

Sopwell Residents Association

Annual Report 2010-2011

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2010-2011 was yet again a productive year for the Sopwell Residents Association: we organised or participated in several events, realised a major project and we were able to contribute to several consultations and to comment on a number of developments.

EVENTS

Cycle ride on St Alban Day “In Roman Times” – Tue 22 June 2010

On Tuesday 22nd June – St Alban Day – a small group of Sopwell residents met up with Alban himself (actually, Peter Wares wearing his heavy “Roman” fireman's helmet) for a short Roman themed evening cycle ride, following the course of some Roman roads in and around Sopwell which Alban may have once travelled.

During our ride, Alban drew attention to some of the sites he knew well, such as the bath house – now Branch Road – and the Roman temple and royal Celtic burial on Oysterfield, just north of Verulamium.

We then followed the course of the former Colchester road, to where it crosses Beech Bottom Dyke, where our breath was taken away by the sheer size and depth of the Dyke.

We returned to St Michael's where we stopped for a refreshing pint at the Six Bells PH.

The Big Lunch – Sun 18 July 2010

A group of residents from the Priory Walk, Berners Drive, and adjoining Cottonmill Lane area decided to organise a “Big Lunch” on the green at the bottom of Berners Drive, near the pedestrian railway crossing, with help from several committee members of the SRA.

[The Big Lunch](#) is a one-day get-together for neighbours, an initiative from the Eden Project, organised across the UK. (This year, it will be on Sunday 5th June.)

It turned out to be a very nice and pleasant family event, with plenty of good conversation and enabling people to get to know each other a bit better, in an informal atmosphere.

From a local history point of view, it was particularly interesting to hear Lilly's story, who has been living here since when the houses were first built.

On the same day, Ramsbury Road also had a successful Big Lunch event, which they used to raise money for seats at the new Odyssey cinema on London Road, the old Odeon.

Walk “Celebrating Green Sopwell” – Sat 18 Sep 2010

Following on from the success of our Sopwell walks in the last two years, we organised another walk around the Sopwell area in the Autumn, on Saturday 18th September.

We met at 2pm in the Nunnery open space in Cottonmill Lane, near the benches, and set off across the green space towards Sopwell Mill. Then we walked along Cottonmill Lane to the New Barnes Mill area, along the public footpath through the golf course (the original “London Road”), to return via the Alban Way.

The walk was led by Councillor Eileen Harris and our own Chris Pudsey.

Eileen, and our own Sandy Norman, were able to illustrate the walk with the history of the area, including some of the interesting information and stories gleaned from talking to local residents as part of the Sopwell project. And Chris filled us in on anything to do with nature and the environment (and some history too!).

After the walk, Ananda Armstrong-King invited all to her home for some tea and delicious refreshments in her garden. Many joined in and we had a good time. In fact, it was then that some of the people present decided to organise the 10:10:10 Party on the Green, described next – yes, only 3 weeks beforehand!

10:10:10 Party on the Green – Sun 10 Oct 2010

On the international “[10-10-10 Day of Action](#)” to cut CO2 emissions, the SRA helped organise a “Party on the Green” at the bottom of Berners Drive to raise some money for [Mandeville Primary School](#) to pay for green projects cut because of budget constraints.

Although preparations only started three weeks beforehand, a small team of local residents, egged on by Roselyne Masselin of Priory Walk, managed to pull it off.

Between 2pm and 5pm we had a range of stalls and activities on offer, including a stall with home-baked cakes and refreshments run by Mandeville PTA (Parent and Teachers Association), a soft-toy tombola, face and henna painting, plants and herbs, nearly-new clothes, a balloons artist, bric-a-brac and books, a Friends of the Earth stall, solar hot water demo, solar cooking dish, entertainment and group games for children etc.

Raffle prizes were donated by Homebase (mini plastic greenhouse plus seeds and bulbs), Spar (food basket) and Sainsbury's (big box of sweets).

We had 17-18 stalls and, thanks to the good weather, the turn-out of around 80 people was reasonable, although we'd been hoping for more. Many people commented afterwards how they and their children had enjoyed the afternoon.

Subsequently, the St Albans Review published an article with photo and, in the end, after expenses, we raised just over £400 for Mandeville Primary School's green fund.

Planting Bulbs – Sun 24 Oct 2010

We planted bulbs on the little green going up to Cottonmill Lane near the pedestrian railway crossing and in the two planters near the shops on Abbots Avenue West, having done a much-needed clean-up of both planters first.

Alban Way cycle ride “Lost Rails” – Sat 13 Nov 2010

With the exhibition “Lost Rails” at the Museum of St Albans telling the story of the District's former railway lines, including the former Hatfield-to-St-Albans branch line, now called the Alban Way, we decided to organise a guided cycle ride.

Starting from Leyland Avenue, we had a gentle ride on the Alban Way to Smallford, where we stopped off at The Plough in Sleapshyde Lane. There, we were joined for a light meal, drinks and good conversation by non-cycling residents. We returned via the same route.

Along the way, and in the pub, Peter Wares, Robin Hogg and Eileen Harris were on hand to explain many interesting historic aspects of the route.

Litter Pick – Sun 20 March 2011

We had a productive sunny Sunday afternoon, picking about 20 bags between the 13 of us. And although there was still plenty of litter left that we didn't have time for, where we picked, we made a difference.

Launch of Sopwell Nunnery Boardwalk and leaflet – Thu 24 March 2011

In March 2011, the new boardwalk in the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space was officially declared open by the Mayor of St Albans, Cllr Maxine Crawley, in the presence of Bede Fox, President of the Rotary Club of Verulamium, Sandy Norman, Chair of the [Sopwell Residents Association](#) (SRA), Nick Sherriff, [St Albans District Council](#) (SADC) Parks and Green Spaces Officer, and Petrina Llewellyn, [Countryside Management Service](#) (CMS) Project Officer.

It was the culmination of the Boardwalk Project – see Projects section below for details.

We were blessed with a gloriously sunny spring day, so quite a few people attended the

event and there was a really nice atmosphere, with people chatting away.

There is a little photo album of the event, including the moment when Sandy and the Mayor – eventually! – managed to cut through the ribbon on our new [Sopwell Nunnery blog](#). Cutting a ribbon is not as easy as you might think!

CMS and SADC also produced a brand new leaflet for the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space, providing details of the site's history, natural environment and wildlife that might be seen.

The first copies were handed out at the boardwalk launch event.

The leaflet is available for download from the SADC website [here](#) and printed copies should be available from the Tourist Information Centre, and local libraries and museums.

PROJECTS

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space Boardwalk Project

The Sopwell Nunnery Green Space on Cottonmill Lane is owned and managed by [St Albans District Council](#) (SADC) with [Countryside Management Service](#) (CMS) as their main advisor for managing the site.

Both SADC and CMS are keen to involve the local community in caring for and looking after St Albans' green spaces, and, for the Nunnery Green Space, the SRA and the [Cottonmill and Nunnery Allotments Association](#) have been reliable partners for some time.

The success of this partnership is demonstrated by the fact that, for a few years in a row now, the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space has won a [Green Flag Award](#), which is an award specifically to recognise well managed parks and open spaces for all to enjoy.

Community Spaces Delivery Grant for boardwalk and footpath improvements

Part of the Nunnery Green Space, next to the river Ver, consists of Wet Woodland, a rare habitat in Hertfordshire. In winter and early spring this area often gets flooded, which is quite normal and why it is called Wet Woodland, but when this happens, the River Ver Trail, which runs through the area, is impassable.

When this was discussed in the management group late 2009, it was agreed to build a boardwalk and an all-weather path to make the trail accessible throughout the year.

To fund the project, the SRA applied for a £15k grant from the [Community Spaces](#) programme, which is part of the [Big Lottery Fund](#) and is managed for the lottery by [Groundwork UK](#). Additional funding was obtained from the [Rotary Club of Verulamium](#) and [Watling Chase Community Forest](#).

It took a lot of hard work to obtain the grant, from early 2010 until September 2010, and it was Sandy Norman, our Chair, who persevered and navigated the application through the many stages, with help from Nick Sherriff of SADC and a facilitator from Groundwork.

The District Council's Parks and Green Spaces Team and CMS designed the boardwalk and [Maydencroft Rural](#) was appointed as the contractor.

Construction started on Monday 18th October and the work was completed on Saturday 20th November. Due to bad weather, it took five weeks instead of the three-four weeks originally estimated.

We kept a blog of progress, with photos, at sopwellnunnery.wordpress.com All along, Sandy also had to provide progress reports to Groundwork: an initial progress report, an interim progress report and a final progress report. Lots of paperwork involved...

The boardwalk is some 108 meter long and is constructed of pressure treated softwood on top of recycled plastic posts. The bit you walk on is covered with a galvanised mesh.

There are two passing bays, positioned so that oncoming wheeled “vehicles” (prams and the like) are able to catch sight of each other.

The boardwalk is not all one level but there is a gradual change in levels.

Either side of the boardwalk has crushed concrete paths. On the Cottonmill Lane side this starts approximately where the two grass paths meet and it ends under the Alban Way bridge over the river Ver, on the other side.

With the spring weather arriving and a new site leaflet completed by SADC/CMS, the boardwalk was officially opened by the Mayor on Thursday 24th March 2011.

We decided to call it “Fenny’s Boardwalk”, because local residents used to call that area “Fenny’s Wood”. We are currently not 100% sure who Fenny was, but there was a P. J. Fenn who was a riding master at the stables where Nunnery Stables is now. He may well have been nicknamed “Fenny”.

Community Spaces Sustainability Grant

Every Community Spaces project that has been awarded a “Delivery Grant”, the grant above, also qualifies to apply for a further grant, called a “Sustainability Grant”.

The sustainability grant is intended to help ensure that the project will continue to be a valuable asset for the community after the initial project effort, by providing the skills and equipment needed to maintain the site and helping to build and maintain community interest and participation in the site.

Sandy has submitted an application for about £2,000 with which we are planning to hold a combination of educational and activity events in the Nunnery Green Space this year, such as willow weaving, digging a scrape and planting reeds and rushes, crayfish trapping, a moth walk, and a bat walk. All will be open for residents to join in.

We are currently still awaiting confirmation that we will get the grant.

The Sopwell Project (local history)

The Sopwell Project is a project to collect information, anecdotes and memories about the history and people of Sopwell and to share this information with all residents.

Led by Sandy Norman, and with help from Anne Wares, Eileen Harris, Chris Pudsey and others, many local people were interviewed this year. Most of the reminiscing was captured on tape and then diligently processed and typed up by Sandy.

Thus, lots of interesting information about railways, gas works, the ruins, a leper hospital, swimming baths, the mills, the river, Sportsman’s Hall, Cottonmill Lane, Prospect Road, the watercress industry, schools, churches etc. has now been recorded.

E.g. did you know that the golf course was home to some special evacuees during the war? Sheep evacuated from elsewhere not to let them fall in German hands!

HCC Locality Budget Scheme grant

The plan is to publish a book about Sopwell’s history and to incorporate 5 historic walks.

To help fund the cost of publishing, Sandy successfully applied to our County Councillor, Martin Frearson, for £500 from the Locality Budget scheme. There is no date for publication as yet.

Sopwell Noticeboards Project

It’s always been a bit of a challenge for us to “spread the word” in Sopwell about events, activities, public consultations, planning matters etc.

To address this somewhat, we thought that it would be good if we had a couple of

noticeboards in Sopwell, near the shops on Abbots Avenue West and Vesta Avenue.

Grassroots grant

With assistance from Stella Merryweather from CVS and Chris Roach, Community Engagement Manager at SADC, Sandy Norman managed to secure a [Grassroots grant](#) from the [Community Development Foundation](#) for £1,925 to help pay for two noticeboards.

SADC's Housing department kindly agreed to pay half the cost of the noticeboard on Abbots Avenue West (as part of the improvements planned for the area) and SADC also took care of selecting, buying and installing the boards, which happened last January.

And when it turned out that we had some money left over, Sandy obtained permission from the grassroots fund to use it to install a further noticeboard at the Marlborough Pavilion.

FORUMS

The SRA is represented on a number of bodies and forums.

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space Management Group

The partnership between [St Albans District Council](#) (SADC), [Countryside Management Service](#) (CMS), the [Sopwell Residents Association](#) (SRA) and the [Cottonmill and Nunnery Allotments Association](#), looking after the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space on Cottonmill Lane, is referred to as the "Sopwell Nunnery Green Space Management Group".

The group has regular meetings during the year, which some of our committee members always attend.

Earlier this year, SADC/CMS decided to review how they currently work with various "Friends of" groups in the District and they concluded that it was desirable to have standard working practices for all Friends groups.

SADC/CMS then produced and distributed a "Friends of Greenspaces" Action Pack which defines the standard approach for working with all Friends groups in the District in the future. The pack outlines both what is expected from a Friends group and what support will be provided in return (e.g. training and insurance).

Our Chair has been persuaded by SADC/CMS to sign the Friends of Greenspaces Agreement and, since then, a few committee members have already been able to attend specific training from CMS, on "Task Planning and Leadership" and "Leading Guided Walks", with more to follow.

ABFLY and Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership

The SRA is a member of [The Abbey Flyer Users' Group](#), better known as "ABFLY". The user group goes back to 1995 and was formed to keep the branch line alive and thriving, and make sure that standards are kept up.

In 2005, ABFLY became a key part of the [Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership](#) (CRP)

In January 2010, the Department for Transport and Herts County Council ran a consultation on **The future of the Abbey Line**, with a proposal to convert the line to light rail, i.e. to run a tram instead. The results were published in October and are [available on-line here](#). Basically, a majority of respondents (66%) was in favour and, if all goes according to plan, a tram could be up and running by 2012.

Neighbourhood Policing meetings

Committee member Rick Taylor is the SRA's portfolio holder on Police and Neighbourhood Watch matters.

He attends regular Neighbourhood Policing meetings for the [St Albans South Neighbourhood](#), which consists of Sopwell ward together with Verulam ward.

The meetings are part of [Hertfordshire Constabulary](#)'s Safer Neighbourhoods strategy and their main purpose is to set the policing priorities for the area.

Each neighbourhood has its own dedicated Police Constable (PC) and Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), who work closely together with local authority wardens and officers, Neighbourhood Watch groups and people and organisations accredited as partners in community safety.

Meetings take place every 3 months, during which the top 10 issues in the area are discussed and the top three issues of those are nominated as the current priorities. These then last 3 months, but can last longer if they remain relevant.

Details of the current priorities and the top 10 issues they were selected from, as well as who makes up the local policing team, can be found on-line on the [St Albans South Neighbourhood](#) web page.

Another interesting resource are the new on-line local crime maps at www.police.uk where you can find out which types of crime have been reported where, down to street level.

Neighbourhood Watch

Rick Taylor also attends meetings of [Neighbourhood Watch](#) coordinators.

In last November's meeting, PC Jos Bartlett, Watch Liaison Officer for Sopwell ward, talked about **SmartWater**, a new theft deterrent. It allows people to mark their valuables with a unique DNA-style forensic code. Also, if sprayed on an intruder, it would provide the police with evidence that a suspect was present on the scene of a crime. Any residents interested in purchasing SmartWater can do so at a discounted rate from their local Neighbourhood Watch group. More information [here](#).

St Albans City Forum

The [St Albans City Forum](#) is a consultative body, a way for the Council to communicate with representatives of community groups, stakeholders, businesses and members of the public, to discuss new initiatives, policies, strategies and actions and to receive feedback.

The St Albans City Forum also enables local residents and community groups to raise their concerns on a range of issues relating both to Council services and to the responsibility of other agencies, including Hertfordshire Highways, the Police, West Hertfordshire Primary Care Trust, etc, and to contribute to Council policies and strategies.

Peter Wares usually attends the meetings for us. The minutes of the meetings are available online from the [St Albans City Forum](#) page on the council website.

St Albans Environmental Forum (STEF)

STEF brings together the Council and various groups and organisations in the district interested in the environment and sustainability. The meetings, which are led by SADC's Sustainability team, are usually a combination of a topical presentation and workshops to discuss the issue and potential solutions. The STEF gets together about every 4 months, with the SRA always represented last year.

In September, the theme of the meeting was "Fuel Poverty" and in January "Waste Management and Recycling in St Albans District".

St Albans Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Conference

Local Strategic Partnerships exist in nearly all local authority areas in England. They bring together representatives from the local statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors

to address local problems, allocate funding, discuss strategies and initiatives. They aim to encourage joint working and community involvement, and prevent 'silo working' (i.e. different agencies that share aims but are working in isolation), with the general aim of ensuring resources are better allocated at a local level.

The [St Albans Local Strategic Partnership](#) (LSP) has a [Constitution](#) available on-line.

Every year, usually in October at the Rothamsted Conference Centre, the LSP organises a day conference to communicate its work to a wider audience and to provide an opportunity for community organisations and groups across the District to become actively involved and to network.

Several of our members usually attend the conference, although last year only our Vice-chair, Chris Pudsey, was able to attend.

Last year's theme was **"Targeting Change. Local Solutions to Local Issues"**.

The format was similar to previous years with a report on developments, a keynote speaker (the new Bishop of St Albans), a film, and several workshops and showcases.

The film with the year's achievements can be viewed on-line [here](#).

Bishop Alan Smith's key note was about two ways that people do community: 'bonding', i.e. getting together with other like-minded people in a fairly inward looking way, and 'bridging', outward looking and inclusive.

Workshops included one to discuss "The Big Society".

Some interesting items from a list of possible future LSP projects that Chris picked up on: integrated community transport, active management of the greenbelt, a biomass/biogas facility, Sopwell Health Clinic, Marlborough Community Hub.

CONSULTATIONS

The SRA responded to several formal and informal consultations.

Marlborough Pavilion consultation

Early last year we became aware that the council was looking into turning the Marlborough Pavilion into a community centre for Sopwell and was going to do a feasibility study.

In July, we were asked to participate in a consultation about the pavilion and one of our committee members got interviewed by telephone. Several months later, our chair also got interviewed.

Throughout, the council kept their cards very close to their chest, however. When, on several occasions, at City Forum meetings, we asked to see the results of the consultation, we were promised a copy, but we never got one. And, eventually, we were told that we couldn't have it.

At the time we were rather disappointed about the consultation process and expressed our concern in a letter to the council.

In March this year, the council organised a [public consultation meeting](#) at the Marlborough Pavilion. Local residents and stakeholders were all invited to come hear about the plans for a community centre, provide feedback on them and voice ideas for use of the centre.

The plans were also put on display at Sainsbury's the next day to give residents another opportunity to make comments and offer feedback.

Several committee members attended the public meeting and, in all, there were some 40 people present.

Officers from SADC and the project architect outlined a three-phase approach to redevelop the building into a local community centre, tentatively called “Sopwell Community Centre”.

Phase 1 would provide a temporary weights room and additional storage to enable the weight lifters club to move from the dilapidated Youth Club on Leyland Avenue. Phase 2 would potentially provide a multi-purpose room of about 17m² with a central partition, and additional storage. Finally, if the demand exists and funding is secured, there would be the possibility of creating a new larger community centre in Phase 3 of the development.

Officers explained that the plans were presently at the outline stage and that no planning applications for Phases 2 and 3 had yet been submitted. They also said that there were no plans to seek an alcohol licence for the premises and that they were determined to ensure that there is no increase in anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of the centre.

Residents’ ideas for activities which could take place at the new “Sopwell Community Centre” included: mother and toddler groups, computer classes for the elderly, music lessons, art classes, weights training, a youth club, and exercise and dance classes, such as line dancing, yoga, and pilates. It was also suggested that the community centre could be used by voluntary and community groups, for neighbourhood policing meetings and for councillor surgeries.

Richard Shwe, Head of Community Services for SADC, summed it up nicely: “We want this centre to be one which is run by the community for the community, where everyone feels they have a stake in the success of the building. It needs to move on from being primarily a sports pavilion serving the young and be a building that everyone of all ages and from all backgrounds can use.”

Outline plans for the site should be available on the Council’s website shortly. Anyone interested in registering their interest in using the building or in being a member of the proposed management group should contact Chris Roach, Community Engagement Manager at SADC.

Sopwell Conservation Area Character Statements consultation

In October 2010, SADC ran a consultation inviting residents to comment on a series of draft documents that describe 18 Conservation Areas in St Albans, areas that are considered by the Council to be “of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

The [Conservation Area Character Statements](#) aim to explain why an area has been designated with this status. Each document defines the elements that make the area that it covers special and that, therefore, need to be preserved and enhanced, and it also explains how the area developed historically.

The documents are used to help shape future planning policy, but they are worth reading in their own right as they contain lovely bits of history!

In the committee we agreed that we would submit comments for those areas that are part of Sopwell. Peter Segers collated the comments from committee members and submitted a response on behalf of the SRA.

Winter Plan grit spreader consultation

In February, we received a letter from Moira Wollington, Principal Waste Management Officer at SADC, asking for feedback on an idea to give a push along grit spreader to residents associations for gritting local pedestrian areas in winter. The Council would provide the salt and we would be expected to maintain, store and operate the device.

We responded with a letter seeking clarification on a number of points by asking questions

about how this might work in practice. We thought that, besides helping to address the problem of icy local footpaths in winter, the idea had potential to bring the community together, e.g. if residents involved wore hi-viz vests with “Sopwell Residents” on.

Alban Way Management Plan consultation

The Council and CMS conducted a review of the current Management Plan for the [Alban Way](#) and produced an updated version for the period from 2011 until 2016.

The council then invited members of the public to comment on the [draft](#), with the consultation period open until 25th March 2011.

We discussed the draft amongst ourselves and also informed other groups about the consultation, but decided that interested committee members should each submit any comments directly, in their own name.

St Albans LDF “Shaping Our Community” consultations

The “Shaping Our Community” consultations were about defining the high-level planning policy principles for locating future development in the District, i.e. the policy for deciding where to put new housing and employment.

The outcome will be what is called the Core Strategy document which will form the basis of the [Local Development Framework](#) (LDF). Each Local Planning Authority – the District in this case – must create a LDF, a series of documents that set out policies and proposals for future development within its area between now and 2028. The Core Strategy sits at the centre of the LDF, to be followed later by other more detailed documents.

In July 2010, SADC ran a number of “Shaping Our Community” workshops and Chris Pudsey attended one of them for the SRA.

Residents were asked to express an opinion on different types of housing provision: urban consolidation (opportunistic filling in spaces), smaller settlements (on previously developed land but potentially also a little bit on greenbelt), eco-village on Harperbury hospital site (this site will be developed anyway and an eco-village would be a nice way to do it), or urban extensions (possibly into the greenbelt).

The conclusion in Chris' session seemed to be: let's simply do a bit of everything.

In December-January, SADC then organised a further LDF Core Strategy consultation, this time using an on-line questionnaire (with hard copies available on request).

Some of our committee members attended a meeting called by SADC in January, to explain the purpose of the consultation to non-parished wards and resident associations to ensure that as many people as possible would fill in the questionnaire.

We decided to each submit our own response to the questionnaire.

SADC have since published a progress update and summary on-line [here](#).

Inclusion Strategy consultation

From mid November to early February, SADC consulted residents and community groups on their [draft Inclusion Strategy](#).

The strategy aims for our District to be an inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity and capability to take part and contribute to community life.

To achieve this, the draft document put forward a number of proposals, such as a civic awards scheme and greater roles for citizens as community leaders.

In the SRA committee we decided to respond individually, with Chris Pudsey to also submit a general response from SRA, making a specific point about no-hardcopy consultations.

The final [Inclusion Strategy](#) document has since been published, describing many new opportunities to contribute to community life.

Hertfordshire Policing Plan 2011-14

Through his involvement in [Neighbourhood Watch](#) and participation in Neighbourhood Policing meetings for the [St Albans South Neighbourhood](#), Rick Taylor has contributed to Hertfordshire's [Policing Plan for 2011/2014](#), a rolling plan that gets updated annually.

[Hertfordshire Police Authority](#) officially launched the plan at Police Headquarters in Welwyn Garden City on Monday 28th March.

MONITORING & HELPING

We kept an eye on what's going on in the ward, examining planning applications and

Abbots Avenue West shopping parade enhancements

Work to improve the street scene near the shops on Abbots Avenue West (AAW) has continued, co-ordinated by Chris Roach, SADC's Community Engagement Manager.

In July, Year 6 pupils from nearby Mandeville Primary School painted murals on the two giant planters and planted flowers in them.

The murals project was led for the school by volunteer artist Lorna Corbet, and help to design the planting scheme came from Aylett Nurseries, who donated the services of their garden designer, Martin Finney.

Earlier, staff from the Council's grounds maintenance contractor John O'Conner made their own contribution to the community project, by clearing new weeds from the planters and then laying down fresh topsoil, without charging for their work.

Initially, there has been a bit of vandalism, from children getting on to the planters and squashing the young plants, but the situation seems stable now the plants have grown, with litter accumulating in the planters and watering/weeding the main issues remaining.

Ward councillors, notably Cllr David Poor, have been involved in ongoing maintenance and have even undertaken additional planting and mulching, assisted by a couple of SRA committee members.

We have also been checking it over on an adhoc basis and, when we did our Bulb Planting event in October, we gave the planters a good clean before planting the bulbs.

As to who is responsible for the continuing maintenance of the planters: ultimately they are owned by SADC's Housing Department and there will be a contract with John O'Conner to maintain them. But SADC would like them to be managed by the community.

Other improvements, apart from the planters: a new noticeboard financed by SRA – see Projects section above – and earlier this year a couple of trees got planted.

To lessen the risk of vandalism, larger circumference trees were chosen, with cast iron grills added round the base and tree trunk protectors.

Especially during the first year, the trees may need watering, and it would be really helpful if residents could lend a hand and keep an eye on the health of the trees.

The Council operates a Tree Warden scheme where volunteer tree wardens monitor the new tree sites and ensure they are healthy. The new trees at AAW will be added to the list for tree wardens to monitor. Anybody who would like to know more, or is interested in becoming a tree warden, is welcome to contact David Curry, SADC Trees and Woodlands Officer, for further details.

Finally, with regards to Herts County Council funding the reinstating of the grass verges

and improving the car parking, that will depend on the availability of funding. Last year, there was no budget available.

Parking on grass verges

We received complaints from residents who are thoroughly fed up with people who insist on parking their cars on grass verges. Over the past few months great gouges have been made in many verges, which turn into muddy puddles after rain or snow. It looks extremely unsightly and leaves the ground uneven making it difficult for the council contractors to mow whatever grass is left. Added to this, it spoils the look of the neighbourhood and it gives the impression that nobody cares much about the area.

We appreciate that there are problems with parking, especially in places where there is a lot of building work happening, notably in Creighton Avenue near Mandeville School where it is mostly down to delivery trucks and parents dropping off or picking up children.

And, although the building work at Mandeville is temporary, we are concerned that, due to the school doubling in size, there could be lots of additional traffic from parents later.

We contacted Herts Highways, our local councillors, and the head of Mandeville school to raise our concerns and speak out in support of residents' complaints.

Cllr Eileen Harris wrote to the local PC and PCSO asking for their help, PCSO John Massey made visits, County Cllr Martin Frearson added his support to get the message across to Herts Highways, and Amanda Godfrey, the Head of Mandeville, took steps to try and reduce the problem by having a member of the school leadership team on duty every morning outside the school, speaking to parents and requesting that they park more considerately, and writing down the registration numbers and descriptions of persistent offenders who are then contacted directly.

However, if people don't respond voluntarily then solutions will be sought to stop them. Herts Highways might put up bollards or other barriers as has been done elsewhere in the District, but do we really want Sopwell's streets to be littered with bollards every few metres? Another solution under consideration is a regular patrol by parking wardens.

Overhanging foliage obstructing pavements and footpaths

Committee member Jack Hill has been trying to sort out overhanging foliage in the ward, but it has been a difficult struggle. Several pavements have issues in this respect, especially for people with a disability, e.g. where uncut hedges make it difficult or impossible for people with a disability scooter to get past without leaving the pavement.

After many emails, Herts Highways simply told Jack that they were not going to reply to any further emails because they were not going to do anything about it, notwithstanding Section 130A of the Highways Act 1980.

With self-service also not allowed, it seems to be a lost cause. We are considering asking someone with a scooter and a camera to gather evidence.

Litter

Unfortunately, there is plenty of litter in Sopwell. Our Litter Pick helps but only a little.

Authorities have a clean-up responsibility, but only if the litter is on land that they are responsible for. In Everard Close, near Sainsbury, was an area that no authority seemed to take responsibility for.

Jack Hill went to the bottom of this, until Hertfordshire Highways eventually confirmed that the disputed verge area in Everard Close is "adopted highway" and thus their responsibility for keeping it clean.

Children's playground fence in Berners Drive

Vandals tore down one side of the fence around the children's playground on Berners Drive some time early last year. We reminded the council several times during the year, until the fence finally got repaired – replaced actually – in January this year.

Cycle route 6/61 safety

The SRA's Peter Wares kept up his efforts to highlight several safety issues with National Cycle Route 6/61 which runs through Sopwell ward. The main ones are: the Berners Drive-Abbots Avenue crossing; the Vesta Avenue-Watling Street crossing; the route next to Mandeville Primary School with a post in the middle of the path and the hedge often left overgrown narrowing the path; poor sight lines at the Leyland Avenue junction where the hedge along Cottonmill Lane obscures drivers view of cyclists emerging onto the road.

In January 2011, Peter raised the matter at a meeting of the SADC Overview and Scrutinee (Public Services) Committee, and suggested that they might want to have a go at cycling the NCR-61 route through Sopwell to find out hands-on about the safety issues.

Because of this and other cycling related interventions, the OSC committee agreed to put a more general "Cycling in the District" one-hour item on the agenda for their meeting in June this year, where representatives of local cycling groups will be given an opportunity to speak on what the Council could do to improve cycling facilities in the District along with allowing the Council to explain what they were doing already.

Air traffic increase

In July, a local resident contacted us by email to complain about a noticeable increase in frequency and noise from low-flying air traffic over Sopwell recently. Cllr Martin Frearson, who had also received a copy of the email, confirmed that people in Verulam ward had reported this too.

We wrote to Anne Main MP and received a response saying that she'd passed this on to Richard Deakin, the Chief Executive of [National Air Traffic Services](#) (NATS).

In September, Anne Main MP forwarded us the reply from the CEO of NATS, saying that nothing had changed recently in terms of routes or procedures and suggesting that the increase in noise might simply be due to seasonal traffic (peak holiday season), from Luton arrivals in particular, with the noise made more noticeable because people have their windows open with the good weather, especially in the evenings.

St Albans is also close to one of Heathrow's main departure routes for late night flights to the Far East, he said, but that had always been the case and nothing had changed in terms of either routes or procedures.

However, the CEO wanted to point out that NATS does not determine the volume of traffic and he advised contacting [BAA Heathrow's Flight Evaluation Unit](#) as they are required to keep track of all aircraft movements to and from the airport and log any related noise complaints.

Anne Main MP admitted that the reply did not seem to shed any light on the situation and recommended us to keep monitoring and to let her know if it continued to be a problem.

Note: we also found that if anyone wants to complain about noise from air traffic to or from Luton Airport, they can do so on-line at the [Luton Airport](#) website.

Network Rail communications mast near Berners Drive

A local resident contacted us about Network Rail's intention to erect a communications mast next to the rail track near the open space and the children's playground at the bottom of Berners Drive. Work was already underway and the resident was concerned about

harmful emissions for people and children living and playing nearby.

We replied with links to relevant web pages with more information ([link1](#), [link2](#), [link3](#)), but we felt that we couldn't do much more because we understand that the normal planning rules do not apply as this development is governed by rail safety regulations.

Alban Way fence on Sadleir Road bridge

Residents from Sadleir Road got really upset, with a flurry of emails flying about, when, in February, they suddenly discovered that a very unattractive 1.8 meter high metal safety fence had been erected on top of the Alban Way bridge at the bottom of Sadleir Road.

The fence replaced a simple wooden one, which had seemed perfectly adequate and fitted in well with the surroundings.

It didn't help that this happened right after all the trees and shrubs on the bridge's banks were cut down, apparently to stop the roots from damaging the bridge. With the lack of any shrubbery, only bare soil, considered an eyesore already, this just made it even worse.

Residents felt strongly that they should have been consulted for such a radical change to the street view, and offered help to replace the fence and replant, to keep costs down.

The SRA and local councillors spoke up in support of the residents, and Brian Peers, City & District Engineer, reviewing the situation, then proposed measures to remedy the situation (which, by the way, wasn't his decision, but a colleague's who had since gone on long-term sick leave).

The proposal is to replace the fence by a lower 1.2m one, with timber rails, keeping the posts, but cut down to the lower height and painted black, and replanting the banks with suitable plants to soften the view now that all the vegetation have been removed. And a new home has been found for the fencing removed: it will be used to protect allotments which have been subject to ongoing vandalism in another part of the city.

If you and the community groups wanted to get involved and do the planting to the embankments then the cost of the plants could be reimbursed up to an agreed figure, and it would give people a choice as to how they want the area to look in the future.

Sainsbury's revised planning application 5/2009/2385

Sainsbury want to extend their supermarket, by adding a mezzanine level, and reconfigure the car park, with a covered walkway and some landscaping. Their first application ([5/2009/0189](#)) included a decked car park but they withdrew it in response to strong local objections.

In February 2010, we looked at Sainsbury's new application ([5/2009/2385](#)) and found it to be of a high standard, with a proper tree survey, covered cycle parking, a green travel plan, a customer survey etc. Still, we submitted our concerns to the council, mostly to do with the development's impact on local traffic, especially when considering the planned redevelopment of Griffiths Way retail park, opposite ([5/2009/1997](#)).

In February this year, Cllr David Poor alerted us that Sainsbury's application was now due to come before the planning committee with a recommendation to grant it.

We decided that we didn't have any particular reason to oppose the application but that we would forward the information to residents in Leyland Avenue who might have a different view as their properties are close to Sainsbury's.

When residents looked at the plans again, they noticed that they had been changed since the consultation in Feb 2010 – now proposing windows with obscured glazing along the Leyland Avenue side of the proposed mezzanine. But none of the residents had been consulted or notified about this and they felt strongly that they should have been.

Advised and supported by Cllr Poor, residents decided to attend the public meeting of the planning committee to speak out against, focusing on the windows issue, and they got several neighbours to be present to show a strong opposition. Cllr David Poor and Cllr Eileen Harris also spoke at the meeting, raising the residents' points, with Cllr Poor putting forward some alternative options.

As a result, the committee agreed to grant on the condition that the windows were opaque rather than obscured glass and that a management plan was developed to manage delivery times – as they had also complained about noisy deliveries throughout the night.

Residents were pleased with the outcome.

COMMUNICATIONS

Newsletter

We produced and delivered two newsletters, issue No 17 in Autumn 2010 and No 18 in Spring 2011. Thank you to all who provided content and helped with door-to-door delivery.

Website

Sandy Norman made sure the website at www.sopwell.org.uk was kept up to date, adding bits to the Sopwell Project content especially. Do visit the site and give us your feedback!

During the Boardwalk Project, Peter Segers also created a blog for the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space at sopwellnunnery.wordpress.com

Public meetings

We held only one public meeting last year, our AGM on Tuesday 8th June 2010.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Jose Sena stepped back as active committee member in the past year but remains a supporter. We would like to thank him for his work over the years.

During the year, no new members were co-opted in the management committee.

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

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

However, Sandy Norman wishes to step down as Chair, and Mark James as Treasurer.

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

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

You can contact us via the website at www.sopwell.org.uk or by sending an email to info@sopwell.org.uk

Peter Segers
SRA Secretary

May 2011