

# Walton Manor Residents Association

WMRA 25-05-25\_02

Minutes of committee meeting held at 6pm, Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May at 41 Kingston Rd

Present: Maggie Black (MB); Jo Lane (JL); Caroline Martin (CM); Godfrey Cole (GC); Janet Minot (JM); Charlotte Beatson (CB); Helena Webster (HW)

Apologies: Bryan Pickup (BP), Mary Pegler (MP); Tom Landell-Mills (TLM)

1. Talk from Ian Green (IG), Chairman of Oxford Civic Society on Transformation of Local Government
  - MB welcomed IG and he gave us an overview of the possible ways in which one or more Unitary Authorities (UAs) will replace the current local government structures of a county council and several District/City councils who split services between them. This has been done across the north of England in many areas but is now proposed for our region.
  - By 2028 all current County, City and District Councils will cease to exist and the Councils are currently working up plans for what should replace them. Although they had been asked for one proposed plan by December, the County in fact proposed three because there is a lot of disagreement. These must be narrowed down to one by November 2025.
  - The three proposals are as follows:
    - A single UA so the County will absorb all the District and City Councils. This is only supported by the County Council.
    - Two UAs. One would include City of Oxford plus West Oxfordshire and Cherwell and then another called Ridgeway which would consist of South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and also West Berkshire. The idea here is that Oxfordshire is too big as a whole and also accounts for rural and urban communities needing different facilities.
    - Three UAs. One would be Greater Oxford, the second Cherwell and West Oxford and the third would be the Ridgeway group.
  - The government had specified that any UAs should include a minimum of 500,000 people and most of these plans do not meet this criteria but it may be that 300,000 will be accepted. For reference, Oxford City is only around 200,000 though.
  - The idea is that the UAs make running local government more efficient, will make local neighbourhoods stronger and also support the devolution objectives of the central Westminster Government. Whether these plans can meet these objectives is being investigated by the Oxford Civic Society (OCS) .
  - Oxford City Council will announce its thoughts in a few weeks and residents should keep an eye on the press although only The Clarion has so far reported accurately.
  - The Government has also announced that they will fund an Oxford Growth Commission because Oxford is such a vibrant economy and has historically not been as successful in building on this as for example Cambridge.
  - The Civic Society research will evaluate the proposals. Their idea is to use criteria taken from the strategic growth initiative which covers sustainable development and which all councils had previously signed up to.
  
2. Summary of Meeting between Chief Planning Officer of Oxford City Council David Butler and representatives of local residents associations
  - HW gave us an overview the meeting which took place on 23 April and addressed issues arising from the planning process as it affects the North Oxford Victorian Suburb Conservation Area.
  - DB clarified that the council is only interested in observations on material considerations (e.g. the bulk of the building) when residents / committees make objections. The list of these is on their website.
  - The planning officers record the number of material objections made and not the number of complainants per material objection. The committee members expressed surprise at this.

- DB clarified that the process for sending a large (more than 10 houses) planning application to the Planning Committee for consideration required 6 councillors to lodge a material objection within 21 days of submission. As a consequence amenity groups would be advised to lobby their councillors rather than encourage multiple letters objecting to a planning proposal.
  - DB confirmed that the council were unable to set up an automatic notification process for amenity groups and therefore **HW and BP will continue to monitor submissions manually each month.** IG suggested that HW and BP might want to look at the Infrastructure Bill currently going through Parliament and submit comments given that it deals with the way in which local residents and groups will be able to comment on planning submissions in future. **HW to investigate.**
3. Update on maintenance of new flowerbeds adjoining Woodstock Rd
- The recent elections have made it hard to find anyone who can advise on who is responsible for maintenance of these beds. Locals to be encouraged to keep an eye on them in the meantime.
  - The bollards were agreed to be unsightly but again, it's not clear who to ask about their removal or purpose (to protect establishing flower beds?)
  - **MB to pursue once new council staff have got up and running in new posts**
4. Update on our Area Appraisal
- At the meeting (2. above) DB made it clear that some important architectural features of our area, e.g. low front walls, will be hard to protect because the council were reluctant to initiate any more Article 4 Directives (cost and liability). However, important architectural features will get some protection if they are identified in the forthcoming WM Conservation Appraisal.
  - There is a growing conflict in conservation areas between the need to conserve the character of an area and the imperative to conserve energy. The City Council have promised to provide residents with more guidance on energy conservation in conservation areas.
  - IG noted that in the past there were regular meetings between local representatives of residents associations and the planners. It was agreed that it would be a good idea to reinstate these meetings. **HW to contact James Fry.**
5. Discussion of Representation on the WMRA committee.
- This was postponed but all committee members were asked to send thoughts to Janet for inclusion in her draft. **JM to continue to develop draft wording for constitution**
6. Meet the Neighbours event.
- Confirmed on 2nd July From 5,30. **CM to advertise in Newsletters/Website.**
7. Next meeting. **Sunday 27th July, 6pm at Caroline's (1 Farndon Rd)**