

A VISION FOR LOWER SUNBURY

1. PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

Like any other local neighbourhood, the policies and actions which affect the character and future of Lower Sunbury are generally framed and implemented by a combination of local and national government, along with the vested interests and market forces which operate within those frameworks.

Although we are able, both as an Association and as individuals, to contribute to the drafting of some of those policies in a small way through consultation exercises, there is an increasing sense of remoteness of government from the wishes and aspirations of individuals and residents' groups. It is not surprising that central government appears distant and disconnected from local concerns, but is worrying when people feel that the system and operation of local government also appears to fail on this count.

Lower Sunbury is under threat from increasingly rapid urban development, the growth of traffic, and other pressures on the quality of life and the character of the area. Residents regularly expend effort reacting to proposals from local and national government agencies, and from developers and other commercial and vested interests, to change Sunbury in ways that are often not welcome and threaten seriously to prejudice both the character of the area and the quality of life of its residents.

The choice for residents is either to carry on reacting to local authority and other proposals or to seek to drive the political agenda and the strategic thinking behind it; to set out what we want the area to look like and to bring the focus of the Council regularly back to that. This does not necessarily mean residents' groups like LOSRA 'getting political' but it is important for local politicians and local government officers to understand and take account of the aspirations of residents in framing local policies.

It is surely the responsibility of residents' and amenity groups such as LOSRA to address the underlying issues which fundamentally affect their members' lives, as well as the minutiae of everyday life with which such groups are often concerned.

The purpose of a plan for Lower Sunbury developed by LOSRA is to encapsulate what residents like about living in Lower Sunbury and how residents would like to see it protected and improved, and how it might evolve over time. It asks what we know are awkward questions. We know that delivering "joined-up government" is difficult – it is easier for councils to deal with each topic in isolation, because accommodating the inextricable relationship between housing, traffic, air quality, bio-diversity and other matters is not easy.

We are aware from informal exchanges with Borough and County councillors that they probably share many of the concerns and aspirations expressed in this document. However, we are also aware they are constrained by the demands of central government. Because of this, it is even more important that our local authorities work more closely with residents and participate in a more open debate about these difficult strategic issues.

We are not stupid or irresponsible people. If there is a perception that local government is unreasonably failing to take account of local views, even if that view is misguided, both elected representatives and council officers need to recognise that there is a problem, and talk to us. If their hands are tied, they need to say so, and we can try to find a solution together. The purpose of this document is to get the issues on the table and open the dialogue.

In addition to providing comments on the Spelthorne Strategic Development Plan in the prescribed format, LOSRA has also sent a copy of "A Vision for Lower Sunbury" to Spelthorne Borough Council as an attachment to these comments, in order that our strategic view and aspirations for the area are understood by Spelthorne, and can be taken into account if they deem it appropriate.

2. LOWER SUNBURY : ESSENTIAL CHARACTER AND IMPORTANCE

Lower Sunbury occupies a unique position as the first true riverside village on the north bank of the Thames travelling upstream from London.

It is a historic place, with a documented chronology of settlement going back to Saxon times, and a rich diversity of architecture resulting from the continuous evolution over the centuries.

The core of the riverside village is the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area, but this is now surrounded by suburban housing development which has taken place from the 1920s onwards.

Lower Sunbury is fortunate in enjoying a cohesive neighbourhood character by virtue of its clear geographical delineation, with the River Thames to the south, Kempton park and Thames Water land to the east and north, and the Green Belt between Sunbury and Shepperton, along with Sunbury Cross to the west and north.

Lower Sunbury has some significant green spaces which are linked to provide a semi-rural character within the built-up area – some of these have been preserved only as a result of lobbying and campaigning over many decades. They include Sunbury Park, Orchard Meadow, Rivermead Island, King’s Lawn, Flowerpot Green, and the TP26 Linear Park, as well as more formal open space such as The Cedars.

The essential character of Lower Sunbury is provided by the combination of close-built historic houses in the Conservation Area, and suburban houses with good-size gardens, interspersed among the open spaces.

This character has been prejudiced and threatened by the increasing pressure of traffic, and the development of previously-developed land for housing. Many of the open spaces, including Orchard Meadow, the TP26 Linear Park, the London Irish Rugby Ground and the Green Belt to the west, have been the subject of planning applications, appeals and public inquiries, all of which have been opposed by LOSRA, and all of which have been turned down by Inspectors, who have consistently confirmed the integrity and key role of these green spaces.

It is this character which residents of Lower Sunbury wish to maintain, not simply from a “nimby-ish” standpoint, but through a recognition that the social cohesion of the village is intertwined with its physical character. A dramatic increase in housing density, with associated loss of habitat provided by suburban gardens, along with the associated increase in traffic, on-street parking and air pollution, allied to increased pressure on an over-stretched and fragile infrastructure, without ready access to genuine town-centre services, would see the community begin to unravel and disintegrate.

We are not prepared to see this happen.

2. THE STATUTORY PLANNING CONTEXT

This document necessarily takes account of the various statutory plans which provide the context for relevant strategic decisions in Spelthorne. These include :

- Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs), now replaced by Planning Policy Statements (PPSs), issued by central government. Many of these set out the framework for planning and development decisions which are central to the issues raised in this document.
- Surrey Structure Plan 2004. This provides the county-wide context for strategies to be decided on a borough-by borough basis, and can also inform the thinking on many of the topics addressed below.
- Spelthorne Borough Plan, to be replaced by the Spelthorne Strategic Development Plan, which is at consultation stage. This sets out the Borough’s own policies on the topics addressed in this document.
- In addition, there are subject-specific documents published by Surrey County Council and Spelthorne Borough Council which provide strategic background. These include Surrey CC’s “Urban BioDiversity Action Plan”, Spelthorne BC’s “Air Quality Updating & Screening Assessment” etc..

These are important documents, but the perception is that the policies in them appear to be applied selectively by Spelthorne in addressing planning, development, transport, air quality, bio-diversity and other strategies. It is a purpose of this document to ensure that officers and elected members are held accountable for the proper and consistent implementation of the guidance and policies in these, and not to ignore them when they are inconvenient. If officers and councillors cannot implement them because of the over-arching demands of a central government PPS, they must say so.

The concept of “joined-up government” is one to which both national and local government bodies have paid lip service, but the perception is that it has not been applied in practice. As noted in the introduction, issues appear too often to be considered in isolation, and it is a purpose of this document to demand properly integrated thinking, however difficult this is.

3. THE “SPELTHORNE FACTOR”

It is our view that Spelthorne suffers because it is the “poor man of Surrey”. It is not historically a part of Surrey and has a very different character from much of the county. It is more built-up, and has one of the highest housing densities not only in Surrey, but in the south-east region. It is criss-crossed by motorways and major arterial roads, and available land is restricted by large areas of open water from reservoirs previous gravel workings, as well the area suffering the blight associated with many current gravel workings.

A harsh view, which many people nevertheless share, is that it seems to have become a convenient “dumping ground” for things that the wealthy traditional rural boroughs of Surrey do not want, and it is our view that Spelthorne Borough has been insufficiently rigorous and robust in resisting this process to protect the quality of life of its residents. Indeed, it appears to have acquiesced in the process as part of its drive to secure Audit Commission recognition and consequent funding.

One of the purposes of this document is to ensure these problems are recognised, and that the culture within Spelthorne Borough is suitably changed to address the reasonable aspirations of its residents.

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The concept of truly sustainable development lies at the core of the idea of “joined-up government by addressing development plans in the context of the ability of the local infrastructure to sustain them. Unfortunately, by having become a buzz-word over recent years, the concept has been abused by developers who merely refer to the existence of an infrastructure, rather than its capacity to sustain further development.

The Surrey Structure Plan states “*North Surrey is the most densely developed part of the County.....Spelthorne Borough has amongst the highest average density of population of districts in the South-East*”

The “Surrey Structure Plan : Examination in Public” document published in 2003 made further crucial statements about North Surrey, which includes Spelthorne. It stated : “*In North Surrey, we were impressed by the shared concerns that further major development would increase problems of service and infrastructure provision.....In practice, much housing will come from previously developed land. If this can be accommodated with proper infrastructure and contributes to the quality of life (e.g. with regard to traffic generation or maintaining open space provision, there is no reason to prevent it as a matter of principle. However, these are important requirements, which will not easily be satisfied in the North Surrey sub-area. In many parts of the sub-area, it may not be possible to satisfy them at all.....Where those requirements cannot be met, then we have no doubt that development should not be allowed.*”

It is our view that Spelthorne’s strategic planning does not take account of this very serious assessment in any way. Within Spelthorne, Sunbury’s infrastructure is unsustainably overloaded :

- 40% of Spelthorne’s children go to school in Sunbury with associated traffic
- Over 17,000 people are registered at Sunbury Health Centre
- The relative locations of Sunbury Cross, Walton Bridge and Hampton Court Bridge as major traffic foci causes large volumes of through traffic
- Public transport has limited scope and does not service many routes where many people need to go, adding to the traffic burden.

- Sunbury is not a genuine town centre, with resources and facilities to service a substantial population.
- Sunbury has the worst air pollution in Surrey, which will only be exacerbated by further development and more traffic.
- Sunbury has a growing elderly population, but Spelthorne Borough has sought to reduce provision of essential services for older people.

It is our view that development in Sunbury, as in Spelthorne generally, should be limited and highly selective, since the infrastructure is not sufficiently developed to support it. Spelthorne Borough must have the courage to recognise this and reflect it in their strategic planning.

5. PLANNING CONTROL AND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

The points noted above make it clear that Spelthorne is already very densely populated. However, Spelthorne Borough continues to allow housing development to proceed at a rapid rate. The following facts illustrate the situation :

- Under the Surrey Structure Plan, Spelthorne has a new housing target for the period 2001-2016 of 2,450 units.
- Completed housing, units under construction and planning permissions for the period 2001-4 are 1,283 units.
- Spelthorne has completed 50% of its 15 year target in 3 years
- On a year-on-year pro rata basis, Spelthorne is 5 years ahead of its target.

We do not know whether, or how robustly, Spelthorne resisted the housing targets allocated by Surrey County Council when housing targets were drawn up. Our view is that the case for minimising the allocation should have been strongly argued, and should continue to be argued in the future, and that Councillors and officers should be accountable for delivering on this mandate.

Spelthorne is allowing development in an already overcrowded borough at a rate which is unacceptably and unnecessarily high.

During the last 5 years the following developments have taken place in Sunbury :

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| - Windmill Road | - Prince Albert pub | - White Lodge Garage |
| - Ekco site | - Waverley Lodge | - Arona House |
| - Hawke House | - Oakington Drive | - Green St. (north end) |
| - Golden Manor (Darby Gardens) | | |

These developments have provided several hundred housing units. Of these developments, three have involved the loss of green space and wildlife habitat in the form of extensive domestic gardens.

In the immediate future, at least two major sites are likely to be the subject of planning applications for housing development. The Environment Agency land in Fordbridge Road is already in the Strategic Development Plan as a Preferred Option for development, while the Police College is also likely to provide a windfall site. Two other significant sites in Green Street – land occupied by detached houses at the northern end, along with the Loyola Centre and land at St Paul's School - are under incessant pressure from developers.

LOSRA believes that the people of Spelthorne, and specifically Sunbury, are entitled to see the following plans and provisions, a mere sample of the relevant provisions in the various statutory documents, properly implemented :

- PPG3 :
 - "The Government attaches particular importance to the 'greening' of residential environments"
 - "Developing more housing within urban areas should not mean building on urban green spaces."
 - Consideration of design and layout must be informed by the wider context, having regard not just to neighbouring buildings but the townscape and landscape of the wider locality."
- "Surrey Design" (Surrey County Council document)
 - "Surrey's built environment is as much dominated by 20th century suburban development as historic buildings. It is important that the qualities of the best suburban areas are protected as one of the characteristics of Surrey that make it such an attractive place to live."

- Spelthorne Borough Plan
- “The aspirations of property developers need to be assessed in the context of the importance of protecting the environment in the wider public interest.”
- “There is a public concern at what is often referred to as ‘town cramming’”
- Policy BE6 “Proposals for residential development will be expected to avoid development out of character with the existing locality.”
- Policy BE1 “The Borough Council will expect new development to contribute to an improvement to the townscape or the environment.”

It is LOSRA’s view that Spelthorne’s Planning Officers give insufficient weight to the available policies and guidance to limit development and do not use the tools available to them. It is also LOSRA’s view that it is improper for Planning Control and Housing Strategy to be lumped together as the combined responsibilities of one officer. This inevitably results in a conflict of interests. If the officer has a remit to deliver housing targets, this will inevitably colour his or her judgement on planning control issues. They should be handled by different people.

LOSRA’s primary objectives in the area of housing and planning control are :

- To ensure that Spelthorne maintains a robust dialogue with Surrey about its allocation of housing targets in order to get them reduced
- To put in place Local Plan policies, and engender a planning culture within Spelthorne, designed to resist pressure from developers wanting to build densely populated developments, especially on land currently occupied by suburban houses with good gardens.
- To ensure good modern housing design, especially in the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area.
- To ensure that Spelthorne’s planners apply the policies and guidance available to it to maintain the character of the area.

The issue of demolishing existing houses for dense developments using suburban gardens is a key consideration. Indeed, we would recommend that the Strategic Development Plan includes a policy with a specific presumption against such development. We are aware this may conflict with a central government PPS. If so, we would at least like to know what the personal view of Councillors is, to understand whether or not they are committed to the same aspirations as the people they represent

In LOSRA’s view, especially from its experience in fighting public inquiries on planning applications, there is evidence that Spelthorne Council is insufficiently robust in its attitudes and approach regarding the subjects addressed in these objectives, and we would seek to change this situation.

5. THE ENVIRONMENT : GREEN SPACE & BIODIVERSITY

Lower Sunbury is fortunate that it has a good resource of public open space, both public and private, some of it quite rural and informal in character, which, along with the suburban gardens, provide a rich habitat for wildlife.

This is an essential part of the character of the area, and one of reasons people choose to live here. Planning strategies which seek to alter the character of the area, either by design or neglect, will also undermine the social cohesion of the area, as the population profile changes. This would be a wholly negative development.

The Surrey County Council publication “Surrey Urban Bio-Diversity Action Plan” has the following mission statement :

“To safeguard and enhance the bio-diversity found in the urban areas of Surrey and, in doing so, to improve the quality of people’s lives through contact with, appreciation of and involvement in nature conservation.” This should provide the context for the addressing of issues relating to the green environment in Sunbury.

Key issues in ensuring a coherent strategy to protect the local green environment and its bio-diversity include :

- **Green Belt** : The Green Belt in and around Sunbury performs a vital role in maintaining the character of the area.

- The land occupied by Watersplash Farm, Vicarage Farm, Hazelwood Golf Course and Orchard Farm perform a classic Green Belt function in separating the built-up areas of Sunbury and Shepperton.
- Kempton Park and the Thames Water land towards Hampton perform a similar function to the north and east of Sunbury.

The integrity of these areas' Green belt status has been consistently confirmed by Planning Inspectors over the years. It is vital that planning policies and decisions maintain this stance in order to support the cohesion of Lower Sunbury as a distinct community, and to preserve and enhance the Green Belt according to Local Plan policies.

Watersplash Farm is important in maintaining viable agriculture and associated landscape within a suburban area. Vicarage Farm offers the parallel rural activity of equestrianism, while Hazelwood maintains the typical open grass and parkland associated with golf courses. All play an important role.

The quality of the River Ash as an environmental feature should be recognised and supported. Obviously, a significant factor in considering the Green Belt, and specifically Watersplash and Vicarage Farms, is that of gravel extraction, and LOSRA has a very clear position in opposing gravel extraction on the basis that the Green Belt function of the land would be prejudiced for the foreseeable future by primary industrial activity of this kind. There is valuable material on this issue at www.sssage.org.uk, the web site of Sunbury and Shepperton Against Gravel Extraction, a consortium of which LOSRA is a leading member.

- **Public and Private Open Spaces/River Thames** : Lower Sunbury has a number of very attractive open spaces, some of which are linked, and which form a vital component of the townscape and character of the area.
 - *Sunbury Park, Walled Garden & Orchard Meadow* : This is a flagship park within Spelthorne, secured for the community over several decades as the result of enlightened use of compulsory purchase powers by Spelthorne Council. There needs to be a proper management strategy to ensure that its quality habitats as a semi-rural park are optimised. The opening of the Embroidery Gallery in the Walled Garden, already admirably supported by Spelthorne Council provides a significant opportunity and imperative to maximise the potential of these areas. A voluntary group, the Friends of Sunbury Park, exists to co-ordinate the management of the Park, working in partnership with Spelthorne, but to date it has lacked the resources to achieve real progress.
 - *Rivermead Island, King's Lawn & Flowerpot Green* : Sunbury's riverside open spaces are renowned and well-used beauty spots. It is essential that policies ensure their protection and enhancement. In particular, it is important that the integrity of the backwater on Rivermead Island as a free-flowing stream and habitat should be promoted.
 - *TP26/Linear Park* : This land plays a special role in providing a traffic-free pedestrian route across Lower Sunbury, linking with Sunbury Park to provide a green corridor to the River Thames for much of the residential area. LOSRA has consistently lobbied for this land to be transferred to Spelthorne's ownership, and for a proper integrated plan for the landscaping of the park to be put in place with full public consultation.
 - *The Cedars* : This is the only public formal recreation ground in Lower Sunbury, and as such is very important. It should clearly be maintained in this form.
 - *Private Sports Grounds* : *London Irish/GAFLAC/Sunbury Cricket Club/Sunbury Village Cricket Club* : While these grounds only have limited public access through sports clubs, they provide a significant component of "green lung" space, and with their surrounding trees and hedgerows, offer valuable wildlife habitat.
- **Private gardens** : The "Surrey Urban Bio-Diversity Action Plan" defines urban habitats, including "perhaps most significantly of all, domestic gardens".

It goes on to state : "There is particular pressure on previously developed land, many of which have communities of plants and animals far richer in terms of species diversity than intensively managed farmland."

The objectives and views outlines above with regard to housing are linked directly and coherently to the role of private gardens in supporting the biodiversity of the area.

The Borough Plan states : “All areas of the Borough, both open countryside and green spaces (including gardens) in urban areas, have conservation value.” LOSRA expects this view to be carried through in implementation of policies and planning strategy.

- **Flood control issues** : There have been significant floods during periods of heavy rainfall in recent years, exacerbated, in our view by the impact of the Jubilee Channel. In addition, the Environment Agency has published Flood Plain maps which appear to show a wider range for the flood plain than previously thought.

LOSRA’s objectives include :

- To ensure that the Environment Agency accepts and addresses the issue of the Jubilee Channel, and that Surrey and Spelthorne treat this as an issue they should also address with the EA
 - To minimise development in potentially vulnerable areas of the flood plain, not least the Environment Agency’s own site in Fordbridge Road.
 - To minimise any activity, such as gravel working, which might prejudice the stability of ground water and drainage.
 - To clarify with the EA the true area and extent of the floodplain for the benefit of residents.
- **Trees/plants and air quality** : This is dealt with in more detail in 6. below. Suffice to say that trees, plants and green space are vital in alleviating the harmful effects of air pollution, and in an area with an air quality problem as acute as Sunbury’s, no strategy should provide for any reduction in the area occupied by these components of the environment.

LOSRA’s primary objectives for green space and bio-diversity are :

- To protect the long-term integrity of Green Belt land.
- To ensure that Lower Sunbury’s public open spaces are protected and retained, and maintained in order to optimise both the bio-diversity in terms of habitat for flora and fauna, and the potential for the public’s enjoyment of them.
- To put in place policies and processes which help to resist development which involves building houses on existing domestic gardens.
- To ensure that the vital role of green spaces as part of the character of the area, and as an antidote to the negative pressures of housing, traffic and air pollution is recognised by policy-makers.

The overall thrust of LOSRA’s vision for Lower Sunbury in terms of environment and biodiversity is that there must be a presumption against the adoption or implementation of any policy, strategy or decision which reduces the amount of green space and potential wildlife habitat.

6. AIR QUALITY

As noted in 5 above, air pollution is clearly very closely allied to the issues addressed under Environment and Biodiversity. However, poor air quality is such an acute problem in Sunbury that it merits attention in its own right.

The whole of Spelthorne is an Air Quality Action Zone. Sunbury Cross and Green Street have the highest levels of nitrogen dioxide both in the Borough and in Surrey.

Despite this, there appears to be no coherent strategy in place to address the problem, and it is disappointing that Government has extended the deadline for local authorities to reduce pollution to acceptable specified levels.

The issues which affect air quality are inescapably intertwined with other topics addressed in this document, namely :

- **Traffic** : Unless measures are taken to stem the increase of traffic using our roads, exhaust emissions will continue to contribute to a worsening of the situation. This includes improving the quality and usefulness of the public transport network.
- **Building development** : Cramming more houses into an already densely-populated borough, bringing with them domestic emissions and more cars, with the extra pollution impact of journeys starting in the area, will inevitably exacerbate the problem.

- *Loss of trees and green space* : The vital role of trees, plants and green space in alleviating air pollution is a matter of scientific record. Replacing of gardens with housing development directly substitutes a contributor to the problem for a partial solution to the problem. It is an approach which should not be countenanced.
- *Schools* : As noted above, 40% of Spelthorne's students are educated in Sunbury. This in itself creates some of the traffic which contributes to air quality problems. However, the presence of so many young people in Sunbury for extended periods of the day places a duty of care on local government. Levels of asthma in local children are already well above national averages. Policies to make the area a healthier place to spend their educational time are essential.

This is a classic example of the need for "joined-up government". Some of the decisions needed in demonstrating a practical commitment to improving air quality may be difficult and involve standing up to some powerful, wealthy and vociferous commercial and vested interests, not least among them central government. However, decision-makers in local government need to put the well-being of their residents above other considerations if such a commitment is to be something other than mere hand-wringing and lip service.

LOSRA's objective is to ensure that Spelthorne has a clear strategy to reduce air pollution at least to the levels required by Government targets, which encompasses the implications of their policies on traffic, housing development and biodiversity, and applies appropriate pressure to external agencies to achieve this.

7. TRANSPORT

The issues of traffic and public transport have already been referred to in topics covered above. This is inevitable, as travel is such a basic element of everyday life. This section aims to identify the primary travel-related issues in Lower Sunbury, and ways LOSRA envisages them being addressed.

Traffic congestion

Sunbury has a major problem with traffic congestion, resulting from the following factors :

- It lies at convergence of major routes at Sunbury Cross, namely the M3, A316, A308 and A244.
- The A308 and A244 are major routes to and from Hampton Court Bridge and Walton Bridge, which provide the main river crossings for traffic from Surrey to Heathrow Airport. The building of a new Walton Bridge is bound to attract more traffic to use this route, placing further pressure on the A244 and associated "rat runs".
- Congestion and accidents on the SW section of the M25 invariably result in traffic using routes via Sunbury Cross as a diversion.
- Peak time traffic is exacerbated by the "school run" phenomenon, with about 4,000 pupils attending schools in Lower Sunbury. Three of these are faith schools, which tend to draw pupils from a wider area. There are no independent prep schools or secondary schools in Lower Sunbury. All pupils attending independent schools have to travel outside the area. School-related traffic in and out of Lower Sunbury is a very significant factor. This ensures that the afternoon rush hour starts before 3pm, and continues for 3-4 hours.
- Routes through Lower Sunbury are used as "rat runs" to avoid congested main roads. Surrey C.C.s own map and statistics from 1999 show that the A244 runs at 101%+ of capacity during peak hours. This means it is always congested at these times. Drivers use Nursery Road, Green Street, Manor Lane and The Avenue in Sunbury to avoid the A244. Drivers travelling towards Hampton Court Bridge use Thames Street to avoid the A308, despite the traffic calming measures.

As a result, Sunbury Cross, which is always congested at peak hours, operates on a knife-edge. It only takes a minor problem, such as local roadworks, to cause gridlock, and residents can effectively be trapped in Lower Sunbury, with every route blocked. Major events, such as Hampton Court Flower Show, can bring the entire area to a standstill.

Public transport

Public transport in Lower Sunbury only serves a part of the needs :

- Apart from the Shepperton branch, train services only go east to Kingston, Wimbledon and Waterloo.
- There are only two trains a day, at peak hours, at peak hours, which go via Richmond, the most useful link to the Underground network.

- The two main bus services available to Lower Sunbury are the 316, going to Staines and Kingston, and the 235 going to Feltham and Brentford. There are more occasional services going to Walton, Chertsey and Heathrow.

Travelling by public transport to Heathrow, West London, the Thames Valley corridor, and the main centres of Surrey is a tortuous business. The poverty of public transport means that many people drive to another location which gives them access to better services, namely Feltham, Hounslow and Teddington.

In addition, there has been an ongoing problem associated with the operation of the 235 service, whereby the on-street bus stand in the Conservation at the southern end of Green Street was designated as a bus depot, with resulting problems of noise, pollution, litter and illegal use by drivers of Sunbury Park as a toilet. This has been partly addressed by the driver changeovers being moved back to Brentford, but there is a hangover of nuisance generated by the service. However, residents are in something of a cleft stick, since we would not wish to see a withdrawal or significant reduction of the service.

Impact of housing development on traffic

Inevitably, the addition of more and denser housing in the local area is bound to add to the amount of traffic generated by the local population. This is addressed in the Surrey Structure Plan Policy DN1, which states : “In assessing infrastructure requirements, local planning authorities will have regard to the cumulative impact of development.”

However, Surrey County Council’s Highways Department has never opposed a housing development in Lower Sunbury on the basis of this provision.

The Institute of Highways and Traffic guidelines state that : “ A Traffic Impact Assessment should be produced where traffic to and from the development site exceeds 5% of the 2-way traffic flow on the adjoining highway, where traffic congestion exists.”

This has been interpreted by SCC to the effect that unless a proposed development would add more than 5% to the traffic flow, they will not oppose it. In Green Street, there have been five separate developments which have contributed to traffic flow, but Surrey CC has failed to take account of their own policy in considering them. Clearly, the more traffic that uses a road, the less likely it is that a development will add 5% to the flow. However, it is bound to make congestion worse.

In considering the traffic issue at the Green Street/Englemere Homes public inquiry, the Inspector stated : “I acknowledge that small traffic increments cannot continue ad infinitum without adverse consequence. However, I believe such cumulative impacts would need to be addressed in a wider policy context.”

LOSRA would endorse this, and would urge Surrey County Council and Spelthorne to face up to the problem and address it with a strategic policy to take account of cumulative development.

Cycling and walking

LOSRA supports all initiatives designed to promote travel on foot or by bicycle, subject to their impact on other key considerations, primarily that of environmental protection.

The proposal for a combined cycle/footpath along the Linear Park is a sensible, especially if it promotes the idea of children going to school on foot or by bicycle by enabling them to do so more safely by minimising use of public roads. However, as noted above, this should be done sensitively, using an acceptable surface for the path to maintain the character of the Park, and as part of a coherent integrated landscaping scheme to enhance the Park both visually and as wildlife habitat.

There has been much discussion over the years about a footbridge across the Thames at Sunbury to provide access to the Thames Path on foot and by bicycle. This was mooted via an organisation called Thames Overways Projects (TOPS). Feasibility studies were done and artist’s impressions produced of possible structures based at Rivermead Island, Swan’s Rest Island and Flowerpot Green. These were unacceptable to LOSRA, as the huge amount of engineering and footprint required would completely destroy the visual character of the riverside beauty spots.

At that time, LOSRA promoted the idea of pursuing a crossing using the weir across Sunbury Lock, on the lines of the highly successful and well-used crossing at Hambleden Weir near Henley. This was endorsed by a vote at the TOPS AGM some years ago. We would still support such an initiative, and the possibility of the development of the Environment Agency site might provide an opportunity to re-open discussions. The idea received coverage in the Surrey Herald in July 2006, and in LOSRA's view, it has merit, as long as it can be achieved without unduly prejudicing the quality of life of any group of residents.

LOSRA objectives

LOSRA accepts that traffic growth is not a problem which can be solved readily. However, any initiatives designed to mitigate its effects would be supported. These could include :

- An acceptance that cumulative development and its traffic impact is a relevant issue in considering planning applications.
- Official approaches to SW Trains to promote the idea of expanding rail services via Richmond.
- Research involving the Highways Agency and their consultants Mouchel to investigate ways of organising Sunbury Cross to optimise traffic flow.
- Any signage or other methods to reduce the use of "rat runs" through the area.
- Promoting the idea of a river crossing for pedestrians and cyclists using Sunbury Weir.

8. SOCIAL SERVICES AND HEALTH

The recent furore over the proposal to close the Benwell Centre and reduce other service to elderly people in Spelthorne has highlighted the importance of this aspect of local provision.

Services for the elderly

A primary issue is that elderly people form an increasingly large proportion of the local population, and for the less active and mobile of them, the relative poverty of the local infrastructure (see Sustainable Development) makes life difficult unless specific support services are available.

Services such as the Benwell Centre and Spelride are well-used and popular, and it is clear that Spelthorne failed to appreciate this in framing their cost-cutting exercises.

The hastily cobbled-together proposal for a dense development of housing on the site of the Benwell Centre, incorporating some kind of day centre facilities, does not represent a properly thought through strategy for meeting the needs of elderly people in Sunbury.

Health provision

Sunbury Health Centre is a victim of its own success. It is popular, and provides access not only to GPs, but various diagnostic procedures. As a result, it operates at the limit of its capacity, with 17,500 patients registered there. It clearly serves a much wider catchment than Lower Sunbury. Indeed, there are proposals to extend it by placing a portakabin on the car park.

Youth provision

There is a lack of provision of social activities for young people, outside of pure sports facilities. The support network for such clubs which used to exist has generally fallen away, and it is difficult to identify the ideal solution to this. Lack of such centres for indoor games and other pursuits is often quoted as a contributory factor in anti-social behaviour among young people, and it is an area that should receive attention, although LOSRA does not have an instant proposal.

LOSRA's objectives would be to ensure that :

- Adequate and top quality provision of services for elderly people is maintained, including a fully-functional day centre in Lower Sunbury, and whatever transport services are required to supplement public transport.
- Primary care facilities are kept under continuous review to ensure that they are adequate to meet the needs of the local population.
- Provision of social facilities for young people should be given proper consideration.

8. POLICING & LAW AND ORDER

The level and quality of policing in Lower Sunbury has been something of an issue ever since the organisation was changed so that local policing became part of Surrey Police rather than the Metropolitan Police.

The effective closing of Sunbury Police Station resulted in a much reduced local presence of officers, and a consequent increase in anti-social behaviour, burglary and other low level crime. As a result of this LOSRA organised a public meeting with senior Surrey Police Officers and Police Committee representatives to highlight the issues.

Since this time, with the appointment of home beat officers and Community Support Officers, plus the recruitment of Special Constables, a more regular dialogue with officers has been established, especially through the Area Committee. In general, there is a more visible, and more locally-responsive police presence in the area.

However, the crime issues which affect many parts of the country are still prevalent in Sunbury :

- Anti-social behaviour by groups of youths, involving random verbal abuse and occasional physical assault on residents, plus littering and other gratuitously anti-social activity.
- Often associated with the above, the driving of motor scooters and cars in a noisy and aggressive fashion around the streets.
- Again, associated with the above, the joy-riding of cars, often on open land, and often followed by setting the cars on fire.
- Clear evidence of drug dealing and abuse, often in Sunbury Park and especially at Sunbury Cross.
- Armed or opportunist robbery of local shops, especially off licences, but also convenience stores such as Budgens.
- Spates of burglary, which police believe to be drug-related.

LOSRA's objective is to ensure that the system is more responsive, so that local officers have more ready access to support units and incidents can be dealt with more quickly and effectively. A more efficient presence of this kind would increase the deterrent effect of policing.

9. RETAIL SERVICES

In Section 4 above (Sustainable Development), the point was made that Sunbury is not a proper town centre with fully developed town centre services.

One of the key issues surrounding this is the fact that Sunbury Cross is such a complete mess, and a classic example of ad hoc planning and development where the needs of strategic highway development has ignored local infrastructural considerations.

As a result, Sunbury Cross has a relatively poor selection of shops and services, and the small major brand shopping precinct is separated from the more local shops by a major road. In addition, there is no real co-ordination with the Tesco supermarket.

Without wishing in any way to see the viability of local shops in Lower Sunbury undermined by the development or expansion of Sunbury Cross, LOSRA would advocate consideration being given to a major strategic overhaul of the layout and functionality of Sunbury Cross, including the re-routing of the A308 to the main roundabout, in order to unify the areas devoted to shopping and local services. The purpose would be to see if private investment would be forthcoming for a more functional model for the Sunbury Cross area, which would make it more user-friendly and upgrade its usefulness as a thriving local centre.

10. EDUCATION

Lower Sunbury is generally well-served by schools. As noted elsewhere, 40% of Spelthorne's pupils go to school in Lower Sunbury. There are two infants schools, and three all-through infants/primary schools (including one faith school), plus three secondary schools (including two faith schools). The weaknesses is in dedicated tertiary colleges, and in the independent sector. In addition, Lower Sunbury is fortunate to have an Adult Education Institute.

However, these are issues which are not readily addressed by an amenity group, since education infrastructure is a long-term county-wide question. However, LOSRA would seek to maintain the current level of education provision so that local places are available for local children.

11. RECREATION

There is generally good provision for sports and recreation in Lower Sunbury :

- The shared-use Leisure Centre at Sunbury Manor School was secured partly as the result of pressure by LOSRA, and continues to be a valuable asset, now supplemented by the private centre at London Irish – both provide swimming pools.
- Football is provided by many competitive local clubs at both junior and senior level, and there appears to be no shortage of pitches.
- Cricket is admirably provided for by Sunbury Cricket Club (which also houses a hockey club), which has a thriving colts section, and by Sunbury Village CC.
- Golf is available at Hazelwood GC, a facility which LOSRA fought to preserve at a public enquiry in 2001, and at Sunbury GC towards Charlton, both occupying parts of the Green Belt between Sunbury and Shepperton.
- Hockey is played at Sunbury Cricket Club, with the all-weather pitch at St Pauls School offering a facility for other clubs.
- Equestrian activities are available at several local stables, most notably Vicarage Farm in the Green Belt, now apparently safe from gravel working, at least in the short term.
- There are tennis courts at the Cedars recreation ground.
- There is competitive rugby at London Irish, including a strong colts section.
- Other sports, although not available via in the immediate vicinity, such as rowing, are readily available within a short distance.
- The Riverside Arts Centre provides a focus and opportunity for music, drama and other groups, and is especially valuable in offering the Riverside Youth Theatre.

LOSRA's objective is to ensure the retention of these facilities, and their enhancement where possible, and to expand sporting and recreational opportunities where it is compatible with other objectives.

The one thing missing, as noted above, are good general clubs for young people where indoor games and sports can be pursued.

11. CONCLUSION

We do not pretend that the questions asked, the problems highlighted and the objectives outlined in this document can easily be addressed. However, we do believe that they must be addressed, not only for Sunbury, but for Spelthorne as a whole, if the quality of life in the area is not to deteriorate rapidly over the next twenty years or so.

It is LOSRA's view that it is all too easy for the Borough Council to deal with issues in isolation, without considering the impact on other aspects of life, and to allow strategy to be framed by an agenda imposed by central government, Surrey County Council and powerful vested interests.

The various "sticks and carrots" in the funding and other systems of government have tended to engender a culture of "box-ticking" which generally results in a triumph of process over principle.

LOSRA's view is that our local authorities need to be more responsive to local needs, as evidenced by the recent "Your Shout" meeting with residents' associations. If this is to be anything other than another box-ticking exercise, simply dealing with a list of minor and occasionally very parochial issues around the Borough, it needs to get to grips with the kind of strategic concerns set out in this document.

LOSRA is a responsible organisation, which over the years has proved its ability to punch its weight at the highest level, and which is able and willing to work with the local authorities and other like-minded residents' groups to turn the objectives and ideas in this document into deliverable strategies and policies.

We would urge our local authorities to take up the offer to open a dialogue. A readiness to consult genuinely with its residents and recognise the need for accountability to the Borough's stakeholders, will make the jobs of councillors and officers easier, rather than harder. The alternative has the continuing potential to lead to confusion and confrontation, which I trust we would all wish to avoid.