

# Sopwell Residents Association

## Annual Report 2009-2010

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2009-2010 was a productive year for the Sopwell Residents Association. We organised or participated in several events, made good progress with our projects and we were able to contribute to several consultations and to comment on a number of planning applications.

## **EVENTS**

### **Family Cycle Ride (Sun 14<sup>th</sup> June 2009)**

We organised a short family cycle ride to explore the new Sustrans '6/61' National Cycle Route cycle route which runs through the ward.

About 25 cyclists, ranging in age from seven to seventy, joined us for a short ride from the Cottonmill Lane / Alban Way railway bridge to Greenwood Park in Chiswell Green.

In the park, the grown-ups settled in the shade of a clump of trees, whilst the younger members of the group headed for the adventure playground. Squash and biscuits that we brought with us provided refuelling for the return trip.

During the course of the ride, the pros and cons of various new facilities introduced as part of the signed route were discussed.

### **Larks in the Parks (Sun 28<sup>th</sup> June 2009)**

Once again we helped organise Larks in The Parks in Sopwell, held on the grounds of Marlborough Pavilion. Feedback from the public was mostly positive but committee members attending felt that SADC could have managed the event a lot better.

### **Sopwell Walk (Sat 19<sup>th</sup> Sep 2009)**

Some twenty people met by the seats at the Sopwell Nunnery site in Cottonmill Lane for a leisurely walk covering the Nunnery Green Space and Ruins, along the river Ver to the Alban Way, the Watercress Wildlife site, Riverside Road, then via Old London Road and Thorpe Road to have a look at the Holy Well on de Tany Court, and back to the starting point on Cottonmill Lane via Holywell Hill and the Ver path. We finished off with some refreshments by the benches.

Chris Pudsey led us round the green space and outlined how it is being managed, while Cllr Eileen Harris treated us to the fascinating history of many places along the way.

During the walk there was a lively discussion going on and afterwards many told us that it had been a very enjoyable and informative afternoon.

### **Planting Bulbs (Sun 25<sup>th</sup> Oct 2009)**

We met near the new bench at Grindcobbe and planted daffodils and crocuses there, as well as on the green opposite Mc Donalds, in the central section of Abbots Avenue opposite St Julians and in the triangle on Tavistock Avenue.

Sandy Norman did a map for the council, showing where the bulbs were planted.

### **Litter Pick (Sun 28<sup>th</sup> March 2010)**

Thirteen people turned up at the railway crossing near Grindcobbe from where we spread out in all directions. Along the way some got help from local children. We managed to pick 19 bags of rubbish in total.

## **Stall at St Julian's Community Open Afternoon (Sat 17th April 2010)**

To celebrate the new extension to the church hall, St Julian organised a Community Open Afternoon, providing an opportunity for groups that regularly use the hall to have a table to promote themselves.

The event was very well attended, with visitors including the Mayor of St Albans.

Sandy Norman and Chris Pudsey ran a stall to promote the SRA and to draw attention to our Sopwell Project recording the history of Sopwell (more below). Many people stopped by and a few shared memories and stories from the past.

## **PROJECTS**

### **Sopwell Nunnery Green Space**

SRA is one of four organisations in partnership to manage the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space, the other partners being St Albans District Council (SADC), CMS (Countryside Management Service) and the Cottonmill and Nunnery Allotments Association.

Last year, the Sopwell Nunnery Open Space won a Green Flag award, for the second time already!

#### ***Visitor surveys***

We did two visitor surveys.

In half term week in Autumn last year, Chris Pudsey, Ananda Armstrong-King and Sandy Norman counted 40 people: 8 youths, 14 children, 4 OAPs and 14 adults.

In Spring this year, on Sunday 28th March, Chris and Sandy interviewed 19 people: only 2 were aware of the Green Flag status; not many were locals, most were tourists, some had come via the Alban Way.

The area is also used a lot after 3pm on school days when the weather is nice and is a real social hub for parents with small children.

#### ***Tree plantings***

The Woodland Craft Elfin Folk had contacted us with a view to planting trees as part of the Tree O'Clock event. We put them in touch with Nick Sherriff of the SADC and the trees were planted in the Nunnery Open Space on 5th December.

#### ***£15k Community Spaces grant for board walk and other improvements***

We applied for a £15k grant from the Community Spaces budget, run by Groundwork UK on behalf of the Big Lottery Fund, to improve the path by the river. We would like to have a board walk placed over the area that is currently prone to flooding.

With help from Nick Sheriff of SADC and a facilitator from Groundwork, Sandy Norman is taking the application through the different stages.

We have been given provisional approval and, provided everything keeps going to plan, we are hopeful that the work will start soon and will be completed by the end of summer!

### **The Sopwell Project**

The Sopwell Project is an SRA project to collect information, anecdotes and memories about the history and environment of Sopwell and to share this information with all residents via the website and, in time, a booklet about Sopwell's history.

The steering committee of the project, consisting of Sandy Norman, Anne Wares, Eileen Harris and Chris Pudsey, have been quite busy this year.

### **£500 HCC Locality Budget Scheme grant**

We secured a £500 grant for the Sopwell Project from the Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) "Locality Budget Scheme" via Cllr Mike Ellis, who sadly passed away in March this year.

Some of the money was used to buy a digital voice recorder for interviews, with the rest destined to cover travel expenses to interview people, to produce a leaflet, to subscribe to the library, to visit the archives in Swindon, to purchase copies of aerial photographs etc.

### **Interviews**

The team have been interviewing several residents, many introduced by Cllr David Poor. All interviews were recorded on tape and Sandy is working hard on the transcripts.

### **Research**

- ongoing research in the Herts Advertiser archives at the library
- attended lecture at the library about the Aerofilms collection of photos
- visited the Aerofilms photo collection in Swindon
- visited the local museum to see their collection of old photos
- joined Arc and Arc, the Architectural and Archaeological Society for St Albans and Hertfordshire, and visited their library room in the Old Town Hall
- exploratory visit to HALS, the Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies centre, at County Hall in Hertford.

### **New benches installed**

Working together with Cllr David Poor and St Albans Council we managed to get two new benches installed near the Abbey railway line level crossing: one on the open space in front of Grindcobbe and the other on the other side of the railway track up on Cottonmill Lane looking down to the level crossing.

### **Abbey station hump**

A section of the platform at the Abbey Station has been raised a few centimetres to help people getting on/off the train. Although a slight improvement, we thought that it was not value for money and not implemented well (e.g. not good enough for wheelchairs and no signs in the train indicating which doors would benefit) but our comments fell on deaf ears.

### **Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) lighting issue**

Thanks to a £79k grant given by the Big Lottery fund, Sopwell residents now have an all-weather, flood-lit Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) on the grounds of the Marlborough Pavilion, off Cottonmill Lane. The MUGA is open free to all living in Sopwell, with no need to book.

In Winter, we noticed that the big flood-lights came on early and remained on late, even though nobody was using the facility in the cold weather. We reported the problem to the council but it took some time and perseverance to get it fixed.

### **Cycle route 6/61 safety concerns**

We highlighted several issues with the new signed cycle route through Sopwell ward, Sustrans' NCR 6/61 (NCR=National Cycle Route), the main ones being:

- the Berners Drive-Abbots Avenue crossing;
- the Vesta Avenue-Watling Street crossing;
- the route next to Mandeville Primary School: post in middle of path, overgrown hedge, parents parking activity in the area;
- missing ribbed paving for partially sighted near the play area on Berners Drive where the footpath has been upgraded to cycle path.

In August 2009, Peter Wares published an article in the St Albans Review: “New cycle route slammed”, and on Car Free Day, 22<sup>nd</sup> Sep 2009, Peter took Cllr Eileen Harris and others on a 1½ hour tour of the route to demonstrate the issues.

As a result, Herts County Council officers and local officers promised to have another look at the route back in April 2010, but they haven't let us know the outcome yet.

### **Litter in public bins**

We are concerned that litter from public bins simply goes to landfill and is not separated for recycling and we continue to push the council on this matter.

## **CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

We responded to a number of consultations.

### **St Albans LDF “Shaping Our Community” consultation**

The SADC “Shaping Our Community” consultation ran until 28<sup>th</sup> Sep 2009 and included a touring exhibition, an on-line survey and public meetings in local wards on request.

The consultation followed on from the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), created by the St Albans Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and “refreshed” in July 2009.

Whereas the SCS sets out a long terms overall vision for the District to 2021, the “Shaping Our Community” consultation is part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) Emerging Core Strategy and focuses on planning matters, setting out the Council’s suggestions and options for the future location of development within the District, including where new housing and employment could be located, given the overall vision in the SCS.

We organised a public meeting at the Marlborough Pavilion on Wed 9<sup>th</sup> Sep 2009, discussed matters in our committee meetings, and several of us submitted individual responses.

### **East of England Plan >2031 consultation**

In November 2009, Ananda Armstrong-King and Jose Sena attended a public consultation meeting in Stevenage, organised by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA).

The meeting was seeking responses from the public to four scenarios for housing growth across the region in the next 20 years as outlined in the “East of England Plan > 2031” consultation document. This was to help EERA update the existing East of England Plan with housing targets to 2031.

### **Mandeville Primary School extension pre-planning consultation**

On Wed 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2009, the SRA attended an informal public consultation meeting at Mandeville Primary School, where we were able to view draft building proposals in advance of a formal planning application being submitted for a major extension of the school that will double the number of classes from 7 to 14.

We spoke with several people, including an architect and the headteacher, Amanda Godfrey, and we asked probing questions about aspects of the architecture and energy efficiency, and we expressed concern about the impact on local traffic, both during the building works (trucks) and afterwards (increase in school run traffic).

In general, we were in favour though, and good news for us in particular was that the plans included creating a community meeting room for use by local groups.

### **Abbots Avenue West street scene improvements consultation**

The area around the shops on Abbots Avenue West is being smartened up by the Council working together with Hertfordshire Probation, Mandeville Primary School and Herts Highways.

In February this year, Chris Roach, Community Engagement Manager at SADC, and co-ordinator of the project, sent a consultation letter to residents and shopkeepers asking for their comments on ideas to improve the area. SRA was also invited to give an opinion, which we gladly did.

Since then, Probation have cleaned and painted the big bull nose planters on both ends of the parade, and the plan is for Mandeville School to work on a replanting scheme and to design a mural for the planters. Furthermore, the parade will get an extra bench, a new community noticeboard and a couple of trees.

Working with Herts Highways, SADC are also looking into a revised parking scheme to create more parking space (diagonal parking instead of 'nose-to-tail').

### **Streetscape Design Manual consultation**

Jack Hill commented on SADC's draft Streetscape Design Manual (available on the council website) which was subject to public consultation until 4th Feb 2010.

### **Abbey Line light-rail consultation (aka tramway scheme)**

In Q1 2009, the Department for Transport (DfT) and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) published the "The Future of the Abbey Line" consultation document.

They want to increase the frequency of services on the Abbey Line to at least half-hourly, and to do so most economically, they propose to convert the line to light rail, i.e. to run tram vehicles, on the existing railway track and using the existing overhead power lines, with relatively minor modifications to the infrastructure and power supply.

DfT and HCC also propose that responsibility for the line should transfer to Hertfordshire County Council, so it would become locally operated and accountable.

SRA submitted a positive response to the consultation, with some constructive comments.

### **St Albans Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Priorities for 2010-11**

The St Albans Community Safety Partnership (CSP) undertook a review of community Safety and how it is managed within St Albans District. Following the review, they consulted widely on what the key priorities for 2010-2011 should be.

We responded positively to the consultation, adding that it is important for the public to have utmost confidence that their persons and property are being protected, and we agreed that probably the best way to achieve that is by having more visible policing.

### **Hertfordshire Policing Plan 2011-13 consultation**

Rick Taylor attended the launch of Hertfordshire Police Authority's Policing Plan 2010-2013

in Hatfield on 29<sup>th</sup> March. Points that he picked up on: the Police Authority is conscious that residents want more visible policing and there now is a commitment for that; for young teenagers causing a nuisance they are trying a new tactic which seems to work: report them to their parents(!); the PA are also keen to involve residents more.

## **FORUM PARTICIPATION**

### **Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership**

#### **St Albans City Forum**

#### **St Albans Environmental Forum (STEF)**

STEF relaunched in January 2010, bringing together the Council and various groups and organisations in the district interested in the environment and sustainability. All of us who attended the two meetings at the Council Offices so far (every 3-4 months) thought that it was positive: the Council seems to have become much more aware of and active on sustainability matters. The recent appointment of two young and dynamic sustainability officers reflects this, giving them the (wo)manpower to make things happen.

## **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

We examined several planning applications and submitted comments to the Council for some of them. The main ones were:

#### **Griffiths Way retail park redevelopment (5/2009/1997)**

Developers want to demolish the existing buildings of the Abbey View Retail Park on Griffiths Way (Currys, CarpetRight, Halfords, Matalan and McDonalds) to erect new buildings, completely changing the retail park's layout, appearance and access.

The internal floor space would increase by almost 60% but the footprint of the new buildings would only be about 10% more than the current ones by adding a mezzanine level to the new buildings.

We made a series of comments and expressed concern about the impact of an increase in traffic on the immediate surrounding area, with Holywell Hill and the King Harry Lane junction already congested and rat-run traffic via Vesta Avenue/Dogget's Lane/Wilshere Avenue and Cottonmill Lane/Prospect Road on the increase.

#### **Sainsbury extension (5/2009/2385)**

Sainsbury want to extend the supermarket and reconfigure the car park, including erecting a covered walkway and landscaping. Originally, they submitted an application 5/2009/0189 which included a decked car park but they withdrew it in response to local objections.

Although we found Sainsbury's new application to be of a high standard including a proper tree survey, covered cycle parking, a green travel plan, a customer survey etc, we submitted certain concerns to the council.

We strongly feel that both developments, Sainsbury and Griffiths Way, need to be looked at together, especially with regards to their impact on local traffic.

#### **Mandeville Primary School extension (5/2010/0683)**

Construction of a new building comprising 10 classrooms and main entrance, widening of existing access and extension to existing car park.

We remain in favour and are considering submitting constructive comments.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

### **Newsletter**

We produced and delivered two newsletters, issue No 15 in Autumn 2009 and No 16 in Spring 2010. Thank you to all who provided content and helped with door-to-door delivery.

### **Website**

We have updated the website [www.sopwell.org.uk](http://www.sopwell.org.uk), adding substantially to the Sopwell Project content. Go and have a look and give us your feedback!

### **Public meetings**

We held two public meetings

1. Our AGM on Tue 12<sup>th</sup> May 2009
2. LDF "Shaping Our Community" on Wed 9<sup>th</sup> Sep 2009

The latter was a public meeting at Marlborough Pavilion to discuss the Council's "Shaping Our Community" planning consultation document (see Consultation Responses above).

## **MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Giles Hanford, Chantal Burns and Rebecca Prebble stepped back as active committee members this year but remain supporters. We would like to thank them for their hard work over the years.

Three new members have joined the management committee: Rob Sharman, Adelle Stapleton, and Peter Segers. Welcome.

All current committee members have put themselves forward for re-election:

Ananda Armstrong-King, Jack Hill, Mark James, Sandy Norman, Chris Pudsey, Peter Segers, Jose Sena, Rob Sharman, Adelle Stapleton, Rick Taylor, and Peter Wares.

The following wish to be elected and re-elected as Officers: Sandy Norman as Chair, Chris Pudsey as Vice-Chair, Mark James as Treasurer and Peter Segers as Secretary.

As always, we like to take the opportunity to call for more committee members and supporters. We need your help!

You can contact us via the website [www.sopwell.org.uk](http://www.sopwell.org.uk) or by sending us an email at [info@sopwell.org.uk](mailto:info@sopwell.org.uk).

Peter Segers  
SRA Secretary

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