



The Farnham Society

76th Annual General Meeting

Chairman's Report

You will shortly be able to read the comments and reports from the committees and you will see that we continue to be active although prevented by lack of extra hands to expand on our many ideas. However, despite this restriction your stalwart committee members have maintained a proactive approach to all matters affecting the welfare of Farnham. It is therefore a delight to welcome Colin Jordan to the Executive Committee and he has taken up the role of Membership Secretary. We would still welcome more support which would enable us to make progress with projects currently on hold.

One of the ideas we chose to explore was that Farnham justified having a quality town beacon. Many towns with similar historical background to Farnham have town beacons, often close to ancient buildings and it was felt that a beacon in Farnham Park would also serve the community well. Unfortunately, after months of negotiations it was deemed that the potential disturbance of the archaeology of Farnham Park was too much of a threat. This does not appear to have caused difficulties elsewhere and it does seem to be a lost opportunity to provide a gathering point for the community on the few public occasions when a beacon justifies lighting. The discussions did reveal that Farnham Park is under the management of Waverley and the thought did form that rather like Gostrey Meadows, this asset should also be returned to the care of Farnham Town Council.

The Farnham Infrastructure Programme plods on with the hope that all this consultative time will ultimately result in an improved town centre. We continue to press for a two-way system on Woolmead Road which would enable East Street to be partially pedestrianised. It seems the only hope to meet the original objective to at least partially pedestrianise the centre of Farnham. The hope that a relief road from the top of Castle Street to the Upper Hart Car Park seems to have foundered on the altar of cost.

Following the unacceptable standard of work undertaken by Crest Nicholson on Brightwell House, it remains uncertain what is happening to enforce the original planning permission. It was understood that Waverley were undertaking enforcement procedures but then issued a public statement which appeared to alter our understanding of what had been agreed. A confirmation of the actual enforcement detail is awaited.

Whilst it may be irritating there is every incentive for developers with planning permission and deep pockets, not proceeding with real construction but to wait for land values to increase and the enhanced profit for the future. Who can blame them, after all they are in the business of satisfying shareholders and not the local community? However, surely the time has come for construction work to commence on the Woolmead site?

Shaping our future, protecting our heritage

Our Planning Committee, chaired by Yolande Hesse continues to cope with many planning applications with clear evidence of the increasing pressure from developers who are aware of areas which lack full protection and exploit any chink in the planning regulations. Even when areas are protected developers are still making applications in the hope that an Appeal Inspectorate will overrule a local decision to refuse permission. Again more support would be helpful and if you have any architectural, heritage or town planning knowledge then your help would be welcome.

Our investigation into the creation of an additional conservation area in the St. James area of Farnham continues and is currently at a stage where local opinions and hopefully support, is being canvassed. The recent local election has altered the structure of various committees and we are awaiting news on the composition of The Farnham Conservation Area Task Group. We have hope that recent experience indicates that this committee will be active in imposing a greater level of care for these important areas.

After last year's successful event, our Heritage Open Days Committee under the leadership of Sue Farrow is again at full throttle planning meticulously for this year's event which will be taking place in September. It was a loss to lose the active involvement of Peter Bridgeman who had been a valued member for many years. We are grateful for his hard work and his willingness to lead many innovative ideas. Providing additional support we are pleased to welcome Alex Lentz and David Clough.

We were all saddened to learn of the death of Celia Sandars. Celia, who with her husband Richard, David Wylde, Councillors Andy Macleod and John Williamson lent their names to the legal action attempting to prevent the development of Brightwells Yard. It should be remembered that at the time there was no certainty of financial support and yet they accepted that risk. For that alone Celia should be remembered but her involvement in all matters Farnham were much more extensive. We owe her much and we have all lost someone special. Our sympathy and regret for this loss is extended to Richard and his family.

After almost 14 years and several attempts to find a successor, I have decided that the time is appropriate for me step down as Chairman. I am pleased to say that Richard Hunt has agreed to take on those responsibilities and will be offering himself for election at the AGM. I am sure that the future of the Society will be safe in his hands and he comes with the full backing of the Executive Committee. It has been proposed that I should become a Vice President alongside Michael Blower, which in itself is a privilege and which I would be delighted to accept.

To have been Chairman of the Society is a distinct honour but I had no conception of the future pleasures and stimulating experiences and most of all, forming friendship and acquaintances with so many wonderful people. This adventure has been dramatic and has been a fascinating period in my life. To everyone I have met and worked with, thank you for your support and encouragement. I am particularly grateful to the past and present members of the Executive Committee whose tolerance, understanding, encouragement and support have made my path smooth even when dealing with some difficult situations.

I hope I will be able to continue an active involvement and assist in keeping a watchful eye on our historic and beautiful town.

Alan Gavaghan.

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