

Chair Report

19th March 2014

As I will be standing down as Chairman in May, this is my last Chairman's report. I will however resist the temptation to include everything remotely applicable and stick to recent updates.

Horses

I understand from a Surrey Advertiser reporter that all the horses have now been removed from the fields off Down Lane. The Police report will hopefully tell us a bit more about this.

Lighting

A quick investigation has revealed that many other Parish Councils have been involved in lengthy discussions over the lighting, the options and dates for installation. It seems fair to say that we have had zero information. A resident raised the matter 4 years ago, having seen the draft proposal. At that time Simon Gimson didn't have any information to share with us, but assured us that Conservation options would be given in Conservation areas. We have non-conservation lighting in the conservation areas and conservation in the gap? I believe from my own research that there may have been options to have lighting at different heights and other Councils were given options to part fund schemes where their preference was for a more costly version. None of these options were given to us.

Cllr Johnson is looking into the matter. A brief conversation with John Hilder about the matter resulted in him saying that the lights may have been replaced 'like for like' ie if we failed to have appropriate lighting before, be received it again!

Water

Gordon Spencer from GBC and Jason Lewis from SCC joined Cllr Haskins, me, Michael More Molyneux, Peter Borrott and Margaret Arnold & David Baskerville to look at the problems in Polsted / Withies Lane. The problems are caused by an adverse camber in the road, blocked pipes, silted ditches and general excess water caused by perpetual rainfall. We also looked at the Green, which is still very boggy. The pipes were cleared outside Puttocks Cottages and grits dug into the verges to allow running water to run into the ditch. Ditches were also widened / cleared higher up by Loseley Park.

It is thought that the problem on the Green is not due to a broken pipe but is more likely due to the topography, the directional flow of water (it drains towards the Green / Common from both directions) and the green is relatively flat, so it doesn't drain well. A follow up meeting will take place tomorrow.

Parking

For all the reasons mentioned above, parking on the Green is a tricky subject. Whilst scouring PC minutes in an effort to find any correspondence about the lighting, I noted that in 2009, Compton Parish Council stated that that there shouldn't be any parking on the Green apart from the Fete. The decision was taken as the Green was being badly damaged by people parking in poor conditions. The problem was not helped by the fact that some parking was permitted, which led people to assume that you could park at any time and individuals then parked there whilst visiting the recreation ground etc leaving deep ruts in the grass.

It was also difficult to permit parking on the basis of good ground conditions as these can only be determined the days leading up to an event, which makes planning very difficult. To be discussed later. CVA will also propose that fete proceeds be used for mesh to protect the Green. If this meets with approval, various Organisations would need to supplement funding including the Parish Council.

Watts Cemetery

Received Grade II*listing from English Heritage, a great tribute to those who have helped maintain the cemetery over the last 120 years.

Watts Gallery

Congratulations to Watts Gallery on attaining heritage Lottery Funding for Limnerslease studio project. We do not believe there are any issues remaining that might prevent the long-term lease of the Chapel and Cemetery and hope this will take place within the next couple of weeks. Confirmation was received by Council several months ago that we could proceed and it is my intention to do so unless any issues transpire that materially alter the agreement.

Eastbury Manor

Complaints were made by residents concerning increased frequency of lorries to the Manor and related issues, such as, going to Westbury by mistake and then trying to turn round in private property, arriving and leaving during the night and early hours, reversing out, with audible reverse sounds at unsocial hours and general lack of communication or consideration for neighbours. The matters were addressed by the Area Manager and I have subsequently heard from residents in Eastbury Lane that things appear to have improved. Thanks to David & Peter for attending this meeting. The VAS is positioned with its cover on, in the lane to get an idea of traffic levels and size of vehicles.

Local Plan

Since the last meeting I spoke in support of the GGG petition for a review of the SHMA (strategic housing market assessment) at GBC following a petition by Sue Parker which received 1200 responses in a very short space of time. The current draft proposes 700-800 houses per year. We are reminded that this is only a draft, but as it underpins everything else, we cannot be complacent about any document, draft or otherwise. Draft ideas, quickly have a habit of becoming factual. At a previous meeting Cllr Palmer reminded us that the sites being put forward are just proposals and everyone can propose a site, it doesn't mean it will actually meet the criteria for development. We now however see the Hog's Back still listed with recent reference to it and Gosden Hill and Wisley Airfield as 'Strategic Sites', we await clarification on this.

I am becoming increasingly skeptical as to the rationale behind the desire for growth and this is fuelled by almost every paper presented and every meeting attended. At the petition on 26th February, most Councillors voted against the SHMA renewal. This was in part due to a poor choice of wording, as review, versus renew might have carried the can as several Councillors could see the issues and understood residents concerns (Wickes & Hogger). It was concerning to hear Councillors support the continuation of the SHMA based on anecdotes rather than policy, like the fact that their own children couldn't find appropriate housing in Guildford. When I asked Cllr Rooth why his daughter couldn't find housing, when there were over 5000 for sale within 10 miles of Guildford, he said that 10 miles was too far to travel.

There are known issues with the report and we are told these will be addressed, but will they all be addressed? Not addressing the problems up front has resulted in a figure that is too high, this was because of the student-housing anomaly (where all students are presumed to stay and have families in Guildford), where windfalls and existing permissions are excluded (and this includes permission for 2,500 student flats within Manor Park that have yet to be built). There are also bizarre presumptions such as one job to one person to one house? The problem is that the statistics feed one another and hence if key figures are incorrect, then subsequent figures are incorrect.

The reports seem hell bent on justifying the need for high demand when actual need is much less. If the reason is because local councils will not get the financial support they need to manage, then this needs to be stated as the justification process is losing its currency.

Letter from S Mansbridge to D Cameron

Our concerns appear to be shared by leader of GBC, Stephen Mansbridge who recently wrote to the Prime Minister over the question of being given responsibility without authority. The response from Nick Boles appears to pass responsibility to local Councils, but we know the NPPF does not cross reference. We have been told that the NPPF and Councils will protect the greenbelt, but at the same time spurious reasons are being given as to why land should no longer be classified as greenbelt. We are told that GBC is listening to the electorate, but, their hands are tied by national policy and government Inspectors, yet the letter by Nick Boles on 14th March to Michael Pitt contradicts this. [This appears to be a turn around however as various court cases proved]. The counter response by the Planning Inspectorate to Nick Boles is concerning as it refers to 'careful wording' and makes it clear that they will include in the summary clear reference to the basis for their findings (referencing local planning). The onus is on local planning and not Central Govt. The level of buck passing has left us all rather dizzy! Cllr James Palmer who wears a number of hats, is equally frustrated by the lack of clarity and will seek firm and clear guidance at tonight's meeting at GBC.

On 6th March Nick Boles clarified various points relating to the NPPF. They are all important, I have highlighted the ones that are of particular importance to us;

1. **Issuing robust guidance on flood risk**, making it crystal clear that councils need to consider the strict tests set out in national policy, and where these are not met, new development on flood risk sites should not be allowed.

2. • Re-affirming Green Belt protection, noting that unmet housing need is unlikely to outweigh harm to the Green Belt and other harm to constitute very special circumstances justifying inappropriate development.
3. • Making clear that Local Plans can pass the test of soundness where authorities have not been able to identify land for growth in years 11-15 of their Local Plan, which often can be the most challenging part for a local authority.
4. • Making clear that windfalls can be counted over the whole Local Plan period.
5. • Explaining how student housing, housing for older people and the re-use of empty homes can be included when assessing housing need.
6. • Ensuring that infrastructure is provided to support new development, and noting how infrastructure constraints should be considered when assessing suitability of sites.
7. • Stressing the importance of bringing brownfield land into use and made clear that authorities do not have to allocate sites on the basis of providing the maximum possible return for landowners and developers.
8. • Noting that councils should also be able to consider the delivery record (or lack of) of developers or landowners, including a history of unimplemented permissions. This will also serve to encourage developers to deliver on their planning permissions.
9. • Incorporating the guidance on renewable energy (including heritage and amenity) published during last summer and making it clearer in relation to solar farms, that visual impact is a particular factor for consideration.
10. • Allowing past over-supply of housing to be taken into account when assessing housing needs.
11. • On the five year supply of sites, confirming that assessments are not automatically outdated by new household projections.
12. • Clarifying when councils can consider refusing permission on the grounds of prematurity in relation to draft plans.
13. • Encouraging joint working between local authorities, but clarifying that the duty to co-operate is not a duty to accept. We have considered and rejected the proposals of HM's Opposition to allow councils to undermine Green Belt protection and dump development on their neighbours' doorstep.

Workshop

This was to review the evidence based docs with Consultants who wrote the papers. The problem was that they hadn't been told the work shop was to do this and just defended their position. It also became apparent that one of the reasons for the issues that have cropped up in the papers was the actual remit given by planners. It was impossible to get to all the tables in the 2 hours allotted and everyone I spoke to, left, very frustrated at this wasted exercise.

As it is my last report, I would like to formally thank Joanna for her support as Clerk, all Councillors and everyone who gives up their time to attend the meetings, reports updates and attends the numerous meetings in between times to move things along. As Chairman it can be hard to keep all the plates spinning and to prevent any ending up on the floor, I set up the activity list and the dropbox. It means we can all see what is going on and where it is up to at any point and if I am to take on 'projects' under the new Chair, I will continue to use this system unless anyone has any better ways of managing multiple projects.