

Committee members

PRESENT: Chair: Lyn Anthony-Higgins (LA)
Committee: Sue Feather (SF: Secretary – attended via Zoom),
Carole Kingston (CK: Treasurer), Adnan Chaudry (AC),
Jennifer Hooper (JH), Jon Lloyd (JL)

(When referencing the above, first and second name abbreviations will be used throughout)
The meeting was quorate.

1

Apologies for absence/nominations

There were no apologies. LA stated that a nomination to join the Committee had been received from Adnan Chaudry (AC), who complied with the full membership clauses of the DRFA Constitution/Code of Conduct. Members expressed their gratitude to AC for putting himself forward, no objections were raised and he was welcomed to the Committee.

2

Approval of minutes of meeting held on 3rd February 2025

The minutes were approved by all. JL suggested the Committee go through the action points from the previous meeting.

Highway Engineer:

Following the last Committee meeting, LA had circulated the quotes to Committee members. However, the draft letter was still on hold as it hadn't been decided whether a road survey would be necessary, so she had not submitted the survey quotes as yet. LA felt the survey would be useful to inform any traffic-calming measures on the road. It was decided to follow up on this after the AGM.

Streetlamps update:

This would be covered in item 4.

GDPR:

Suggested wording for the GDPR policy had been circulated since the last meeting, but final wording had yet to be confirmed. It was agreed that this would be actioned and uploaded to the website when ready.

Action: Finalise GDPR policy and add to website.

3

Treasurer's Financial Report 2024–25

CK introduced the Treasurer's report. She was asked for the total number of contributions for the year and replied this would be confirmed after the meeting. She had recently received one payment with no address details given, and was still in the process of trying to identify the payee. It was noted that interest rates had reduced since last year, which would reduce the income for this year a little.

SF asked for clarification with regard to voting. She thought it would be useful to have a comparison between how many households had contributed and how many of those had voted in recent votes. SF said she was concerned because the policy of a previous committee when holding a vote had been to treat a household that did not vote as being in favour of the proposal in question. JL believed that had only happened once several years ago and would not be allowed to happen again. JL offered his help to CK when collating the information regarding the final number of contributions.

Action: JL to help CK with contribution information.

4

Street lighting columns safety: Draft letter to residents and businesses

LA had sent a revised draft letter (which had more technical information) to Committee members just before the meeting. She wanted to make it as clear as possible the safety grounds on which the current streetlights were no longer fit for purpose and needed replacing. JL said this vote would be slightly different from previous ones as the Committee was not making a recommendation to residents/businesses on an option.

SF felt the draft letter might have over-emphasised the safety aspect. LA felt this was a vital point to make and said that simply buying parts wouldn't satisfy the regulations, as the issue of wiring and the underground infrastructure condition would also need to be addressed to ensure it was all safe.

JL said that now the issue had come to light, the Committee was obliged on health and safety grounds to rectify the situation, as otherwise it would not be covered by insurance in the event of an incident. CK also noted the safety warning from Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) following their inspection in 2024, which obliged the Committee to act. LA confirmed it was SSEN who were the Distributors in this field and, as such, their advice had to be followed.

SF noted there was a difference in lead-in times between the two options and whether that would be an issue. LA said this was likely due to supply issues and it was up to the residents and businesses. SF asked what would happen if not enough votes were cast. LA said the insurance covering the fund would fail, but felt it was not worth getting into hypotheticals for now. LA noted that the quotes could increase if the decision on how to proceed took too long, hence the need to present residents/businesses with the options now.

LA said that using Reading Borough Council as sub-contractor meant they would charge a fee as they would take on the responsibility for ensuring that all works are completed to the necessary regulations and the Council would be dealing with their street lighting contractors direct. She said doing so would provide the Fund with a level of security as the Council had extensive experience in this area.

JL asked whether there would be a difference in future maintenance costs between the two streetlamp options. LA said it would depend on the nature of the maintenance. LA was aware that the chief concern of some residents would be about retaining the heritage element in the aesthetics. However, it was noted that at present, there was no consistency of style for streetlamps on the road, with a range of modern styles in place alongside the original style. JL asked if both options were the same height and LA confirmed this.

LA said there might be an issue with the one streetlight that was located on a driveway, but that she had been told that the cost of moving any of the lights would be prohibitive.

Action: Voting letter to residents regarding lampstand works with options to be approved and sent out.

5

Arrangements for 2025 AGM

Committee membership:

Following the procedure given in clause 4.11 of the DRFA Constitution, as they had reached their tenure of four years on the Committee, CK, JL and LA confirmed to the meeting they would be prepared to stay on the Committee for another year. This was considered and unanimously approved by Committee members. It was noted that recruiting new members had been an issue stretching back many years.

JL mentioned that although it had been unanimously agreed by Committee members at the May 2024 meeting, he wondered whether it should be written into the Code of Conduct that Committee members would act as the sole representative for their household re submitting questions or agenda items to Committee meetings or AGMs in line with the one vote/one voice per household principle in the Constitution. The rest of the Committee felt that although this had been an issue in previous years, this seemed unlikely to recur with the current Committee membership, so it was agreed this would be left for now.

Recent works:

SF asked if there was going to be any discussion about recent works carried out and an update on the road resurfacing situation. LA said she had considered making a statement on this, as the 2024/25 financial year had been the first with any major expenditure since the Constitution was voted in by residents in 2021. She also said the intention would be to seek updated quotes for the road resurfacing to see if things had changed since the last quote two years ago.

LA wished to emphasise the importance of residents contributing to the Fund, as the recent experience with the streetlights had highlighted that unexpected and potentially costly infrastructure repairs could arise at any time. AC and JL suggested that while this point could be made at the meeting, the next contributions letter might be the best place to do this.

Contribution levels for 2025/26:

SF asked if the contribution level was going to be increased as it had been frozen for four years. AC suggested a modest increase could be based on the Retail Price Index in order to keep pace with rising costs. It was agreed by all to look into this and, if all agreed with the proposed figures, to present these at the AGM for approval.

Action: Change to 2025/26 contribution levels to be researched and, if agreed, to be presented at the AGM for approval.

Meeting ended at 7.45pm