

**Sopwell Residents Association  
Annual General Meeting – 9<sup>th</sup> May 2017  
Held at Mandeville School, St Albans**

**Those signed in to attendance sheet:** Rick Taylor (Chair), SADC Councillors Eileen Harris and Janet Smith, HCC Councillor Sandy Walkington; Jo Cooney, Jack Hill, Steve Peters, Sandy Norman, Barry Bateman, Mark James, Dominic Tang, Adelle Stapleton, Willem Hofland, Jennifer Taylor, Jo Welch, Margaret Fensome, Andrew Johnstone, Anna Bates, Keith Bates, John Burke, Jean Smith, Janet Smith, Michelle Mackenzie, Gail Jackson.

1. **Welcome and introduction:** Rick Taylor welcomed all present and in particular thanked the Councillors for taking the time to attend.
2. **Apologies:** Received from St Albans District Councillor Iain Grant, Maggy Douglas, Janet Charles, Peter Wares, Shakir Rahman
3. **To approve minutes of AGM held 10<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** These minutes have been posted on the SRA website and were approved as a correct record of that meeting. Proposed by Barry Bateman and seconded by Jo Cooney.
4. **Matters arising from the Minutes:** No matters arising.
5. **To receive and adopt Annual Accounts for 2016/2017 presented by Dom Tang:** Dom circulated the Statement of Accounts and schedule of SRA assets which had been independently examined by Andy Sharpe and signed off by email. These show an opening balance for the financial year from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 of £2,804.17, which includes proceeds received from the sale of the Sopwell Memories books, £100 from SADC and personal donations of £89.00. Expenses for the year amounted to £237.58 which gave a closing balance of £2,942.09.  
Jack Hill proposed that the accounts be adopted.  
Rick thanked Dom for his hard work during the year and for preparing and presenting the minutes. Dom is standing down from his role and from the committee as he is moving away from the area.
6. **Annual Report presented by Jo Cooney, Joint Secretary**

**Committee Structure and Changes**

Dominic Tang will not be standing for re-election. We thank him for his time and service as Sopwell Residents Association Treasurer. We are therefore looking for anyone interested in filling this post.

Adelle Stapleton is standing down from her role as co-secretary. We thank her for her time and effort. There is a vacancy for shared responsibility for the secretary role.

The following people are putting themselves forward for election / re-election:

Barry Bateman, Janet Charles, Jo Cooney, Maggy Douglas, Jack Hill, Willem Hofland, Mark James, Steve Peters, Martin Reed, Jennifer Taylor, Rick Taylor,.

The following are prepared to be re-elected as officers:

Chairperson: Rick Taylor

Vice Chairperson: Barry Bateman

Treasurer: *Vacant*  
Secretary: Jo Cooney / *Vacant*  
Minutes secretary: Jennifer Taylor

Sandy Norman, Peter Wares and Peter Segers are filling ex-officio support roles to the committee.

Any Sopwell resident is entitled to stand at the AGM for any office mentioned above. Please let us know if you are interested in joining the committee.

### **Activities and events**

#### **Walks**

Maggy Douglas led 30 people on a “Sopwell Secrets” walk on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2016 (her second of the month, having taken 33 people on a similar walk at the start of May just before the last SRA SGM). The walk took in the Alban Way and St Stephen’s field, where the white cow parsley and hawthorn were apparently lovely.

The 25<sup>th</sup> August saw a dusk walk around Sopwell looking for bats. Undertaken by the Countryside Management Services (CMS) and the Ware Bat Group, the bat walk has seen up to five different types of bats in the Sopwell area, all found using bat detection equipment.

Local Councillor Eileen Harris took a group of local residents on a History Walk around Sopwell on 16<sup>th</sup> October. Starting at the Nunnery Green space, the interesting walk included the Sopwell Nunnery ruins (the remains of Lee Hall), the ex-lido St Albans Sub-Aqua Club and parts of the River Ver.

#### **Bulb planting**

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2016 saw a number of residents and committee members come together to plant over 300 daffodil bulbs in areas of Wilshere Avenue, Tavistock Avenue, Berners Drive, Grindcobbe, and Riverside Road. All came up in the March and provided a beautiful spring display, alongside the plantings from previous years.

#### **Willow tunnel**

The Sopwell willow tunnel, planted in 2012, has had its latest pruning in March 2017 thanks to committee members Maggy Douglas and Barry Bateman. Volunteers interested in learning how to prune willow and lend a hand keeping it looking well-maintained can contact either Barry Bateman or keep an eye on the SRA facebook page or website for details of upcoming pruning events.

#### **Litter pick**

As part of the Great British Spring Clean, over 25 bags of rubbish and an old mattress were picked up from the roads around the area on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2017. While this is an annual event, note should be made of local litter hero Jack Hill, whose daily litter picks keep Sopwell looking good. His efforts made the Herts Advertiser this March!

#### **Sopwell Project**

Sandy Norman gave two talks during the year about the Project. Our book, *Sopwell: a history and collection of memories* has not been selling very well this year and our printer, who has kindly been storing copies for us, told us he now needs the space. As we have nowhere to store them

ourselves (about 40 boxes), it has been decided that we could keep a few boxes only and the rest would have to be pulped. We also decided to give them away rather than sell them.

## Communications

### Web communications

Sopwell Residents Association now has a Facebook page, thanks to Janet Charles. The page now has over 250 members and has been a useful way to publicise events. Thank you also to Peter Segers who manages the SRA's web page [www.sopwell.org.uk](http://www.sopwell.org.uk).

### Newsletter

Two newsletters are produced each year, keeping residents abreast of local events and sent out to all 3,000 residents of Sopwell. Thanks to Barry Bateman (editor), Maggy Douglas (distribution co-ordinator) and the team of local volunteers who deliver the newsletters. If you are interested in writing an article for the next newsletter or hiring advertising space, then please contact Barry Bateman. Anyone able to help deliver the newsletters, please contact Maggy Douglas.

### Conferences and meetings

- We have held six committee meetings during the year.
- Rick Taylor attended meetings of the Combined Group of Residents Associations.
- Jo Cooney attended one meeting of the Combined Group of Residents Associations.
- Rick Taylor attended meetings of the City and Neighbourhoods Committee of St Albans City and District Council.
- Janet Charles attended one meeting of the City and Neighbourhoods Committee of St Albans City and District Council.
- Rick Taylor attended Ward Co-ordinators meetings of St Albans and District Neighbourhood Ward Co-ordinators.
- Willem Hofland has attended one meeting of the Bus Users Forum.
- Rick Taylor has met with PCSO Seb Jackson.

### Upcoming activities and events

A Walk through Sopwell will take place on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2017, meeting 2.30pm outside Mandeville School, Mandeville Drive. The 2.5 mile stroll aims to explore Sopwell's farming history.

The SRA are holding a Charity Market stall in the city centre on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017. There will be displays of local history, as well as free copies of ex-officio committee member Sandy Norman's wonderful and informative book *Sopwell: a history and collection of memories*.

**Jo Cooney** May 2017

Rick thanked Jo for presenting such a comprehensive and well illustrated report, complete with Powerpoint slides.

7. **Welcome of guest speaker:** Rick welcomed Kevin Ambrose of the Abbey Flyer Group (AbbFly) which represents the users of the line. Kevin stood in at short notice for Dave Horton who was unable to attend. Kevin gave an illustrated talk on the background and management of the train line between St Albans Abbey Station and Watford Junction. London Midland are responsible for the running of the line. He explained that a shuttle bus has started to run, serving the Abbey Station/St Peter's Street/City Station in an attempt to encourage more use of the line, although this service hasn't received much publicity. AbbFly's remit is to fight for the long

term future of the line which was threatened with closures during the 1960s and again in the 1980s. There was a recent proposal to convert the line to a busway.

AbbFly has a new website and Facebook page and a Twitter Account. Their AGM is being held on 5<sup>th</sup> July and takes place at the St Stephens Parish Centre in Bricket Wood. They are campaigning to become attached to the Oyster network and Freedom Pass.

Kevin took several questions from the audience and Sandy Walkington commended the group to all present.

Sandy advised that the County Council still want to build a footbridge over the Cottonmill crossing.

## **8. Election of Management Committee**

Rick began by thanking Dom Tang (Treasurer) and Adelle Stapleton (co-secretary) who were both standing down from the committee. Rick reiterated the fact that the SRA committee is now seeking a new treasurer and assistant secretary. In the meantime, the remainder of the committee members are all still available to stand for re-election. Andrew Johnstone proposed that the remaining members of the committee be re-elected and this was seconded by Gail Jackson. Rick thanked all the committee members for their support during the year.

## **9. Announcements**

Gail Jackson announced:

- (a) The Council Community Grants Fund is now open and groups such as SRA are being encouraged and invited to put forward their ideas for anything from £500 to £5,000. This is part of the Council's 'inclusion strategy' scheme. The deadline for applications is 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017. Jo took the opportunity to remind those present about the toy lending library.
- (b) Gail told the meeting about the textile workshops coming soon to Sopwell. This will be a 9 week project and is aimed at women over the age of 18 living in the Sopwell area. It is an opportunity to spend a couple of hours every week to get creative, with no craft experience necessary. This is part of the Arts on Prescription project and more information can be obtained by contacting Chris on [artsonprescription@1life.co.uk](mailto:artsonprescription@1life.co.uk).

Michelle Mackenzie announced:

- (a) She is endeavouring to form a community hub for the Sopwell area and invited those present to a meeting at St Julian's Church on 11<sup>th</sup> May at 10.30 a.m.. Betty Entwistle House and the King Offa had been put forward as possible venues. However, Anne Main (MP) is supporting the conversion of the Mandeville Clinic in Mandeville Drive into a community hub. Apparently the clinic has been put up for sale. Sopwell Community Trust which is made up of the local Bangladeshi community are interested and they are putting together some funds. Apparently proposals keep being made and fail. Cllr Harris advised that she'd been told the King Offa will go a housing association for a residential development.
- (b) Cllr Walkington said that the Cunningham Hub is run by HCC in the library building and is run as a day centre. However, after 4.00 p.m. it can be hired by the local community.
- (c) Cllr Harris said SADC has spent a bit of money on the Marlborough Pavilion and the Verulam Cycle Club and a youth club have started to use it.
- (d) Michelle raised the issue of the three sets of allotments in Sopwell. SADC has notified allotment holders of the proposed staged rent increases over the next few years. The allotments are a valuable asset to the community; the stages of increase

over the next few years are 7%, 14%, 48% and 82%. The current rent is £50 p.a. per plot.

- (e) Cllr Smith said that the matter of allotments would be discussed at the next City & Neighbourhoods meeting and advised that at the moment the allotments make a considerable loss for the Council and this loss must be recovered somehow.
- (f) Cllr Walkington said that people who live in the parished areas of St Albans, i.e. outside of the City area, pay higher council tax than residents in the non-parished areas (i.e. Sopwell) and thus pay less for their allotments.
- (g) Mark James considered the Council overspent on the gates at the Sopwell Mill allotment site.

#### 10. AOB

Cllr Smith was thanked for arranging to get the rubbish removed behind Leyland Avenue.

Jennifer Taylor reminded those present that SRA was taking the charity stall at the market on Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> June and help would be much appreciated from 8.30 a.m. The stall will close at around 2.30 – 3.00. It would take much the same form as that held a couple of years ago, showcasing the history of the area (via Steve Peters' archive) and Sandy Norman's Sopwell Memory book, copies of which will be FREE to anyone – however, a voluntary donation would be very welcome!

The meeting closed with refreshments which included a box of Jack Hill's homemade rock cakes, for which many thanks, Jack!