



DREWS PARK VILLAGE ASSOCIATION

MINUTES of the **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** of the **Drews Park Village Association**
held on Tuesday 23rd October 2018 at 7pm in the Fox and Hounds

PRESENT: Mr Peter Bennis, Mr&Mrs Richard Powney, Mr&Mrs Malcolm Humphreys, Mr Robin Mitchell, Mr Tony Mitchell, Mr Simon Evans, Ms Sally Rhodes, Mrs Annette Piper, Mr Rob Murphy, Mr and Mrs John Pameley, Mrs Carol Holmes, Mrs Daphne Reeves and Guest Speaker Laura Mayes.

APOLOGIES: Mrs Lynne Farrow, Mr Simon Mills, Angus & Carrie Watson, Ms Mary Rennie, Mr and Mrs Prince, Mr Adrian Wood

ADDRESS BY LAURA MAYES

The DPVA was pleased to welcome Laura Mayes, Councillor for our Ward, to speak to the association members on planning issues in our area.

Treatment Centre – LM confirmed that Outline Planning had been received for the new Health facilities adjacent to the existing Centre. Funding and Detailed Consent has yet to be approved. She had been assured that sufficient parking would be provided to avoid overspill on to the roads and she agreed to make further enquiries about the proposed 50 houses to be constructed. The building would be a 'sustainable' project.

Football Field Development – LM believed that most of the objections had been solved and the application is due to go to Planning by the end of November. A bat survey had been carried out and it was understood that disruption would be minimal. In addition the floodlighting would be moved to a more central position thus minimising the effects. There were a number of queries about traffic volume and parking and **LM** suggested that the developers would be likely to accept restrictions on parking on Green Lane. She would push also for a 'stop' sign at the junction with Byron Road. She confirmed that office use would be seven days a week. The carpark would be properly laid out and provide more spaces than at present.

LM mention the existence of an App for mobile phones etc., called My Wiltshire. This allows people to photograph any defects (such as overflowing dog bins) and this is sent directly to the appropriate department. **LP** agreed to make note of this in the next Drews News.

There was no news of any application for Greenacres.

The assembled members thanked Laura Mayes for taking time to keep the group informed.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Simon Evans welcomed members to the Annual General Meeting of the Drews Park Village Association and explained that he chairs the DPVA Committee. First he recognised the committee members who all contribute to the Association's work: Sally, Norma, Lisa, Peter, Dick, Robin, Neil, who get through a lot of work during the year. He said he has great support from them and would like to thank them, especially Lisa, who produces the Drews News twice annually.

SE said we had just heard from Laura Mayes about what's happening in our immediate neighbourhood. He went on to talk about Drews Park itself.

Some statistics: We have about four acres of grass, and close to a hundred trees of different sizes, plus many flower beds. These all belong to our landlord, Aster, but as residents we are deeply involved in the management and maintenance of our estate. **SE** said he had seen other Aster estates and none of them comes close to looking as good as Drews Park, largely because we have such an active and vocal residents' association. We get many compliments on the appearance of our grounds from visitors. The Chair hoped members all noticed our splendid display of daffodils this spring, which many of you helped plant last year, and the magnificent replanted lavender bed in Thurnham Court.

ISS, who cut the grass and provide other services, are attempting to battle the weeds, but it has to be said that the grass is not as good as we'd like it to be. That is partly because of the long dry summer, which left the grass looking like a small desert.

The Chair informed members that we recently had a comprehensive survey of our trees, and are embarking on an annual programme over the next few years designed to make sure they are safe and sound and look good to everyone. He said we have some dead trees that need removing, and others that need tidying up, to give them a longer life, make them look better, or to ensure they are safe.

SE then turned to money, the money that leaseholders pay in ground rent, service charges, and sinking fund contributions. He said he was going to talk in round numbers to make things simple. Recently we were hit by what one might call a perfect storm of increases:

These included:

- Increased ground rents
- Increased sinking fund payments
- Increased insurance costs
- And, to add insult to injury, increased Council tax as a result of the merger of Roundway and Devizes. This has nothing to do with Aster, but affects our pockets.

Our leases allow ground rents to be raised by inflation every twenty years. This is why Aster has just increased them from £75 to £129—prices have risen by over 70% in the last 20 years. The good news is that the ground rent won't go up again until 2038.

Aster originally proposed tripling sinking fund contributions to £750 from £250. At the last First Tier Tribunal hearing we got that figure reduced to £550, but it is still too high. Our sinking fund is now accumulating at the rate of £73,000 a year. In the current financial year, and **SE** thought about £30,000 will be spent out of it—some for paths and some for roof repairs, leaving a balance to carry forward of over £180,000.

Next year Aster estimate that £80,000 plus VAT will be paid out of the sinking fund for stonework repairs. He said we have yet to see specifications for these, and are far from convinced of the need to spend that much.

At some point in the next few years we will need to invest in our 44 street lights. The bulbs they use will no longer be made and we will need completely new lanterns housing new LED fittings. The good news is that the LEDs use less electricity and cost less to maintain. The bad news is that the one quote we have so far had to do the work is upwards of £36,000 plus VAT.

Finally, the Chair mentioned insurance. As a result of large claims in the last two years our premiums rose substantially. Aster have now switched to a group wide insurance policy and premiums have reduced significantly, although not to the previous level. He added that, after lengthy discussions, we have established that the Aster buildings insurance policy covers the bits of your house that stay put when you move. If you can take it with you, then it should be covered by your contents insurance.

The arrangements for billing and invoicing service charges are deplorable. Many representations have been made to Aster about this over many years. But, alas, Aster's record keeping is not what it should be. Within the last two weeks DPVA have identified errors (admittedly small) in the amounts billed for service charges, from figures which were audited by Aster!

There has been some progress, and a service charge manager is now in charge who reports to a director with whom we are in contact. Both these people acknowledge that more work is needed before the quality of record keeping and, just as important, the statements and invoices we get are simple, accurate and comprehensible.

You will all recently have received a statement which looked like a bill. If you pay charges half yearly this was a bill. The balance due at the bottom shows what Aster think you owe for service charges, sinking fund contribution and ground rent for the current financial year, which ends next March.

SE ended with a roundup of a few things that various members of the committee have been involved in since our last AGM.

- We managed to solve a difficult problem caused by one resident's dog's behaviour.
- We've got an extra recycling bin in Thurnham Court.
- We've seen to it that abandoned vehicles have been removed.
- We've managed, more or less, to keep the lights on. Sorry about the delays when they stop working, that's SSE, who are sometimes very slow to respond.
- We ensured that a refund of about £17,000 for service charges in total was made available to leaseholders.
- Scaffolds appear and disappear, but are often left up for a long period. We try and get them removed as quickly as possible. Without constant badgering from DPVA they'd be up for even longer.
- Our gardening committee has worked with Aster so that we could buy replacement plants for dead and diseased plants
- After several requests we got Aster to level many of our paths, and repair places where the paths were defective.
- Last, but by no means least, thanks to a project running over several years and master minded by Peter Benns we have had new signs installed. Their main functions are to tell strangers where the courts are, so they can find them more easily, to make clear where the one-way section is, and to slow down speeding drivers. He said our experience has been that there are now fewer lost drivers and fewer driving the wrong way down the one-way section. Some people think we have too many signs, and most people would agree. There is a certain amount of clutter, and in the coming months we are going to look at rationalising things, and perhaps using fewer signposts. **SE** hoped that he could tell members more about that at the next AGM.

Simon Evans thanked the members for their attention.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Norma Humphreys reported that the accounts had been signed off by two non-committee members as required under the Constitution. Funds used to purchase plants had been refunded by Aster and the total expenditure this year was for stationery. Sums held for possible legal expenses remain at £1050.00 and current available funds are now £832.25.

NOMINATIONS

The current committee is unaltered, and the group were pleased to welcome Judith Pameley to the committee. The first meeting will be on November 27th.

Questions and Answers

As the members had previously had a chance to put their questions to Laura Mayes there were no more queries.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 20.10.