

Swanage Residents Association

Annual General Meeting, 29 May 2007, Catholic Hall, Rempstone Road
(Draft minutes)

1. John Leach, Chairman, chaired the meeting. Officers present were: Rowland Hughes (Deputy Chairman), Stewart Borrett (Membership). Committee members present were: Robert Owen, Cherry Bartlett, Eric Gosney, Mike Hadley (Councillor). There were about 20 others present. Apologies received from: Rachel Kerley (Treasurer), Pat Bizley, Peter Clark, John Wootton.

2. Annual Report

John Leach noted that activities over the past year had been detailed in recent newsletters, and observed that the Residents' Association does have influence over many matters and plays an important part in keeping people informed of events and addressing issues that arise. Topics dealt with over the last year have included:

Town Partnership (John Leach represents the SRA),
Beach Committee (John Leach represents the SRA on this Town Council committee),
Purbeck Task Force (Robert Owen represents the SRA),
Alcohol issues,
Grammar School (John Leach maintains a watching brief),
Pier Head,
Pavement obstructions
Tree destruction
.....and other issues

3. Treasurer's Report

John Leach thanked Rachel Kerley for her work, after 9 years as Treasurer and 16 years on the committee. He repeated her plea for someone to take her place. There is a small credit balance for the year of £136 and a bank balance of £1016. Expenditure is mostly on production of the newsletter, postage, the hire of meeting rooms and accountancy fees.

4. Membership

Stewart Borrett noted that membership seemed to be declining by 30 or so a year, and is now around 360 (with 313 subs paid for this year). He called for volunteers to knock on doors to seek new/renew members. No one volunteered.

5. Election of Officers

Existing Officers indicated that they were prepared to stand again, and were duly elected. John Leach noted that he had been Chairman for 3 years and intended to stand down next year. Robert Owen also noted that he could not remain on the committee as he is moving to Spain. The meeting was asked if anyone wished to join the committee: no one volunteered.

6. Minutes of AGM 17 May 2006

It was noted that the draft minutes had been discussed at an earlier meeting. Acceptance of the minutes as a proper record was proposed, seconded and adopted.

There were no matters arising.

7. Minutes of Open Meeting 20 November 2006

Acceptance of the minutes as a proper record was proposed, seconded and adopted. Matters arising included:

7.1 Town Partnership (addressed under AOB)

7.2 Pier Head: John Leach noted that nothing is yet resolved, and the issues are now further complicated by the Environment Agency seeking stringent flood risk assessment.

7.3 Pavement by Playland: David Price-Hughes expressed concern that nothing has been done to make this pavement wider and safer (apart - as Mike Hadley noted - from installing a drop-kerb, to facilitate disabled access).

7.4 CCTV: Robert Owen noted that there appeared to be uncertainty over whether the equipment was owned or leased by STC or the Police, and that the quality was not good enough to provide adequate identification to secure conviction. He also noted that volunteers are sought to operate the monitors. Rowland Hughes expressed concern at the enthusiastic spread of cameras, perhaps instead of talking to some of the perceived troublemakers.

7.4 Skate Park: Rowland Hughes made reference to the unnecessary fencing-in of the Skate Park; Cherry Bartlett reported that the kids had asked for this.

7.5 Survey: Mike Hadley drew attention again to the survey that had been conducted among members, which elicited 11 responses from 300 members, with 10 asking the association to remain much as it is (and by default, the majority presumably of similar opinion).

8. Strategic Plan (aka Town Partnership)

John Leach reported that the detailed plan was available from the Town Hall (in booklet and CD form), to accompany the Summary that had been delivered as a 'wrap-around' with the Advertiser in 24th May. There is to be a manned exhibition at the Town Hall annexe on 8th June and at K's on 9th June. People are asked to

get involved to drive projects forward, and the report emphasises that it is never too late to add further projects. There was considerable discussion about the general difficulty of understanding the summary, and John Leach noted that the report was required to conform to a specific format. Robin Brasher said he had made a computer analysis of some paragraphs which indicated that words and sentences were too long and that "people needed to be highly educated to understand the document". There was agreement that the Partnership should be approached to request a translation in plain English. Mike Hadley noted that a different presentation and layout would further aid understanding. Nico Campbell-Allen made reference to the Crystal Mark's Plain English campaign that can advise on clarity of communications.

9. Purbeck Housing Action Group

Nico Campbell-Allen (from the Purbeck Gazette) introduced the work of this new group, recently established to promote affordable housing in Purbeck. The Group was very active, with a number of enthusiastic members and officers, and national publicity was being gained for its efforts (including for example, featuring on Trevor MacDonald's TV programme). Nico stressed that the Group was not responsible for and did not in any way condone the recent posters and graffiti that had appeared around Swanage saying "No to 2nd homes" and similar messages. The group is now also getting involved in other issues (supermarket packaging, pedestrianisation of the seafront), perhaps similar to many of the issues that the SRA was originally set up to address. This was why Mike Hadley had suggested a discussion between the two groups, to avoid a duplication and dilution of effort. Nico noted that given the apparent decline in support for the SRA, and the increasing number of people contacting them on many issues, there may be a place for the new group to add some vitality to the SRA. There was some discussion about whether the new group would be interested in many of the wider issues that the SRA is involved with, but a proposal was made (David Price-Hughes), seconded (?) and adopted "that the committees of each group should meet to consider how they may work together in some way". Following observations on the failings of the SRA website, Mike Hadley asked if perhaps the Group could provide resources to improve this aspect, as he admits to simply doing his amateur best in the absence of anyone else able or willing to help.

10. Anti-social behaviour

Robin Brasher reported on recent incidents where he had been harassed by young people, and that the police said there was little they could do and that they no longer gave incident numbers. He was concerned at this, as well as the difficulty in simply getting through to anyone, without hanging on the phone for ten minutes.

Both Robert Owen and Mike Hadley said they understood it was still the case that the police should give reference numbers for all incidents that are logged.

11. Swanage Hospital: minor injuries unit

Cherry Bartlett reported on the proposals to close this unit between 10 pm and 8 am, from September/October this year. She stressed how important the unit was, that being 22 miles from the nearest main hospital (a 40 minute journey), it was critical that we retained an active facility in Swanage. Mike MccGwire asked what was the view of the Friends of Swanage Hospital, who Cherry will consult.

12. Safety Pledge for Purbeck

Robin Brasher referred to PDC's Safety Pledge, designed to encourage all road users including pedestrians, cyclists and drivers to behave responsibly, legally and respectfully towards other road users. He asked if the Association would support the pledge. Mike Hadley expressed his personal view that he did not see the need for this, when he tries to abide by the existing laws anyway. Rowland Hughes noted that those who were a real danger (including the boy racers who cruise the town after dark) were the ones to address, and they were exactly the ones least likely to sign any such pledge. He and Robert Owen further noted that more effort should be made to review speed restrictions (lower on Shore Road, perhaps higher at Ulwell), together with traffic calming measures in locations such as Shore Road. Mike Hadley suggested that he was sure the Association would support anyone who does sign the pledge. Mr Roberts suggested that people might more readily sign such a pledge if there were incentives, such as reduced council tax (owing to the cost savings that might arise). The proposal was put, but was not seconded.

13. Conservation Area of Swanage

Mr Roberts reported that the 10 year review of the new conservation areas in Swanage was still outstanding, owing in part to the lack of a Conservation Officer at Purbeck. He stressed that this was an important opportunity to protect the character of Swanage, and in particular hoped that the majority of south Swanage could be included. Robin Brasher added that the Railway Station should be too. Stewart Borrett referred to the work of the Buildings Preservation Society. Mike Hadley agreed to try to have this raised as an agenda item with the Town Council.

14. Road issues

Robin Brasher raised a number of traffic/road issues:

14.1 Flooding on A351 near Wilkswood. Mike Hadley said that he had also reported this regular flooding to the Dorset County Council, and had been assured that action would be (or has been) taken.

14.2 Water leak on Priest's Way near Argyle Road: this has been an ongoing problem for many months (years?) now, with no one accepting responsibility, despite the suggestion that it might be sewage, with the associated health risks. Cherry Bartlett reported that she understood this to be a matter of PDC not being prepared to accept the cost of the work quoted by Wessex Water.

14.3 The 20 mph signs on Valley Road: these signs are still in place despite the work apparently being complete, causing confusion to drivers, some who observe the signs and some who believe they are redundant. And when will the markings be reinstated?

Mike Hadley suggested that perhaps a good place to raise these issues would be at the monthly Town Council meeting, when representatives from PDC and Dorset County Council (Mr Donald Hiatt) are present.

15. Action by SRA

Colette Drayson asked who from the SRA actually acted on any of the issues discussed. John Leach and others reported that all issues were addressed by various officers and committee members, either in person or through correspondence; and that some issues were resolved, some not. Mike Hadley said if anyone wished to volunteer to help, they would be welcome. No one volunteered.

16. Planning/ empty homes

Colette Drayson enquired about what could be done to stop the spread of flats (often presumably as second homes) and someone else commented on the situation where a single, perhaps elderly, person lives alone in a block of flats where all the others are empty for most of the year. Nico Campbell-Allen referred to the Purbeck Housing Action Group's efforts and that it did seem possible that things could be done about this: such as banning second homes, imposing extra council tax or adding a 'negativity charge', and made reference to the campaign chaired by TV's Elinor Goodman.

Mr Roberts referred to recent government proposals that all large gardens should be considered as 'brown field sites' for the purpose of greater development.

Robert Owen advised that utility companies are obliged to provide services to all new developments; and that when these are under-used, the consequent

shortfall in income is added to resident householders so that they may recover their investment.

17. Hotels

Nico Campbell-Allen reported that many hoteliers have said to her that they need help to be able to remain in business, as they wish to.

18. Grammar School

There was discussion about the position of this site. It was noted that the site was originally sold to the 'Welfare Dwellings Trust' by Dorset County Council. Cherry Bartlett said the site was subject to covenants requiring it be to be used for "leisure and learning". Mike Hadley said that regular planning applications were made and refused. John Leach noted that he remains informed of all developments and applications.

19. The Waverley

Robin Brasher reported on the fact that the Waverley would again not be visiting Swanage this summer, because the necessary steps have not been taken to repair the landing stage. Cherry Bartlett noted that this appeared to be because of a reluctance to settle by the insurers of the Waverley's sister ship, the Balmoral, which damaged the dolphins a couple of years ago. Mike Hadley noted that a recent meeting, the owners of the Waverley seemed to give the impression they were keen to resolve matters, and wished to reinstate visits as soon as possible. Robin Brasher proposed that the MCTI (Town Partnership) be approached for funding to repair the 'dolphins' that would permit large boats to visit the pier without risk of damaging it. This was agreed.

Mr Roberts suggested that some of the Heritage Lottery funding granted to the major works at Durlston Country Park should be provided for this purpose, especially given our nation's maritime heritage.

20. Jurassic Coast

David Price-Hughes noted that he felt it is ludicrous that the so-called Jurassic Coast bus does not visit Swanage.

21. Rudesheim

Robin Brasher reported that hosts are sought to accommodate around 40 visitors from Rudesheim, Germany, with whom Swanage is twinned.

22. Next meeting

John Leach noted that the next meeting is scheduled for 7.30pm, on 3rd September, at the Mowlem Committee Room.

He thanked everyone for attending, and the meeting closed at 9.30.