

OXFORD GREEN BELT NETWORK

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Beckley village hall at 7.30pm on Friday 4th November 2011

Present: Ian Scargill (in the Chair), four other members of the Steering Committee, local council representatives and members of the public.

Apologies for absence were received from Heather Palmer (webmaster), Jacquie Martinez and Jane Baldwin (OPT), Maggie Stoppard (S.Hinksey PC), Helena Whall (CPRE).

Minutes of the 2010 AGM were approved. There were no matters arising.

Hon Treasurer's Report and Accounts for the year to 30th September 2011: Michael Tyce presented the accounts, a copy of which is attached to these Minutes. A balance of £2,518.60 was reported. At the suggestion of the Hon Treasurer it was agreed to maintain the annual subscription at £15 for the coming year.

Election of Steering Committee: Introducing this item, the Chairman paid tribute to the work of Dr Clive Briffett who had died suddenly on 29th October. Clive had been a member of the Committee for seven years, representing South Hinksey, and during that time made a very positive contribution to OGBN, particularly in his own field of ecology and natural history. Amongst his many achievements had been a very fine parish plan for South Hinksey and, according to the Chairman of the Parish, "his enthusiasm and energy getting things done are legend." He will be greatly missed by the many organizations to which he belonged.

No new nominations having been received, the following were re-elected to serve on the Steering Committee: Joe Adams (Kidlington), Elizabeth Gillespie (Baldons), Christopher Gowers (Wolvercote), Martin Harris (Horspath), Jacquie Martinez (OPT), Gill Oliver (Oxford), Gillian Salway (CPRE), Ian Scargill (Oxford, Chairman), Liz Shatford (Sandford-on-Thames), Henry Towers (Stanton St John), Michael Tyce (Waterstock, Hon Treasurer), Paul Wooldridge (Sunningwell).

Chairman's Annual Report: The Chairman presented a report on the activities of the Oxford Green Belt Network over the past year. A copy of the report is attached to these Minutes and is also available on the website (www.oxfordgreenbelt.net).

In the course of discussion attention was drawn to the expected delay in publication of the Chiltern Railways inquiry report. The problems of Thornhill park and ride were noted, and the likely use of Woodeaton quarry in connection with the removal of inert waste from the Barton West development.

Michael Tyce, who was representing OGBN at the EIP into the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy, gave a report on progress of the inquiry to date. Attention was drawn to pressure from certain quarters to reinstate the South of Oxford development Area, and to the provisional decision of the inspector to allow for taking Berinsfield out of the Green Belt, but not to allow the proposed extension of the inset area of Wheatley.

The National Planning Policy Framework: Discussion of this government document and its

implications for the Green Belt was led by a panel of Committee members: Elizabeth Gillespie, Martin Harris, Gill Oliver, Ian Scargill and Michael Tyce. The following observations were made in the course of the discussion:

The document is a highly abbreviated version of existing planning guidance documents and its layout poor. Nuances in the existing documentation are lost.

Reference to sustainable development will encourage developers to argue that all their proposals are sustainable, creating legal uncertainties.

Local authorities will be reluctant to spend money defending issues.

Contrary to what government says, it is likely that many parish councils will not have the resources or expertise to draw up neighbourhood plans. Exceptions might be where existing parish plans can be converted to neighbourhood plans.

If neighbourhood plans do not exist there is a danger that developers will step in to fill the gap, e.g. there might be tempting offers to build a new village hall subject to consent to other matters.

The 50% needed for approval in a local referendum has not been clearly defined.

It has always been difficult to get local people to say where development should take place because such a matter can be very divisive in a village, upsetting neighbours.

It is unclear where the presumption in favour of sustainable development stands in relation to other policies. Where, for example, does it fit in with the present plan-led system?

Oxford City thinks of sustainability in terms of expansion over nearby villages.

The inspector at the SODC inquiry has to consider the NPPF but it is unclear how much weight is attached to it.

The NPPF does not put brownfield first, so greenfield sites are more vulnerable.

A weakness of NPPF is that it omits to say that quality of the land is not an issue so far as Green Belt policy is concerned.

The document encourages the removal from the Green Belt of villages that do not contribute to openness.

Villages are of very different shapes and the drawing of boundaries round them is a problem. A boundary also carries the danger of encouraging building up to the boundary line.

The provision in the NPPF for a Community Right to Build is a further threat.

Although the consultation ended in mid-October, there is still scope for keeping up the pressure.

The Green Belt is a popular concept with the public, so continuing publicity and pressure is worthwhile.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.30pm with thanks to Mary Scargill, for providing the refreshments.