

Minutes of a Four Oaks Estate Ltd Security Survey Review Meeting Held at Four Oaks Tennis Club on Tuesday 15th November 2022 at 7.00pm

PRESENT

Mr R.W.Forrest (Chairman of Four Oaks Estate Ltd), Mr M.McCollum (Director), Mr F.Dolan (Director), Mr C.Johnson (Director) & Mr S.R.Tullah (Secretary). In addition the attendance register records 54 residents present representing 41 residences in all.

The meeting was live streamed over You Tube and in all around 105 additional residents viewed the stream.

1. Introduction to the meeting by Mr Ron Forrest, Chairman of the Board

The Chairman, Mr Ron Forrest, welcomed everyone and outlined the purpose of the meeting. He explained that Mr Dolan would run through the findings of the security survey and that two matters that were apparent from the survey were the desire for improved levels of lighting and the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch schemes. These two matters would be addressed specifically under agenda items 4 and 5.

The Chairman acknowledged that several residents had canvassed other residents over the Security WhatsApp group and by leafleting and had subsequently put in place an overnight security patrol scheme with participating residents sharing the cost. He applauded them for their initiative. He explained that the Estate as a body is in not in a position to run such a scheme due to serious potential liability issues and as the covenants in resident's deeds of covenants and freeholds titles refer to charges for maintaining Estate roads and associated land. This means that the obligation to contribute to the cost of a patrol scheme would be unenforceable and a significant departure from the purpose of the charge. He added that 44% of survey respondents said they would not pay for security patrols and that trying to enforce these costs may lead to legal challenges and an undermining of the charging system that has worked so successfully for many years.

The Chairman concluded by saying that the board recognised that a patrol scheme may be re-assuring to many residents and that it would support it as appropriate but is not in a position to run such a scheme itself. He introduced Mr McCollum as Chairman-designate to present the remaining agenda items.

2. Security Review and Issues presented by Mr Mike McCollum

Mr McCollum reinforced the Chairman's statement that the board is not in a position to run a patrol scheme but that it understands the wishes of a significant number of residents to do so. He added that it is essential that residents take charge of security measures at their individual homes and that it is a fine balance between having an Estate-wide patrol scheme and not intruding on other resident's lives. He echoed the Chairman applauding the residents who had acted swiftly to introduce a patrol scheme and confirmed that he personally has subscribed to the scheme having suffered a recent break-in.

3. Security Survey Review presented by Mr Farrell Dolan

Mr Dolan explained the background to carrying out the recent security survey and added that it had acted as a useful 'fact finding' exercise. He highlighted the principal findings of the survey as follows:

- * 87% of residents had experienced no crime on the Estate.
- * 71% of residents had lived on the Estate for ten years or more.
- * Two thirds of residents feel 'safe'.
- * 54% of residents would like increased lighting on Estate roads.
- * 45% of residents support the idea of security patrols.
- * 41% of residents would support the introduction of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.
- * 4% of residents would support the introduction of CCTV on Estate roads.
- * 42% of residents will not pay for security measures.
- * 38% of residents will not pay more than 25% more than their current charge for security measures.
- * 14% of residents will pay 50% or more than their current charge for security measures.

Mr Dolan explained that the potential for Neighbourhood Watch schemes and increased lighting would be discussed in the next two agenda items.

4. Lighting Improvement Plan report given by Mr Stuart Tullah, Secretary

The Secretary explained that lighting columns were first installed on Estate roads around 1965, prior to which there had been no lighting. Since then lighting levels have been 'subtle' and that over the years this has been the wish of the majority of residents. He acknowledged however that there appears to be agreement that lighting levels should be increased. He explained that currently there are 65 lighting columns across the Estate and that to approximately double light output another 50 would need to be installed. Generally the lighting in cul-de-sacs and at points where Estate roads meet public roads the output is good.

The Secretary explained that this exercise would cost somewhere in the region of £275/300,000 assuming the use of the current style of lighting column. He explained that a significant portion of these costs is to provide new electrical supplies which have to be installed by National Grid, especially as on four of five of the principal roads the current lighting columns are on only one side of the road. He added that he has been instructed by the board to prepare a streetlighting improvement plan and that research to lower costs, and thus shorten the period the plan would take to fully implement, will be undertaken.

The Chairman added that this capital expenditure would have to be funded by a combination of a contribution from existing reserves and an amount spread over several years by a short-term increase in the road frontage charge.

5. Potential for Neighbourhood Watch schemes report given by Mr Farrell Dolan

Mr Dolan outlined how Neighbourhood Watch schemes work and explained that these can only be set up by residents themselves, not by the Estate as a body. He stated that these schemes appear to be successful and have the backing of the Police across the country and give easier access to the Police. He asked residents to consider setting these up under the national framework and highlighted the national website (ourwatch.org.uk) which gives full details of how the schemes work and how to set them up.

The Chairman said that Neighbourhood Watch schemes may only be a minor deterrent but can enhance community spirit. He asked residents who may consider setting up a scheme to express their interest to the Secretary who will co-ordinate the response.

6. Resident-led Security Patrol Scheme

Mr Mark Pickering explained that he and several other residents had launched a security patrol service, operating from 6pm to 6am with one liveried van and one guard with a dog, and had appointed Alpha Bravo K9 Security Ltd as its provider. Currently sixty residents have 'signed up' for the service at a cost of £130 per month per household. He added that the cost will lessen as more residents join, but that the objective currently is to have enough residents join to be able to fund two vans and two guards.

Mr Mohsin Rashid of Alpha Bravo K9 Security Ltd was in attendance and addressed the meeting. He outlined the service his company provides and added that his company is providing a similar service at Little Aston Estate. He explained that residents who subscribe to the service receive the guard's telephone number and can call for assistance at any time during patrol hours. He showed a draft sign that subscribing residents can place on their gate or wall showing that a security patrol service is operative. He stated that he believes that the service is effective and acts as a significant deterrent and that several cars have already been identified as 'suspicious' and have exited the Estate upon seeing the van. He was asked if the guard would intervene in the case of suspicious activity at a non-subscriber household and he responded explained that the guard would not do so but would contact the Police if he felt it was necessary. He added that the guard patrolling Little Aston Estate liaises with the guard patrolling Four Oaks Estate and they share security-related information. Mr Rashid was asked how many guards would be required if every household on the Estate subscribed to the service and he responded to say that three vans and three guards would be sufficient.

Mr Pickering stated that he and other subscribing residents feel safer with this scheme in place and believe it is working well and that other residents were welcome to join. Mr Pickering said that details of who to contact about joining the scheme have been posted on the WhatsApp group. The Secretary pointed out that around 150 households are not on the WhatsApp group and asked for these details so he could pass them to any resident who request them.

7. Resident Input & Feedback

Mr McCollum invited 'questions from the floor'.

Mr Tom Garsed asked the board to reconsider whether Four Oaks Estate Ltd, as the landowner, would run the scheme so that all residents benefit from the service and to lower the scheme's costs. The Chairman reiterated the nature of the board's liability concerns, adding that as a landowner liability cannot always be ceded to a service provider, irrespective of their insurance cover. He added that in addition to this if Four Oaks Estate Ltd collects the funds that finance the scheme on a 'non-optional' basis it effectively becomes the provider and takes on some of the liabilities and risks such a scheme will always carry. He also reminded everyone that 42% of residents would not pay for Estate-wide security.

Mrs Amanda Pickering referred to the earlier discussion about Neighbourhood Watch schemes and stated that she would not feel safe being part of a scheme which involved any form of patrolling or responding to emergency situations. The Chairman commented that no resident should put themselves at risk by confronting intruders and as he understood it these schemes are to monitor events and communicate with Police. Mr Dolan explained that Neighbourhood Watch schemes work successfully around the country but accepted her concerns and pointed out that raising the matter of these schemes was in response to 41% of residents saying they would wish to see them.

Mr Richard Dewsbery asked if the board would consider installing CCTV on Estate roads as a security and deterrent measure. The Secretary replied to say that planning permission would be required for CCTV and would not be granted. He added that consent from and registration with the ICO would be required and that consent is highly unlikely to be granted. He also added that the cost of required signage, secure data storage and footage retrieval upon request from anyone potentially recorded, would be prohibitive.

Mr David Westbrooke explained the importance of responding to residents' crime and safety concerns and applauded those residents who have set up the scheme. He thanked the board for organising a survey and for hosting this meeting and asked them to ensure that they support the scheme. The Chairman replied to say that whilst the board will not operate a scheme of this nature it will support those residents who are managing the scheme and will assist them in the distribution of information.

8. Summary.

Mr McCollum summarised the meeting's principal points and explained that the board would review these when it next meets. He added that the board fully appreciates the importance of security related matters and will keep in touch with the scheme organisers and support them as far as it can.

There being no further business Mr McCollum thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed at 8.40pm.