

THE WIDCOMBE ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the Autumn Meeting held at Widcombe Junior School on Thursday 24th October 2013

Welcome

About 55 members attended. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed everyone, commenting on the good turnout.

Chairman's Report

Paddy's report was a supplement to his report published in the Newsletter. He apologised for the lack of a speaker, as Peter Rignall had had to withdraw due to illness. This, however, would give more time for discussion under AOB.

Beechen Cliff School Lights

WA's policy has been to oppose any extension of the operating time of the lights on the Astroturf pitches. On October 23rd, Paddy and a group of concerned residents attended a meeting of the Development Control Committee. Caroline Kay, Chief Executive of the Bath Preservation Trust, Robin Kerr, Secretary of FoBRA, and five Widcombe residents whose lives and homes have been affected by the lighting, were included in this number. Eight of the group spoke against the application, making powerful points about the adverse impact on local properties and the inappropriate location as regards the conservation area and the WHS skyline. Ian Gilchrist, sitting on the DCC, described it as a 'carbuncle'. The decision to grant the application was passed by a vote of 6 to 4 in favour and 2 abstentions. Paddy thanked our local councillors for their principled stand and regretted that the WA efforts had been to no avail. The School will now have to put in place an approved management plan and Paddy has already written to the planners to request that WA and affected residents are consulted about the content of this plan. Paddy thanked Sue Kinchin-Smith, Jan Shepley and David Lees for their tireless contribution to this effort.

Halfpenny Bridge Lights

The bridge is a listed structure and will therefore require listed building consent before anything can be affixed to it. A pre-application exercise has been conducted with the planners and indicates that, providing no holes are bored in the structure and that there is no light spillage onto the water, there should be no problem with approval. Paul Ruffles' design, which will give nine staggered pools of light onto the surface of the bridge, has received approval in principle. We are awaiting a response from Kelvin Packer of Highways.

Events

Paddy thanked Chris Rogers and the events team for the successful and varied summer programme. He mentioned, in particular, the feat of bringing Opera to the Royal Crescent for the first time in 10 years. It is hoped to find a suitable venue so that this event can be held in Widcombe again in the future as has been traditional. Sian Lewis is now Vice Chairman of the Events Committee and Paddy Barker the Secretary.

Choir

Choir is now in its second year and proving to be very successful, with many members now signed up on a termly basis. It meets on Monday evenings at St Matthew's Church. There are no auditions and the first session is free. More members are always welcome, particularly men! Thanks are due to Paul Fisher, who has taken over as Chairman.

Arts and Crafts

Paddy congratulated Sarah Lewis for continuing to organise ever better Arts Trails and Craft Fairs. This year's Craft Fair is on Saturday November 23rd and the Widcombe Choir will, once again, be performing during the day.

Personnel and Help

Alan Langton, who is returning to his full-time job as a senior planning inspector, and Andrew Gordon-Duff, our Vice Chairman, have both left the committee. They will be greatly missed for their support and wisdom and are owed thanks for all their efforts on behalf of WA.

Alex Nash, who has organised the Garden Club wonderfully well over the last seven years, is also leaving at the end of the current programme. We will say goodbye to her properly at the AGM in April but would like to flag up that the Garden Club will need an organiser or, perhaps, a small committee to continue to run this popular club, which is a great asset to Widcombe. Members were asked to contact Alex if they had ideas about how the club could proceed in the future.

Keith Palmer has volunteered to take on the role of Vice Chairman and Jeroen Weimar has agreed to become a committee member and to serve on the Rossiter Road Sub Committee. We are conscious of needs in our committee line-up for a 21st century residents' association. Ideally we would like help with IT and a more interactive website as well as a social media manager to oversee our Facebook and Twitter accounts. We would also like to recruit someone with design and marketing skills to take a serious look at how we brand and market ourselves. Someone with layout skills who could take over the compilation of the biannual Newsletter would also be welcome. Anyone who would be willing to help out on the WA stall for an hour or so from time to time should contact Liz. With the departure of Andrew Gordon-Duff, we are in need of someone to join the committee and take over the planning brief.

Police News.

Paddy introduced Widcombe area Community Support Officer Jonathan Bintcliffe who emphasised that Widcombe is a safe environment with very little crime but, none-the-less, gave us some helpful tips on home security to prevent burglaries and suggested the use of D-locks on bicycles as there is currently a spate of cycle thefts in Bath as a whole. Widcombe's specific problem is street drinkers, in particular the large groups, often of 15 or more, who gather by the lock. This is a designated area where drinking is prohibited and he encouraged anyone seeing problem drinkers here, or elsewhere, to ring 101 so the police can move them on. Asked where they are moved on to, he replied that, unfortunately there is very little option but to move them from location to location so this tends to be circular. The police talk to the relevant agencies that offer help but, sadly, many of the homeless do not wish to change their life style. Begging is also a large problem as those who beg can make £300 to £400 a night, particularly in the city centre. Asked about the sleeper who is often in the subway, Jonathan said the police are aware of him. The public should ring 101 if they are concerned about rough sleepers anywhere but the police can do no more than have a chat with them unless they are

contravening the law. Simply sleeping rough does not constitute law breaking but the police are always ready to speak to these people and try to offer help. The police occasionally patrol with the Julian House outreach workers whom members of the public can also contact by telephone. Helen pointed out that the prickly bushes planted by WA to deter people from sleeping on the embankment and behind the disused public toilets had largely been trampled down and there is again evidence of drug use with needles being discarded here. The question of the young homeless was raised, as Julian House does not cater for them. Jonathan reiterated the use of 101.

PACT has been discontinued all over the area due to consistently poor attendance. This has been replaced by Beat Surgeries in various locations. The Widcombe Beat Surgery is held at Prior Park Garden Centre on the first and third Wednesday of each month at 11.00am.

Paddy thanked Jonathan for coming to the meeting and for his contribution.

Rossiter Road – Richard Wales

The Steering Group meeting on October 8th was very positive. The delay had been due to the council ensuring that there are no problems with utilities. The cabinet has made a formal commitment to this scheme and the money is in the budget. It is hoped for work to start in July 2014 and for it to be completed by Christmas 2014. £300k has been set aside for Public Realm works and Rhodri Samuel will be involved in these. Consultants will also be involved. Detailed designs for both the Public Realm and the engineering works have not yet been completed but, once they are, there will be a public presentation for which there is, at present, no date or venue. The council have used their discretion to drop the 40mph maximum speed to be used for design purposes thus overcoming various difficulties. With reference to the relationship between the November introduction of a bus gate in Dorchester Street and the Rossiter Road scheme, it has been suggested that the bus gate be delayed until after the completion of the scheme. Ian Gilchrist said that there is the political will to do this. On the subject of whether people outside Widcombe might feel that the £1.8m could be better spent elsewhere, Ian said that the arguments have already been had. Ian is in favour of the contra-flow cycle lane design. Helen Peter felt there should be proper public consultation but Richard pointed out that there has already been consultation on the old design and comments made then have been taken into account in the new design. There will be an opportunity to ask questions at the public presentation. Paddy felt very hopeful that this scheme would go ahead.

Treasurer's Remarks

In the absence of the Treasurer, Paddy read out his report.

We hold the following balances in our accounts:

- Main current account £12,120
- Nationwide interest account £4,001
- Cash £271
- Cemetery Action Group £111

Total funds as at the end of March 2013 are about £16,503, which includes Choir advance subscriptions £2,400 and EEW funds of £4,900, leaving about £8,350 of unallocated funds. If we retain one year's running costs as a reserve of about £4,000 this leaves about £4,000 in free funds. This would enable us to put some funding towards the cost of lighting on Halfpenny Bridge.

Social Club up-date - Chris Rogers

Paddy introduced Chris Rogers who is Treasurer of the Social Club as well as WA Events Chairman. The council has informally let it be known that the plans for the Club have been approved. The developer has not yet applied for section 106 agreements but is intending to have the convenience store and student accommodation completed for the beginning of the academic year in October 2014. By Christmas 2014 it is hoped that the shell of the new Social Club will be ready for fitting out by the Club. Demolition should start soon so the street art, which has been much enjoyed by many, will soon disappear! At the Social Club AGM on October 20th, it was agreed to re-open applications for membership and Chris encouraged people to join although the club will be open to the wider community. It is intended to be primarily a community centre but with performance and exhibition spaces that will be available to a wider demographic. Chris asked for suggestions as to what people would like to see in the Club and what they felt needed to be done to ensure engagement with Widcombe residents. Chris did not know who would be taking over the convenience store although he had heard that it was neither Tesco nor Sainsbury.

Elections

Keith Palmer, proposed by Liz Doyle, seconded by Richard Wales, was elected nem com as Vice-Chairman.

Helen Peter, proposed by Ann Ashworth, seconded by Sylvia Green, was re-elected nem com as a committee member.

Jeroen Weimar, proposed by Richard Wales, seconded by Helen Peter, was elected nem com as a committee member.

AOB

Widcombe Alphabet Project

Margaret Burrows encouraged more people to attend the Local History Study Group that meets 8 times a year. An exhibition is being organised by Stuart Burroughs of the Museum of Bath at Work highlighting local items of interest around Bath. Among other groups, Widcombe has been invited to participate. There will be one item exhibited for each letter of the alphabet. Margaret invited members to submit ideas or any old prints or photos, which might be of interest, together with a brief comment. There will be a meeting to discuss ideas on Thursday November 21st in the Lower Hall of Widcombe Baptist Church (access from the canal-side footpath). The date of the exhibition is expected to be about June 2014.

Defunct Public Toilets

Paddy will find out the status of planning for this site.

Litter

Elaine Taylor, who has recently moved to Bath, commented on the problem of litter, particularly by the river and canal and observed that it is cleared up infrequently. Paddy explained that the northern riverbank would improve when Peter Rignall arranges a spring and autumn clean up in future. Ian Gilchrist has met with the person responsible for street cleaning who admits Widcombe has been neglected. He will get back to Ian in about three weeks with a plan.

Access to station

Concern was expressed that the redevelopment of the station area has meant that only taxis use the forecourt and that drop-off at the rear only of the station could cause problems for the elderly or disabled who need to access the ticket office at the front. It was pointed out that there often are staff at the rear selling tickets and there is also a ticket machine. Jeroen will take this up with Peter Rignall.

Signage

It was noted that signage to Widcombe needs improvement and Paddy replied that Peter Rignall would help with a sign over the tunnel but that he would like to see a fingerpost installed in Brunel Plaza.

Beechen Cliff School Lights

WA should ensure a good and effective management plan is devised and adhered to. Roger Nunn will discuss this issue at the next meeting of Greenway! early next month and suggested that appropriate screening might be used to mitigate the effects of the lights. He will also make contact with the school. Chris Kinchin-Smith pointed out that the plan will be written very shortly and that affected residents would want to be involved in influencing this. He would like to see the plan named 'Community Use Management Plan'. There should be the greatest possible mitigation in the shortest possible time, which might involve adjusting the cowls on the lights. Ian Gilchrist felt that, although he would be prepared to mediate between residents and the school, a better solution would be for the residents to deal directly with the school. Jan Molyneux wondered if the school would be willing to negotiate with residents. Jeroen wondered who would be responsible for signing off on the plan. Ian did not know as this is not DCC but will find out. Jeroen suggested a small group approach this officer as soon as possible. Jan will help with this and should others wish to join the group, they should contact Jeroen. A report will have to be made to DCC after six months. The school will have to demonstrate the modifications to the lights are in place, e.g. time switches are working to ensure lights not being used are turned off, and this may not be easy. Evidence should be collected ready for the 6-month review.

Social end to the evening

The evening concluded with drinks and an opportunity for members to talk to the WA committee and each other.