

Wantage and Grove Campaign Group



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

held 2000 hrs 23th March 2015
Lockinge Room, The Beacon, Wantage

The meeting was opened by the chairman Geoff Rice who firstly addressed the H&S aspects of the hall. Geoff then stated that the evening would be in two parts (i) the AGM of WAGCG and (ii) a presentation by Julie Mabberley on the Oxfordshire Transport Strategy.

All members of the Committee were in attendance in various roles in the hall.

1. Adoption of minutes of last year's AGM held on 2nd April 2014.
The adoption was proposed by Francis Sketch and seconded by Eileen Young.
No issues were raised in relation to these minutes.
2. Finance report by Peter Barber
Peter informed the meeting that the information related to the accounts for the year ending 28 February 2015.
Much more detailed information is available on the website.

Peter made it clear that the campaign does not collect fees and is funded purely by donations and fund raising events. A number of donations were received during the financial year for which we are extremely grateful. One in particular is worthy of mention - on the 28th May, John Yearley arranged a concert of chamber music involving very accomplished young musicians from Holland. All monies from the sale of tickets were donated to the campaign.

At the year end the account balance stood at £1974. During the year our income exceeded expenditure by £780.

3. Campaign Manager's Report by Julie

As a result of the presentation these questions/comments were raised:-

- a) What will happen to the existing Leisure Centre if a new one is built? It is not really known, it might be given to KAs but it is possible that KAs have their own plans for the site.
- b) Why will KAs sell East site? The money will allow the construction of 140 houses. The income will provide funds to expand both West and Centre sites. It is worth noting that parts of Centre sites are listed.

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- c) It is claimed that the Leisure Centre is over capacity but in the evenings there are often just 5 people using the swimming pool. There is money in the budget allocated for maintenance of the Centre but it is not clear whether it was actually spent on this.
 - d) There is some pressure to construct the new Leisure Centre in the green space between Wantage and Grove. An alternative would be near the allotments.
 - e) What is the timescale for the development of the convent and East site. The convent is dependent on the nuns finding suitable premises to move to. It is not known about East site timeframe.
 - f) A new resident in Ardington asked if there is a campaign group to promote ROAR. Yes, posters will be put up and leaflets distributed after this meeting.
 - g) How much would the 'want list' cost? Do not know but possibly £500M including perhaps £10M for Grove station.
 - h) When will the new Chilton interchange be completed? There are apparently, ongoing negotiations with the landowners. It is expected completion will be within the next 12 months.
 - i) Reading is to be a station on the Cross Rail line. This will have the effect of making Reading a London suburb. The likely consequence of this is that more people from Wantage and around will commute to Reading to access London putting greater pressure on the road network.
 - j) The result of a new station at Grove will be more housing. In addition the inability to meet the rules for the Council's 5 year supply of land for housing mean that more housing will be allocated in this area. We are trying to get the 5 year land supply ruling changed.
 - k) The housing in Wantage is expensive and the number of jobs locally is low. People who move to this area expecting their spouse to get a job to which they can walk or cycle. The reality is that a (possibly high) proportion of them will be required to get a second car and drive to work.
4. Geoff said that it was now time to elect the Committee for the coming year. He asked for nominations but unfortunately none were forthcoming. The existing Committee members having stated their willingness to serve again were duly elected with their roles decided at the first meeting of the Committee.

At this point Geoff stated that this concludes the official AGM business.

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Appendix 1 Campaign Managers Report 2014-2015

The Wantage and Grove Campaign Group started as a concerned group of individuals after numerous Councillors had told us that there was nothing we could do...

Since we started in early 2013, the campaign group has widened the distribution to a much more representative group of 1,000+ (mainly by email but also a small group who are telephoned periodically).

Aims of the Group:

We are not against any development in Wantage and Grove but:

- Developments should be proportionate and sustainable
- The infrastructure should enhance and improve quality of life for its residents.

Background:

Planning rules have changed in the last few years

Planning rules are governed by the National Planning Policy Framework – written by the Government. It states that each area should have a local plan and if there is a local plan in place that all development should be approved until the 5 year Land Supply target is met and in any case there is a “presumption in favour of development”.

The main comments from Planning Officers and any Councillor on the Planning Committee are:

- a. we have to meet Housing Targets
- b. we can't afford to say no to developers and then have to pay for expensive appeals.

Obviously this means that developers can get permission to build anything now before the plan is finalised (probably late this year). And even when we have a plan, any site mentioned in the plan can and probably will be built on. That could include another 1000 at Monks Farm, a further 1000 at East Hanney and another 100 at East Challow as well as infill sites like the Convent and King Alfreds East Site.

In the past year we have done a great deal:

- We have attended Town and District Council meetings;
- We held a meeting here in the Beacon about the Local Plan
- We have addressed planning committees on all major developments in Wantage and Grove;
- We wrote and submitted a 46 page report detailing our comments on the Local Plan 2013 to add to our 42 page report on the earlier draft;

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- We also commented on the Community Infrastructure Levy Consultation and the Design Guide Consultation;
- We have attended every planning exhibition and consultation held affecting Wantage or Grove;
- We held a concert here in the Beacon to raise funds for the Campaign;
- We have organised and manned tables in the Market Place on the day of the Farmers Market to talk to residents;
- We have written to our MP, Vale and County Councillors as well as Network Rail about the planning issues facing us;
- We have spoken on BBC Radio Oxford, Jack FM and the local internet radio station Hendred Chatters and worked with local journalists to get our messages into the local papers as often as possible
- We write regularly for the Grove Parish Newsletter and the Wantage and Grove Review
- We maintain a website and a twitter account and contribute to a Facebook page
- As members of the Community Voice on Planning (CoVoP) – a national group of 100 organisations in similar positions around the Country, we have been to the Houses of Parliament three times
 - Firstly to represent CoVoP at a cross party group led by Greg Mulholland helping to formulate changes to the NPPF – their manifesto will be published shortly
 - Then to represent Wantage and Grove at the Community & Local Government Enquiry into the NPPF led by Clive Betts. Matthew Barber got a hard time from them when he gave evidence. They produced a very good report which the Government has since almost totally ignored
 - Most recently, to the launch of the Civic Voice manifesto 'Localism for Real' which proposes putting power back into the hands of communities.
- Finally we have got heavily involved in the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan.

We couldn't have done this without your support. Yet:

- 2,500 at Grove Airfield and 1,500 at Crab Hill have been recommended for approval – but still do not have outline approval
- 80 on Chain Hill is being built
- All three phases of Stockham Farm have been approved (380 homes) and Phase one is in progress – they still haven't built the entrance road correctly, so we need to keep on the pressure

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- The 133 homes on first piece of Monks Farm has finally received outline planning permission and the second phase of 75 homes has been applied for. More will follow.

We believe – and so do many others – that we have won the arguments. But the planning committee has not listened to arguments on the merits of developments. It has only listened to directives from central government to build more and more houses.

Now, what will be happening in 2015/16?

We all agree that more houses are needed, some here. But if we are getting houses, we need road improvements, more school places, the expansion to the Health Centre and the new Leisure Centre (I'll come back to that in a minute).

The Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership forecast about 100,000 homes by 2031 and if we are providing at least 5% of the housing required across Oxfordshire, why don't we see at least 5% of the investment being made in Wantage and Grove?

- 5% of the £815m investment in transport infrastructure will be about £42m – that would fund our western ring road and the improvements to the A417.
- 5% of the £500 million investment in rail improvements would fund the reopening of Grove Station.

We know that the developers have to provide some funding but this only pays for the infrastructure required on the developments themselves and does not help to support the rest of the infrastructure around the area. This will come from Government funding if it comes at all and we need to be ready to fight for every penny!

For transport – our first action is the Strategic Transport Plan which I will talk about later. But there will also be the Neighbourhood Plan and the Science Vale Plan.

The Neighbourhood plan will highlight what infrastructure we need and where we want to put it. This will include: shops, parking and green infrastructure as well as cycleways and footpaths. It does only cover Wantage Town so we can't influence the roads and have little input to schools.

The Science Vale plan will include everything labelled as Science Vale and the first point is to define what the Science Vale is. If we want funding for the Western Relief Road from the Aeroplane to East Challow then we need to ensure that the land for that is inside the Science Vale. As the plans develop there will be more details to look at.

All of these will include consultations and require action. If we don't demonstrate that we need infrastructure then the planners, developers and Councillors (never mind the

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Government) will assume that we don't care. Money will continue to be in short supply so we need to fight for what we need.

Talking of fighting, we are organising a Rally next month. Together with ROAR (Rural Oxfordshire Action Rally) and CPRE we are hosting a rally in Wantage Market Place on Sunday 12 April from 11am. Come and join us and let's challenge our prospective parliamentary candidates to tell us how they will make the 5,000+ homes planned for Wantage and Grove and the other 15,000 homes planned for the rest of the Vale sustainable with

- roads that can hold the traffic,
- schools big enough for all the children in a timely manner,
- health facilities that can cope with 45,000 more people in the Vale alone, never mind the other areas which use the hospitals in Oxford,
- cycleways, footpaths and leisure facilities as well as the additional shops we all requested in the recent Neighbourhood Plan survey.

Peter Jay, Chairman of ROAR and ex-economist, broadcaster and diplomat, will be our keynote speaker, and groups from surrounding villages are also being invited to provide a speaker.

Please come along and swell the numbers, we'll have plenty of banners and posters.

Witney managed to get onto TV News so let's see if we can do the same.

Now, the last point. I mentioned earlier that we might get a new Leisure Centre. The Vale seem to have got enough funding lined up to enable them to replace our existing old Leisure Centre. They are currently looking at possible locations and the Vale owns land next to the Health Centre on Mably Way. Obviously it's cheaper if they build on land they already own, but this is part of the green gap between Wantage and Grove. Are we happy for a new leisure centre and associated car-park to be built on that land?