



DRAFT

**Minutes of the 2024 AGM of Leatherhead Residents Association (LRA) held on
Monday 21st October 2024 at 7.30pm at the Methodist Church, Church Road,
Leatherhead**

Agenda presented as:

1. Apologies for Absence.
2. Approval of the Minutes from last AGM 2023.
3. Matters arising.
4. Chairman's report.
5. Treasurers report – Accounts 2023.
6. Report on Transform Leatherhead and the Local Plan.
7. A.O.B.

In attendance: Members = 45, Non-Members = 5, Speakers = 1, Total = 51.

1. Apologies received from: Elaine Arnold, Peter Humphries, Tony Russell and Paula Sabine.

2. Approval of the Minutes from last AGM 2023

These had been posted on the LRA's website for many months. There were no objections raised and no matters arising. A vote was taken and they were unanimously accepted.

3. Matters Arising

No matters arising.

4. Chairman's Report

The Chairman gave a brief report, stating that it could be found in full on the website. The Chairman summarised the report, stating that it captured issues related to Transform Leatherhead, the Local Plan, Bull Hill and the state of Leatherhead in general, much of which is elaborated upon under item 6 of this meeting. The Chairman did however remind everyone that the Litter Pick was taking place on this Sunday 27th October 2024 in the car park opposite Oaks Close.

5. Treasurers Report

The Treasurer's report was presented by Martyn Williams, in the absence of Paula Sabine, for the period of 1st January 2023 to the 31st December 2023. No queries were raised.

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6 (a) Report on Transform Leatherhead and the Local Plan

The Report on Transform Leatherhead and the Local Plan was presented by Martyn Williams.

MW stated that at a Council meeting on 15th October 2024, the Local Plan was adopted. It was acknowledged that although the Plan was not ideal, it was the best compromise that could be expected and certainly better than having no Plan which would put the District at the mercy of developers and might lead to a much more onerous Plan being imposed by the Government.

The subject of Transform Leatherhead was then presented by MW. At the Council meeting on the 15th October a petition of over 1600 names was presented which argued that the development proposals for Bull Hill are inappropriate development of the Town's central area park. A surprisingly large number of Councillors agreed that they are far from ideal. MW stated that this means that there are significant concerns expressed by some Councillors, the independent assessors, the panel of local stakeholders, the majority of consultation respondees and the 1600 petitioners. MW then took questions from the floor-

Q1: It is understood that a "Tall buildings review" is planned. What further information is there on this?

A1: MW clarified that this was a requirement of the Local Plan and requires an 'independent expert' to review and comment on the suitability of the various elements of the proposals. No further details are currently available.

Q2: The Chairman asked for clarification if the above study was to be paid for by the Leret Partnership and hence, not truly "independent"?

A2: It was pointed out that Councillor Chris Hunt (Ashtead) was in attendance and that he might be best to enlarge on this later.

Q3: Historically, the land at Bull Hill was understood to be designated as 'Leisure' for more than 100 years ago, so as such, Martyn was asked if it was not possible for it to be protected from development?

A3: Martyn responded by saying that the land was owned by the Council and does not have any formal 'green' or 'leisure' status as far as he was aware.

Q4: Is there an Advisory group associated with the Leret Partnership?

A4: MW replied that there is a Panel of independent Assessors giving a third-party view of design considerations (and MW is part of this Group) but they had not been brought into the most recent discussions.

Q5: It was advised by the floor that there was a 'Local Green Spaces nomination scheme' for the area, but it was considered to now be too late for Bull Hill.

A5: This was duly noted. It was also agreed that this was likely to be unsuccessful at this stage.

Q6: Are the Developers adhering to the Council's "Affordable Housing" requirements?

A6: MW responded that they are, but whether to its full extent remains to be seen.

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6 (b) Further information on Transform Leatherhead

Further to question 2 above, Ashted Councillor Chris Hunt took over the podium from MW, clarifying that he was an 'outsider' to Leatherhead, from Ashted, hence could be considered as partly 'independent', and offered the following advice:

- the 'Open Spaces Society' could be consulted, to apply for a "listed protection".
- a consideration for Planners is also the "Community Assets" register.
- any Application that goes to the Planning Committee can either be 'accepted' or 'rejected' only but not redrawn.
- the Council does look at 'Height studies' and can insist that it is fully independent, so it is important to ensure that any such report is 'responsive to change' in nature, particularly in respect to accommodation changes.
- Informal consultation with all parties might also help, especially in such cases where the Developer is aware that there is a large (1600 representations) movement against current plans.

So, the advice was, rather than simply object, to also stay as close to the scheme and the Developer as possible, where suggestions can have a far greater impact.

Councillor Hunt also suggested that it was wise to look at Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act as well, whereby any local Planning Authority can enter into a legally binding agreement or planning obligation with the Developer as part of any planning permission being granted.

As a postscript to Councillor Hunt's advice, he pointed out that Leatherhead was particular poor at making requests for CIL monies, having one of the lowest allocations in respect to CIL funding. But in turn, it was important to note the difference between "Strategic CIL" and "Neighbourhood CIL", where it is the latter that sees so little from Leatherhead.

7. Guest Speaker – Julian Ashworth from the Wildlife Aid Foundation (WAF)

Julian Ashworth opened his presentation with statements regarding the condition of wildlife in the UK. A very recent WWF report, from earlier in this month had declared that wildlife in general had declined by 75% in recent decades. Specifically for the UK, foxes had declined by 50% and hedgehogs, numbering 30 million approximately 50 years ago, were now less than 1 million! These 2 statistics were given as examples of the state of UK Wildlife, as of today.

Against this backdrop, Julian then provided the meeting with the history of the WAF. Started by Simon Cowell MBE almost 40 years ago, the core work of the organisation is rescue, nurse where necessary and return wildlife back into the wild. Only 7 people are involved full time, the rest is largely supported by volunteering, numbering 375 people in a recent count.

The busiest time of the year is Spring, where 50% of the wildlife coming into the centre tend to be orphans. Examples of animal injuries were then presented in a series of video demonstrations, most notably a fox being caught up in a football net. The WAF now has a system where schools are asked to remove such nets when not in use.

Other examples of animal injuries were provided, in photographs of bats, hedgehogs, snakes, badgers, even a peregrine falcon, after which Julian asked if anyone knew of

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people over the age of 18 years, interested in such issues, to kindly make themselves known to the WAF.

Other activities associated with the WAF included education programmes, where they frequently go into schools to present their work to children. It was pleasing to Julian how particularly noticeable it had become that younger children were becoming increasingly enthusiastic about the work of the WAF. A motto now formed part of this programme: "One small thing, every day, do it". Plant a tree, walk to school, bat box, etc.

Simon Cowell had passed away just a few months ago, in June 2024, but the WAF continues its work just as Simon had wished. The WAF have purchased 22 acres of land in Leatherhead, adjacent to the M25, classified as 'impoverished floodplain', from the £1m left in Simon's will. The WAF hope to build a visitor centre along with a dedicated pet hospital, commencing next year 2025.

Julian closed his presentation, thanking the LRA for their interest and attention.

MW thanked Julian for his excellent and informative presentation, reminding all in attendance that the WAF is a charity, and a collection box was located at the rear of the hall! Donations can also be made via the WAF website.

The LRA showed their appreciation in the normal manner, with a round of applause.

A.O.B. and closing address by the Chairman

The Chairman asked the meeting for any matters arising, but none were raised from the floor. There were however a number of references and notices made by the Chairman, as follows:-

The litter pick is to take place this **Sunday 27th October 2024** in the car park opposite Oaks Close. The Community Hub on the Kingston Road had a major refresh and two of their leadership team continue to push for better training opportunities for the young people of North Leatherhead.

Following vigorous opposition to closure, our Library had instead now been provided with a wider range of services, plus the Station ticket office will now remain as well.

Leatherhead Art shows and 'Arts Alive' was supported by our Chairman and, after a very successful programme in 2023, it now has a similar schedule ongoing into 2024.

A MacDonalds food outlet is under construction, at the site previously occupied by Englishman's Castle. The LRA had objected, but permission had still been granted, which prompted much debate but with no meaningful further outcomes.

The Chairman also returned to the earlier discussions of the Local Plan and Transform Leatherhead/Bull Hill. A major unknown element remained, namely what will the Government's review mean for the Local Plan? And if public consultation is to mean anything, after the Bull Hill proposals were so comprehensively rejected, where do the Leret Partnership go from here with Transform Leatherhead? It left our Chairman concluding that the LRA and the Town in general are at something of a crossroads with the future development of Leatherhead.

Finally, and after a number of previous announcements, our Chairman Caroline Brown, confirmed 100% that she will be resigning in 2025 and, if the LRA is to continue and prosper, then a new Chairman must be found.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm.

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