

**Normandy Action Group (NAG) Annual General Meeting
29 October 2024 at 2000 in Normandy Village Hall
Draft Minutes**

Present: Mike Aaronson (in the Chair), David Bilbé, Simon Schofield, Paul Hart (NAG Treasurer), Martin Sweeting, Les Asher, Mike Dean, Roshan Bailey, Nicky Armstrong (part), Rory Armstrong (part).

Apologies: Nick Norton, Keith Witham, Dina Ahmed.

1. Mike Aaronson, Chair of the NAG Steering Committee, opened the meeting and welcomed those present. He thanked Roshan Bailey, Chair of Trustees of Normandy Village Hall, for the Trustees' generosity in making the Hall available to NAG at no cost, and thanked Guildford Borough Councillor (GBC) and Planning Committee member David Bilbé, and Councillor Simon Schofield, Chair of Normandy Parish Council (NPC) Planning Committee, for attending. All those present introduced themselves to the meeting.
2. The Chair had posted the draft Minutes of the 2023 AGM on the NAG website after that AGM, and said he hoped they could be taken as read; they were duly approved. Under Matters Arising he reported that he had written to NPC Councillor Bob Hutton about possible NPC membership of the Guildford Residents' Association (GRA); Councillor Schofield informed the meeting that after due consideration NPC had decided not to join the Association. A further matter arising concerned the future funding of NAG, which was on the agenda of this meeting.
3. The Chair spoke to his Annual Report, and apologised that he had not been able to post this in advance of the AGM, along with the meeting agenda, on the NAG website as he had done in previous years. The Report dealt with changes in the external context for planning, both nationally and locally, particularly in the light of the new Government's avowed commitment to build more houses and, as a means to this end, to reform the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF). The proposed NPPF changes signalled a significant increase in housing targets for Guildford Borough, as well as an easing of Green Belt restrictions, and the implications of this would be discussed later in the meeting.
4. The Report also gave an update on the Surrey Hills AONB (now National Landscape) review, and in this context reported that GBC's Planning Committee was due to decide at its meeting on 6 November the outcome of the application to build a proposed solar farm on Green Belt/proposed National Landscape land to the west of Guildford. It also gave an account of NAG activities during the year, including some very encouraging statistics regarding an increased number of visits to the NAG website. It described areas where impact had been achieved, notably the serving of an Article 4 Direction by GBC on the fields to the West of Bailes Lane. Finally, it described NAG's links with other bodies with shared interests, notably the GRA, and the Community Planning Alliance (CPA).

5. Discussion centred on the potential impact of increased housing targets for Guildford Borough and what action NAG might need to take, in conjunction with NPC, as when a major housing development had been proposed for the open fields between Normandy and Flexford as part of the Local Plan process. Councillor Bilbé emphasised that the local community would need to remain vigilant on this score. Councillor Schofield reported that NPC was seeing an increased number of applications for Certificates of Lawfulness of Existing Use or Development (CLEUD) in the Green Belt, evidence that the Green Belt was already under pressure. All acknowledged the regrettable under-resourcing of Planning Enforcement at GBC, which led to long delays in addressing potential or actual breaches of the regulations, including some obvious ones in Normandy and Wanborough. All equally acknowledged that new houses were desperately needed, and that those of us fortunate enough to live in the countryside needed to be mindful of the pressures created by the housing shortage nationally.
6. The meeting heard about a potentially concerning situation regarding the capacity of the existing waste drainage infrastructure in Normandy. Thames Water were understood to have carried out a survey that suggested the present system was close to breaking point and that, unless significant improvements to infrastructure were undertaken, future housebuilding on any scale risked the collapse of this system. The importance of getting this information into the public domain so that it could be properly considered and the implications assessed, was agreed, and Councillor Schofield undertook to try to have this discussed at the next meeting of the Normandy Flood Forum.
7. The Treasurer presented his report. The key point was that, assuming similar activities in 2024 as in 2023, NAG was fully funded through only to July 2025. As of 29 October 2024, the balance of funds stood at £54.30. Projected expenditure for the coming year based on the current year's costs amounted to £122.26 (GRA subscription £15; NAG Domain Name Renewal £21.58; NAG website hosting £85.68). Therefore, without an injection of funds, NAG would not be able to continue to provide information to members and community throughout 2025. This was a nearly identical position the organisation had faced at the 2022 AGM, when the decision had been taken to apply for a small grant of £100 from each of NPC and Surrey County Council (SCC). This year's position had therefore been anticipated, and the need for a discussion in 2024 had been flagged at the 2023 AGM. The obvious options were: ask the community for individual donations or reintroduce a membership subscription; seek further grant funding from NPC and SCC; shutter the NAG website and rely solely on email communication with the community.
8. In discussion, confidence was expressed by Councillor Bilbé and others that, should it be necessary, the local community would provide financial support to the work of NAG as they had done in the past. But, as per the discussion at previous AGMs, it was felt that it was better to reserve this for when a major fundraising effort was required to address a specific issue – for example if the threat of a major housebuilding development in Normandy resurfaced. In the absence of this there was no enthusiasm for asking for donations or a subscription, which would be administratively costly and which might dim people's appetite to provide further support when it was really needed. Nor was it considered sensible to close the website and thereby deprive the public of what had become a valuable resource on planning matters, as borne out by the statistics.

9. It was therefore decided that the sensible course of action was to approach NPC and SCC for further small grants to support the continuing work of NAG. These might be rather more than the £100 granted in the past, given inflation; it was agreed that the Chair and the Treasurer would look into this and tailor the amount as necessary to secure a further two years of operation. **Action: Chair to approach NPC and SCC; Chair and Treasurer to establish appropriate amount of funding requested and submit applications for funding.**
10. Under Any Other Business, the attention of the meeting was drawn to the recent change of ownership of the land to the immediate west of the Bailes Lane Article 4 area, and the extensive ground clearance and other activities taking place on the site. The meeting agreed that further Article 4 protection might be needed for this sensitive site, and were glad to hear that GBC were aware of the issue and committed to investigating. Just as NAG had, with NPC, helped to mobilise public support for the Bailes Lane Article 4, so it might be necessary to become involved again regarding this site.
11. All members of the existing Steering Group had indicated their willingness to stand again. The meeting unanimously re-elected Mike Aaronson (Chair), Paul Hart (Treasurer), Dina Ahmed, Les Asher, Mike Dean, Nick Norton, and Martin Sweeting, to serve for a further year on the Group. Roshan Bailey proposed a vote of thanks to the Steering Group for their hard work during the year in making sure local residents were informed about relevant planning matters.
12. The meeting closed at 2140.

Mike Aaronson (Chair of the Meeting)
31 October 2024