

Sopwell Residents Association
AGM – 14th May 2015
Mandeville School

Those present: Rick Taylor (chairman), Sandy Norman (acting secretary), Cllr. Janet Smith, Jack Hill, R & M Douglas, Len Lewsey, Dom Tang (Treasurer), Peter Wares, Jo Welch, Lawrence Jevon, Andrew Johnstone, Paula Johnstone, Mike Bennett, Jill Bennett, Mark James, Frances Burrows, Jennifer Taylor (minute secretary)

1. Welcome and introduction from the Chairman:
Rick welcomed and thanked those attending the SRA's 12th AGM. The Association was formed in 2003. He reminded the attendees that every resident of the Ward was a member of the Association and that there was no subscription payable.
2. Apologies for absence:
Received from Cllr Harris, Cllr Ian Grant, HCC Cllr Sandy Walkington (who was attending the AGM of Verulam Residents Association), Willem Hofland, Barry and Linda Bateman, Martin Reed, Val Langford and Anne Wares.
3. To approve minutes of previous AGM which took place on 21st May 2014:
One editorial error was pointed out: in second paragraph of item 4, the final word should read *limit* and not limited.
The approval of the minutes was proposed by Andrew Johnston and seconded by Mark James. Thus, the minutes of the 2014 AGM were approved.
4. Matters arising from the minutes.
Cllr Smith advised that she, along with Cllrs Harris and Grant had a meeting with the Council's parking officers in connection with Cottonmill Lane and it has been agreed that they will not be putting in the double yellow lines on the opposite side of the road from where the new black-top verges have been laid.
There were no other matters arising.
5. To receive and adopt audited statement of the Annual Accounts for 2014/15
Copies of the audited accounts were distributed. Dom Tang (Treasurer) explained that the accounts are split into three sections and summarised the figures against each as follows:
 - Book Project, where there is an increase due to on-going sales of the book, giving a closing balance of £2,482.95
 - 'More Memories' project where movement for the year represents the work done on the Sopwell Memories website, the Memories launch party, printing and design, museum exhibition and End of Project Party. This gives a closing balance for the year of £169.40.
 - Other Activities includes other sundry items spent over the year and which gives a closing balance of £587.79.
 - The total closing balance is £3,240.14.
 - In future the current three sections of the accounts will be amalgamated.It was proposed by Mark James that that the accounts be adopted. This was seconded by Len Lewsey.
Rick thanked Dom for his hard work in preparing such comprehensive accounts and for his work during the year.
6. To receive and adopt the Annual Report of the Association presented by Acting Secretary, Sandy Norman.

Prior to commencing her formal report, Sandy reiterated her annual plea for someone to take over her role of admin secretary of the Association as she would like to concentrate wholly on the More Memories project and other matters

Committee Structure and Changes: Sandy advised Rob Sharman and Ros Poor have left the committee and thanked them for their input; consequently there are four committee vacancies to be filled. The following have put themselves forward for election/re-election: Barry Bateman, Jack Hill, Willem Hofland, Mark James, Sandy Norman, Martin Reed, Adelle Stapleton, Dom Tang, Jennifer Taylor, Rick Taylor, Peter Wares.

The following are prepared to be re-elected as officers: Chairperson – Rick Taylor; Vice Chairperson – Vacant; Treasurer – Dom Tang; Minute Secretary – Jennifer Taylor: Admin Secretary – Vacant.

Activities & Events:

Sopwell Memories Project finished officially at the end of August 2014 with a month long exhibition in the City Museum with a celebration party on 10th August to thank all those who took part with the Mayor, Councillor Geoff Harrison officially opening the exhibition and launching the website, www.sopwellmemories.org.uk. The website has been visited by approximately 28,000 and new entries are still being added from time to time.

A set of five history walk leaflets have been produced as part of the project and these free leaflets are available from the Tourist Information Centre and from the committee.

Sandy has given three presentations to local groups on the subject of the project.

This year 87 copies of 'Sopwell: a history and collection of memories' have been sold, including some via Waterstones and the Museum. There are still many more to sell and all monies raised goes towards community projects and activities.

Walks: A bat walk was held on 28th August and Eileen Harris led a history walk with the focus on WWI on 7th September 2014, repeated on 12th April this year. There was a history/environmental/archaeological walk held on 10th May lead by Sandy, Simon West – Council Archaeologist and Jez Perkins of Countryside Management Services (CMS)

Litter pick: This was held on 23rd March.

Disabled ramp to the river: Contractors have built a ramp off Cottonmill Lane by the bridge to improve access for wheelchairs, mobility vehicles and buggies and 200 metres of the River Ver Trail has been resurfaced. This links up with the boardwalk. SRA received a community grant of £5,000 towards the cost of this improvement scheme.

Willow tunnel: Due to the lack of volunteers, SRA is having to pay Hazel Godfrey, the willow designer, to maintain the tunnel. It is looking good despite a poor start to the maintenance last year because of flooding, and vandals who hacked at it in March. CMS have sent volunteers to cut back some of the overhanging willow trees which is making the tunnel list to the right looking for light.

Bulb planting: The planting team planted two bags of bulbs last autumn in the same place as the previous year resulting in another magnificent display of daffodils in Cottonmill Lane on the bridge over the Alban Way.

Conferences and meetings:

- 5 committee meetings were held during the year.

- The Combined Group of Residents Associations meetings were attended by Sandy on two occasions and Rick one.
- Rick attended four meetings of the City & Neighbourhoods Committee of St Albans City & District Council.
- Sandy attended the Smallford Station Project celebration at the University of Herts on 22nd October 2014.
- Barry Bateman and Sandy attended the St Albans Local History Conference on 25th October 2014.
- Jack Hill and Sandy attended two meetings of the Friends of Sopwell Nunnery Open Space Management Group.
- Rick Taylor and Liz Klir attended a thank you party for volunteer groups December 2014 at the House of Commons hosted by Anne Main MP.

Communications: Two newsletters have been produced in the past year and thanks were extended to the happy band of newsletter deliverers. Thanks were also extended to our website manager, Peter Segers.

A proposal that Sandy's report be adopted was made by Jack Hill and was seconded by Mark James.

Jennifer explained to those present just how much work Sandy put into SRA and thanked her for her tremendous achievements.

7. To elect management committee

Rick asked if anyone present would like to take a place on the committee. At the close of the meeting Jo Welch advised Sandy that she may be interested in joining.

Jo Welch proposed that the committee be re-elected en masse and this was seconded by Len Lewsey so all were re-elected.

8. Announcements:

- Charity Stall on the Saturday market, 15th August has been booked to showcase the Memories project and to attempt to sell more copies of the book. Sandy advised we will need a team of volunteers to help staff the stall throughout the day and she would like to hear from those able to assist.
- There will be another bat walk taking place on 20th August, 7.30 p.m. – 9.30 p.m. from the Nunnery Open Space. This will be free of charge and to be booked via CMS.
- Hatfield Railway Line – 150th Anniversary Celebrations. This is to be held between 16/18 October 2015. All the groups associated with the line are getting together but the event is being spearheaded by the Smallford Station Project team. There will be a guided walk on Friday, 16th October, walking the whole length of the Alban Way and that evening there will be a talk at the University of Hertfordshire.

On Sunday, 18th, there will be a celebration walk. SRA will be responsible for the London Road Station to the Abbey Station. We will need volunteers for the day at the London Road Station; perhaps we can dress in Victorian costume, have a picnic at the station; we will be talking about the history of the line. We hope to get the Monkey Puzzle Nursery to be involved.

- Willow tunnel social – 8th July; this will be another 'pruning' event. Hazel Godfrey has suggested making it into a social to encourage volunteers to come along, perhaps bringing along a picnic.

9. To receive a presentation from Dr Julie Moore, Deputy Director of the Heritage Hub at the University of Herts. Julie gave a fascinating talk about St Albans and the Home Front during the First World War accompanied by a slide presentation.

10. Open Forum:

Cllr Smith said that at the City & Neighbourhoods Committee it was agreed the play area at Holyrood Crescent will be completely refurbished. Part of the money is coming from monies left from last year's budget and some from this year's budget.

St Albans Council has £5,000 available for spending on improvements to the Ward. £4,000 from that will be spent on the Holyrood Crescent play area. The council officer says they are now in the process of getting tenders and the work will go ahead but it is unlikely to be finished before the school summer holidays.

We are now into the next financial year so we can look at ways to spend our next £5,000. Ideas include bat boxes, dog ladders on the river bank to prevent erosion. Mandeville School would like to fill the planters outside the shops in Abbots Avenue.

Jo Welch asked who is responsible for the hedges overhanging pavements, in particular the bushes outside Sportsman's Hall. Cllr Smith said that if they are in private ownership then it is the responsibility of the owners to cut back the hedges; the Council has the power to cut back seriously overhanging hedges and charge the owner.

Parking on pavements is a big problem and Sopwell has never had signage forbidding such parking. Leyland Avenue is particularly bad because it is so narrow and cars park on both sides of the road half on and half off the pavement.

Jennifer drew Cllr Smith's attention to the lack of street lighting on the big bend in Cottonmill Lane on the left-hand side after Weyman's old shop. This has apparently been mentioned to the police.

Mark James updated those present on the food bank held at Christadelphian Church Hall. This was slow to begin with but is now picking up; the main problem being finding somewhere to store the groceries. The organisers are looking for more volunteers and trustees to run the bank and anyone interested should speak to Mark.

11. The meeting closed with thanks once again from Rick to everyone for attending and for their contribution to the evening. Refreshments were served.