



Ripley Parish Council

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MINUTES of RIPLEY PARISH COUNCIL EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING held on TUESDAY 15th DECEMBER 2015 at 1930HRS at THE SCOUT HQ, ROSE LANE, RIPLEY.

Present: Cllr Jennie Cliff (Chairperson)
Cllr Richard Ayears
Cllr Colin Cross, Parish Councillor and GBC member for Lovelace Ward
Cllr Caspar Hancock
Cllr Lisanne Mealing
Cllr Vernon Wood
Cllr Richard Billington, GBC Lead Councillor for Rural Economy, Countryside, Parks & Leisure
Cllr Matt Furniss, GBC Lead Councillor for Infrastructure & Environment
Cllr Paul Spooner, GBC Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Planning
Jim Morris, Clerk of Ripley Parish Council

Apologies: Cllr Suzie Powell-Cullingford

Also present: 26 members of the public

124/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr Powell-Cullingford.

125/15 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

No Disclosures of Interest were received.

126/15 INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME

The Chairperson welcomed Guildford Borough Councillors Billington, Furniss, and Spooner to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

Cllr Paul Spooner introduced himself and Cllrs Billington and Furniss. The Cllrs had undertaken to visit all the parishes and some residents' associations in the Borough, a project which had taken six weeks so far. The Cllrs were seeking to understand local issues and views from across the Borough and discuss problematic areas of their own portfolios.

Cllr Spooner was familiar with Ripley Parish, having come originally from the area and still had extended family in the village.

127/15 RURAL ECONOMY, COUNTRYSIDE, PARKS & LEISURE

The meeting received a report from Cllr Richard Billington on his portfolio, which included rural economy, partnerships, the countryside, and parks. Cllr Billington was the member for Tillingbourne Ward and had been a councillor in south London before being elected to GBC five years previously. The Borough Council had limited powers and it was hard to get things done at times. Cllr Billington represented the rural Borough to the GBC Cabinet. 85% of land covered by GBC was designated green belt, and several Conservation Areas were under the councillor's remit. For this reason it was incredibly important to get things done with great care. Concerns were raised over rural traffic, road safety such as speeding in villages, and the lack of police presence in the villages. Cllr Billington expressed an interest in attending future meetings of RPC if he was available.

128/15 INFRASTRUCTURE & ENVIRONMENT

The meeting received a report from Cllr Matt Furniss on his portfolio, which included both infrastructure and the environment. GBC had no powers over provision of infrastructure, but made great efforts to engage with the relevant outside agencies and worked hard to encourage good design. Major infrastructure projects in the South East were being planned for the coming years, including airport expansion and crossrail, as well as local projects such as works to the A3 and extra rail halts around Guildford as well as improvements to road systems in the town centre. Works to improve the M25 Junction 10 would also be enacted alongside Elmbridge Borough Council. GBC worked closely with power network companies and Thames Water. Other projects under Cllr Furniss' remit included increasing Guildford's supply of burial plots, possibly replacing the crematorium, and replacing the roof of the Spectrum leisure centre.

129/15 PLANNING

The meeting received a report from Cllr Paul Spooner on his portfolio, which included both planning and regeneration. The 'Masterplan' for Guildford town centre was not a planning document as such, but would guide the development of the town for the next 50 years. The consultation had attracted just 160 responses, in comparison with over 20,000 which had been received during 2014's draft Local Plan consultation. Drafting a new Local Plan was going to be a difficult exercise. A 'traffic light' system was used for identifying sites, whereby red stood for highly sensitive, yellow for slightly less valuable, and green for supposedly green belt sites on the edge of settlement boundaries. Brownfield or urban sites would be utilized first in the forthcoming Local Plan. The draft Local Plan was planned for consultation in June 2016. Many changes had been made to the previous draft Plan, particularly in the east of the Borough. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMAA), carried out alongside both Waverley and Woking Borough Councils, had settled on a figure of 693 new homes per year in each Borough to meet future demand. Cllr Spooner acknowledged that planning enforcement at GBC had been inadequate for too long, and steps were being taken to ensure the system was improved. Retaining trained Planning Officers was a challenge which other Principal Authorities in the South East shared. Embedding County Council employees at GBC had been a success, and a more robust approach to planning enforcement was expected.

130/15 PUBLIC FORUM

Visiting Borough Council members received questions from parish councillors and members of the public.

i) How can RPC and GBC work together to encourage new small business into the parish to stimulate local sustainable employment of all types and support those already in place to ensure Ripley remains a thriving community and not another dormitory village with expensive housing?

Cllr Billington replied that first and foremost development was required, but applications for change of use from farms into housing, for example, must be stopped. Rural areas needed to be able to keep industries and employment. Business would go where it was made welcome and stay where it was looked after, and was a force for good in attracting people into villages. Any particular actions to encourage business would have to be made on a case-by-case basis.

ii) What options are available from GBC to support RPC resolve the considerable parking issues in the community and in particular Ripley's car parks and on street parking being used as all day "park & share" spaces by commuters? Evidence suggested people used the village in order to avoid parking charges elsewhere.

Cllr Furniss replied that GBC was involved in running street parking reviews. A survey of people parking in the village could be carried out. The Local Committee system was a laborious process taking up to 2 years, but an holistic review of the parking situation across the village could be carried out.

iii) Ripley Parish Council burial ground is nearing capacity and the PC owns the adjacent plot however we are currently unable to use this land because of the EA's concerns over the water levels and flooding. Can GBC provide some technical and financial support to overcome these issues to allow the extension of the burial ground?

Cllr Furniss replied that the short answer to the question was 'yes'. Excess soil produced by development elsewhere could be brought in to help raise the ground level of the proposed Burial Ground extension.

iv) Cllr Ayears posited a question regarding affordable housing provision. Could GBC promote affordable housing or rural exception housing provision so that young people would not be forced to move elsewhere?

Cllr Spooner replied that this was a key area that GBC was aiming to improve. The Local Plan could only go so far in shaping affordable housing provision as central government set the agenda on this issue and current ideology wished to pursue the 'right to buy' scheme. GBC provision of low cost housing was still some way above national averages and the Borough had managed to retain some 5,500 council owned properties.

v) Initial enquiries to GBC Planning Officers have suggested that plans to change the use of land at the rear of West End Cottages from redundant agricultural to 'Nature Reserve' may be refused as 'inappropriate development in the green belt'. This has caused some bemusement amongst members of the working group and other members of the public. The necessity of the planning process is completely understood by the parish council, is there sometimes a case for a more common sense approach, though?

Cllr Spooner replied that the rigid application of planning policy was sometimes frustrating and that there were numerous examples of similar circumstances from other parishes. As the RPC plan included measures to mitigate flooding, however, this could be seen as 'exceptional circumstances'.

Cllr Furniss added that, whilst legal definitions needed to be rigidly applied, common sense approaches were preferred where appropriate.

vi) Questions over the Lutidine House development at corner of Wentworth Close and Newark Lane were raised – Approved under Planning Application 14/W/00078, the finished scheme now has "cold" LED lighting "far in excess of street lighting" which illuminate a 360 degree area from their positions atop 80cm posts. The lights are extremely bright and blinding to traffic and pedestrian passers-by. Can the developers be encouraged to replace the bulbs or partially blackened to avoid visibility from the street?

Cllr Cross replied that, in his capacity as the Borough Councillor for Lovelace Ward, he would look into the planning conditions attached to the development. The lighting was unlikely to be a planning issue as the site had been approved under permitted development rules. The lighting issues were likely to be an Environmental Health matter, however.

vii) Questions were raised over traffic issues in the High Street and Newark Lane – Morning and evening rush hour traffic is often gridlocked and there are many incidences of road rage and anti-social driving. Many vehicles, particularly vans and large private cars, tend to use the footpath at the south end of Newark Lane as an extension of the carriageway and pedestrians have been clipped and occasionally knocked down. Thankfully a serious accident has not yet occurred, but it feels like this is just a matter of time. Over-width vehicles are also often seen using Newark Lane despite a 6'6" width limit. Further development in the village inevitably leads to a greater number of road users, yet no improvements have been made to road infrastructure. What can be done to mitigate congestion and anti-social driving practices? A3 sliproads at Burnt Common (Send Parish) and at Ockham would alleviate much congestion through the village. Is there any enthusiasm for this as a project?

Cllr Furniss posited that physical barriers to over width vehicles could be considered, and also replied that there was enthusiasm for improving access and egress on the A3 through the Borough. The Highways Agency was not keen on excessive movement between lanes on the carriageway, but all possibilities were to be considered in the forthcoming GBC transport strategy. Infrastructure provision to encourage the freeing up of main routes would be considered, and all options would be scrutinized.

viii) The parish council sees the Ripley Conservation Area as a major asset to the village, which positively enhances the area and adds immeasurable benefit to the locality. The parish council did not receive a report of the meeting with Chesil Byrd and Marianna Beadsworth which took place some time ago. Could Councillors offer reassurance that the Conservation Area will be supported as an asset to the borough?

Cllr Spooner replied that Conservation Areas had the full support of GBC and that developing Neighbourhood Plans could help entrench and extend Conservation Areas. Conservation Areas would be extended wherever possible. It was also suggested that the report of the meeting with Chesil Byrd and Marianna Beadsworth could be sought under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and Cllr Spooner agreed to follow up RPC's query regarding its copy. RPC could also influence Conservation Area area details and develop policies of its own and carry out regular reviews.

ix) Local residents raised various comments over the proposed development of the former Wisley Airfield: Ripley and surrounding areas would need far better road infrastructure if the development was to go ahead; Wisley Property Investments (WPI) was a Cayman Island registered company; a decision on the planning application had been deferred twice already; the Armed Forces Day, hosted in Guildford, had allowed parking on the site and photos of were now being used in WPI's advertising and information.

Cllr Furniss replied that the Highways Agency would need to prove that appropriate A3 infrastructure could be delivered in order for development at the site to go ahead.

Cllr Spooner added that there were contradictions from central government over mass housing developments, and that GBC would not allow such developments where the infrastructure was inadequate. There were currently transport and infrastructure issues associated with the proposed site, and there had been conjecture that the site was too small to be classed as sustainable.

Cllr Spooner added that GBC were unable to perform due diligence on Cayman Islands registered companies, and that their tax status would be a matter for HMRC to consider. The deferred decision on the planning application was not unique, there were currently around 50 applications to GBC with the same status, but the decision would not be deferred again.

Cllr Furniss confirmed that the use of the site for parking during Armed Forces Day would have no impact whatsoever on the determination of the planning application.

x) The Chairperson of the Lovelace Neighbourhood Plan Group (LNPG) asked councillors how they judged the usefulness of Neighbourhood Plans.

Cllr Spooner replied that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) saw Neighbourhood Planning as representing localism at its best, providing the bedrock of local planning guidance. Burpham and Effingham Neighbourhood Plans had proved to be useful up to a point, but were proving extremely adept at shaping what sites ought to accept development. GBC had been receiving very positive feedback on their Senior Planning Policy Officer tasked with aiding Neighbourhood Plan Groups.

xi) A question was raised over whether the new Local Plan would be able to halt planning by appeal? It was also asked whether the SHMAA figure of 693 per annum would be fairly distributed across all the parishes in the Borough? Ripley had seen much development occur over recent years. Further questions were raised over the Local Plan process, the need for elements of quality design when assessing planning applications, a recent GBC Planning Committee decision on a local application, and the proliferation of 'gated developments' in the village.

Cllr Spooner replied that care must be taken to ensure rural areas were not joined up through development.

Cllr Cross postulated the theory that the SHMAA figure could be brought down to a lower number. The member for Lovelace also described the situation that had occurred at the GBC Planning Committee whereby the Chairperson had apparently mismanaged a vote. The case had been taken up by GBC's Director of Corporate Services, who had found that whilst the process had been atypical, no offence had been committed.

Cllr Spooner agreed that the case had been irregular and unfortunate, but had been found to be legal. Cllrs received training dealing with material planning considerations, but that sometimes there was a disconnection from local issues.

Cllr Spooner discussed occasions when GBC had attempted to steer planning applications to include better design, but had been overruled by the Planning Inspectorate at appeal. On 'gated developments', advice was given that the key was in attaching conditions to successful planning applications.

Cllr Furniss agreed that Ward members must remain diligent when assessing planning applications.

Cllr Cliff suggested that GBC could use their parish councils more efficiently in order to understand planning issues and concerns.

131/15 CLOSING COMMENTS

The Chairperson closed the meeting by thanking the Borough Councillors for visiting Ripley. The meeting had been very useful, and it was felt that a significant element of trust had been developed over the course of the evening.

132/15 DATE OF THE NEXT PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

The next Meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 21st January 2016, at the Church Room.

The meeting closed at 2130hrs.

Date:

Chairperson