



# Minutes of Graven Hill Residents' Association (GHRA)

## Formal Committee Meeting (via Zoom)

Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021 @ 19:30 hrs

### Attendance:

<b>Chair:</b>	Philip Sore (PS)	
<b>Secretary:</b>	Christine Clynes (CC)	
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Sam Omotayo (SO)	
<b>General Committee:</b>	Helen Baker (HB)	Susan Weston (SW),
	Simon Kirkman (SK)	Eleanor Smith (ES)
	Max Dias-Gunawardena (MDG)	Karen Sims (KS)

The meeting was also attended by residents and three Councillors

1. **Apologies:** Stephen Aggett (SA)
2. **Minutes of EGM held on 04/05/21 were agreed as a true record.**
3. **Minutes of Formal Committee Meeting held on 07/04/21 were agreed as a true record.**
4. **Matters arising from EGM of 04/05/2021 and Formal Committee Meeting of 07/04/21 and not on the agenda**

#### 4.1. Post Box

PS informed the meeting that he had received an update from GHVDC on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021 to say that a licence had been sorted by their solicitors. PS further stated that a location had been agreed near the existing apartment buildings. According to Royal Mail, there would now be a lead time of 16 weeks to installation.

#### 4.2. Access to Foundation Square from main site

PS informed the meeting that at the last Liaison meeting with GHVDC the question was raised if there could be a footway connection between the main site and Foundation Square. GHVDC responded that as works were due to start on the Western Spine Road, there would be lots of earth moving and GHVDC was not willing to put a pedestrian route on a construction site as health and safety was the main priority. GHVDC added that there was an access road for residents of Foundation Square and that these plots were sold at prices that took the dates of the connection to the main site into account.

PS felt that there was nothing further the GHRA could do. CC felt that GHVDC's refusal to provide a footpath connection was very unsatisfactory for residents who live on Foundation Square, especially now that facilities such as children's play parks had opened up on the main site. CC therefore suggested that this issue should remain on the agenda for future Liaison meetings with GHVDC as this issue was too important to ignore. PS agreed to keep the item on the agenda although he felt that GHRA would not get very far, but that we could try.

**Action Point: PS to leave the access from Foundation Square to the main site on the next Liaison meeting agenda.**

#### **4.3. Recycling facilities (for glass etc)**

PS reminded the meeting that the proposed location for the above facilities 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 stated on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021 that they were in contact with the Recycling Officer of CDC and were looking to move this forward. Implementation would take place within three weeks of agreeing a temporary location and completing a risk assessment on a potential temporary location.

#### **4.4. Opening of play park areas**

PS stated that all but one of the play areas were now open and being used. GHVDC informed GHRA that the play area alongside Westacott Road would be opened once practical completion was received from Cherwell DC at a date not yet known. PS said he would keep this item on the agenda. CC mentioned that she had observed children playing in the Westacott Road play area and asked that GHVDC were being made aware of this security breach at the next Liaison meeting.

**Action Point: PS to make GHVDC aware of children playing illegally in the Westacott Road play park.**

#### **4.5. Watering of new saplings by GHVDC contractors**

PS informed the meeting that GHVDC had undertaken to check the schedule of work from the maintenance company and that it was recognised that a suitable maintenance regime was an important factor. In the meantime, PS encouraged residents to water saplings near their homes whenever possible.

#### **5. Finance – Sam Omotayo (Treasurer)**

SO said that there was nothing significant to report. With reference to the new bank account, SO informed the meeting that we were hopefully getting closer to the opening of a current account. The Bank was currently carrying our checks on our application. He had been asked by the Bank to check back on the 14<sup>th</sup> June if we hadn't heard from them by that date. SO confirmed that there had not been any significant transactions since the last meeting. SO also informed the meeting that the GHRA Just Giving page would remain open until February 2022 and encouraged resident to give generously.

**Action Point: SO to check with Bank after 14<sup>th</sup> June if no further communication received.**

#### **6. GHRA Events Group Update (Helen Baker, Co Chair)**

HB informed the meeting that a review of past events had been carried out and feedback received from residents which would be analysed and fed back to the residents at the next meeting. The next event coming up was an Olympic themed Sports Day on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July which would be advertised shortly. For the rest of the year, the GHRA Events Group were planning other events including an end-of-summer BBQ and a Halloween celebration along similar lines to the one held last year. A Photo Competition was also in the late planning stage and would be advertised shortly.

PS informed the meeting that the Committee members had signed off (by email) the Olympic themed Sports Day and the Photo Competition.

PS asked the Committee members if they were happy for him to seek details and obtain costs for GHRA insurance and public liability insurance which suited the needs of the GHRA. This was approved.

**Action Point: PS to look into Graven Hill insurance options.**

#### **7. Timeframe for community facilities, retail units, pub etc.**

PS informed the meeting that at a Liaison meeting with GHVDC on the 25<sup>th</sup> May the following higher profile items were discussed along with other items (full minutes to be published when available):

### **7.1. Primary School**

GHVDC reported that Oxfordshire CC were to open the Primary School for the September 2023 academic year. This was a further one-year delay. CC asked if GHVDC would officially communicate this to residents and PS undertook to follow up with GHVDC. Cllr Calum Miller said that he was not aware of the new opening date but offered to follow up with the Education Team. Cllr Dan Sames informed the meeting that the decision to delay was made by Oxfordshire CC based on projected numbers, not GHVDC.

**Action Point: PS to follow up with GHVDC to ask how the new school opening date would be communicated.**

### **7.2. Community Centre**

PS informed the meeting that GHVDC had a meeting scheduled with Cherwell DC on the 9 June to review the specification and discuss timescales. A decision also needed to be made if GHVDC would build the Community Centre or if they would be passing the money for the build to Cherwell DC. PS said that he again reminded GHVDC that the comments passed to them and Cherwell DC by the GHRA had not yet been discussed with residents and that he was hoping the residents would be given the opportunity to comment and give feedback on the design before anything was set in concrete.

### **7.3. Nursery**

PS informed the meeting that a planning application was expected to be submitted in July 2021.

### **7.4. Retail Units**

PS informed the meeting that he had fed back to GHVDC that there was strong concern about a lack of consultation with residents regarding the retail units. GHVDC stated that “GHVDC must manage residents’ expectations along with providing a good spread of occupiers (with a strong financial covenant) based on the use classes marketed and interest received. So far there had been around 35 enquiries (a mixture of operators and investors), five of which were strong contenders for Units 1 and 4. Interest included café, licensed restaurant, offices, showroom, small convenience store and various personal beauty / medical services”. GHVDC were unwilling to give further details at this time or consult with residents to avoid setting expectations that cannot be met. However, GHVDC stated that as contracts were confirmed, announcements would be made.

### **7.5. Proposed Pub**

GHVDC had stated that the provision of a pub was “not viable pre or post pandemic for Phase 1 and would be revisited at a later stage, probably in Phase 2. Operators would like to see site occupation of over 750. As more pubs were set to close as a result of the pandemic, many were not looking to open new outlets on a site that is seen as out of town with no passing trade”. However, GHVDC said that they were “committed to ensuring that there was a licensed operator for one of the units within Block E that would deliver the social space being sought.” PS was unsure whether this would mean that the provision of a pub would be considered at a later stage in the current location or another location and undertook to get this clarified at the next meeting.

**Action Point: PS to clarify with GHVDC whether the current location of the pub would be “mothballed” until a final decision is made or redeployed for other uses.**

## **8. Update on proposed cycleways / footpaths**

### **8.1. London Road / (B4100) Rodney House roundabout to town centre**

PS informed the meeting that he hadn’t got any updates since the last meeting and undertook to ask Cherwell DC if there had been any developments. Cllr Dan Sames informed the meeting that hopefully work would start on the London Road cycleway during the course of this year. ES asked if the proposed closure of the London Road level crossing had been taken into account in the planning

of cycleways and footpaths and Cllr Dan Sames confirmed that it had. Cllr Calum Miller informed the meeting that Option 1 of the London level crossing consultation made provision for a pedestrian/cycle bridge. Concern had been expressed by cycle groups such as Bicester BUG that such a bridge would not facilitate active cycling. Instead, it would merely provide a facility to transport a cycle over the railway line. Cllr Sames made the meeting aware that the consultation remained open until the 9<sup>th</sup> June and residents were invited to express any views they may have.

## **8.2. Graven Hill to Tesco Extra / Bicester Avenue**

PS informed the meeting that he raised the lack of cycle ways and footpaths during a recent A41 consultation meeting. Cllr Dan Sames informed the meeting that Cherwell DC were leading on the construction of a cycle route from Graven Hill to the Esso roundabout and he undertook to advise the GHRA of updates as they become available. With reference to the Pioneer roundabout, Cllr Dan Sames informed the meeting that discussions were ongoing as part of the A41 corridor consultation. A further A41 consultation meeting had been scheduled to which Cllrs would be invited and would be able to make requests for improved cycle routes along the A41 corridor. PS pointed out that the issue was not only the improvement of cycle routes as there were currently no cycle routes at all in some stretches such as between Graven Hill and the Esso petrol station.

## **9. Vehicle speeds**

PS informed the meeting that a request had been made at the last meeting for additional 20 mph road markings along East Circular Road. GHVDC said that they were “awaiting a response from Oxfordshire CC Transport Team to see if this was possible and if so, agree location and specification”. If approved, GHVDC said they would undertake this investment. PS asked if a member of the Committee had taken over the liaison with the Community Speed Watch team and MDG said that he had contacted them by email but only got an automated response and would follow up again. Cllr Dan Sames explained that the Police have started the second stage of their Community Speedwatch programme and Cherwell were not included in the second stage of the pilot. Cherwell were still waiting to be included in the next roll-out of the programme. Cllr Dan Sames invited MDG to liaise with him on this matter. Cllr Dan Sames also raised the point that the speed limit on Graven Hill was officially 30 mph, not 20 mph as the signage indicated. This appears to be an administrative issue which was in the process of being resolved.

**Action Point: MDG to liaise with the Community Speedwatch team and Cllr Dan Sames to get the speed checks on Graven Hill reinstated.**

## **10. Car Parking Update**

PS said that this issue was again discussed at the last Liaison meeting and GHVDC confirmed that they were continuing to monitor parking with all stakeholders. With specific regard to Block E residents, GHVDC stated that the current focus was on addressing the parking teething issues relating to some apartment purchasers not buying a parking space. The Estate Management Company was working on the parking strategy and would be issuing letters to all residents within Block E to remind them of their obligations and to explain how the permit parking system would work.

A resident asked if the original message that there was going to be no parking on the roads in any part of the development had changed. PS said that the parking signs installed on site indicated where parking was prohibited (mainly on Graven Hill Road and East Circular Road) and where it was allowed. CC raised the point that the parking signs were confusing and that she was under the impression that on-road parking was supposed to be restricted throughout the development. HB raised the point that in a survey carried out last year, 75% of residents indicated that they did not want third party parking enforcement and the majority of residents did not see the existing parking arrangements on Graven Hill as an issue.

**Action Point: PS to get clarification from GHVDC if any on-road parking was permitted on GH and if not, exactly where this was stated and enforceable. PS to also reiterate that the vast majority of residents surveyed last year thought parking was not an issue.**

## **11. Managed Areas on Graven Hill**

PS acknowledged that ES had done a significant amount of work on the problems surrounding the managed areas. ES explained that she and PS were currently investigating what could be done to help residents in the managed areas and how to open up channels of communication with the Management Company. PS acknowledged that this was an ongoing issue which needed renewed focus to get it resolved.

## **12. Council Tax**

PS explained that there were concerns by many residents that the Council Tax bandings at Graven Hill were higher than in surrounding areas of Bicester. Some residents had appealed against their Council Tax bandings, but it was difficult to ascertain the scale of the problem and whether or not residents were successful in their appeals. SA had proposed that this issue should again be included on the agenda for this meeting, but unfortunately SA was not able to attend. Cllr Lucinda Wing informed the meeting that Cllr Dan Sames had done some work on behalf of one of our residents who was unhappy about their Council Tax. Cllr Dan Sames acknowledged that he had been looking into this and that there appeared to be a couple of issues. Firstly, some residents had their billing period started before they moved in. If that was the case, he asked residents to get in touch with him as this was an error which could be fixed. Secondly, with reference to the bandings, Cllr Dan Sames explained that the District Council was not responsible for bandings which are determined by the Valuation Agency. However, it was difficult to determine on what basis they were doing their valuations as properties on Graven Hill appear to be higher rated than those on neighbouring Langford. Cllr Dan Sames reiterated that any challenges must be made within six months of receiving notification of banding and encouraged residents to take advantage of the appeals process. Cllr Dan Sames felt that comparisons with neighbouring new build estates could be included as evidence in appeals.

**Action Point:** PS to include Council Tax on the agenda for the next meeting.

## **13. Any other business**

### **13.1. London Road Level Crossing**

PS reminded the meeting that there was a consultation happening at the moment with possible options on how to resolve the impact on the London Road level crossing of increased rail usage. One of our residents had already picked up that there was no option for a pedestrian and cycle underpass. Cllr Calum Miller stated that the deadline for responses was the 9<sup>th</sup> June and he encouraged residents to express their opinions as East West Rail were particularly keen to hear direct from local residents. PS told the meeting that he had been in contact with neighbouring resident associations where people were concerned about the impact of a closure of London Road and would like to see a bridge to keep an access route to the town centre for motor vehicles as well as pedestrians and cyclists. HB felt the access to the town centre via the A41/Bicester Village was already difficult and would become more congested if the London Road was closed. PS also pointed out that Graven Hill was a growing development and that another large housing development (Wretchwick Green) was being planned opposite Graven Hill on the A41.

### **13.2 Sewer Blockages**

PS explained that we recently had various sewer blockages. GHVDC provided a copy of a letter from Thames Water. It would appear that the blockages had been caused by inappropriate domestic waste being put into the sewers. PS undertook to publish a copy of the Thames Water letter together with the minutes of the liaison meeting.

**Action Point:** PS to publish Thames Water letter together with the minutes of the Liaison meeting

**14. Date of next Committee meeting with residents**

4<sup>th</sup> August 2021 – TBC

The meeting finished at 20:54 hrs

Signed as a true record

Philip Sore, Chair

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Date

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