

Chairman's speech 2023 AGM

Peter Seaward

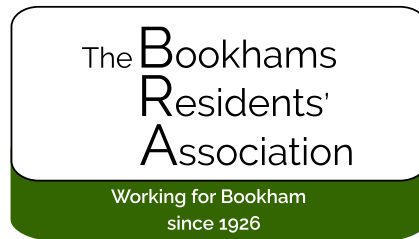
I hope you will indulge me a little as this will be the last time, I will be carrying out this task of giving the Chairmans annual report. I would like to cover three areas. First our activities for last year, secondly a lot of thank you's. A bit like an award ceremony but without the tears! Finally, some comments on my years as Chairman.

On last year. There were all the usual things such as Christmas lights, hanging baskets. Reviewing over 150 planning applications, many discussions with MVDC and our colleagues in the other RAs as well as with SCC but I would like to focus on just two activities especially. One is our involvement IN CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) and the other the Local Plan.

On the Local Plan we spent a lot of time and money which has caused a lot of soul searching. A view was that whatever we said would have little input but as there was very strong local objections, we felt we had also to be involved. This involved a lot of technical work as the responses needed to relate to specific issues and we had expert help here. Geoff Tranter pulled all our efforts together. These enabled us to make our case at the hearing.

This was a bit formalistic with The Council holding their ground and others attempting to convince the Inspector of errors or differences. Some of these exchanges just did not make sense. There was a challenge about the amount of traffic that would come to Bookham if the addition 100 plus house were allowed on the HOE site. MVDC insisted this would not affect us as all this traffic would go west. We appeared to fail to convince MVDC there is nothing to the west apart from an "open all hours" shop at Effingham Junction.

Of course, now we have no idea what the Inspector decided about the Plan as her response is on hold until the Government publishes the revised NPPF which will be after changes to the Levelling Up Bill go through Parliament probably in

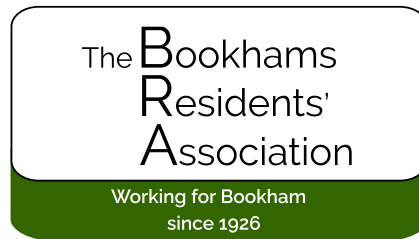


November. We would expect the new plan without the greenbelt sites will broadly be approved but as this is Major Modification more lengthy consultations between ourselves and MVDC will take place.

Our complaint all along about the Plan was that MVDC decided many years ago that there were to be a limited number of sites to be released to meet the government housing demands and no consultation on these selections took place with us or others. We always believed that if sites were needed, we could not escape and had to take our share, but we believed there were other options in Bookham rather than use the Preston Farm site, but this debate was never allowed. All took a lot of time and effort not to mention the cost and time involved by the group opposing the PF site Their effort was much greater than that of the BRA but we both kept ourselves aligned all the time.

Onto CIL. This excellent scheme which allows anyone in Bookham to make a bid for funds for community purposes was heavily advertised by MVDC and they laid down processes and rules so that bids was properly submitted and scrutinised. Unfortunately, the first time these rules were thoroughly tested showed up some serious problems both in the detail and how the cases were reviewed. We were very much part of this with a large bid to replace the skateboard park at the Lower Road Rec with a bump and BMX track like the one on the Kingston Road in Leatherhead. A result of our input and others the rules and scrutiny process has been revised, and our bid is progressing. All takes some time though.

Now the thank you. I like to think that the BRA is in a slightly better shape than when I came on board around 2005. The reason for this is all the good people who supported me and all that we did together over these years. Of most significance is Clare Curran and Andrew Freeman; both were in the BRA before me and held it together during difficult times and continued to be involved over all these years. Only this year has Andrew stood down. Planning is always part of the BRA workload and as I said before looking at over 150 applications every year is some tasks. Fortunately, I have been blessed with some excellent Planning Chairmen, Edmund Morgan Warren, John Pagella, Brain Granger, Stan Miles and his fantastic sidekick, Mike Brooks. And then



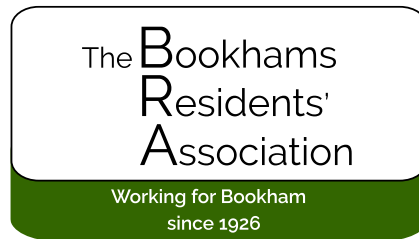
taking up the role without any complaints quickly when Stan died was Nigel Smith with his wife Julie always helping. And now Keith Whale continues this excellent and difficult work. People like Brian Eve. Peter Witter and his wife have been a key part of this team for many years. We always need to look after the funds you all donate some regularly and Tony Major, then Chris Pullen for many years and now Neil MacDowall have done the Treasurer role without issues and no complaints. John Howarth acted as Company Secretary for many years and was instrumental in moving the organisation on to a more professional footing when we became a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Michael Agius led our road teams along with flooding issues for many years and was responsible along with Clare Curran for getting the drainage scheme resolved by the square about plus many other topics. He also with SCC redesigned the High Street so that traffic flowed more sensibly.

It would flow better if the no parking zones were not abused.

A lot of what we were able to do is down to you our members and in the early days John Allen and his lovely wife, Gillian, who unfortunately is no longer with us trawled every street and almost every house in Bookham recruiting road stewards. Gillian and John also produced the early version of our newsletter and getting this distributed to many 1000s of houses in the village. Carlolyn Elson took up this membership role when John stood down and now in a different era and along with Les Huett has so successfully managed and changed the way we go about our membership. Road Stewards though continues to be a vital part. We have always tried to do things with the visual environment in Bookham and Frances Fancourt has with her team planted well over 200 trees in the village and organised planters, renewed flower beds and whatever else she can and to keep Bookham brighter. Her Tree Warden role is now vigorously carried out so well by Chris Cunningham

I was approached some years ago by Margaret Lawson who said could the BRA help with the litter problem in the village. Now 8 years latter Margaret has organised monthly litter picks, street Wombles and coordinated with many organisations to tackle this never-ending task. I think Margaret has been



responsible for ensuring that over 1000 bags of litter have been sent back to Mole Valley cleaning depot.

Our Notice Boards are an important part of our communications and Nick Forrer looked after these for many years a task now done by David and Michelle Smith. Les Huett, our communications Director has changed the way in which we communicate and employs every channel both conventional and non-conventional and his work is seen as a role model throughout Mole Valley.

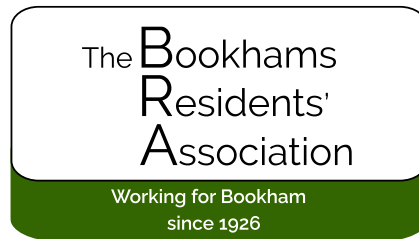
Blue Hearts started here by Diane and Steve Poole and is recognised by SCC and followed as a precedent elsewhere in the County.

Education and young people have always had a role for the BRA and David Cox picked this up maybe 15 years ago or even longer both Chairing BYCA and dealing with the many education topics we need to address. Some may remember the DDOCA campaign which David played a major part in and at long last this anomaly has been cast aside. David is still working as hard as ever to resolve the long-standing issue about the Youth Centre. Along with David, Julia Dickenson has always been in support and especially looking at cycling interests for young and old.

Julia too plays a major role, whenever we need research Julia always finds answers and source of some many issues and her latest work with Chalk streams and the expansion of the Surrey Hills ANOB is a work of an unsung hero.

Transport is something we try to understand, comment on and provide information. Without Kieth Francis diligence we would never have done this.

Working with the Trading Association always been one of our tasks and David Smith along with Michelle were the link we relied on for so many years. Geoff Tranter has led our Projects and how challenging this, Have a word with him later about the War memorial.



So, thank you all and I must not forget all our Councillors, past and present who all sit on the BRA General Committee and are always available to help and support our case when needed. Of these I must mention dear Jim Smith, Big Jim, who for many years both as an SCC and MVDC Councillor did so much. A friend and a great man. Much missed. I am sure there are some I have missed if so please forgive me. As a well-recognised Residents Association this only came about because of the many hours and dedication you all showed through volunteering to make Bookham a better place.

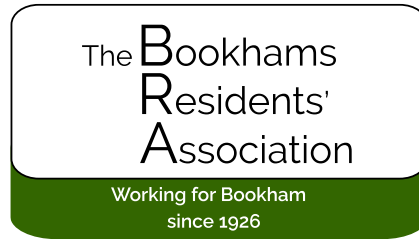
Finally, some personal thoughts. RAs are important as the fourth line of governance. Key because we can look at the very small things that the other civic institutions miss. (St Nicolas Avenue was an example where a small location had an issue which nobody would respond to. We got involved and persuaded Councillors and others to make improvements.

Could we do better? being a PC was not an option the village wanted. MVDC is in my opinion is too small and SCC too big. Maybe the three unitary option recently proposed by all Surrey Districts could be better with a second layer representing the whole on the north of MVDC.

Local Government is a problem. In too many ways it is set in the past and has not reorganised to do its role suitable for this century. So much money is spent on social services and welfare that little is left for public realm work the staple work of LG years ago. Who would organise MVDC in the way it is now if starting from scratch. A £10million organisation with effectively a 39 man board of Directors and probable too many senior officers for its size.

This is no criticism of any the people. Councillors or District or County officers. All do a good job and put in so many hours but as David Cox reminds us the system is so bureaucratic and over organised that things take for ever to complete. Why did it take 20 years to complete the drainage problem at the square about and now in 2023 15 years after SCC decided to close the youth centre, we still have no replacement.

I wish Simon every success with the ongoing challenges that will continue to face Bookham.



Peter Seaward

Chairman