

Osney Island Residents' Association AGM

23 April 2018

Minutes

Present: 23 residents

Apologies were received from the following: Susan Hutchinson, Suzanne Jeffrey, Gareth Strange and Sarah Jane Williams.

1. Minutes of the 2017 AGM

Acting Chair Stephen Lynam explained that although the OIRA Committee approved the minutes, only the draft minutes were uploaded onto the website. The AGM accepted the minutes as true and accurate, with the remark that the lock keeper's name was Mark Winks (and not Wicks).

2. Report from the British Transport Police

They deal with all incidents that happen at or around the railway station as well as on the railway lines, such as: trespassing on the lines; graffiti; noise; congregation in dark places, and also with incidents on the train. How to contact them (not via 999):

phone: 0800 40 50 40

text: 61016

website: btp.police.uk

3. Report from the Thames Valley Police

Main issue in the area is drug activity, which has historically been a problem in the city. An explanation was given of 'county drug lines': these are organised crime groups based in big cities such as London or Birmingham. They peddle drugs in smaller cities through the exploitation of vulnerable people. The dealer would give them money and send them on the train to cities such as Oxford to sell it and repay their debt to the dealer.

The police's Stronghold campaign aims to reduce drug-dealing through engagement with local communities, installation of CCTV cameras and better lighting, as well as the deployment of plain-clothes officers in the city. They also work in partnership with the City Council and other partners. Recently they completed a project in cooperation with the St Frideswide Church: they planted shrubs in front of the bridge arches to act as a fence in order to stop drug users getting under the bridge.

In the summer they carry out several joint projects with the Council and Waterways. For instance, they patrol the Thames and the riverbanks from boats and look at unlicensed boats. It was mentioned in particular that the boat Acanthus had been monitored for some time, after which officers boarded the boat and found a large amount of drugs. The owner was taken off the boat.

Neighbourhood teams have sadly got smaller.

The officer encouraged everyone to report incidents (not emergencies) on 101.

Answering a question about speeding in Bridge Street, the officer stressed that should it become a problem, the relevant people at the police could be contacted. It was suggested by some Bridge Street residents that the signage permitting a maximum of 30mph is difficult to see as it is too high up, and Cllr Susanna Pressel suggested it could be lowered so that drivers would notice it.

4. Chair's Report

SL reminded the AGM participants that although he had been elected Chair at the last AGM, this was on the basis that the post would be shared with other Committee members throughout the year. The Report was meant to be given by Suzanne Jeffrey but unfortunately due to a family bereavement, Suzanne had asked to be excused from the duty and SL had offered to deliver it instead.

Newsletter

The Newsletter had been produced six times last year. Many thanks to Elizabeth Newberry for continuing to produce such a high-quality publication. There are residents who either do not have internet access or do not wish to join the residents' e-mail list, and for that and other reasons (it is still an excellent publication), we will continue to prepare and deliver the Newsletter in traditional paper form. And where an issue arises of such importance and urgency that it needs immediate communication, we will still resort to a mail drop to residents.

E-mail list and website

The Osira e-mail list continues to grow from strength to strength. Thanks to all the members of the community who demonstrate time and time again their civic mindedness and creativity. We are very fortunate to have so many people who have not only the knowledge and ability but the desire to help the community. Thanks especially to Robert Lawrence for his great work in moderating the list. In the view of the Committee, its usefulness means that we need to rethink our role. We would welcome any thoughts that residents might have.

Thanks to Jane Buekett, our webmaster, who has greatly improved the functionality of our website.

OIRA Committee

The OIRA's Committee met 6 times. Meetings were mainly at Maureen Ergeneli's home. All residents are welcome to attend but we would appreciate advance notice if someone wants to come along to raise an issue.

Please join the OIRA Committee! We need new members. Joining the committee as a non-officer is not onerous, often fun and invariably interesting.

Social events

Two social events were held between the last AGM and this. Open Gardens was held on 21 May last year and was very successful. As Julia will report, it was very successful financially. We had planned an additional event, a 'Midsummer Brunch on the Towpath' but decided not to hold it as the date was very close to the Botley Picnic held as part of the 'Great Get Together' social events to celebrate the life of the late MP Jo Cox. We did though hold the usual 'Tea Light on the Tow Path' event just before Christmas and this was we believe a great success in spite of the miserable weather.

We plan a somewhat scaled-down version of 'Open Gardens' this year partly at the request of resident artists who are taking part in Arts Week. Thanks again to Anna Truelove for agreeing to take on Open Gardens. And to Suzanne Jeffrey for agreeing to take on the organising responsibility for the tea and cakes.

Local concerns

There have been a number of issues which have concerned residents this year. There was some minor vandalism last summer and an increase in unsightly graffiti. There have unfortunately been a number of incidents involving drug dealing on the Island and in respect of at least some of these, some boats (two in particular) seem to have been involved. We have recently seen less of the two boats concerned but this has not stopped the dealing. We have raised with the police and with Councillor Susanna Pressel.

A particularly important issue for us has been the current Council policy on HMOs and specifically the rule that restricts the number of HMOs in a given area to a maximum of 20 per cent. OIRA does not in general involve itself in issues relating to housing policy because we believe that we only represent residents where there is a wide consensus of views. However, we did involve ourselves in the question of 8 West Street and the attempt to obtain planning permission for 7 residents in what is a small house. We think that expanding very high density occupation in a place such as the Island needs to be resisted. Although the particular battle may have been won (it is too early to say) it was disappointing to find that Councils are severely constrained in what they can do to resist over-density of occupation, and we await

the next steps. From our point of view what was gratifying, however, was to note the way that the e-mail list has helped residents to share views and co-ordinate responses.

It was disappointing to find out recently that the saga of the Hollybush may continue for a while yet, to the detriment of the Island as a whole but especially to those who are its near neighbours.

Thanks

Thanks to all the cake bakers, tea makers, litter pickers, newsletter contributors, people who fill in questionnaires, people who will open up their gardens this year, those who walk the streets in the snow to deliver newsletters and flyers, and everyone else who helps make the residents association work. OIRA would like to give special thanks to Susan Hutchinson for running the West Oxford Academy. And a special additional mention for Susanna Pressel – our city and county councillor comes to all our committee meetings, keeps us in touch with wider matters which impact on the Island, and is a tireless advocate on behalf of the residents.

5. Treasurer's report (attached)

After circulating the report, Treasurer Jula Turner informed the AGM that OIRA can and are happy to fund initiatives. Residents were invited to suggest ideas that they would like to see done on the island.

SL mentioned that the grit bins at the bottom of East Street needed to be filled.

6. Election of Committee Members

Stephen Lynam explained that no one had put themselves forward to stand as Chair, therefore the post would need to be filled on a rotating basis. The Constitution requires the AGM to elect a named person as Chair and Secretary, but the Committee is then able to appoint these in between AGMs.

Elizabeth Newbery has agreed to stand as Chair with the understanding that she will step down after the first OIRA Cttee and thereafter the post will be filled on a rotating basis. The attendees were in agreement and EN was appointed as Chair under the above terms.

A similar arrangement will be in place for the Secretary, Stephen Lynam.

Jula Turner will continue as treasurer.

Veronika Haacker-Lukacs will continue as note-taker.

All existing members will be staying on and no new members have put themselves forward.

Members of the OIRA Committee were agreed as follows.

Joyce Chalmers

Maureen Ergeneli

Veronika Haacker-Lukacs

Suzanne Jeffrey

Bob Lawrence

Stephen Lynam

Elizabeth Newbery

Karen Schoenemann

Gareth Strange

Anna Truelove

Jula Turner

7. Report from Jo Emberson-Wines, Manager of the Environmental Agency's Osney Depot

As part of her introduction, JEW mentioned that the depot is responsible for the stretch between Cirencester and Reading. There they manage all flooding and pollution, help out at accidents and are responsible for all structures such as locks and weirs.

JEW stressed that she would be happy to show residents around and/or have their meeting room made available for OIRA meetings.

JEW was aware of the speeding problem along Bridge Street and she emphasised that the Depot is very keen to be good neighbours to residents. Therefore EA badged cars are all fitted with a telemeter and GPS, through which their speed and whereabouts can be tracked. Contractors have also been spoken to and are monitored. The only cars they cannot monitor are deliveries.

Responding to a question, JEW said that they were aware of the missing bit in the white log along the riverbank near Botley Bridge but a water based crane is needed for its repair, which has so far been prioritised elsewhere.

Regarding dredging, JEW said that historically the Thames had been dredged for navigation reasons. The last time the river was dredged was in 2015 and then only to a small extent for recreational purposes. The river is not routinely dredged because the process has negligible flooding risks.

Asked whether the depot was being threatened by the University's plans to develop Osney Mead, JEW answered that they, similarly to the rest of Osney residents, did not know what exactly would happen.

8. Barbara Hammond, Osney Lock Hydro

Osney Lock Hydro and renewable energy

A survey in 2001 showed that Osney Island residents were concerned about climate change and wanted renewable energy.

Osney Lock Hydro produced 65% of the energy forecast during the last financial year. The reason: not enough rain. During an average year, Osney Lock Hydro produces enough energy to supply 60 households. As yet it is not possible, however, to purchase energy directly from the Hydro. The Environment Agency uses as much as possible, for which they pay. The rest is sold to an energy supplier, Summertown-based OPUS Energy.

There has been strong interest from Osney Islanders to buy directly from the Hydro, and a system to make that possible is currently being considered by a not-for-profit organisation, Energy Local. It is hoped that a number of households (the Energy Local Club) will be recruited which will then switch to Coop Gas and use local gas through them. A smart meter would show how much local energy is being used and that amount could be bought directly from the Hydro at a reduced price compared to other energy suppliers. BH mentioned that approximately 50 households would be needed. The generated income would then be turned back into the community. A sign-up sheet was circulated to gauge interest.

Osney Lock Hydro Island plans

Osney Lock Hydro Island is being leased from the EA for 40 years. (JEW said that the rent from the Hydro goes into a water environment project fund. At the end of the year she could, if residents were interested, circulate what sort of projects are thus funded.) Ideally, the Osney Lock Hydro Island should be transformed into a public park. Right now, only guided tours are allowed in due to health and safety issues. BH and team have applied for community benefit funding in order to turn the place into a park. BH said that the community garden idea put forward by Veronica Strang (see below) would fit their plans very well.

Osney Lock Hydro being a community benefit society, they have to serve the interests of the local community. BH would welcome help with writing funding applications so that they could serve the community better.

Questions

1. If Osney Lock Hydro Island becomes a public park, the houses adjacent the area will be exposed. Does the Hydro have a solution?

Balustrades would ensure those gardens would not be overlooked.

2. Does the Hydro affect flooding?

Scenario tests have been carried out and confirmed that the Hydro does not cause floods.

3. Would an Osney Lock Hydro Island walk be possible for Osney Island residents?
Absolutely. It could be set up via the Google group.

4. It would be useful to put up some information panels to explain how the Hydro works. Is this planned?

As they are short on money and manpower, this could only happen after the landscaping work is completed to ensure the site is safe for visitors.

5. When will they start selling energy to local households?

They will soon be starting to recruit households so that they can be ready for next winter.

9. AOB: Community Gardens by Veronica Strang

VS asked whether residents would like to (re)start a community gardening initiative. It was agreed that she would circulate a set of ideas and see what people will find interesting.

10. Post-AGM note added at OIRA Committee meeting, 7 May 2018

Treasurer Jula Turner: subscription rates will stay the same as in 2016/2017.

Notes by Veronika Haacker-Lukacs
6 May 2018