



# The Friends of Old Headington

## **Draft Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Friday, 13 May 2016 at Ruskin College**

*Present:* Lady (Nancy) Kenny (President), Dr Sonia Brough (Vice-President), Councillors Altaf-Khan and Ruth Wilkinson, and 55 members and friends.

Veronica Hurst (Chairman) welcomed members and friends and chaired the meeting, with Robert Grimley (Deputy Chairman) assisting.

1. *Apologies for absence:* received from John Clarke, John & Sheila Coyle, Penny Fox, Julian and Carmelina Lawton Smith, Penny Richards, Ronnie Sonneborn, Anthony and Celia de Vere, and Joe & Lowell Winkelman. County Councillor Roz Smith also sent her apologies.

2. *Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 8 May 2015*

Innes King raised the matter of access to the phone box to post notices when it was locked. The chairman replied that the phone box was to be covered as part of her report later in the meeting. It was our policy to keep the phone box locked and the trustees were considering ideas for improved presentation of notices. Currently notices should be submitted via the Secretary ([secretary@foh.org.uk](mailto:secretary@foh.org.uk) or telephone 764022).

The minutes were then approved by the meeting unanimously.

3. *Matters arising from the Minutes:* Councillor Wilkinson wished to update the meeting on the current position with 29 Old High Street, and it was agreed to consider this after the Chairman's Report.

There were no matters arising from the minutes, the Chairman having asked members to raise only urgent matters, or those not otherwise on the agenda.

4. *Treasurer's Report*

The Treasurer, Peter McCarter, presented the accounts for 2015.

A surplus for the year of £904 was reported, £226 down on that for 2014. There had been a drop in membership subscriptions, but income from Open Gardens was very close to that of last year.

Expenditure was slightly up at £1220, of which 44% was due to meeting expenses.

Insurance at £207 is 17% of costs, and future provision was under consideration by the trustees. The main project of the year was the restoration of the Old High Street telephone box, with a net cost to the Friends of £205. (Costs were shared with Headington Action and there was a grant from Oxfordshire County Council.)

Financial reserves were now £12,934 compared to £12,031 in 2014. It was proposed that in 2016 more of the reserves would be transferred to the Scottish Widows account, leaving about one year's worth of operating costs in the current account.

In discussion following the presentation of the accounts the Treasurer was encouraged to chase up subscriptions. This is already being acted on by the membership secretary, and the Treasurer recommended that all use standing orders to set up their renewals. About 70% of members use standing orders at the moment and we would encourage remaining members to switch to this method of payment. The Treasurer also encouraged members to Gift Aid their subscriptions, a measure that also enables to Friends to increase their subscription revenue significantly.

5. *Adoption of the Annual Accounts for 2015*

The accounts were adopted (proposed Peter McCarter, seconded by Howard Stanbury) unanimously.

6. *Appointment of independent examiner of the accounts*

The Treasurer thanked Adrian Williams for his examination of the accounts and proposed that he be appointed for 2016. This was seconded by Hugh Ferris and approved *nem. con.*

7. *Chairman's Report*

**Introduction**

The Chairman began her report by noting that since the previous AGM

- the membership has been kept informed on matters of local importance;
- events, consultations, and meetings have been organized and publicized;
- an informative and attractive website has been maintained.

The trustees regretted the loss since the Winter Meeting of **Ray Wilsdon**, one of the founding members of the Friends in 1959 or 1960, who had been Secretary, Treasurer, Vice President, and a stalwart attender of FOH meetings. More details about Ray were given in the Spring Newsletter.

More recently, **Chris Wilkes**, Principal of Ruskin College and a good friend to our trustees died very suddenly. One of his priorities was to build stronger relations between the College and the local community, and in that he made significant progress in his all too short time as Principal, for which the Friends, and many others in Old Headington have been very grateful. She offered Ruskin sincere condolences on behalf of the membership.

## **Planning Matters**

### *Barton Park*

We have kept a watching brief on the progress of the Barton Park development, but haven't seen the need for any action since last year's AGM. Planning approval for the first phase of development was granted in March, and construction is under way.

### *Bury Knowle Park*

Problems with the Lock's Court development continue to arise, the chief of these being the effectiveness of the "car free" stipulation written into the City Council's tenancy agreements, and its enforcement. This is linked to the debate over management of the parking area just inside the entrance from North Place. The Council's suggestion that the parking area be extended further into the park to provide more space for car-users was dropped before it became a formal planning application.

### *Neighbourhood Plan*

A major consultation on the draft Plan for Headington was launched at the Headington Festival at the end of May 2015, and after feedback was analysed a revised version has been drawn up and sent to the City Council for comment by the Planning dept. prior to formal submission. The new draft Plan is available on the HNF website.

### *Access to Headington*

The County Council's project to deliver a package of improvements to the Headington area included proposals affecting Osler Road, including the grass verges within the conservation area. These specific proposals were subsequently dropped following much local opposition. Revised proposals regarding parking in Headley Way and in Windmill Road have been issued. A decision on the project is due to be taken by Oxon CC on June 9.

### *Hospitals' Energy Pipeline project*

Preliminary work began with the digging of a trench in All Saints Road, when it was discovered that the necessary planning permission wasn't in place, owing to several procedural misunderstandings. Apart from work in the JR grounds there has been little direct impact on the Old Headington Conservation Area. Howard Stanbury still attends stakeholders meeting and keeps a watching brief on our behalf.

### *29 Old High Street*

Unusually there is very little to report on this, other than the temporary emergency repair to the wall on OHS by the Council, and the successful efforts by Cllr Ruth Wilkinson to have the repair documented officially as temporary and as inappropriate for the conservation area.

### *Article 4 Direction*

Following the 2015 AGM, which produced an ambiguous result in terms of support for an application to the City Council for an Article 4 direction, the trustees took no

further action. They may bring a proposal to next year's AGM, or decide to defer the matter again.

### *Local applications*

During the year the trustees made around 10 formal submissions in response to planning applications, the most significant and substantial being our comments on the Access to Headington proposals – and also worked informally with local councillors, organizations, and residents on a variety of planning issues.

The formal responses can be seen on our website.

Work has now begun on the new house to be built in Stoke Place, where permission was granted to demolish the existing house and build a new one near the northern end of the site, with a new driveway at that end.

The chairman thanked Cllr Ruth Wilkinson for her vigilance on behalf of the conservation area in planning matters, and notably with regard to the loss of local trees.

## **Open Gardens**

2015 was another excellent year for Open Gardens. The Chairman thanked Jenny Butler for organizing the event and for ensuring all participants enjoyed their work, and all those who opened their gardens or helped sell plants, or helped in any other way to create such a success. Extra interest was provided by St Andrew's church, where supervised bell-ringing was on offer.

## **Winter Meeting 2015**

This generated a lot of interest. Professor Street's talk presented a fascinating summary of the highlights of the genre known as *film noir* and left the audience wanting to hear and see more. All those who attended were impressed by the welcome Ruskin College provided. The subject of the Winter Meeting should be announced shortly.

## **Printing and Publicity**

Scott Fraser's printing of the FOH Newsletter is much appreciated, while information for those on the members' list is emailed whenever possible.

Anyone who feels they aren't receiving information should contact one of the trustees.

## **Membership**

Numbers are noticeably down against last May's 300+, which may be due in part to some existing members not having paid.

All were urged to pay by standing order, to avoid this situation, and simplify the process.

### **Old High Street phone box**

A selection of pictures of the telephone box owned by Headington Action and run by the Friends of Old Headington illustrated some of the year's key events and the way the phone box to draw attention to local events.

Work is currently underway to design and produce a set of information panels for the phone box to create a professional background and structure for the seasonal displays.

### **Trustees 2015-16**

The chairman announced that this was her final report as Chairman of the trustees of the Friends of Old Headington, since she had reluctantly decided to stand down for health reasons.

During the year, the President (Nancy Kenny) and Vice President (Sonia Brough) continued to provide support for the trustees, and to represent the Friends in the wider community.

Sonia Bhatt stood down in June, after 3 years of managing the Friends' finances. Peter McCarter kindly agreed to take over from Sonia, and in August was duly co-opted as a trustee and elected as Treasurer. The Chairman thanked both Treasurers on behalf of the membership.

**Robert Grimley, Vice-chairman and Press officer**, has been Acting Chairman for several months, adding considerably to his existing work for the Friends, while **Howard, Secretary to the trustees**, has similarly taken over many of the chairman's tasks. These two trustees, backed by their fellows, have ensured that the Friends' business has steadily proceeded, and Veronica Hurst wished to record publicly her great gratitude to them and to the rest of the trustees who had dealt with so many issues: **John Clarke, the Webmaster**, for keeping the website up-to-date and informative; **Julie Harrod, Membership secretary**, **Hugh Ferris**, organizer of meeting venues and refreshments; **David Cartwright** distributor of printed material, and **John Rawson**, planning advisor to the trustees.

Efforts had been made during the year to complete a full tally of trustees, and also to future-proof the Trust by recruiting members new to the area or to the organization of the Friends of Old Headington. As a result **Roddy Deans** was coopted earlier this year, and she welcomed him to his first AGM as a trustee.

The Chairman then called for a vote of thanks to the trustees; she also thanked regular volunteers, in particular **Jenny Butler**, who organizes the Open Gardens events; **Alison Soskice** who runs the Growers' Group; **Sue Shaw** and **Stella Welford** who represent the Friends on other local organizations, and **Chris Belson**, who has

generously offered his time and skills to help with notices for the phone box in Old High Street.

Robert Grimley then asked for general questions or comments on the report.

Ruth Wilkinson updated the meeting on the current position with 29 Old High Street:

- The City Council is dealing with all of the owner's properties, not just this one and is having the same problem in securing improvements with all of them.
- The Council has tried to prosecute the owner for failing to comply with a planning notice served on him at this address, but lost the case
- The Council has considered carrying out works in default for failing to comply with the planning notice, but this would cost the council around £40k, which it hasn't got. Formal approval would be needed to spend £40k. Spending the money would make the property look a bit better, but would not solve the issue of it being empty and unused.
- The Council has concerns about the risks associated with spending £40k and being able to claim it back when it has already lost a legal case and would prefer to serve a new notice. This would almost certainly involve an appeal from the owner and will involve further delay.
- Compulsory purchase was being considered at another property owned by the owner, but his valuations are way in excess of what the council considers reasonable. At present this is not a financially viable option.
- Environmental Health Officers visited last week with a Pest Control Surveyor, but no evidence of rats was found on the land. If anyone does experience an issue with rats they should contact the Council's pest control service on 249811
- The Council's recent approach has been to try to negotiate with the owner, but this has not resulted in the improvements hoped for. The Council will now be considering a different approach to dealing with the owner and this will be raised at the group that leads on bringing long term empty properties back into use.

Ruth Wilkinson also said

- Bury Knowle Park car-parking proposals had been dropped
- There had been problems with the electronic gate control system for the grounds of Bury Knowle House
- A Local Plan is to be developed by the City Council and there will be wider consultation on this
- Councillor Altaf-Khan is taking up the post of Lord Mayor of Oxford from 16 May
- In response to questions  
The Oxontime bus notification system was not working owing to the decision by the county council to cease funding, but the bus companies were exploring alternative funding.  
She had checked that trees had been cut down in Bury Knowle Park and in other parts of the conservation area only because they had been declared unsafe

## 8. *Thanks to the Retiring Chairman*

The President expressed warm thanks to Veronica Hurst for her outstanding service with the Friends of Old Headington since 2009 – not only as Chairman in recent years but also for her work in opposing the Ruskin Fields development before that. Thanks were also expressed to Clive Hurst for his support and encouragement over these years and to Robert Grimley and Howard Stanbury for their supporting work during the Chairman's periods of absence. She made a presentation, as an expression of the gratitude of the Friends of Old Headington.

## 9. *Enhancement Award 2016*

The Award is made for work undertaken during the year since the previous AGM, and there had been two nominations for the current year's award, both of which were outstanding in their respective fields: Bury Knowle Barn and Stables (Dominique Sabatini and Craig Haller) and St Andrew's Church Tower (Friends of St Andrew's Church). Both nominations had been received by the deadline, and both met our criteria. Because they were very different, there had been an interesting debate amongst the trustees, since both were clearly very strong candidates.

At the previous Committee meeting there had been no objection to the suggestion that the rules would allow a joint award, and the trustees had therefore decided to declare two equal joint winners – the transformation of the Bury Knowle Barn and Stables, and the restoration of the tower of St Andrew's Church.

The work by Craig Haller and Dominique Sabatini on the barn and stables exemplifies conversion at its best, with an impressive design paired with a careful choice of materials, the whole being sensitive to its context and enhancing that part of Old Headington.

The work on the Church tower, funded by the Friends of St Andrew's, exemplifies conservation at its best, with the utmost care having been brought to bear on the merging of necessary repair work with the cleaning and revealing of original features, while keeping change to a minimum. The tower now enhances the heart of the conservation area even more than it had done before.

The Chairman offered congratulations to both winners, who would shortly be receiving a framed award.

## 10. *Election of Committee Members*

Four nominations had been received by the deadline of 8 p.m. on 6 May, all of whom were current trustees; two, having come to the end of their terms of office, were willing to be re-elected and two were co-opted trustees now seeking election for the first time. The following were duly elected en bloc:

David Cartwright (Proposer Julie Harrod, Seconder Peter McCarter)  
John Clarke (Proposer Howard Stanbury, Seconder Hugh Ferris)  
Roddy Deans (Proposer David Cartwright, Seconder Howard Stanbury)  
Peter McCarter (Proposer Hugh Ferris, Seconder David Cartwright)

*11. Any other business*

1. The Chairman offered Members' congratulations to Councillor Altaf-Khan on his election as Lord Mayor
2. Innes King suggested we might contact Thames Valley Police about a perceived absence of police 'on the beat'; Councillor Wilkinson reminded the meeting that a PCSO would be attending the next meeting of the Old High Street Neighbourhood Watch and had also been invited to the next Ward Focus meeting, and there is the opportunity to raise issues directly.
3. Jenny Butler was invited to address the meeting about arrangements for Open Gardens on 26 June. She appealed for
  - plants from growers to sell on the day
  - volunteers to prepare an activity sheet for children
  - volunteers to help erect the gazebo

There being no other business, the formal part of the meeting closed at 9.30 p.m. and it was followed by refreshments and informal discussion.