

BERA AGM Minutes 30th March 2023

7.30pm, St Augustine's Church Hall

1) Welcome and apologies for absence

RW - Welcome all and apologies - Mr & Mrs Harper, Mr Watson

2) Minutes of last meeting

RW – In front of you, you have got the minutes of last year's AGM. Hopefully you will approve them as a true record. When you read it through, you can see what really went on. Any questions on these minutes?

The members were given time to read these minutes.

RW - No? Okay, we are alright. Do we agree and can we have a proposer and a seconder for the minutes? Proposer, Freddie Dawkins and seconder, Mike Carter.

3) Constitution

RW - We have amended it slightly from last year's meeting. We have made those changes. You have got it in your pack and hopefully you are okay with those changes. Then we can move forward and say that our constitution is now up to date. The last time we amended that was in 2013 and so last year was the last time we amended it. Any questions on the constitution?

Time was given for all members to read the constitution.

RW - Is the constitution agreed by everybody?

Agreed and ratified by a verbal 'yes' from all members.

4) Re-election of Committee Members

RW - Last year if you remember, myself, MS and SF were re-elected to the committee. We have still got our remaining committee members to be re-elected for two more years and that is JF, MD, MC, CB, MC, KS, BO, DH, MH. So all of the committee members want to stay on the committee so if we approve that, then they will stay on for another two years. Can we have a proposer and a seconder on the committee to remain? Proposer Mrs Carter, Secunder Ron*. Thank you.

* Note - This was not Ron Woodley, this was a member in the audience

5) Questions from Members

a) Gentleman – My one is about all of this transport that is going up and down Thorpe Hall Avenue. Has anything been resolved on that?

RW – As you know, myself, a committee member and one other member delivered from Shoeburyness, past Kent Elms through to Progress Road to every household along the route, hence why we have got 1292 people that said that this needs to stop. A little bit of history on that is of course that when it came to Development Control Committee, I was the only one out of 17 councillors that said 'what are we

doing here?’ and said no. I was out voted 15 to 1 and one abstained, which was the chair. We could have stopped it at that point. It is alright for certain political parties to say we are doing this and we are doing that but they could have stopped it at that Development Control Committee. I fought to get them to change their minds for about 45 minutes but in the end, I was overruled and hence we are now doing a secondary function in terms of trying to stop it. Bellway Homes apparently were calling me a loose cannon but I believe we are right in what we are trying to do to stop those trucks coming down and through our ward and through our city. The Conservatives put a motion in, working with me in terms of at full council and that won approval for the majority of councillors. This means that we should look again at this. Unfortunately the Labour, Lib Dems and the Independent Group, didn’t include Mike or me, voted for it to still continue. We have put it in the hands of the BERA solicitor to see what he can do and I emailed him again tonight about where are we with that. So hopefully in the next week or so I will get a response back. But if there is a change of administration, I believe that the trucks will not happen. Both Mike and I have said that we will work with the Conservatives to make sure that we stop those trucks coming down Thorpe Hall Avenue and Thorpe Esplanade and through the city. That is our aim, we haven’t given up on the legal route and we haven’t given up on the council route because Crossrail, all that material was delivered by barge to Wallasea Island, so why can’t we deliver by barge to Barge Pier. That’s where we are but of course we are in purdah so not a lot can be done in that period but our intention is not to give up on this. Mike and I are in full agreement and we will work with the Conservatives to make sure that doesn’t happen.

Lady – If that is a flood plain over there and they are building it up, how many feet, 30 feet?

RW – They are building it up 6 meters (approximately 20 foot)

Lady – If that is a flood plain, no matter what you do down there in years to come that water is going to find its own way back again. I am very surprised as well that Martin Terry, Independent, he voted for it?

RW – Yes

Lady – I am disgusted. There’s no thought, he lives along the seafront doesn’t he, so he is not affected on Thorpe Hall Avenue.

RW – Can I just say on that we have disassociated ourselves from the Independent Group

Lady – Glad to hear it and thank you for being the one.

RW – I am up for re-election and you will not see Independent, you will not see anything, just my name. The council have asked me to be Deputy Mayor and then Mayor next year and the year after. So I am going neutral, so there will be nothing along my name, just Ron Woodley and I will be at the bottom of the ballot paper.

Lady – Can I ask another question as well. Who said that can be passed, to be built on if it’s a flood plain? Because the only people that should plan for this is our own

council, not Bristol or if it goes to this department or that department otherwise you don't get anywhere.

RW – It didn't go to Bristol; it was initially approved in 2016 again by our political parties and will be built on stilts.

Lady – Who wants that

RW – It will be built on stilts. It was only this application that came through on 30th November last year that they decided to ship in all this earth and ballast to build up the land, to build on top. They still have to pile through that but.....

Lady – If it is a flood plain it will always be a flood plain. It has been a flood plain since time began, so if it was a flood plain all those hundreds of years ago, it will always be a flood plain.

Gentleman – Let's hope no-one buys one.

RW – Of course, we haven't done anything yet about the sea defences. We know there will be a rise in the sea level and we all know that we have the River Shoe that runs alongside that land, so they may have made it safe for their new houses but in my mind, they have not made it safe for all the ones that have already been built. Like the ones around Admirals Walk and ones like that. So there is a problem, we are hopeful with the nearly 1300 signatures on the petition and we are hopeful that Bellway will listen and that the council are having discussion with Bellway to overcome what is now a problem that need not have happened in the first place.

Lady – Why should the M.O.D sell them the land? Is it all M.O.D?

RW - No it's not.

Lady - Well they were selling most of the Garrison before

RW – The Garrison was bought from the M.O.D but I cannot remember the developers name at the time

Lady – Well someone has got to be behind it, who can say they can build on that?

RW – The council

Lady – Well then they're idiots

RW – To come back to you, Ron?

Ron – A lot of people may have mentioned this but I may have missed it, that it is very ironic to me that the destination for all this dirt is Barge Pier Road. It seems to me that the clue is in the name. That's why the road was there in the first place

RW – Well when you consider that in 2000 we re-charged the whole beach along Southend from dredging. We can do the same down there. We can ship it in by barge and pump in onto the site or use small trucks to take it from Barge Pier to the site. We don't need to shift this on our roads. Our roads are not capable. These lorries will be 32 tonnes but if they are articulated, i.e. 4 wheels at the back as well, that takes it to 48 tonnes and we all know down Thorpe Hall Avenue especially, the

amount of burst water mains we have down there and the sewer mains at the bottom of Thorpe Hall Corner.

Members are agreeing

RW - You just have to go along Thorpe Esplanade and Shoebury Common Road and you know that that has been built on sand. It is vulnerable to collapse as you put all these weights on it and it is 85,600 lorries over 2.5 years. There's no getting away from that. What I couldn't understand and what I couldn't get through to the councillors on that committee and I said 'do the sums' and they couldn't work out the sums. It was so obvious what we were talking about and the number of trucks being involved but they were completely blind to it. As it was then, the Deputy Leader of the council, Lib-Dem, who's in charge of planning, tourism, the environment, parks & open spaces and she sits on that committee and everybody on there on the administration side, look to her as to what should we say or how to vote and of course they have the majority. It didn't help that the Conservatives actually voted for it as well. That just blew it out of the water, we could have stopped it, as I said before.

Lady – We have had a note through from Davidson? Someone called Davidson? A Tory?

RW – Yes

Lady – He said he has got other Tory members saying that they are against it

RW - Yes but they voted for it in the first instance

Gentleman – How much money changed hands?

Lady – What gets me is who are they speaking to, the council? They are not speaking to us. You talk to the residents around here, they won't want it. Where do these councillors come from? Do they come from Thorpe? Or do they come from Leigh where it's not going to affect them

RW – Leigh, Eastwood, West Leigh, Blenheim Park, Prittlewell

Lady – Well this lady you're talking about, why doesn't she come and face a hall of residents?

RW – Well.....

Lady – Is it that a yellow bit going down her back?

RW – Well you know I haven't got a yellow bit down my back.

Lady – No you haven't, no.

RW – I can't help it; I see it so I say it. There are no grey areas, it's black and white and it's straight and because I cannot articulate it with words, I come out with the first things that are in my mind. That's where we are, we've got to fight as long as possible. Hopefully we will win it. The Conservatives are now fully supportive and they do realise that they made a mistake at the Development Control Committee but

apparently no-one else does, but they do realise it, hence we get this coming out. It would be nice if they said, 'we are behind Ron' but they don't do that, that is politics.

RW – Yes, the gentleman there

Gentleman – Have the developers said how much more cost will be incurred if they did the barge option?

RW – No they didn't but one councillor turned round and said that the truck movement is the cheapest route possible. In my mind that's the developer's problem, not our problem

Audience agrees

RW – It's not the peoples problem. The developer, if he wants to put that material on that land then he has to choose a route that is beneficial or not against what the residents wishes are and I just think that unfortunately, I was the only councillor from this area on that committee.

Gentleman – Ron, in the original application 4 years ago when it was approved, there was only two stilts, now there's not going to be stilts, they are going to pile down

RW – There will be stilts but they will still need to pile down as the earth will be 20 foot high

Gentleman - The vacuum of soil that they are going to put there over the years is going to compact and they will be back where they started probably

RW – It is a problem. Our solicitor is involved, that is what you pay your fees for and hopefully we can come up with a solution that is okay for everybody

Gentleman – Coming off of that subject, could you look into something for us and some of the ladies that live around us. The lighting around the Church, particularly where the trees are, is very dark and very spooky and some of the ladies I know who live on their own around where we live are quite frightened to come across from Johnstone and around the Church, they prefer to go around the block. The bushes are wonderful so do not want them taken away but the Church itself and around the perimeter where those trees are is very, very dark. Is there something that you could look into to perhaps have a word with the Vicar, or is it something we should write to the Vicar on behalf of those ladies?

RW – What we have got is that when they prepared and put forward the budget, they were going to reduce and dim the lights more than what they were. It wasn't until we dived into it, that we found out that they were already dimming the street lights. So we didn't realise, us councillors, that the officers were already dimming the lights to save energy. So we got the additional dimming reversed and again, after the May elections we will be pushing to put the lights up full, unless residents in certain houses or streets only want it dimmed a little bit. Every single light is capable of being individually dimmed or brightened. So what we have got to do after the election is to say around St Augustine's Church, we want those lights at full power.

Gentleman – Yes you do get problems and we had a problem with the police involved and the council about a week ago when some of the naughty little boys and girls decided to use these big nitrous oxide cylinders, not the little tiny ones but the ones that are a foot long and they were chucking them over the fences. They were actually sort of living in the shrubbery. We found this, the police and myself and they were doing this while it was dark. They were also, when I spoke to the Vicar, loitering around his Church as well in the small vestibule. So if you could have that on your agenda in the future to look at and monitor, it would be helpful.

RW – Yes okay

Gentleman – I have one other question. Do you know when they are due to modify or refurbish the Church on the North side?

RW – No I don't. I know the plans were passed

Gentleman – Yes, they were passed

RW – They only have 3 years to implement the plans before they will have to submit a new set of plans. But no, I don't know.

Gentleman – It was a lovely improvement. And it would be nice for the Church to benefit the community more, which is why they were adding to it. If you could monitor the light please for the ladies particularly who were frightened who spoke to me about it.

RW – Yes, the secretary is making a note so we will pick that up

RW – Anything else? No, alright, okay. That's good.

6 – Treasurers Report

MS – We changed our bank account in early January because we were dealing with NatWest who didn't really seem to want our trade anyway. Whenever you tried to go in to pay in cheques, the doors were barred, you should be doing it online so we have now changed to Metro bank. It is quite different. When you go there they actually welcome you at the door, the door is not locked, they ask you what the problem is and they solve it, so we have spent a lot of time with them getting the account up and running but they have been so good and helped us every time. So we think that our move to go to Metro has made life so much easier for doing the accounts and if there's an issue you can go in straight away and talk to them. We are Metro bank people now and whenever you pay, it will still go through the same process and our money comes into the Metro bank. Our current balance is £7522. This is kind of grown because the last two years, we have tried to approach the council's Parks Department to plant trees for residents who said that they would like a tree outside their house. Bizarrely, the last two years we have approached them and said that we have £1700 to pay to plant trees and they said no we can't plant your trees because we are too busy doing ours and this is the same council that is saying that they have not got any money. Even now, we are waiting for trees and have paid money in just after Christmas and we have now been told they will be planted in May now as they are having problems. I don't know what the problem is

but they have got our money and we still can't get them to plant our trees. So if anyone here is still waiting for a tree to appear outside their house, it will do eventually, it's just that they are taking their time.

FD – Mike can I just add something to that. The number of staff that are working in the parks department has been cut quite dramatically over the last two years so they really are actually on a very tight manning problem, which could be part of the issue why they can't do it

MS – The only thing is they don't plant the tree do they. It's the tree fellas that plant it and they are working hard everywhere but I take your point

FD – They should tell you that

MS – If they don't plant them and they want everything to be green, going to let everything grow, the simple answer would be to plant more trees as they say trees are one of the biggest advantages to keeping an area a green area. So our money is in their bank account at the moment and we are still waiting for the trees to be actually planted.

MS – So what did we spend the money on? We spent £1583 on the Christmas lights. BERA members have funded the lights on the tree in The Broadway for about 8 years now. We do think from time to time, do the shops appreciate it, do they benefit from it and we just pay for it. We do think, should BERA carry on paying for the lights or should we see if the business want to pay for the lights? I think Ron is going to mention that later on. Coffee morning and social events £501. Brochure advertising our achievements and introducing BERA to new residents which was quite successful, we did get quite a few people approach us and want to join, £798. Administration, office work and updating membership is £1285. Insurance which we have to have for the coffee mornings and if any of us doing anything while we are out and about, it covers BERA not us and planning £519. That is what we spend the money on. In our 2023 accounts we have bit the bullet and we have paid £1700 to the council to plant trees which may appear soon or as soon as they can get around to it. That is the accounts. Does anyone have any questions on the accounts?

Members were given time to review the accounts

MS - No? Okay.

MS - I first joined BERA some 23 years ago and very quickly I was voted in as the treasurer. It has been a privilege to work with BERA all these years. Our membership at that time was in the region of 200 households. However whilst we were tackling the injustice of the covenants, this rose to over 1500 households so we have been quite up and down with our finances. I feel now is the right time for me to stand down and pass this role to a fresh face and Jane has kindly volunteered to do that. The advantage with Jane is that she does online banking and all that stuff that people don't normally know how to do, so she will be doing it all. Jane, thank you. Thank you anyway for working with me all that time and Jane will be taking charge in future.

The members gave Mike a round of applause.

7. Chairman's Report and Christmas Lights

RW – I have to follow that now and following Mike is always a hard thing. I will say on a personal note, that Mike has been a real rock for me over the last 23 years. I have been on BERA's committee for 26 years, since March 1997 and my neighbour said 'Ron, I think you have a bit more time so I think that you should join BERA' and Mike has been my rock and my 'go to' person. Mike also said that I should stand for council in 2006/2007 and I got my own back the following year and said you should stand! So we have been this double act now for a long while and hopefully you will all agree that the Committee, Mike and I through various roles that we do, have made a difference to the ward. I think that it is good to see that a lot of people like to move into Thorpe Ward and then do their utmost to destroy it. We are still here, it is a wonderful place to live, we have great members of the association. Jane will be up here next year.

RW – There are a few things in my report.

a) Firstly, as Mike said, do we as an association keep funding the Christmas lights? We all know it looks good, it brings business into The Broadway so we continue to do it. As Mike said we have been doing it for a number of years now so can I have a show of hands. Do we as an association carry on supporting and funding the Christmas Lights in The Broadway?

The majority of members put up their hands

RW – I think that is the majority. Thank you

b) We are still fighting on planning issues and that is important. It is important so that we do not get massive over-development. I think this year alone I have had 3 retirement companies who wanted to demolish four or five houses and build retirement flats. I have stopped them in their tracks by saying that there are covenants and the association will fight for those covenants to be upheld and remain and they say that they will look elsewhere. So there are a lot of retirement flats that have been built but not here, so we have managed to keep the integrity of the Estate as it is as much as possible.

c) Southchurch Park - we have fought hard to get the council to replace the safety rail around there. They did remove it and said they are not replacing it but since then, we have had 2 children fall in and so under pressure again, we have convinced the council to replace that safety rail and that should be back in place by the end of April. That is their target timescale. That has to be a good thing, as we cannot have small children running into that park, parents or grandparents thinking it is a safe because it is a park and then they end up in that water. We even had a grandparent holding a child above the water while they got rescued.

d) The pavilion – we are still fighting that. That pavilion in 1948 hosted the Australian cricket team and a world record was produced there, 721 runs in a single day. To let a historic building deteriorate in the way they have, to my mind is wrong. We are still fighting as councillors as we are trying to hold onto that heritage because why not. They have let it rot, they have let ivy grow into the roof and lose tiles, they have let

the tree roots go under it and damage the foundations, vandals have been inside and damaged it and their way out of it is to demolish it. No you do not demolish it. The money is in the budget, we proved money was in the budget and they don't want to do it and I am talking about the current administration here. But I am hopeful that after the election, we will be changing peoples' minds.

Gentleman – Where is that?

RW – As you go in by the Southchurch park lake, look past it you will see the cricket pavilion there. It has got boarding around it, next to the toilet block that is there

RW - It is historic and why we want to keep throwing away our history, I just do not know.

e) Also they wanted to bring in car park charges into the car park and we have stopped that as well. We have worked well with the Conservatives on that, fought hard to make sure we don't have car parking charges in car parks in parks. That's wrong, we want people to enjoy the park and not worry about parking charges or how long they can stay.

f) I hope that you noticed that the grass verges at long last have been trimmed back. They have all been trimmed back throughout the ward which is good. It should be done every two years but it has been 5 years since it has been done and you can see how much grass and trip hazards that went over the footways throughout the ward and it is good that it has all been cut back. We need to make sure that in two years' time it gets done again. We have had new shrubs put in in certain roads as well.

g) You all received a brochure; I hope it was a good read and you all enjoyed it. It is amazing that when you write something down, how much we have done over the years and I have to thank Ken for editing it for us and I need an editor and a sub-editor. Between the two of them it came out and it is amazing. It is amazing, the achievements and of course that is just about this ward. It is not just about getting the finances right for this council or getting the £10m per year for the footway and highway repairs and all the other mountains of stuff. The Southend pass, the tradesmen's pass, all those things that help make local shops, local businesses, local people go and park up and do your shopping, it is going to cost you 28p a day and park for 12 hours.

h) Personal setbacks - I was rushed into hospital three weeks ago. Nothing too serious, lungs and heart. The hospital have been very good and I will need a couple of operations and they are not too worried about it and therefore, I should not be too worried about it. I am still fit and healthy and it will all be okay. That is where we are.

RW - I have been on the committee now 26 years and chairman for 23 of those years and of course your local councillor for 16 years. I feel I haven't completed the role when coming onto this committee, I still believe there are things to be done and we need to make sure that going forward the committee is solid and does have the back-up of the new treasurer and we need a new chair at some point in time. The committee meets every two months, we work well together and throw the ideas out

and I believe it is good for the community. Without the community we wouldn't exist and the whole area would change and I would hate that to happen. So, that's where we are. I think we have covered most of it. I hope you have seen the improvements in the road under Thorpe Hall Avenue bridge which was terrible but at least that has now been done. The golf course, we are still very wary on that and still keeping our eye on what is happening there, as with any major developments within our wards and we have to just highlight that. The new local plan was indicating hundreds of thousands of homes were to be built in Southchurch and Shoeburyness etc. In Thorpe because of our commitment, only 9 homes have been identified to be built in Thorpe because we have got the covenants, we have got the single private dwelling house per plot, we know where our strengths are and we know where we can fight to protect the place that we live. Hopefully you have seen that and we will continue on that basis.

8. Membership Update

RW – This time last year at our AGM we had 545 household members. Currently we are on 585 household members, so we are 40 on, and I believe that by the end of May we will be at over 700+ members. It seems to take ages for people to give us £10. It is good our membership has held up, it is good that as Mike said we started with 235 when we took over and now we have been talking about a vast number and it is the strength of us as a community that keeps us going and I hope you all know and understand what drives me, us and the committee. Are there any questions on that?

Gentleman – I am in favour of the Christmas lights but is it worth asking the shop keepers to make a contribution or a donation? Or are you just wasting your time with them?

RW – We have tried that but they wouldn't donate. If you were a shop owner, would you give someone money rather than in your pocket?

Gentleman – Yes, I would for the community if I had a shop here, yes I would. It was just a thought. Is it worth persisting? There are new people coming into the shops isn't there.

RW – There is no harm in it. After the membership period is done, we have a leaflet ready to go into the shops to inform them that we have a page on our website that they can advertise for free. We are trying to look ahead and we have got them ready to go. It's a question of once we have got time, we will set up each business onto the website so that we can encourage them and people to look at our website and look at what is available in The Broadway and attract more business into the shops.

RW – Anyone else? Okay, so any other business for me or the committee?

MD – I think we should show our appreciation Ron for all that you do and the many years that you have been here and say a great big thank you.

Members gave Ron a round of applause

RW – Thank you for that, I really appreciate it, especially when you get people stop their cars and shout at you and send you death threats.

RW- We have bought some wine and nibbles so please enjoy. Thank you for coming along.