

STANDISH VOICE

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES SEPTEMBER 19, 2023

The meeting commenced at 7.45pm

Management Committee present: Fran Aiken, Gill Foster, Karen Bliss, Paul Ogden, Ron Wade, Sarah Djali, Diane Gore, Allan Foster, Kathy Robertson.

1. **Apologies:** Janet Monks, Ian Trafford, Nicky Ogden, Andrew Holliday.
2. **Minutes:** The minutes of July's Management Committee meeting were passed without alteration.
3. **Update:** Gill said that she had had six meetings with Wigan Council over the past four weeks, with Paul attending another, to discuss the situation at Kilhey Court. The issue was discussed as a separate item later in the meeting. She said during one of Standish Voice's other regular meetings with the council, they said a new planning officer was being recruited who would have responsibility for looking at the future of Standish village centre. Other updates were:
 - A 'capacity and access' plan would be forthcoming soon from Healthier Wigan, the former CCG, about the problems at Standish Medical Practice.
 - There would be a review of the Rights of Way process after Standish Voice complained about the length of time the adoption of a footpath off Rectory Lane was being taken to complete.
 - The plan to put traffic lights at Bradley Lane was still being reviewed by the council.
 - Wain Homes has been given a warning by the council after Standish Voice reported that they had been working on a Sunday, in violation of their CEMP agreement.
4. **Robin Hill Field:** Paul said the council was still being extremely slow with the plan to improve biodiversity at Robin Hill Field. The council said it needed to go back to Sport England to discuss tree planting in the centre of the site, away from the former playing field area. Paul said that ahead of a decision on the improvements, Standish Voice should ask the community to decide on a new name for the field, which would include the word 'Park' to give it more status in the psychology of the council and reduce the chance of it being sold off for development in the future. This was agreed.
5. **Kilhey Court:** Gill said that a series of meetings had taken place between Standish Voice, Standish councillors and Wigan Council. All had expressed their opposition to closing Kilhey Court as a hotel and re-opening it as a hostel for asylum seekers. It is a totally inappropriate site for this; resulting in the closure of a well-used community facility in a historic building that was part of the fabric of Standish; and has resulted in job losses, loss of a leisure facility and event cancellations. This was done without warning or consultation with the community. Standish councillors Ray Whittingham, Debbie Parkinson and Terry

Mugan gave updates to the meeting on how they had been opposing the plans, including writing to the Home Office, Serco and MacDonald hotels, and working with the council and MP Lisa Nandy to try to persuade the Government to overturn the decision.

Gill said Standish Voice has also written to the Home Office and MacDonald Hotels, and their PR company, strongly opposing the situation and had encouraged its members and the public to do the same. Replies from this correspondence was unsatisfactory. Gill said that Wigan Council had taken legal advice which said that there was no legal or planning means to oppose the situation, especially as the Government had tightened up planning rules to prevent opposition to hotels turning into hostels. She said a similar situation in Bolton had been stopped as that hotel was already housing homeless families; one in Chorley had not gone ahead as it was deemed that that hotel was not suitable – although this was 18 months ago and criteria from the Home Office on this had subsequently changed – and a situation in Great Yarmouth had prevented a hotel being used as a hostel due to a policy in the local authority's Local Plan stating that seafront hotels had to only be used for tourism. She said that Paul had submitted an FOI request to the Home Office asking for the new criteria given to Serco when deciding which hotels to choose for this activity and this was due by October 5th when it would be passed to Wigan Council.

Gill said a motion would go to Wigan's Full Council meeting the next day (Sept 20th), opposing the use of hotels by asylum seekers but she was disappointed it did not mention Kilhey Court directly and she would write to the council asking for this to be added. She said Standish Voice had written to Lisa Nandy MP but no response had yet been forthcoming.

Paul said that Wigan Council told Standish Voice that it had studied all the planning applications submitted for Kilhey Court since it became a hotel in around 1983 to see if any conditions had been breached with the new situation. Paul said there were about 16 applications with a number of conditions on each one.

The committee discussed whether to engage a planning consultant to independently review and study all these applications and conditions with regards to the new use. The committee agreed and Paul said he would take this forward.

6. **Standish Christmas Market:** Kathy said the Christmas Market committee was working ahead of schedule on arrangements for the event on December 2nd. She said the latest trader window had closed and a recent volunteers meeting went very well. Sponsorship requests had been really successful so new attractions could be added, including the return of the popular Snowdome. Kathy said the Standish Voice stall would be assimilated into the event organisation base this year. Gill thanked Kathy and the committee for their continued hard work on the event.
7. **No other business**
8. **Date of next meeting:** October 17th.

The meeting ended at 9.35pm