

Committee members

Zoom meeting

PRESENT: Chair: Lyn Anthony-Higgins (LA)
Committee: Sue Feather (SF), Jamie Harcourt (Jamie H), Jon Lloyd (JL),
Tanya Pynn (TP), Carole Kingston (CK – joined at 7.20pm)
(When referencing the above, first and second name abbreviations will be used throughout)

Welcome and introductions

LA welcomed everyone. She noted that the meeting was quorate and reminded members of meeting procedures. She also reminded Committee members to speak one at a time.

LA then stated that she thought this would be a difficult meeting because of the written legal threat against Committee members from a group of residents (including two current Committee members). She stressed that she wished to have a meeting that was correct, transparent and open. There should be no conflicts and if there are any declarations of interest, then these should be declared. She then started the meeting by asking members to raise their hand if they had paid their 2023/2024 contribution, which was one of the criteria for being a Committee member.

All those present indicated that they had paid their 2023/2024 contribution.

1

Apologies for absence

Jennifer Hooper (JH) had been called into work at the last minute so was unable to attend. She had given her apologies to LA and had given LA her proxy vote for the meeting.

CK initially gave apologies after experiencing technical issues but later joined the meeting at 7.20pm.

2

Committee membership

The following volunteers were re-elected at the AGM on 29th June 2023:

Lyn Anthony-Higgins (LA), Sue Feather (SF), Jamie Harcourt (Jamie H), Jennifer Hooper (JH), Carole Kingston (CK), Jon Lloyd (JL) and Tanya Pynn (TP).

LA noted that Committee members' names and how they voted would be recorded against each agenda item.

3

Committee appointment of DRFA officers

Chair: LA said she was willing to continue as chair and asked for a vote. 3 votes were in favour (including JH proxy) 2 members didn't vote. JL asked at this point as there had been two votes that had not been cast whether anyone else wished to put their name forward. No-one else was willing to do so. LA was duly elected.

Treasurer: TP put her name forward. LA said she was unsure what CK's position was and that she had thought she was willing to continue as treasurer (CK was not present at this point in the meeting). There was a discussion on whether to continue or wait until all members were available. It was decided to continue with the vote on the assumption that CK was willing to continue. A vote was taken. There were 5 votes in favour of CK (including JH proxy). TP did not vote. CK was duly elected.

Secretary: SF put her name forward. There were 6 votes in favour (including JH proxy). SF was duly elected.

4

Minutes of 2nd May 2023 and draft minutes of AGM 29th June 2023

LA asked if the Committee agreed that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 2nd May 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record of the proceedings.

All members voted in favour.

LA then asked whether the Committee agreed the draft minutes for the 2023 AGM.

All members voted in favour.

5

Road Signage and quotes

LA began by stating that it was agreed at the last meeting and the AGM that the Committee would now go ahead and get three tenders for signage and poles. Once the quotes had been received, the Committee would inform residents of what would be happening at the same time as asking for any relevant permissions. Hopefully the process would be relatively easy.

Jamie H asked for a reminder of what exactly the quotes would be for. LA responded by saying this was outlined in the first three points in the list in the 2 May meeting minutes.

LA said these signs would let drivers know what to expect when driving down Derby Road. The give way markings at the junction of Grosvenor Road and Derby Road would need to be re-instated and would be quoted separately from the signage quote.

LA noted that a resident on the road who had already stated at the AGM that nothing was to happen in front of their property without their explicit permission. She said the Committee would be seeking written permission from all relevant parties in relation to anything occurring on their verges.

Jamie H suggested re-surfacing the portion of the road next to the Grosvenor Rd junction at the same time. LA was concerned that it might look patchy if permission was not granted by some residents and could be more costly to do small areas rather than the whole road. CK would be asked as she had more information on this. Only two quotes had been previously received, the difficulty being the size of the road, meaning that not all companies were interested in quoting for the work.

Jamie H asked whether a 'Private Road' sign was necessary. He also asked about adding white lines near the pinch point to show narrowing. JL said this had not been discussed at the last meeting as there had been no decision regarding the positioning of the planters. JL suggested deferring discussing this to another meeting. Jamie H agreed. SF suggested that if quotes were being sought for white lining on the road, then they could be asked to quote on this point too to give an idea of cost.

Action: LA to write to three companies to submit tenders for signage and poles.

6

Treasurer's Financial Report

Jamie H said he would like to know the numbers of contributors and non-contributors for comparison purposes. When CK entered the meeting she was asked for details regarding the number of contributions paid. She said she could not give details at that point as monies had arrived from different sources (letting agents etc.) and not necessarily an owner. However, she said contributions were broadly in line with those received at this stage in 2022/2023. She said a reminder letter would be going out at the end of October.

JL suggested that as the printing costs were low, the reminder letter should be sent as a paper copy to all those who hadn't contributed so far, as some email addresses for properties might be out of date following recent house sales. CK agreed and said she would like to update the letter to include a request for email addresses to tackle this, plus a note for those who are tenants to please forward it to the leaseholder/freeholder. She also felt that some residents were unaware of what the DRFA was and she would look at including some info on this in the reminder letter. CK was thanked for her work on this.

ACTION POINTS:

- CK to add the number of contributors to every quarterly report.
- CK to update the reminder letter – SF to format. CK to send out at the end of October.

7

Leaf fall

Jamie H was keen for the Committee to oversee the leaf sweep again this year and felt that like last year, two sessions would be the best way forward. The unpredictability of the weather and when the leaves fell made it difficult to decide on a date so far in advance, but notice would need to be given to ensure that as many volunteers as possible could be involved.

JL noted that most volunteers and donated green bins for last year's sweep had come from Field View and Derby Villas, but few from elsewhere in the community. TP suggested notifying residents via the Facebook pages. JL said that last year, some residents on social media claimed that the leaf sweep was their activity, and that other residents had seen this as a sign of a possible conflict brewing and didn't want to get involved as a result. He hoped this could be avoided this year as the leaf sweep was a community activity for everyone's benefit. He also felt that Committee members speaking to their neighbours directly about volunteering or donating their green bins would have more impact.

TP asked whether the Council should be used to sweep the leaves this year. JL said this would mean less work for the Committee, but would incur a fee of at least a few hundred pounds and would also mean leaves in the road for a much longer period, as the sweep could not be done until all had fallen, which had been as late as the end of January in previous years. He noted that the lengthy presence of so many leaves on the road could be a safety issue for pedestrians by obscuring trip hazards.

It was generally felt that the Committee should oversee the leaf sweep again this year. It was agreed to put notices on trees, to ask residents to make their green bins available to those volunteering and also to ask Fry Court's permission to offload leaves to their compost area.

ACTION POINTS:

- SF to create a notice based on last year's version.
- Committee members to circulate available dates and agree on a date in November.

8

Jamie and Susan Harcourt's communications

Susan Harcourt had sent two emails to the Committee on 5th and 20th September, the former containing a letter giving her thoughts on what should happen to the road. Jamie H had asked for these to be discussed at this meeting.

LA said she would like Jamie H to explain what he would like to discuss regarding these communications. Jamie H said that his wife should have received a response from the Committee to these.

LA asked what Jamie H thought the response to the letter should be. JL said it wasn't clear what the letter was asking as it appeared to be a statement rather than asking a question. However, he added the letter could be read as a request for re-imbursalment of the costs for Susan Harcourt's journey to attend the AGM, and asked Jamie H to confirm whether this was the case, as he had stated this reimbursement should be made to his wife in an email to the Committee. Jamie H said he was unsure on this and so he was asked to get clarification from his wife on this point.

JL pointed out that Susan Harcourt's approach had been aggressive at times, particularly at the AGM where she made personal attacks on members of the Committee for which there has been no apology. He also noted it was unclear in her communications whether she was speaking on her own behalf only or on behalf of the group that had engaged a barrister for legal advice which included Jamie H himself. Unless there was clarity on this issue, it would be very difficult to move this forward.

TP said the time lapse between the AGM and this meeting could have been spent reviewing the information supplied. LA noted that she had requested at the AGM in June that all relevant documents should be submitted to the Committee, but that the supporting documents had only been submitted two days before this meeting – over three months after the AGM. TP said she had been unaware this information had not been passed on to the Committee in good time. LA also stated this group had only shared the summary of the legal advice with residents and not the full advice or the supporting documents, meaning residents were being asked to make informed decisions on incomplete information.

Jamie H was unhappy that Susan Harcourt had not been able to deliver the legal advice at the AGM. JL said the whole point about meetings is to have a dialogue to move things forward, but in order to have a dialogue, everyone had to have the same information going into the meeting, which had not happened at the AGM. He noted the bad habit that had developed at recent AGMs of documents being put in front of the Committee as the meeting started or mid-meeting. He said such behaviour prevented meaningful dialogue and discussion from taking place.

LA reminded the Committee that everybody on the road is entitled to seek their own legal advice and share it if they wished to, but that it must be remembered that it was their private legal advice that they were getting and was not on behalf of residents in general or the Committee. She said advice is given based on information submitted which may not be complete or relevant. She felt that while conflicts could be difficult to address, openness, honesty, sharing and transparency at all times from all those involved was essential if things were ever going to move forward.

CK felt that the issue here was less about legality than it was about a dispute. She felt that as a legal issue, this could only be categorically decided by going to a court, which she said was inadvisable and that the road fund was not to be used for this purpose. She also raised the issue of the road insurance and said the DRFA should not expose itself to any liability in its actions.

JL agreed and said that as a committee and as residents more generally, we have to be acting lawfully. He stated that no resident had the right to interfere with the legal rights of any other resident and that this point must be paramount in absolutely everything that was done on the road going forward.

Jamie H agreed with this, but added that he wanted some sort of control over the traffic on the road. JL said there was nothing unlawful about the road not be obstructed. He said if anything else were to happen, it would have to be completely legally watertight and agreed by everyone.

SF noted that some of the background information shared with the barrister that related to her property appeared to be selective rather than comprehensive. As such, she was concerned that any view taken on the basis of selective information might be flawed.

LA said that there continues to be a fragmented approach to communications from subscribers to the group that had sought the legal advice which appeared to contradict the approach proposed in Susan Harcourt's email to the Committee. Jamie H agreed that this was problematic and he didn't have a solution. He added that maybe an independent person was needed and that perhaps court was the only answer. LA said that going forward it needed to be clear in all communications with the Committee or residents on the issue who was speaking and whether they were speaking on behalf of anyone else as well.

As members of the group who had sought the recent legal advice, it was suggested to Jamie H and TP that they needed to liaise with the other members of their group and ensure that there was an end to the hostile behaviour towards other residents involved in the process in order to stand a chance of moving things forward. Jamie H and TP said they had taken on board what had been said. Jamie H said he would try to do so with the help of CK and of John

Mullaney, who he said he had great respect for and held in high regard. LA said it was up to John Mullaney to decide if he wanted to be involved in this. JL said this was not official Committee business and so anyone involved would be acting informally. LA agreed but said that ideas could be submitted to the Committee if this would help matters.

SF reminded everyone that a safety audit had recently been undertaken on Derby Road by a member of Thames Valley Police, which while making recommendations had said that the road was relatively safe as it stood. She suggested this point should be borne in mind if the issue of safety was raised again going forward.

ACTION POINTS:

- Jamie H to go back to his wife and clarify whether she was seeking a re-imburement from the DRFA for the monies she had outlined in her letter of 5th September.

9

DRFA Members' Code of Conduct

JL raised the fact that Jamie H had shouted at him during the AGM. He appreciated Jamie H had apologised after being asked to by members of the audience. However, he was concerned that this is a pattern of repeated behaviour from Jamie H, who had also shouted at him in the road before and had shouted at another Committee member in the May meeting. He said this behaviour was unacceptable and breached the Code of Conduct. He said Committee members should never be put in this position by another member. Jamie H said he took this on board.

JL also raised the issue that Jamie H and TP had not declared an interest to the rest of the Committee when advocating for the inclusion of items on the AGM agenda proposed by a member of Jamie H's household in which they both had direct personal involvement. Again, he said this behaviour breached the Code of Conduct.

LA noted that a legal threat had been made against Committee members in the solicitor's letter from the group seeking legal advice sent to the Committee on 26th June and it would be good to know if this was still a legal live situation, as Jamie and TP were part of the group that had made this threat. JL noted that a solicitor had no jurisdiction over items on a meeting agenda as this was not a legal matter; it appeared the letter had actually been sent in order to intimidate the Committee, but that the threat had been made under the cloak of anonymity without those responsible taking ownership of their actions.

Jamie H felt this behaviour was justified because his wife was not allowed to make her presentation at the AGM. JL pointed out that Susan Harcourt had in fact been allowed to speak at the end of the AGM. LA asked Jamie H if he would withdraw the threat in the solicitor's letter. He refused to do so. TP felt that a decision had been made not to include the item on the agenda without full consultation. TP she also refused to withdraw the threat in the solicitor's letter. JL was concerned that Committee members would take such extreme actions against those who were trying to work with them together on the Committee and had not taken ownership of their actions, but had attempted to do so covertly. Jamie H apologised if he had not been transparent but said that had not been his intention.

TP expressed frustration that an item she said she had wanted to put on the AGM agenda had not been permitted. JL said that the Committee acted with one voice at AGMs and that Committee agenda items should be put to a vote and agreed in advance (as had happened at the 2 May meeting re the TVP report and the road signage recommendations). He said it was not appropriate for a Committee member to then try and introduce separate agenda items as an individual. CK suggested that as the meeting was running long, discussion should end there.

It was agreed that there should be a meeting before Christmas if possible. Dates would be suggested once members had checked their availability.

Meeting ended at 8.45pm