

paxcroft mead community forum - chairman's report may 2010

Introduction

Six months have gone by since our Opening Meeting in October and in that time membership has risen from 50 to 180 members.

The website has been working well, with members sending in their concerns and ideas on the e-mail contact page. Newsletters are posted up at intervals and for members who are off-line, we deliver it in hard copy. The recent on-line poll was very successful and netted more than 20 new members, since we made voting conditional on membership.

Committee

Committee meetings were held in January, March and May, with members working on separate projects as time allowed. We have some members who will be stepping down tonight, but we have enough left to keep us going, as well as one or two useful recruits.

The work of the Committee

The work of the forum is in three main areas:

- Responding to residents' concerns
- Protecting residents' interests in the face of local development
- Initiating our own projects

1. Responding to residents' concerns

We deal with residents' concerns on an individual basis, liaising with local agencies, most notably Wiltshire Council, but we also identify the general issues that come out of them. The key issues here have been the recycling facility at Hackett Place and the maintenance of landscaping on the estate.

Recycling Centre

The Council Officer we met on-site agreed that the fundamental problem is that the site is too small, but it cannot be extended because it is enclosed and on private land.

We have been monitoring the site and Hills Ltd, the council contractors are visiting six days a week and collecting cardboard and plastic on alternate days, but overflowing bins are an on-going problem.

There has recently been some fly tipping at the site which we have reported.

Underlying this situation is the impending review by the new unified council into roadside collections of recycling materials, which could make sites like this redundant.

Landscape Maintenance

We recently had an on-site meeting with the new Parks Manager, who has a strong horticultural background and solid experience of managing estates like ours.

He explained that the current contract with English Landscapes is really limited to mowing and hedge-cutting, but this is up for renewal shortly and he hopes to set in train a long term programme for managing the overgrown shrub beds and shelter belts.

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He assured us that residents will be consulted and that he is well aware of the need to provide privacy and security, while trying to keep shading dappled rather than dense.

We were impressed and recent improvements to the tending of shrub beds have been noted. We hope that he will stay in post and find the budget to carry through his plans.

2. Protecting residents' interests in the face of local development

Key projects here were the first stage of the Core Strategy Consultation and the Public Inquiry about the land at Hackett Place.

The Core Strategy Consultation

The first stage of the Public Consultation about the Core Strategy for Wilshire finished in December 2009. We posted the details of the local exhibitions on the website together with a link to the Council website page.

We also sent a response on behalf of the Forum committee, broadly welcoming the preferred option, which takes development to the south of the town along the West Ashton road. This letter may be seen on the Forum website.

The second phase of the consultation is just starting and will feature on the Forum website soon.

The Public Inquiry into the land at Hackett Place

The long-running saga of the pub versus medical centre debate came to a climax in March this year, when Marston's Inns appealed to have the legal agreement lifted which reserved the land at Hackett Place (adjacent to the Chinese take-away) for a medical centre. I noticed yesterday that construction has started.

We held an on-line poll on the website, which was covered in the local press and advertised in local shops. A Public Inquiry was held in the old District Council Offices and we gave evidence to the inquiry, based on the results of the poll. The Public Inspector subsequently found in favour of Marston's Inns.

It has been said that we were wrong to focus on this issue, because it raised expectations that could not be fulfilled. We always stressed that the council was not defending the appeal and that Marston's were expected to win. The fact is that we came too late to this issue, but this was a cause that was central to the founding of the forum. We could not ignore it and it would have been counter to our stated aims and objectives had we done so.

It has also been suggested that our on-line poll was biased, because it did not explicitly invite people to show their support for a pub. But this misses the point. Marston's appeal was that the legal agreement reserving the land for a medical centre should be lifted – that was the key issue of the public inquiry and it was that point that we polled on.

3. Initiating our own projects

The third and final aspect of our work is to initiate our own projects designed to improve the quality of life on Paxcroft Mead.

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Small scale projects

Key small scale projects so far have been: the installation of signposting to Sussex Walk and the moving of the post box from Painter's Mead to the district centre.

Signposting to Sussex Walk

This was raised by forum member Pauline Marples, who lives on Sussex Walk. Thanks to Councillor Steve Oldrieve, the right council department was found and she had an on-site meeting with a council officer, who established that it was the developer's responsibility. The sign has been ordered and should be installed soon.

Thanks are due to Pauline for taking this forward.

The moving of the post box

Committee member John Hatherill has been looking into this. The Post Office say moving the existing box in Painters Mead is too costly. John raised the idea of putting a new post box on Hackett Place. This was well received but is complicated because it will involve negotiations between the Post Office and Attivo, who are the landowners at Hackett Place.

This project has been interrupted through serious illness, but it will be taken up again soon and thanks are due to John for his hard work and perseverance in taking it forward thus far.

Large scale projects

There are two key large scale projects, which are still in early stages: the provision of a BMX track to provide a focus for older children and an initiative to have allotments on Paxcroft Mead.

The Allotments

AGM Agenda item no. 8 has Warren Lee launching his initiative to have allotments on the estate.

The BMX Track

AGM Agenda item no. 9 has Adrian Ingham presenting the plans for the BMX track.

Both of these projects will soon feature on the website on their own separate pages.

Conclusion

The first six months have been very busy, and although progress on our own projects may not have been as swift as we would have hoped we are not discouraged.

We would like to record our thanks to the councillors, council officers, and members of the neighbourhood police teams who have supported our efforts over the last six months. Above all, we record our thanks to the forum members, especially those who have taken the time to demonstrate their support, by contacting us with concerns, suggestions and messages of support, by taking part in our on-line poll, and by coming to our meetings.