**Minutes of Oxted and Limpsfield Residents Group (OLRG) AGM 19th October 2021**

**Introduction: u**pdate on the position of OLRG Councillors at Tandridge District Council. The first elections for two years were held in May 2021 when Jackie Wren was re-elected for the Oxted North and Tandridge Ward with a very large vote and turnout and Deb Shiner was elected for Oxted South Ward also with a large vote and turnout.

There were two more linked Independents elected – one in Godstone and one in Burstow, Horne and Outwood. That gave us 16 Councillors (8 OLRG and 8 Independents) and so we became the largest group on the Council and took over as the administration from the Conservatives with Catherine Sayer becoming the Council leader. It is a minority administration (22 Councillors are needed for overall control) and so we must work together with the other groups and need to take things forward by consensus.

We have inherited some very difficult problems from the previous administration, especially the Council’s poor financial position and the Local Plan.

Jackie Wren thanked all the residents who had supported her. She is now the deputy chairman of the Council (and will be chair next year). She also chairs the Community Services Committee which she’s been on since first elected in 2016 and which covers areas of the Council’s work she feels very connected with.

She was pleased that the early problems there had been with the new Biffa contract had been sorted out and that additional staff had been trained. There was a new open space strategy aimed at ensuring parks and open spaces in Tandridge are kept in good condition, safe for all to enjoy and inclusive to all residents regardless of their mobility or other factors. She was also very pleased to have kept a dog warden service in place for Tandridge.

She was disappointed that Surrey County Council, supported by OLRG and many residents, had lost the appeal by developers Oxted Residential Ltd against the adoption of three footpaths across Chichele field. She thanked Peter Giles for all the tireless work he had done on the matter.

Chris Langton talked about some of the initiatives happening in Oxted South. Improving the safety of pedestrians on Wolfs Hill was crucial if a serious accident was to be avoided in the future. Hurst Green had expanded significantly over the years and it needed improved infrastructure to support it, including improvements to this road. Thanks to the contribution made by Oxted Parish Council, a Vehicle Activated Sign will be installed but a permanent method of making the road safe is needed. Surrey County Council had ruled out widening the road and Chris was now pursuing a different option to create a footpath along the side of the road. SCC had raised difficulties even with this but he is taking the matter further. He said he was extremely frustrated about it because the risk to pedestrians was high.

He is also pursuing health provision for Hurst Green. The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) wanted evidence of need and so Chris had drafted a survey for CCG to comment on. Then came COVID and when he followed things up eight months later, was told by the CCG that the survey wasn’t relevant any more because of changes to health services in East Surrey. He has now called a meeting for 9 November to try to put pressure on again because there is clearly a need.

Anti-social behaviour: the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey, and her deputy, are coming to Hurst Green on Thursday 4 November - 7pm at Hurst Green Community Centre. Chris has arranged for residents to speak first about their concerns and then for the police to respond.

Claire Blackwell and Phil Davies, our two Limpsfield Councillors, talked about recent applications for large mobile phone masts in inappropriate locations which residents were very concerned about - one on Ridlands Lane by the Peter Rabbit woods and one on the corner of Ballards Lane right by the edge of the A25. These were particularly prominent and huge, at least 20 metres high, one with 12 antennae and 7 cabinets, and one abutting residents’ gardens and by a grade 2 listed building. They were delighted that the Council refused the applications and are keeping an eye out for others proposed for inappropriate places.

Phil said that because there is a need for the masts they thought it would be a good idea to talk to the applicants to try and find some places where they can go where they would be acceptable. Limpsfield Parish Council is now dealing with that. He said it was an issue that had to be looked at in a structured way because where one mast goes, others would follow on in the same area to provide the coverage needed.

David Stamp talked about how as a Councillor he had been involved in distributing the COVID grants to businesses. By 2021 most businesses had partially reopened but still had staff furloughed and the Government introduced the re-start grant aimed at helping businesses get back to full capacity. Initially, there was not much take up and the Council asked Councillors to encourage businesses to apply for the grant. By the end of June all the grant money had been allocated to local businesses.

He also outlined his role as chair of the Licensing Committee which has been busier than usual this year due to a combination of more temporary events being held and more objections from the police.

Catherine Sayer gave an update on the Local Plan. The latest is that the Planning Inspector has said he’s minded to ask the Council to withdraw the Plan. The Inspector was responding to a letter from TDC explaining that there would be a further delay to the traffic modelling for junction 6 of the M25. Because of the delay, we as the administration had proposed an alternative option of shortening the Plan period which potentially removes the option of the South Godstone garden village which has proved such a sticking point because of pressure on junction 6 and other roads. We put forward the alternative option to try to salvage some of the work and to put a sound Plan in place.

It has always been our greatest worry that the Plan would be rejected which could lead to speculative applications on the Green Belt and uncontrolled ad hoc development.  It’s disappointing that the Inspector has not accepted the alternative option but he has still left the door a bit ajar so we are considering what else we can do. The Council has spent more than £3 million pounds on the current Plan and it does not have the money to start a new Plan.

The Council has considerable financial problems. In June, a gap in the budget of £920,500 was discovered and accountancy specialists Grant Thornton were asked to investigate. They found the gap was due to an error over pension costs made during budget setting in February 2020. They also found that one of our Independent Councillors, Kevin Bourne, had correctly spotted the mistake at the time – but no notice was taken of him. Having now become the administration, we are trying to deal with the financial problems and set a balanced budget for next year.

The Oxted crematorium had been allowed at appeal after TDC refused it. There is currently a planning application being considered for flats on the old Skinners coaches site in Barrow Green Road.

There is a proposal for CCTV to combat crime and anti-social behaviour in Oxted and Hurst Green. It’s a joint project by Oxted Parish Council, Tandridge District Council, Oxted BID and the Master Park Trustees. But it all hinges on whether the Parish Council is able to provide the bulk of the funding which hasn’t been decided yet.

Peter Giles, chairman of Oxted Parish Council, said they were working with the police on the CCTV project and are carrying out a feasibility study. As part of that, demonstration cameras had been trialled last week outside the station and outside Boots. The cost of the system hadn’t yet been finalised.

Peter outlined the work of the PC including ownership and maintenance of the burial ground in Oxted (cutting the grass and hedges costs £21,000 a year), making grants to local organisations, a road works project in Wolfs Wood, and it was supporting the new Master Park Pavilion project, the Barn Theatre’s project to improve the entrance, improving equipment at Barnetts Shaw playground and revamping the Master Park roundabout. It was also looking at a project at the Hurst Green Community Centre.

Usually the PC has £50,000 a year to spend but had more at the minute because of its share of the Community Infrastructure levy money from the gasholder development – as a result it was much in demand!

Surrey County Council has started a project to produce an updated local heritage asset list for the District. Assets on local heritage lists, also known as local listing, can be afforded protection through the planning system as ‘non-designated heritage assets’. If you want to nominate anything, contact OLRG and we will send details of how to do it.

Treasurer’s report**:** Jon Lenihan said it had been a relatively quiet year on the financial front for OLRG and it was in a solid financial position. There are no immediate spending plans, if there is something major on the horizon we can look to have an appeal for funds then. We would like to thank all members who have made donations.

Election of officers: the current committee all agreed to stand for another term. No one else was nominated and the existing members were proposed and seconded and voted in unanimously.

**Questions:**

What was happening with the restoration of the Oxted Sandpit which has been awaited for a number of years. There was no new information about when that might take place or why there had been such a long delay.

Chalkpit Quarry is preparing a new application for housing on the site and will be holding a public consultation on the scheme but the date of that isn’t known yet.

How much money had Oxted PC committed to the Barn Theatre appeal for funds to which the answer was £25,000.

Anti-social behaviour/drug dealing: there are regular meetings with the Police Community Support Officers and a WhatsApp group between them and various Neighbourhood Watches which meant intelligence could be passed on more easily. Recently, two cars had been confiscated and a moped with false plates involved in drug dealing.

The lack of footpath access from North Oxted to the North Downs Way. There is only a short section of footpath in Chalkpit Lane, can this be increased by using land at the side of the road. It was agreed it would be worth investigating but concern was expressed that some of the land is privately owned and may not be available.

Can OLRG put forward a candidate for Surrey County Council. There will not be another SCC election for several years.

The entrance to the St William flats should be 2-way from Station Road East. Is there any possibility that the Carpetright building may be knocked down to enable this. The answer to this was thought to be no.

What was likely to happen with Council Tax in the future given the financial pressures. There is a limit on how much a Council can raise its tax without a referendum. There was discussion of County Deals, unitary authorities, shared services, levelling up and the demands on finances of social care.

What is happening with the Grasshopper pub on the A25. There is a planning application in at the minute which TDC is considering.

How do you donate to the Master Park Pavilion project. A new brochure has just been produced by the Trustees so best to contact them.

**Meeting closed at 8.14pm**