

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE KIG JOINT PARISHES GROUP**

**Held on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2009 at 7.30pm.**

The meeting was chaired by Richard Jacques

Present: Representatives from the parishes of Detling, Thurnham, Broomfield and Kingwood, Sutton Valence, Langley, Lenham, Bearsted, Boxley, Harrietsham.

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from absent group members.

**2. KIG Update.**

Richard Jacques spoke regarding the meetings that he group members had attended on behalf of the JPG, and he asked John Horne and Gavin McLaggan to report on these matters.

John Horne briefed members of the Planning Inquiry Meeting that he attended.

Geoff Licence spoke regarding the revised plans submitted by AXA and asked if these clarified the matters raised by the Highways Agency.

John Horne stated that the details had yet to come forward.

Gavin McLaggan stated that the Inquiry was expected to last 6 – 8 weeks and the Highways Agency was due to have their case heard half way through and it was anticipated that they would have reached an agreement with AXA by this stage.

John Horne stated the next stage would be for the JPG to get its witness list for the Inquiry.

He stated that MBC was due to appoint a Programmes Officer who would then issue the programme for the Inquiry.

He also stated that it was the responsibility of MBC to arrange and finance the venue for the Inquiry.

Patrick Walton asked when the official report from the meeting would be available. John Horne stated that it was anticipated that these would be available the week following the meeting.

David Burton asked if it was the view that the Highways Agency would reach an agreement regarding their concerns – John Horne confirmed that this was the case.

Alan Bradshaw suggested that the JPG may have to start to consider Section 106 matters.

Richard Jacques stated that he had met with John Wilson of KALC Area Committee and he had advised him that the Borough Council needed to consult with the parishes regarding these matters.

He stated that if all S106 matters needed to be looked at and agreed prior to the Inquiry then the JPG should be looking at this area now.

Gavin McLaggan reported further on the public Inquiry pre-meeting, he stated that the Planning Inspector made it clear that there should be no repetition at the hearing. It had been agreed that the JPG could call eleven witnesses and it would be essential that they did not duplicate evidence; he stated that this would mean a lot of work with MBC and other key parties.

He spoke regarding the meeting that he, Richard Jacques, Peter Waite and John Horne had attended with Mark Watts on behalf of the JPG.

He spoke about the amount of work required following the Inquiry and the need to lobby all parties involved in the decision making process.

He reported that the JPG had been advised to register with PINS to make an opening and closing statement at the hearing.

He spoke of the work to be undertaken by Luther Pendragon with regards to press statements and publicity.

Richard Jacques stated that an appointment was being sought with Hugh Robertson MP.

He informed all that Mark Watts had prepared a question and answer sheet for the JPG to assist them should they have to do press statements.

He also reported the Luther Pendragon had suggested setting up a facebook for the JPG.

Gavin McLaggan stated that Mark Watts would help in preparing the case to present at the Public Inquiry.

Richard Jacques spoke regarding the objectives of the JPG and the need for members to be trained on interviews and to give evidence at the Public Inquiry; he confirmed that Luther Pendragon would undertake this.

JPG attendance at the Public Inquiry was discussed, and Richard Jacques stated that the group would require constant attendance at the hearing; he stated that the task ahead for the group was enormous.

He spoke regarding the Action Plan that he had circulated to all members from Luther Pendragon and stated that there would be a regular review on the progress of the work being undertaken on behalf of the JPG.

The meeting was opened for questions.

The venue for the Public Inquiry was discussed by members.

Patrick Walton spoke regarding the Public Inquiry. He stated that the process of the Inquiry was strictly controlled by legal guidelines; he stated that the Secretary of State needed to stay completely independent and therefore could not be lobbied, if so there would be a right to a legal appeal by AXA.

Richard Jacques stated that the JPG was seeking to lobby all of the people around the Secretary of State.

Patrick Walton spoke further regarding the decision making process of the Secretary of State. He stated that Bearsted Parish Council feels that lobbying would have no impact of the decision process and that the strength of Luther Pendragon would be to help with other issues.

He stated that Bearsted Parish Council had a limited amount of funds available for KIG and that they would not support lobbying.

Richard Jacques spoke regarding AXA and their lobbying of members; he stated that the JPG needed the support of MP's such as Hugh Robertson.

Chris Dyke from Bearsted Parish Council explained further the reasons for the decision taken by Bearsted Parish Council.

He reported that a week ago Bearsted Parish Council held a meeting with Mark Watts and they had been very impressed, however a senior civil servant who is involved in public inquiries was in attendance at the meeting and they had sought an opinion from him. He stated that the Luther Pendragon argument had sank without a trace and Bearsted Parish Council had decided that this was not a suitable way forward. He confirmed that the Parish Council had no objection to the appointment of Luther Pendragon, however stated that they should be used for specific skills. He again referred to the strict legal procedure governing Public Inquiries and stated that the decision making process would not be influenced by lobbying.

Richard Jacques stated that he would take this matter up with Mark Watts to establish his views.

Geoff Licence from Bearsted Parish Council stated that he had expressed his concerns at the previous meeting regarding the appointment of Luther Pendragon and the JPG had not given its members the opportunity to go back to their parish councils to discuss this further.

He stated that he would rather liaise with local parties such as KCC and MBC and Radlet to feed local opinion into the Inquiry, he suggested that the JPG should seek legal advice to establish a way forward as he was not convinced that the JPG was going the right way.

Mike Stark asked about the experience of Mark Watts and Pendragon.

Richard Jacques explained the back ground of Luther Pendragon and Mark Watts.

He stated that if colleagues were opening a debate to brain storm where the JPG should go, then this should be done as soon as possible as time was not on its side. He suggested that Geoff Licence coordinate a meeting and report back, as the group needed to advise Mark Watts on a course of action.

He concluded that the Joint Parish Group had just one stab at the Inquiry. He spoke regards to a letter to the group circulated by Larry Mulheirn and invited him to speak regarding this.

Larry Mulheirn spoke regarding his letter, he stated that he felt that the JPG had not fully established the strategy for KCC and MBC and he felt that the JPG could contribute to this rather than stand alone.

He spoke with concern about the appointment of Luther Pendragon and the potential cost of this.

He stated that all JPG parishes were representing other people and he was not convinced on the amount being spent and the ability to justify this.

He said that he thought that there was a lot of things that the JPG could be doing at ground level to clear the ground for MBC and KCC.

David Burton stated that he was listening to some of the concerns raised at the last meeting. He reported that he had agreement from Langley Parish Council to support the appointment of Luther Pendragon for three months, however this was agreed mainly due to the importance of keeping the JPG together, and he stated that Langley does not feel entirely comfortable with the appointment of Luther Pendragon.

He referred to a recent discussion that he had held with Paul Carter and confirmed that there were no funds available from KCC, however there was the willingness to give the JPG access to the experts.

Chris Dyke stated that the JPG gave a good presentation and came across well as a group at the MBC Planning Hearing.

Richard Jacques warned that members must not underestimate the fact that the JPG were speaking to the converted and he suggested that this will not be as easy at the Public Inquiry.

Geoff Licence stated that the JPG should be drawing on Luther Pendragon as and when needed and not retain the company. He suggested that the JPG should take a step back and look at the terms of their appointment.

He suggested that he was serious about the brain storming exercise. He stated that Bearsted wanted to be united and part of the JPG to establish a way forward.

He referred to the advice given to Bearsted Parish Council by a resident and reiterated that lobbying would not assist the case any further.

Richard Jacques stated that the JPG needed to bear in mind the tight time scales involved with the Inquiry and stated that these were imminent.

If the JPG was to take a different tact then it should be agreed as soon as possible.

Richard Jacques stated that he was prepared to tell Luther Pendragon to hold back if the JPG agreed to do this.

Gavin McLaggan reminded members that the JPG was currently tied to a three month contract and therefore in his opinion the JPG should seek to get as much out of it as possible.

Alan Bradshaw asked about the terms of the contract and Richard Jacques confirmed that this was for three months commencing from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2009.

Sarah Goodwin informed the meeting that Mark Watts had attended a Lenham PC meeting and the public were present and supported the JPG and the appointment of Luther Pendragon.

She spoke regarding the comments made with regards to lobbying and suggested that a good balance of views was needed in order to clarify this matter.

She suggested that the JPG should keep going with the contact and build a communications strategy and work on the other bits that the group agreed on.

Gavin McLaggan stated that he was deeply unimpressed with the performance of MBC at the recent Inquiry meeting. He stated that they were not represented by a QC and they appeared not to know that they needed to appoint a Programmes Officer or book the venue.

John Horne stated that he had found the letter from Sutton Valence to be quite negative. He stated that the JPG was now registered as a Rule 6 Party at the Public Inquiry and he spoke of the commitment and work of the JPG, as members would have to be at the hearing for the whole of the Inquiry, and someone would have to appear and put in the relevant documents.

He stated that KCC were only dealing with the highway issues at the Inquiry and MBC had a statutory obligation to defend its planning decision.

He stated that he too was unimpressed with the performance of MBC at the recent Inquiry meeting.

Patrick Walton praised the performance of MBC at the Planning Hearing. Richard Jacques agreed with this comment but reminded all present that they had had the opportunity to rehearse this.

Richard Jacques summarised the views on the floor to hold back the work being undertaken by Luther Pendragon and coordinate an action meeting.

Larry Mulheirn spoke regarding the lobbying aspect and question what lobbying MBC and KCC were undertaking.

Richard Jacques stated that the JPG needed to put forward draft proofs of evidence to the Planning Inspector.

He spoke of the strict route to be undertaken by MBC at the Inquiry as the Planning Authority and the reasons why they were unable to support the Joint Parish Group.

He asked all present if they wished the JPG to hold back.

Gavin McLaggan reiterated that the JPG was currently in a three month contract and therefore any debate should be for the action following the contract. He stated that there was a lot of work to do by the group in the months leading to the Inquiry.

David Burton acknowledged that the JPG was committed for three months and they had to stand by this, he suggested that the emphasis should therefore be on how the three months were spent and the focus should be on the things that are most important to the JPG.

He stated that there was a strong indication that the JPG would not continue with Luther Pendragon after the three months.

Richard Jacques asked who would undertake the work at the Inquiry if the contract with Luther Pendragon did not continue after the three months.

He spoke of his disappointment at the input from the group members to date.

He stated that there had been a proposal put forward by Geoff Licence for the group to hold back and reconsider its position and the parish representatives needed to vote on this to establish a way forward.

Mike Stark stated that only one member from each parish present should vote on the proposal.

Larry Mulheirn suggested that an open meeting should be arranged with Alison Broom from MBC and a representative from KCC.

Following a discussion regarding the wording of the proposal being put forward by Geoff Licence he confirmed that his proposal was ***'to look at other avenues and the action list for Mark Watts, and for the group to meet next week to agree this.'***

David Burton amended this proposal as follows: ***'That the JPG meets next week to discuss the immediate and future strategy of the JPG.'***

Geoff Licence withdrew his proposal and seconded the proposal put forward by David Burton.

Richard Jacques acknowledged this proposal. He spoke regarding his position as Chairman of the group and questioned his current role.

He asked members to vote on the proposal put forward by David Burton with one vote per parish.

The vote was cast as follows:

**In favour of the proposal: Bearsted, Langley and Sutton Valence Parish Councils (3)**

**Against the proposal: Broomfield & Kingswood, Detling, Thurnham, Harrietsham, Lenham, and Boxley Parish Councils (6)**

The vote was cast **against** the proposal put by David Burton. The JPG agreed to continue its current action plan.

**3. Date of Next Meeting.**

To be arranged.

Richard Jacques declared the meeting closed at 9.45pm.