

WEYBRIDGE SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING APRIL 6th 2016

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It is my pleasure to present the Chairman's annual report for the year just ending. This is my third year as Chairman and I would like to thank Richard Marshall as vice chairman and all those on the Main Committee for their support.

At last year's AGM members gave their approval to apply to the Charity Commission for charitable status. This resulted in a considerable amount of effort preparing the paper work necessary to make the application. I am pleased to say that we are now in the final stages of getting agreement on our draft constitution and hope it will be finalised in the near future. Later this evening we will be seeking members' approval to transition to charitable status. I would like to thank Richard Marshall for the significant amount of effort needed for the Society to reach this stage. As well as the submissions to the Charity Commission it has been considered necessary to cleanse and validate the membership database and to review options for updating the current database management system. A small working party has been set up under the Chairmanship of Steve McCarthy to consider these issues. More about this later.

One of the key activities of the Society is to examine and comment on planning applications and the Society is fortunate to have an enthusiastic and professional Planning Panel; I know that its efforts and the newsletter updates are appreciated by many Society members. During the last year it has continued to review and assess the numerous Planning Applications that affect Weybridge. In particular I would like to highlight two. The first relates to the Honda garage site at the junction of Queens Road and Princes Road. In 2014 an application for a 5 storey block of 51 flats plus two retail outlets was refused by councillors mainly because of massing and its large residential density compared to the norms in Weybridge, a view supported by the Society and a high proportion of the local residents. In the Autumn of 2015 a second application for 46 flats + 2 retail outlets was submitted followed shortly after by an appeal to the planning inspector of the refusal of the first proposal. In February this second application was refused by Councillors despite the Officer's recommendation for acceptance. The reasons for refusal were similar to those for the first; there was also significant local opposition to the application - because of the total unsuitability of the application to the local character of the Queens Road village environment. The developer has recently lodged an appeal on this decision.

The other Application relates to development of a block of flats at the Grotto site. In June 2015 an application for an outline development of 9 flats, with no garages or drop-off points, was granted. The Society and local residents were concerned about the high density of the development and the absence of any off-street car parking spaces. Additionally, concern was raised about the poor visibility for pedestrians at this dangerous junction and the lack of any attempt to solve this hazard. Unfortunately, our concerns were not addressed by either Surrey or Elmbridge councils. In a subsequent application related to landscaping the danger to pedestrians was recognised by our Surrey County Councillor but it was too late to amend the proposed development. This means that any rectification now falls on Surrey Highways and us as council tax payers rather than the developer. The Society has pointed out the need to ensure that such safety concerns are resolved in the early planning stages and has written to Elmbridge on this point but has not received a response.

Regarding the future we are concerned that there will be increased pressure from the Government to build new homes since last year's election. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement referred to redeveloping already developed land at higher densities. We have seen some high density applications being refused, for example the Honda garage and the recently refused application for 19 dwellings at 287 Brooklands Road. In our consideration of applications we try to balance the interests of residents with this national objective of building more homes. Where, however, a proposed development at high density, especially in a key position,

seems to detract unduly from the standards of amenity and design appropriate to Weybridge's character areas, we will object to the proposals. A recent example is the Honda Garage site, where the local councillors listened to the public objections to the mass, size and density of the plan and refused it despite an officer's recommendation to approve it.

These are only two of the planning applications which have been assessed by the Planning Panel throughout the year. The excellent work continues and I would like to thank all those involved which are: Raymond Spary, Eric Hammond, Peter White, Barry Judd, Richard Marshall, Tim Williams, Phil Watson, Hugh Edgar and Richard Manthorpe.

We continue to improve communication with our members through increasing our email contact list; this enables us to send brief news alerts to some 200 addressees in a fast and cost-effective manner. We do hope those that receive these 'eblast' messages find them useful. We think they are valuable and would welcome more email contacts that we can add to our list. Some 35 of our members now receive their Newsletter electronically; if any of you wish to do likewise please notify a member of the Committee. I would like to say a big thanks to Steve McCarthy our webmaster who has continued to work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure its smooth operation; Steve, many thanks for your efforts. The Society's Twitter account continues to keep people informed of local events and news; many thanks to Sally Bean for managing the account for the Society.

We have continued to produce 4 newsletters per year and I hope you all agree to a high standard. This year Haley Jenkins has done a wonderful job as editor and I extend our thanks to Haley for her massive contribution. Haley has also started the Society's Facebook page. Unfortunately, Haley can't spend as much time on the newsletter in the future but we have managed to find some helpers in Nick Tripp and Jane Ward which will help reduce the load on Haley and enable her to carry on being involved.

Anne Lindsay has ensured that the newsletter is delivered to members and we are indebted to Anne for all her efforts. Associated with Anne's activities we must not forget the newsletter distributors- many thanks to all of you for help in this task. As I have mentioned before in many ways you are the 'face' of the Society to our members and the committee welcomes any feedback that you may have as a result of delivering the newsletter, especially about missing or potential new members.

An important part of the Society's activities are its events and we must thank Annette Davies for all her efforts in organising them. In the last year we have had three talks the first in October by Nick Pollard about the Islands in the Thames between Weybridge and Shepperton. In December Valerie Bartlett presented a history of Ashford and St Peter's Hospital and gave an insight into the future including the progress of the proposed merger with the Royal Surrey Hospital Guildford. Recently in February Allan Winn, Brooklands Museum Director gave us a fascinating talk on the museum and the plans for the refurbishment of the Grade II listed WW2 Wellington Hanger. I would like to say a special thanks to Annette Davis who is not standing for re-election to the Main Committee; Annette has been planning and organising our events for many years and we must extend our thanks to her for all her time and dedication. Please make sure you keep a look out for notice of future events in the newsletter or via eblast emails.

Many of you will have attended the very successful Summer Party last July. We were blessed by the weather and all enjoyed the tranquil setting of Anne and Ray Lindsay's home. We again must thank Anne and Ray for allowing us to enjoy a summer afternoon in their garden and to Margaret Wicks for all her help. It was a pleasure to have Michael and Irene Aspel join us for the afternoon and to enjoy Michael's own unique way of presenting the raffle prizes. The party raised a total of £417 of which half was donated to Sam Beare Hospice and the other half to British Red Cross. The donation to the Red Cross was made in memory of Carolyn Pennycook who died suddenly last year while still Secretary of the Society. I am pleased to say we will be holding the Party again this year on Sunday July 3rd so please make a note of the date in your diaries.

Last year I mentioned the support that the Society was giving to the refurbishment of the Weybridge Point car park and our thanks go to Tony Davis who has led the Society's involvement. Last year the proposal for funds out of Elmbridge's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) submitted by Thames Landscape Strategy project was rejected by Weybridge Councillors due to concerns raised by some local residents and rowers about the reduction of car parking spaces. A revised proposal was submitted early in 2016 and funding for a small design phase has been secured under CIL funding; this phase will be an outline design which will be developed in discussions with local residents to ensure their support. An additional part of the last submission for CIL funding was for new signage between the Thames path and Wey Navigation, which has now been approved.

This year, instead of the two prizes which we have donated in the past, Heathside School requested us to make a one-off Donation to the Year 13 Award for "Sixth Form Contributions to the Community of Weybridge" Trophy. We congratulate Olivia Watts, who is studying History, as being the first winner of this Trophy.

I am sorry to report a couple of months ago Margaret Wicks resigned from the committee due to significant other commitments. Margaret has made a major contribution to the Society including being our Treasurer and Membership Secretary for which we are very grateful. I am pleased to say that all the other current committee members other than Annette Davies have agreed to be put forward for re-election to the committee. On your behalf I would like to thank the current committee for all their time and effort during the year; without them the Society would not function.

I mentioned last year the need for new committee members and we are still in that position. This year we have three new recruits for the Committee. The first is Haley Jenkins our newsletter editor and our interface with the local schools. I am delighted to say that Haley has agreed to stand for election to the main committee. The second is Steve McCarthy and many of you will know Steve. Steve is doing a magnificent job as our web-master and we are grateful that he has now agreed to be on the Committee. The third recruit is Trevor Lewis. Trevor and his wife Trudy have been members of the Society for 15 years or so. In his working life Trevor worked in IT for British Airways and is a member of the operational review I mentioned earlier this evening. Trevor is leading the tasks to rationalise and validate the members' database and as such is an ideal membership secretary should he be elected to the committee. The Committee would welcome additional members joining the committee and with an eye on the future we would like to see younger generations joining our ranks as members or committee members.

Finally, thanks to all our members for their friendly support and open discussion.

Dave Arnold
Chairman Weybridge Society