**Westbury Park Community Association Meeting, Friday, 13th March**

The meeting was attended by 60 people including Councillors Geoff Gollop and Steve Smith. Apologies were received from seven people including Councillor Fi Hance.

**Introduction**

Kevin Chidgey welcomed people to the meeting and explained that it had been a difficult decision to go ahead with the meeting in view of the coronavirus outbreak. If we had cancelled the meeting it would have been impossible to contact all the people thinking of coming to the meeting.

Kevin referred back to the AGM held in October 2019 which had discussed the challenges facing the Association and future options. The AGM agreed that a community survey should be conducted in the new year to find out what matters to people in the area and what they would like to see happen. The survey was carried out in February and over 200 people completed the survey questionnaire. This meeting had been called primarily to present the results of the survey and to discuss the future of the Community Association in the light of the survey results and ongoing community issues.

**The Community Survey**

Fran Bragg presented the survey results, highlighting the issues which most concerned people.

Priorities in order as ranked by survey respondents were as follows:-

* Parking - particularly a problem close to the Downs, many support resident parking.
* Traffic and Roads - issues include blocked footpaths, speeding vehicles and “rat runs”.
* Sustainability - tree planting, electric vehicle charging points, reuse and recycling of plastics, using less energy and the benefits of a community sharing scheme (cars, tools, equipment, gardens).
* Community Spirit – supporting elderly and isolated people, neighbourhood watch.
* Community Activities – supporting the Festival, street parties, activities for different generations, litter picking.
* Community Association – more information on local events using NextDoor, street groups, etc, sharing ideas and knowledge, lobbying / campaigning.
* Development and Design – planning issues including 99 Devonshire Road, maintenance of the physical environment.
* Natural Environment – retaining / replacing street trees, retaining front gardens.
* Public Transport – retaining and improving public transport, better links to Redland Station and Gloucester Road, smaller and more frequent buses.
* Community Facilities – supporting local shops and businesses. safeguarding of community facilities inc. Henleaze Library

Respondents also mentioned safety and crime, and van dwellers as issues.

Kevin invited comments from those at the meeting, saying that with over 30 specific issues / proposals mentioned by people in the survey it was important to prioritise possibly three or four groups of actions which we could take forward by setting up dedicated task groups.

Comments included :-

* Did the survey analyse responses by age group – *the answer is no*
* Local change needs to come through our MPs and local councillors – *Councillor Geoff Gollop responded by stressing the importance of local people and community groups in influencing decision making.*
* People coming from London don’t care about issues *– our experience is that many do care, some immediately on arrival and others later.*
* There is a problem with flats and HMOs causing pressure on parking space.
* We need to support cyclists.

It was agreed that task groups should be formed to cover **Transport/Traffic/Parking/Cycling,** **The Natural Environment** and **Community Spirit .** Attendees were invited to sign up to these groups at the end of the meeting. Task groups for **99 Devonshire Road**, **the development of the St. Christopher’s School site**, and to **support the Community Association** were agreed later in the meeting.

Councillor Gollop expressed his support for the Association and the valuable role it played in acting as a communications channel between the local community, ward councillors, the Council and other key decision makers, including First Bus Group. There are a number of examples where the community has been able to feed back comments through the Community Association including proposed changes to bus routes, resident parking and the City Council’s Library Review.

**99 Devonshire Road**

Jeff Bishop gave a detailed exposition of the situation regarding the eyesore uncompleted structure at 99 Devonshire Road – the long history of the development, the ever changing and complex company ownership of the site (invariably involving the same directors), the site valuation, etc.

Jeff offered the view that the owners might be primarily interested in maintaining the book value of the site and are not serious about completing the development. The state of the structure is such that it is very unlikely to be completed – it will probably have to be demolished. It is believed that another developer recently made an offer to buy the site but was turned down.

Discussion at the meeting centred on what could be done to remove the unfinished structure and secure the proper development of the site. Financial considerations largely rule out Council compulsory purchase of the site and there is little that the Council’s Planning Department can do as planning law only requires the developer to make a start on a scheme to keep alive the planning approval.

The option of the Planning Department serving a completion order was raised at the meeting. This might be possible (we would need to check) but is a rarely used instrument and the serving of the order does not necessarily force the developer to complete the building if, for example, the developer can show that there are insufficient funds available. In response to a question about the City Council’s “stalled sites” policy a few years ago Councillor Geoff Gollop confirmed that the Council cannot force completion and that the only Council intervention possible is on health and safety grounds were 99 Devonshire Road considered to be a safety hazard (it is not). Councillor Gollop offered to present new material from Jeff Bishop’s presentation to the Planning Department.

An idea was put forward by Spencer Hall and supported at the meeting – a community led crowd fund to raise money towards the acquisition of the site linked to partnership with a new developer. This would require the existing owners to agree the sale of the site and agreement on a sale price (there is an example of a community led development in Kingsdown). Spencer Hall agreed to lead a 99 Devonshire Road task group to consider further the community led idea and other possible options of securing the redevelopment of the site.

**Development of St. Christopher’s School Site**

Jeff Bishop explained that owners Aurora had decided to shut the St. Christopher’s School and were likely to sell the site for development, most probably housing development.

It is crucial that the Community Association and local residents likely to be affected influence the decisions taken about the development of the site as soon as possible (even before the sale of the site). Planning authorities and developers are required to have regard to the views of local communities on planning proposals and we have the benefit of the Westbury Park Design Statement to support us in this respect.

Jeff described some of the features of the 5.3 acre site – the prominent houses fronting on to Westbury Road are not listed but a post 1960 building at the rear, Grace House, is listed, access to the whole site is now entirely from Westbury Road but this is unlikely to be allowed with regard to new development at the back of the site, the site has many interesting structures (eg. the front gates) which should be safeguarded.

A number of points were made and questions posed about the development of the site:

* High density student accommodation would impact adversely on parking in the surrounding area, could the University ban students having a car? *Councillor Smith said that it could be planned as a car-free development but this could not stop students bringing their cars.*
* Would development on the back of the site require access from The Glen and Bayswater Avenue? *Probably yes.*
* Could the frontage houses be listed? *Probably not.*
* Are there tree preservation orders on any of the trees? *We will need to check.*
* What impact will Conservation Area status have on the development? *It might have to meet higher standards in terms of design, planning permission may required to demolish buildings.*
* Could Grace House be classified as a community asset?
* Could part of the site be used to accommodate an extension of Westbury Park School? *Councillor Gollop agreed to raise this possibility with the Council’s Children’s Service.*

Councillor Gollop suggested that were the site to be proposed for housing the Community Association should be ready with a “shopping list” of requirements / conditions.

People were invited to join a St. Christopher’s task group which would represent the Association in all matters relating to the development of the site: Jeff agreed to convene the Group.

**Other Matters**

Kevin Chidgey raised the issue of vans on the Downs and asked if anyone had any views on this matter; no views were expressed. Kevin referred to the Respect the Downs Group and indicated that information on this Group was available on the table at the side of the hall.

Kevin thanked people for coming to the meeting and advised that notes of the meeting will be circulated as will copies of the presentations made at the meeting. Attendees were urged to sign the contact forms at the side of the hall so that they could receive these.

The meeting ended at 9. 50 pm.

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