



Minutes of Graven Hill Residents' Association (GHRA)

Formal Committee Meeting (via Zoom)

Wednesday 7th April 2021 @ 19:30 hrs

Attendance:

Chair:	Philip Sore (PS)	
Secretary:	Christine Clynes (CC)	
Treasurer:	Sam Omotayo (SO)	
General Committee:	Helen Baker (HB)	Susan Weston (SW),
	Stephen Aggett (SA)	Simon Kirkman (SK),
	Eleanor Smith (ES)	Max Dias-Gunawardena (MDG)

Attendance by residents:

42 residents logged into the meeting, some joined with more than one participant.

1. **Apologies:** None
2. **Minutes of formal Committee Meeting held on 06/01/21 were agreed as a true record.**
3. **Matters arising from Committee Meeting held on 06/01/21 and not on the agenda**

3.1. **Post Box** – PS informed the meeting that an email dated 9th March 2021 had been received from Graven Hill Village Development Company (GHVDC) which stated that the necessary licence was with GHVDC's solicitors and that GHVDC were chasing them up.

3.2. **Access to Foundation Square from the main site** – PS informed the meeting that GHVDC had stated that a link road would be constructed as part of the Phase 2 development and would form part of the Western Spine Road which was some two years away from being built. GHVDC had looked to see if a pedestrian path could be provided sooner but it had been decided that this was not possible. A resident asked if there was an explanation why a pedestrian path couldn't be provided sooner. PS agreed to follow this up with GHVDC.

Action Point: PS to ask GHVDC at the next liaison meeting for an explanation why a pedestrian path couldn't be provided sooner.

3.3. **Recycling facilities for glass etc.** – PS explained that the currently proposed location was within the car park of the proposed Community Centre and would be delivered by GHVDC as part of the Community Centre works. However, GHVDC had undertaken to try and seek an alternative location that could be accessed sooner. GHVDC undertook to update the GHRA at the next liaison meeting.

3.4. **Opening of play park areas** – PS explained that the reasons for further delays to their opening had been on Facebook with input from Councillors Dan Sames and Nick Cotter. GHVDC had stated that Practical Completion Certificates were still awaited from Cherwell DC on some of the play parks (following completion of remedial works by GHVDC) and the final inspections would take place on 29 March. GHVDC had been unsuccessful in securing insurance due to a change in the insurance market and had negotiated with Cherwell DC that on payment of a 12-month maintenance fee the play parks would be added to Cherwell DC's insurance earlier than scheduled. This action would be

subject to a conveyancing process that could take several months to complete. GHVDC had stated that they too were very frustrated that it was currently not possible to open the play areas.

3.5. **Landscaping and the Orchard** – PS informed the meeting that GHVDC were aware that maintenance work was required and that some trees needed replacing. This was part of the maintenance work to be undertaken by GHVDC’s landscape contractor and inspections were to be carried out shortly as it was the time of year to determine which trees were dead and needed to be replaced.

4. Finance – Sam Omotayo (Treasurer)

SO explained that our year end was on the 31st March which means that we had six months of transactions to report. In the six months period to the end of March our draft accounts look as follows:

	£
Total Income	3,187.00
Total Expenditure	(2,001.98)
Surplus for six months ended 31 March 2021	1,185.02
Funds brought forward as at 01 October 2020	134.42
Funds carried forward as at 31 March 2021	1,319.44

Balance currently held in cash and in the Just Giving account.

SO did not expect the final accounts to materially change as there were no significant debtors or creditors.

5. GHRA Events Group – Terms of Reference

PS informed the meeting that Terms of Reference and an Events Approval Form had been drawn up to formalise the relationship between the GHRA Events Sub Group and the GHRA Committee. A copy was attached to the agenda. The Committee members approved the adoption of the Terms of Reference and Events Approval Form.

6. GHRA Events Group - Update

HB summarised the events which had taken place in 2021 so far. They were the Quiz Night in February, the Twisted Wine Tasting Fundraiser in March and the Graven Hill Easter Egg Trail in April. The Wine Tasting event raised the majority of the funds to go towards future events and HB took the opportunity to thank the organiser, Zakima Omotayo, for organising and running the event. HB said that initial feedback from all of the events was very positive and that the GHRA Events Group would be looking for further feedback on the recent events in form of a survey. Moving forward, the Events Group was now planning the events for the second half of the year which may include an Olympics event on the 24th July. It was also hoped that we can put up a Tiny Library on the Village Green at Chadwick Place where people would be able to deposit and borrow books and games. This proposal was currently awaiting approval from the Council. Another event being considered was a photography competition which would run over three months and would invite people to submit photographs of Graven Hill. The winning entries may then be used for a 2022 calendar to raise further funds.

HB took the opportunity to invite all residents who would like to be involved in planning or taking part in events to join the Events Group by contacting her or Alex Lui. The next Events Group meeting was due to take place on the 27th April and new members would be very welcome.

7. Timeframe for shops, pub etc. – Update

PS stated that the commercial units were discussed at the last liaison meeting. GHVDC stressed that the information given were only indications at this stage and based on a programme as of March 2021.

7.1 Phase 1 COMMUNITY Facilities

- 7.1.1. **Primary School** – enabling works were underway and GHVDC were in discussions with Oxfordshire County Council regarding academic year opening.
- 7.1.2. **Community Centre** – PS explained that the Community Centre was subject to a Section 106 Agreement and that the Community Centre was triggered at 500 occupations. It was expected that this point would be reached in 2022 at the earliest. The options were that GHVDC either send funds to the local authority to build the Community Centre, or for GHVDC to construct the Centre themselves. GHVDC were currently in discussions with Cherwell DC with regard to specifications and cost models.

A couple of residents mentioned that on the 2nd July 2019 a meeting took place between some residents and, amongst others, Emily Shaw (Principal Planning Officer at Cherwell DC) when the following delivery timeframe set out in S106 was stated to be as follows:

If the developer delivers the Community Centre:
150 occupations: specification to be submitted
500 occupations: specification to be approved
600 occupations: Community Centre to be delivered

If developer does not intend to deliver the Community Centre:
Prior to 500 occupations: transfer the Community Centre land to the District Council and pay to the District Council the Community Centre contribution.
It is understood that completion of Graven Hill phase 1 will deliver 495 occupations.

PS said that it was his understanding that the decision on which option to choose was with GHVDC. PS also stated that although the GHRA had made comments and suggestions on the draft specification. GHRA had made it clear (to Cherwell DC) that residents had not yet been consulted and that residents must be consulted before the specification was finalised and what was being proposed.

- 7.1.3. **Allotments, Sports Pitches and Gateway Park** – GHVDC said that they were part of the Phase 2 works.

7.2. COMMERCIAL Facilities

- 7.2.1. PS informed that meeting that GHVDC were hoping to secure a **coffee shop** facility during 2021.
- 7.2.2. With regard to the other **retail units under the Block E apartments**, GHVDC said that the marketing of these units had been formally launched and that the GHRA would be updated as each of the four units was contracted. The question was asked by the GHRA as to why restrictions had been imposed such as no pharmacy and no take-away hot food outlets. GHVDC explained that the reason a pharmacy was not allowed was because there would be an outlet elsewhere on the development. With regard to hot food outlets, this restriction was due to several factors including:

- Having a “take away” style outlet could be problematic (e.g. litter and noise). GHVDC’s position was not dissimilar to other developments in the Bicester area.
- The legal implications of having hot food outlets below residential accommodation had to be considered as some mortgage companies would not consider mortgages for apartments above such premises.
- Finally, whilst the Trinity House advertisements state “no hot food”, GHVDC were considering all options and several companies within the food service industry had made enquiries and they were being considered.

A resident challenged the statement from GHVDC that “their position on hot food take-away outlets was not dissimilar to other developments in the Bicester area”, as both Langford and Kingsmere had such outlets. PS stated that he had pointed this out to GHVDC at the liaison meeting with no response from GHVDC.

There was also significant disquiet that residents were not asked or consulted on what retail units they would like to see. PS stated that he had made this point strongly at the liaison meeting with GHVDC.

Some residents suggested that we should have an indicative poll to see how residents felt about the issues discussed in relation to retail units and the Committee agreed that this suggestion should be taken forward.

Action Point: GHRA to organise an indicative poll of what retail outlets residents would like to see.

7.2.3 **Nursery** – GHVDC had signed Heads of Terms with an operator.

7.2.4 **Retail units under the Block A apartments** (to be situated on the opposite side of Graven Hill Road from the completed apartment block): this would include a convenience store (for which GHVDC had already received interest from three operators) as well as further retail units. Delivery of the retail units was to take place six months after completion of the Block A apartments, currently estimated to be in 2023.

7.2.5 **Public House** – GHVDC are saying that due to the current economic climate, they had received no interest at all and were reviewing their options.

Several residents expressed concern that commercial considerations may be overriding promises made to the residents about the presence of a pub on Graven Hill. While everybody understood that interest may be low or non-existent during a pandemic, they felt that GHVDC should keep their options open to delivering what they had been promising to residents over the past years, rather than irreversibly re-deploy the space currently allocated to the construction of a pub. Residents felt strongly that a pub was different to retail units as it was a community issue, rather than a commercial issue.

The question was asked if GHVDC’s original plan was to sell the land allocated for a pub to a public house company or lease the land to a landlord and retain ownership of any pub in perpetuity. The GHRA did not know the answer to that question and would ask GHVDC at the next liaison meeting.

8. Proposed Cycleways / Footpaths – Update

8.1 London Road (B4100) Rodney House roundabout to town centre

PS reminded the meeting that on the 13th October 2020 Oxfordshire CC stated that “these plans were being reviewed in light of the recently released Local Transport Note and to take on board the latest guidance, particularly with regard to crossing side roads”. PS explained that he had been chasing OCC ever since for further updates on progress. Yesterday an email was received from OCC saying that “a targeted stakeholder engagement workshop for the London Road Cycle Scheme would take place in mid to late May and this would include select stakeholders such as GHRA”. A resident added that this meeting had been planned earlier but had been delayed until after the election to enable Councillors to input into the decision making process.

8.2 Graven Hill area to Tesco Extra / Bicester Avenue area

PS informed the meeting that he had received an update from Cherwell DC on 2nd April stating that the railway crossing element was currently going through Network Rail’s internal Business Clearance consultation process which includes clearance on any technical and non-technical requirements. The consultation would take approximately 6 to 8 weeks with the outcome expected mid to end May. Once this initial feedback was received, it would be forwarded to the consultants who would then be able to continue with their work on this project.

PS expressed the view that this project would also get tied in with the workshop on the A41 corridor. A resident added that one of the issues with the A41 underpass was that in order to make a pedestrian and cycle path to run parallel to the A41 overpass is that Bicester Village owned quite a bit of the land that comes close to the railway line. The Town Council is currently considering a planning application from Bicester Village that would enable them to expand their offerings. Councillor Dan Sames had agreed to speak to Bicester Village to see if they would voluntarily give up a small portion of their land alongside the A41 to enable a pedestrian / cycle path to be constructed, although it was not thought that this would form a planning condition.

9. Vehicle Speeds

PS explained that as promised at the last meeting, GHRA had made contact with the Community Speed Watch programme run in association with the local Police. They had subsequently carried out at least one vehicle speed monitoring exercise (Graven Hill Road near the site exit) and planned to carry out more using both marked and unmarked vehicles at various locations. The officer involved said that they would update GHRA with their findings once more surveys had been completed and that we were currently waiting to hear further. PS expressed the hope that the mini roundabout on Graven Hill Road and the new road markings would help to reduce the problem. A resident queried if there could be additional 20mph signs installed, particularly on Graven Hill Road. HB explained that the road signage had been authorised by OCC and GHVDC would have no say on what additional signage could be installed. CC asked if additional 20mph road markings could be added in areas where speeding is most prevalent (East/West Circular Road) and PS agreed to ask the question at the next liaison meeting with GHVDC.

Action Point: PS to raise the question of additional 20mph road markings with GHVDC at the next liaison meeting.

10. Car Parking Update

PS informed the meeting that GHVDC had now completed the installation of signs on parking spaces and would continue to monitor parking with all stakeholders. GHRA were awaiting an update. HB said that GHRA had made it clear that we would want to have a further meeting/consultation with residents before any action was taken by GHVDC in relation to any parking enforcement measures.

11. Process for residents to raise matters with the GHRA

This should be done via email to gravenhillresidents@gmail.com

12. Any other business

12.1 PS informed the meeting that Zakima Omotayo had resigned from the Committee of the GHRA. In accordance with the rules of our Constitution, we now need to hold an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to invite nominations to fill the position and elect a Committee member. It was proposed to hold such an EGM on the 4th May 2021 at 7:30pm. Flyers would be sent to all residents with details of the EGM and to ask for nominations for the vacant Committee position. Everybody will have the opportunity to nominate themselves, should they wish to do so.

12.2 A resident asked if there was a contract in place to water the beautiful street trees which had recently been planted. If not, would it be possible for residents to water trees close to their home to keep them alive and growing during the summer months. There was also a question raised in relation to trees in the managed areas and ES said that there were plans to get a deeper understanding of what was being managed by Living City.

Action Point: PS to ask the question about tree watering at the next liaison meeting with GHVD.

12.3 The question of Council Tax was being raised as most properties on GH seem to be in Band F which appeared to be higher than those in other nearby developments such as Kingsmere and Elmsbrook. A resident explained that the Council Tax rules state that comparisons with other properties could only be made within the immediate neighbourhood and any comparisons with neighbouring developments would not be taken into account. It was asked if the GHRA could assist in raising this matter with the Council. PS felt that this may be a difficult situation for the GHRA to tackle as it involved personal finances. SO felt that as a first step we could be to investigate if the GHRA could have an impact in solving this problem, in other words, would Cherwell DC even entertain an appeal from a residents' association. SA suggested that the Committee could ask for an explanation from the Council why GH properties appear to be banded higher than comparable estates nearby. PS undertook that the Committee would look into the matter and decide how to take the matter forward.

Action Point: Add Council Tax to the agenda of the next Committee meeting.

12.4 A resident raised the matter of the London Road level crossing. He explained that there was now a strong possibility that the crossing would be closed and that there were consultations taking place about possible options. A proposal was currently being put forward to have a pedestrian bridge, but not a pedestrian underpass. He explained that he was concerned that a pedestrian bridge would need to be quite high – the one at Garth Park was 8 metres high - and there would need to be a long slope equivalent to walking another half kilometre just to cover a very short distance. If there was an underpass, this could be relatively low, say 2.4 metres, and would be much more navigable than a bridge, especially for people with disabilities. He asked residents who had an opportunity to raise this matter to do so. Cllr Cotter informed the meeting that he

was going to have a meeting with EWR. He thought that the lack of an underpass option was a glaring omission and he thanked the resident for spotting it.

13. Date of next Committee meeting with residents: 2nd June 2021

The meeting finished at 21:31 hrs

Signed as a true record: Philip Sore, Chair _____

Date: _____