

LOWER SUNBURY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

2013 AUTUMN NEWSLETTER



www.losra.org

Spelthorne Council plans huge housing development on Kempton Park Green Belt

We have been made aware of possibly one of the most alarming development plans which Lower Sunbury has faced in the forty years of its existence.

It not only threatens a development that will change the character of our entire local area—it has the potential to help open the floodgates for development on Green Belt across the entire country.

Please be clear—this is not alarmist, nimby-ish scaremongering—it is real, and unless it is headed off at the pass very quickly, there is very little chance of our stopping it.

For the last year or so, Spelthorne Council and The Jockey Club, owners of Kempton Park, which is, of course, almost entirely within the Green Belt, have been discussing a housing development on areas of the site not used for horse-racing. The reason why Spelthorne is so actively interested in the project is that the Council is a long way short of its target for affordable housing, and they want to deal with it with a major development.

It raises the question as to whether the Council has managed its planning strategy over the last decade, if it has allowed such a situation to develop, but maybe that's another story.

The issue is now very much in the public domain - residents' groups such as LOSRA have had meetings with representatives of Spelthorne, Kempton Park and a company called Aspire, who are acting as agents and promoters of the scheme. The Council has set up a steering group to oversee the project, which involves at least one of our local Sunbury councillors, and we know that the Chief Executive, Roberto Tambini, and the

Leader of the Council, Robert Watts, are both very much in favour of the scheme and are actively promoting it.

The central issue is, of course, that the Council is proposing a major housing development on Green Belt. Spelthorne's own Core Strategy document states that "*Spelthorne's Green Belt has a critical strategic role as well as an important role locally in maintaining gaps between settlements and their separation from London. The Green Belt is a key element in securing sustainable development in the wider area around London by containing the outward spread of the capital, preserving open land for the benefit of all and encouraging urban renewal.Consequently new development will be on previously developed land.*"

Spelthorne Council is aiming to fly in the face of its own planning strategy, as set out in a statutorily agreed document.

And how does it hope to get round this? They know that development on Green Belt is only allowed in "very special circumstances". They will have to establish that there is some very special justification for such a development. We suspect that they will try to establish that the need for affordable housing and the current economic situation between them represent "very special circumstances".

This is of crucial significance because if they get away with it will set a precedent whereby the same principle could be applied across the entire country. Developers, planning consultants and corporate vested interest will seize

on it, and no planning authority will be prepared to oppose it for fear of incurring costs at public inquiries.

Central Government will be no help - they happily acceded to the lobbying of the construction industry and devised the National Planning Policy Framework, and have promoted the idea of Green Belt being released to help housing development, rather than concentrate on getting the 400,000 outstanding planning permissions on brownfield sites built.

We understand that the number of applications on the Spelthorne social housing register is at least 1,750. The area being talked about is huge - probably three or four times the size of London Irish, so could accommodate a thousand or so smallish dwellings. Traffic consultants are already working on models to see how the extra traffic can be accommodated at Sunbury Cross.

The Jockey Club obviously also stand to make a lot of money from the deal. And where will that money go? There is a covenant on the land which says that if the Jockey Club sells any land, then Spelthorne will get a percentage. But that could be lost if The Jockey Club contribute to local infrastructure through the deal.

The Jockey Club is spending £45m on redeveloping Cheltenham Racecourse and has a £20m shortfall in the funding. Guess where the profit from this development will go - not into Kempton Park or Lower Sunbury, but its flagship course in the Cotswolds would be our guess.

Please let's get one thing clear - LOSRA has absolutely no problem with

the Council finding ways to reach its affordable housing targets, and if suitable sites were available in our area, we would not object to their being developed for affordable housing, as long as housing density was at an acceptable level and the infrastructure could stand it.

However, LOSRA's aims include the following: *"To press for the preservation and extension of Green Belt and public open spaces, and work to protect the local environment"*, so inevitably we oppose this proposal without any suggestion of compromise, and we have made this clear to the Chief Executive.

This proposal is completely beyond the pale. The Green Belt round Lower Sunbury performs a classic Green belt function. It separates built-up areas in the most densely populated borough in Surrey, and with the worst air quality in the county, preventing our district from being a seamless suburban sprawl.

If the Kempton Park development were to go ahead, it is hard to see how the Green Belt between Sunbury and Shepperton, all of which is owned by gravel companies or housing developers, could be defended against similar applications—it could all be gone within a decade or less. The same, as we have noted above, would happen everywhere else in Spelthorne and all around the country.

We believe any conjecture and assumptions in this article are well-founded. We invite any Spelthorne officer or councillor to go public and state if they feel that anything we have said in the article is wrong, misleading or irresponsible.

Question marks over EcoPark plan as Government departments start to take an interest

The situation with the EcoPark is in an extraordinary state of flux.

Currently the routing of the footpath around the site is still in dispute and is to be the subject of a second Public Inquiry to be conducted by the Planning Inspectorate on the 28th and 29th January 2014. At the inquiry the Inspector will only consider new evidence relating to the modified route she has proposed, and not evidence about the original planning permission in relation to operational health and safety requirements. So it would appear that despite concerns raised at the first Inquiry we have further abdication of responsibility by a public authority as to whether or not the public is to be put at risk by the operation of this plant.

Meanwhile, SCC is still claiming that their planned experimental two staged Incinerator is a Gasifier, this despite the fact that uniquely it does not produce any synthetic gas! This definition is crucial. If they can persuade OFGEM that it is an advanced process for waste disposal their operator SITA can then claim a 200% subsidy from the Government for any electricity they generate. Failure to convince DEFRA that their proposal is a Gasifier will result in either another fruitless search for a Gasifier that can be fitted into the restricted site or will require a fundamental change in SCC waste disposal policy, which would then require the planning process to start all over again. However, this decision will not be made until SCC/SITA make a formal application.

Interestingly, we found out at the recent Fire Station consultation meeting that Surrey Fire Service have never been consulted on the subject of the Eco Park.

Most important of all, in the last week, we have learnt that the National Audit Office is investigating SCC's handling of the Eco Park finances, along with two other similar projects around the country. Under pressure from the NAO, it looks as if DEFRA might be pulling SCC funding for the Eco Park. If this is so SCC will have to pay SITA about £30 million to cancel the contract!

The situation is hugely complex, but the residents' team of experts are firmly on the case – our feeling is that all is by no means lost.

If you find the prospect of a major housing and infrastructure development on Kempton Park as alarming as we do, please make your views known to any or all of the following people:

Roberto Tambini, Spelthorne Chief Executive, at roberto.tambini@spelthorne.gov.uk

Robert Watts, leader of Spelthorne Council, at cllr.watts@spelthorne.gov.uk

Alfred Friday, Sunbury East councillor, at cllr.friday@spelthorne.gov.uk

Ian Harvey, Sunbury East councillor, at cllr.harvey@spelthorne.gov.uk

Suzy Webb, Sunbury East councillor, at cllr.webb@spelthorne.gov.uk

Sandra Dunn, Halliford & Sunbury West councillor, at cllr.dunn@spelthorne.gov.uk

Tim Evans, Halliford & Sunbury West councillor, at cllr.evans@spelthorne.gov.uk

Daxa Patel, Halliford & Sunbury West councillor, at cllr.patel@spelthorne.gov.uk

Or write to them at Spelthorne Council, Knowle Green, Staines, Middx TW18 1XB

Simon Bazalgette, Chief Executive, The Jockey Club, 75 High Holborn, London WC1V 6LS, or by e-mail at info@thejockeyclub.co.uk for Mr. Bazalgette's attention.

Revised plan awaited for River Thames hydro-power scheme at Sunbury

The proposal for a hydro-power generating scheme to be built on Sunbury Lock Island opposite the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area has run into some delays, and we are awaiting the submission of further information in relation to the plan to Elmbridge Council, as this falls within their borough boundary rather than Spelthorne.

A planning application was submitted by Heather Parker Projects Ltd. for a power generating scheme involving four rotating screws in covered tubes 3 metres in diameter, with noise baffles, which would run through Sunbury Lock Island from the lock cut just opposite the Weir pub on the Walton bank to the weir stream roughly opposite Flowerpot Green.

There would be associated buildings to house the generating equipment and associated infrastructure, and the whole thing would involve the felling of fourteen mature trees on the Island.

Elmbridge's planning office invalidated the application because they were unhappy with the plans and the level of information and detail they have. We will apparently be consulted again when they have received the new information.

Instinctively, an organisation like ours might normally expect to be able to support green energy initiatives, but based on the plan submitted and then invalidated, the environmental impact would be a cause for considerable concern. There is strong opposition from river user groups relating to boating and fishing about the effect on the river ecology and the future integrity of the stream and river bed, quite apart from wider anxiety about possible noise nuisance and the obvious impact on the riverscape viewed from Lower Sunbury's riverside beauty spots of King's Lawn and Flowerpot Green.

There is also doubt about the positioning of the scheme and its technical efficacy. Such schemes are normally located within weirs to take advantage of the speed of flow involved, but this breaks those rules and is untried.

Please monitor our web site and e-bulletins for updates.

LOSRA pursues feasibility study for pedestrian/cycle river crossing

At this year's LOSRA AGM, the possibility of seeking a pedestrian and cycle river crossing between Sunbury and Elmbridge in order to access the Thames Path, maybe using the weir infrastructure, if any negative implications for residents could be satisfactorily addressed, was discussed and received broad support. A survey we have conducted since then also indicates that it is something which a majority of Sunbury residents would welcome, and a considerable number would use.

We asked a question at the Surrey County Council Area Committee on 30th September to ascertain if they would approve such a scheme in principle. While they were unable to "approve" the concept, they said they would welcome new infrastructure that helped meet their transport objectives, which included encouraging more walking and cycling. A bridge could form part of a cycling action plan to be developed in the future. They said that a feasibility study would be needed to establish whether the benefits justified the likely cost and outweighed any negative impacts.

We have since discussed the implications of a feasibility study with Surrey's Area Highways Manager, who indicated that this might cost between £5,000 and £10,000. The LOSRA Committee has subsequently approved in principle the possibility of contributing to the cost of a study, once we have more details.

A local resident, who is a civil engineer with a specific knowledge of bridge technology, has done an initial outline study of options and costs, which may inform the debate as the project moves forward.

At the same time the Surrey Cycling Strategy is currently under consultation, and LOSRA will be making a submission to that which, among other comments, will naturally highlight the potential value of improved access to the Thames Path.

As well as opposing projects that we don't like, LOSRA also likes to take a pro-active stance in pursuing objectives which we think will enhance the quality of life in the area, and this is one of them.

Sunbury Health Centre Are you being served?

Both from members' personal experiences and from anecdotal feedback to our Association, it's becoming worryingly clear that all is not well at the Sunbury Health Centre.

It seems that a growing and systemic failure to provide an adequate service at the Green Street Centre has been allowed to go unchecked over many years. Complaints have led to a siege mentality at the Centre with GPs struggling to cope and patients feeling marginalised by an appointment system that is both impersonal and uncaring.

Any solution to problems associated with the smooth running of our primary health care services will inevitably involve cost when budgets are very tight, but that is no reason for us to do nothing.

Before LOSRA formalises its approach to the Health Centre and, if necessary to the Care Quality Commission, it is essential that details of specific instances of sub-standard service be made available to us. If you have experienced poor service at the Centre, please contact us through our Website or by post to Paul Thompson, 12 Brackenwood TW16 6SQ

You can be certain of absolute confidentiality as no details which may help to identify individuals will be included in any representations which the Association chooses to make.

Register your views on proposed fire service cuts by 4th November

The effects of the proposed changes to the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service deployments in Spelthorne were computer-modelled, and the results presented on the Surrey County Council website as part of the Public Consultation.

However, we could not find any modelling results on the Surrey County Council website which included the particular configuration proposed for Spelthorne – a single fire-engine based at a new fire-station.

This omission prompted a Freedom of Information (FOI) request by LOSRA to Surrey County Council and the results of the modelling relating to the particular changes proposed for Spelthorne are available to be viewed on the LOSRA web site along with our comprehensive briefing note at www.losra.org/welcome-to-the-losra-homepage/item/393-effect-of-proposed-changes-to-the-fire-service-cover-in-spelthorne

Surrey County Council did not plan to hold public meetings in Stanwell or Sunbury, the two areas worst affected, claiming they could not find a suitable venue. After LOSRA intervened a meeting was held at Sunbury Manor School on 10th October, which was attended by about 120 people.

It was chaired by Kay Hammond, Surrey County Councillor responsible for the Surrey Fire & Rescue Service. Many Spelthorne councillors attended including the leader of the Council, Robert Watts. It was a boisterous meeting, with residents and councillors asking questions, many of which Cllr. Hammond and the Senior Fire Officers present were unable to answer adequately, particularly those relating to the savings SCC are hoping to make by cutting the Fire Service in Spelthorne in half.

Cllr. Hammond promised to make public the Best Value report which would give the financial background, and admitted that at the three public meetings which had been held, not a single person had supported the proposed cuts. If you read our briefing note, you will appreciate how potentially dangerous the service reductions could be.

LOSRA will be making a submission to Surrey setting out in detail the reasons why the changes should not be implemented. It is important that residents should also send in their views to psp@surreycc.gov.uk by Monday 4th November. This newsletter is scheduled for delivery on the weekend of 2nd/3rd November, so you should have time to respond if you do it straight away.

Improved Flood Warnings for Lower Sunbury Residents

This autumn, the Environment Agency will be making improvements to its Flood Warning Areas, including the one for Lower Sunbury.

It follows the winter floods of last year when some residents were concerned about the relevance of the flood warnings that they had received.

As a result, the Flood Warning Area for Lower Sunbury will be split into halves to make the Flood Warning Service more focused on where residents actually live.

On **Wednesday 13 November** The Environment Agency will be holding a drop-in session to explain the improvements. It will be held at the Embroidery Gallery in the Walled Garden in Thames Street from 3.30pm to 7.30pm.

Cattle grazing scheme for Sunbury Park

Please let Spelthorne know your views

The Exhibition regarding Cattle Grazing in Sunbury Park took place on 21st September. It was, to say the least, pretty unimpressive, comprising a few sheets of bullet points and some photos. There were no cattle there, as Friends of Sunbury Park were originally promised, and no-one there from Surrey Wildlife Trust, who manage the herd, as was also promised. Publicity was also very limited.

When we complained to Spelthorne, they were surprised and thought they had done a good job with it. Unfortunately, that just about sums up Spelthorne's performance on this issue over the last few years since the proposal first came up. We have been promised a full consultation and a proper exhibition, and tried to organise a presentation at our last AGM, but it never transpired.

We asked Spelthorne to provide an explanation of the position for this newsletter, and this is what they wrote:

"The idea of cattle being introduced to Sunbury Park is to improve the biodiversity of the Park through helping to manage the grass more effectively and allow a mixture of wildflowers and grass to flourish. Additionally in these times of budgetary constraints they will also provide the council with a significant cost saving over time when compared to the current hay cutting regime. Also, as there are fewer farmers in the area, securing someone to do the hay cutting becomes more difficult each year. Spelthorne Borough Council is aware that some residents do have various concerns about the cattle, but we would like to reassure residents that cattle have grazed on Dumpsey Meadow, Shortwood Common and Staines Moor for many years with

great results. The Parks and Countryside Officer discussed the project with several residents at the workshop on Sat. 21st September in Sunbury Park. It is hoped that this provided some reassurance to those with concerns.

The proposal therefore is that over the course of this autumn/winter period Spelthorne Borough Council in conjunction with Friends of Sunbury Park will be preparing for the arrival of a small herd of cattle within Sunbury Park next summer. This will entail installing all the relevant infrastructure required to manage a small herd within the Park. This will include installation of new fencing around the Green Street car park, kissing gates on all pedestrian access points into the main park and a drinking trough to provide fresh water for the animals. It is hoped that this work will be completed by March 2014, with the cattle due to arrive in late May/June. For further information please contact the Parks & Countryside Officer David Hicks on 01784 446319 or by e-mail at d.hicks@spelthorne.gov.uk"

It seems from this that a decision has been made, without residents being given the chance to respond to a formal consultation as promised. The Friends of Sunbury Park have not been involved in the decision, and have been kept in the dark along with everyone else. We appreciate the sound rationale for the proposal, but we also know that many Park users and dog walkers are concerned about issues of interaction between dogs and cattle, and other safety questions. If you wish to express a view, we urge you to e-mail or write to David Hicks so that at least Spelthorne cannot say they were unaware of what people think.

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Please pay your 2013 LOSRA subscription!

For some reason, the number of people who have paid their £5.00 subscription for this year is somewhat down on where we were last year and what we would expect. There are constant calls on our funds, so the income is important for our work, especially in these days when issues often need legal or specialist advice.

Please pay either via PayPal on the web site or using th from below. If it's inconvenient or difficult for you to deliver it to one of the businesses mentioned, please contact a local Committee member (see list alongside) and they will collect it from you.

For regular news updates via our fortnightly e-bulletins, please register your name and e-mail address on the web site.

With Kempton Park becoming a major issue, we need one or more newsletter distributors to cover the Staines Road East and related areas. If you can help, please contact our Secretary Colleen Cuthbert on 783606.

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Please find enclosed my annual subscription of £5.00 for family membership of the Lower Sunbury Residents' Association for the calendar year 2013. In addition, I would like to make a donation of £..... (AUT13)

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