15 pitches was the minimum possible that Dacorum would have to accommodate, this figure will not be challenged. Cambridgeshire was allocated 236! The maximum allowed on one site is 15 pitches, so it may be preferable to have two smaller sites.

There is a significant problem at County Hall with budgets; this year's is £3.7 million less than the previous year on a budget of approx £25 million. Herts County Council has added £10 million from reserves.

Finally, Steve told us that Herts Highways have adopted a new 'hot fill' technique for road repairs. This is considerably more expensive than the 'patching' technique used up until now, but should prove to be much better value for money as the repairs will last far longer.

Brian thanked Steve and then invited further comment and questions from residents. These included:

Q. What is the situation with the 'Egg Factory'? Large lorries continue to cause nuisance and danger to residents.

A. Steve replied that he is hopeful that negotiations will continue.

Q. What can be done about vehicles travelling the wrong way in the one-way section of Featherbed Lane?

A. Steve replied that this situation will change once the junction improvements take place. A committee member remarked that the Police were informed some while ago but responded that this is only a 'technical' offence and would only lead to prosecution if an accident resulted.

A resident remarked that the work on the London Rd/Two Waters Way traffic lights is having an adverse effect on Apsley businesses. Steve responded that the work is scheduled to take eight weeks and is on schedule. (NB Since the meeting this has been revised to 12 weeks.) The new lights will be fitted with LEDs instead of bulbs. These last for several years, whereas bulbs have to be replaced every six months, so although we are suffering disruption at present the situation in future will be better than in the past.

Beverley thanked Steve and Brian on behalf of all those present.

The meeting closed at 9pm.