

Downe Residents' Association - Annual General Meeting

23 March 2021 – Minutes

Meeting opened at 7.30pm.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the AGM was held via Zoom. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. This AGM also covers the AGM missed last year in 2020, due to the pandemic.

1. Apologies for absence

Bridget Robbie, Jill Robinson

2. Adoption of 2019 minutes (the last AGM)

Proposed: Dave Evans. Seconded: Dave Witherspoon. Against: none (unanimously carried).

3. Chair's Report

The Chair thanked committee members for their hard work over the last two years, and reported the following progress.

Village communications

Downe Mailing (442 subscribers) and the Downe website are funded and maintained by the DRA. The DRA have raised funds to enable these services and wish to thank to Waitrose in Green St Green for their generous 'community matters' donation, and the Downe Lottery for theirs.

- There were 306 Downe Mailings in the period 1 Jan 2019 to 31 Jan 2020.
- 517 Downe Mailings in the period 1 Jan 2020 to 31 Jan 2021.

Highest "opens" are generally for crime e-mails (60 – 70%) followed by roads issues. Facebook – Downe Village now over 763 members (458 in March 2020).

Planning (since Jan 2020)

The sub-committee review all planning applications for Downe Parish – as received and shared with us by Bromley Council on a weekly basis. Objections to applications are made on behalf of residents in accordance with the mandate given usually given at the AGM each year and this year the subject of an on-line vote.

What we do:

- DRA aims to be as objective and impartial as possible in making objections to applications. We raise objections only in so far as a proposal is contrary to Green Belt or Conservation Area regulations. We seek to ensure the council upholds the regulations and have full relevant local information when deciding on applications.
- We will request, via our Councillor Richard Scoates, that any controversial application is decided on by a council planning committee rather than by a delegated officer if the officer recommends the application for approval.
- We aim to improve residents' awareness of applications by including a monthly update of all planning matters via Downe Mailing. We also highlight applications that are controversial and have potential for far reaching implications such as the "Parkside" application last spring.
- We provide support to residents where requested to do so: by assisting to identify potential problems with their own applications and assisting with questions on developments proposed or carried out by neighbours.
- We raise objections to the council in relation to their failure to uphold their own procedures to inform or properly document applications. We try to hold the council to account on their own stated standards and obligations.

- We request enforcement investigations where it is uncertain that a development has the required permissions or if it is not in adherence with permissions granted. This is frequently not something people feel able to do for themselves.
- Where we are permitted to do so according to the nature of the appeal type, the DRA will support the council with their refusal of planning permission, in appeal decisions by making representations to the Planning Inspector.

Jan 20 to March 21:

- 47 applications reviewed: Of those decided:
- 23 permitted or lawful. DRA objected to 3 of these.
- 13 refused. DRA objected to 10 of these.
- 11 undecided applications of which DRA have objected to 6.
- 47 (19)

Jan 19 to Jan 20:

- 23 applications:
- DRA raised 10 objections to applications of which 5 were refused by the council
- 1 application supported (Christmas Tree Farm – overflow car park) This application was permitted.
- 23 (10)

Our Green Belt and Conservation area is increasingly under threat and in some cases there is limited action the council can or will take to protect it. There have been changes in 2020 to the planning legislation which will further weaken the council's ability to stop inappropriate development in the Green Belt and widen what is included under Permitted Development. We believe that more detrimental changes are likely in the way of changes to legislation and pressure on councils to build more housing.

Enforcement actions:

The DRA also raise queries with the council with respect to suspected breaches of planning permission or regulations. DRA action is frequently as a result of notification by concerned individuals who feel unable or unwilling to raise the issue with the council personally. The types of enforcement actions include:

- Agricultural land 'grabs'
- Unauthorised use or development of agricultural land
- Breaches of planning permission

Coronavirus

The DRA assisted efforts during 2020 in coordinating help for elderly and vulnerable residents during the Covid lockdowns - a great effort by residents to help these groupings

Landway

The DRA co-ordinated the completion of 91 "evidence forms" by residents wishing to preserve the right to walk along the historic "Landway" track, these were submitted to Bromley Council.

Road safety

A 2019 report was written proposing 20mph in village centre and 30 mph in the lanes. An on-line survey was also conducted. 129 people responded. In answer to the question "How much do you support or oppose the idea of reducing traffic speeds in Downe ?":

- Strongly support - 84%
- Somewhat support - 5%
- Neither support nor oppose - 2%
- Somewhat oppose - 5%
- Strongly oppose - 4%

The report was submitted to Bromley Council. No actions have yet been forthcoming, apart from a traffic speed measurement which we claim was poorly sited. Discussions continue with the Council over another speed measurement

Water pressure and road disruptions

Following intensive lobbying of Thames Water by the DRA and resident Nick Cutmore over the last 3 years, Thames Water eventually installed a pressure reducing valve system (in High Elms Road). There have been no water mains bursts since this time.

DRA made several representations to Bromley Council on road disruptions, and had two questions on the subject at a full Council meeting in October 2019. The DRA also met with two Council Traffic officers to understand how closures work (published on the website).

Downe information board

The information board was installed in the village centre over the summer of 2020, and formally opened by the Mayor of Bromley, Cllr Hannah Grey. Thanks go to Kim Durham and Zoe Knight for their considerable work on this project. The DRA obtained £6,000 funding from Bromley Council, with a further top up of £800 from the Downe Lottery.

“Ultrafast” Fibre broadband

The DRA approached Openreach and started a project in autumn 2020 to bring the next generation of fibre broadband to Downe and Cudham (approx. 800/900 homes). Unlike the previous broadband project in 2017, this will entail end-to-end “Ultrafast” (i.e. capable of very fast speeds) fibre broadband being made available for installation in every home and business. After much lobbying, residents have reached the so-called (Government funded) “pledge” target, and Openreach are now in the planning and delivery stage. It is expected that the technology will be installed in this coming year.

Biggin Hill Festival of Flight (2019)

The DRA negotiated residents discount tickets and Milking Lane access. The 2020 festival was cancelled.

Remembrance

The DRA set up remembrance “poppy” displays in the village centre – outside the church and around the lime tree, arranged for a “Tommy silhouette” soldier to be set up in the churchyard and procured and installed lamp post poppies around the village.

Other

- Continuing to argue for extra “Unsuitable for HGVs” signs around Downe
- Assisting “Dakshin” leaseholders prior to start-up of the business
- Attending Bromley Council residents meetings
- DRA contacted the Council to make improvements to the new rubbish collection system in 2019

Adoption of Chair’s report - Proposed: Abigail Rutherford. Seconded: John Isbell.
Against: none (unanimously carried).

4. Treasurer’s Report

Tony Dixon, Treasurer, presented the accounts. The bank balance at 31 December 2019 was £420.16, and at 31 December 2020 was £719.48. Donations from Downe Lottery (£250) and Waitrose “green tokens” (£333) were acknowledged. The balance at 31 December 2021 (with no further income) was projected to be £270.11. Main items of expenditure were on Downe communications (website, Downe Mailing software, e-mail hosting and domain names)

Adoption of Treasurer's report - Proposed: John Isbell. Seconded: Bruce Anderson.
Against: none (unanimously carried).

5. Election of the committee

Chair thanked the retiring committee, with special thanks to Kerry Judd who is stepping down this year, and thanks to Mike Bingold, Alan Perry and Nigel Andrews who stepped down last year.

The following members are seeking re-election:

Dave Evans, John Isbell, Rev. John Musson, Steve Barnes, Abigail Rutherford, Simon Farron, Tony Dixon, Kwan Phung.

Chair introduced new committee members standing for election: Declan Wells and Nick Cutmore.

En-bloc vote to elect committee- Proposed: Bruce Anderson. Seconded: Julian Benington. Against: none (unanimously carried)

6. Motion to support Green Belt Policy

Over many years Downe Residents have been asked to re-affirm support for Green Belt Policy and the Downe Village Conservation Area. Given the pandemic, this was conducted via an online questionnaire.

- To oppose development within the Metropolitan Green Belt which is contrary to Green Belt Policy and Bromley's UDP, and now The Local Plan (draft).
- Avoid development within the Downe Village Conservation Area which does not preserve or enhance its character.

The results of the on-line questionnaire indicated there were 151 respondents, with 67% in favour of the mandate and the DRA operation of it, and 33% against. It was noted that 28 responses were from the same IP address – if these were excluded, support increased to 82%

Adoption of the motion - Proposed: Tony Dixon. Seconded: Dave Evans. Against: none (unanimously carried)

7. Councillor Richard Scoates

Cllr Scoates reiterated that his number 1 priority remains to focus on the Green Belt. However, he is aware there is the potential for this to be eroded due to pressures to build more housing in Bromley. Whilst most housing is being built in the north of the Borough, there may be a pressure point as obvious sites for development would reduce. There has not been a lot of thought regarding whether the infrastructure (especially the roads) can cope with the extra population. Another area of concern is the London Mayor increasingly allowing people to build in their back garden.

Council tax

Council tax set to increase by 1.99% in 2021/22 plus 3% social care levy means a 4.99% increase.

Other issues

- Bromley is now vaccinating over 50s, with good take up
- Parking in High Elms: during lockdowns people have been increasingly coming to the area to take walks and parking at High Elms – and unfortunately sometimes blocking the area. Car park at the golf club is not an option due to insurance issues. The council may look to help by painting double yellow lines, but Cllr Scoates is of the view that that would be an entirely urban solution to a temporary problem.

- Bromley Council had donated £6,000 for the Downe Information Board. Further money was available for suitable projects in 2021/22

8. Any other business

- The chair mentioned a resident has shown some interest in restoring the village pond
- John Musson reported Biggin Hill airport relationships are improving, and the noise tracking/aircraft monitoring system is in place

The meeting closed at 8.45pm