

# LOWER SUNBURY RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

## 2024 AGM NEWSLETTER



LOSRA

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

[www.losra.org](http://www.losra.org)

The Annual General Meeting of the Lower Sunbury Residents' Association will take place at The Riverside Arts Centre, Thames Street, Sunbury, on Wednesday 19th June at 8 p.m.

### AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting
3. Chairman's Report
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Election of Officers and Committee
6. Guest speaker: Daniel Mouawad, Chief Executive of Spelthorne Borough Council
7. Update on Lower Sunbury Hedgehog Project
8. Open Forum
9. Any other business

Please note that we do not circulate the Minutes of the previous AGM or the Association's audited accounts with this notice, because to do so would generate disproportionate printing costs. Copies will be available at the AGM, and will also be posted on our website. If you are unable to visit the website but would like to see the documents in advance of the meeting, please contact Paul Thompson, LOSRA Chairman, whose details are included in this newsletter.

## The AGM features Daniel Mouawad, Chief Executive of Spelthorne Borough Council, as Guest Speaker

We are privileged and delighted that Daniel Mouawad, the Chief Executive of Spelthorne Borough Council, has accepted our invitation to be our Guest Speaker at this year's AGM.

These are crucial times for the future of Spelthorne, with the Local Plan still not finalised, leaving our Green Belt potentially vulnerable to predatory planning applications, and with the Borough's operations under scrutiny through a Best Value Inspection commissioned by central government. There are articles on both these topics in this newsletter.

Mr. Mouawad naturally is closely involved in these and other aspects of Spelthorne's administration of local finances and services which affect our daily lives and potentially the environment we live in.

We know from experience that he is a cogent and entertaining speaker, always ready to give us as much insight as the situation allows, and to be as open and frank as possible about the difficulties we face and the opportunities we have.

It's an opportunity for residents to get the inside track

from the man who is the Borough's most senior officer, and is responsible for overseeing the Borough's finances, delivering the Borough's essential services and the policies which our elected representatives decide upon, and we can guarantee that it will make for very interesting listening.

As always, our Annual General Meeting is an opportunity for residents to come along, join the Association if you are not already a member, and have a chance to hear about the activities of LOSRA and to ask questions about local issues.

We usually also have a good turnout of local councillors at the meeting so it's chance to meet them as well and they are usually happy to make themselves available to answer questions directly if they can.

We always pride ourselves on being unusual among organisations like ours that we are able to attract a good audience for our AGMs, so we look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at this year's meeting.

# Local Plan process drags on, putting Green Belt sites at risk

As readers of our weekly e-bulletin will be aware, an Extraordinary Meeting of the Spelthorne Environment and Sustainability Committee was convened on 29th Feb. to determine options prior to the resumption of the Examination of the Local Plan by the Planning Inspector.

The outcome was as follows:

- It was resolved to propose to the Inspector to remove all Green Belt allocations from the Local Plan with the exception of the two allocations that meet the need for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople.
- It was resolved to propose to keep all proposed flood risk sites but remove those at high risk of flooding and move some higher risk sites to later in the Plan period (11-15 years) to allow the River Thames Scheme to be operational and effective, the design code to be completed, and subject to no resolution objection from the Environment Agency.
- The Committee resolved to propose to the Inspector to withdraw the Staines Development Framework as a core document.

The Chairman wrote to the Inspector on 6th March advising him of the Council's decisions and setting out a proposed timetable for implementation of the proposed actions:

### *Action Timescale Dates*

- Revised SFRA Level 1 & 2 delivered by AECOM Fri. 22 March; comments back from EA (Subject to Thames not flooding) 6 weeks Fri. 3 May
- AECOM to make any amendments or corrections (Estimate, dependent on comments received from the EA) 2 weeks Fri. 17 May
- Final EA comments 2 weeks or 21 days Fri. 31 May or Fri. 7 June
- Write to Inspector with final EA comments w/c 3 June or w/c 10 June

There has been correspondence between the Council and The Environment Agency, most recently on 8th May from the Council asking for clarification of some points by 24th May and offering a meeting. At the time of writing, no reply has been posted on the Council website.

There are clearly a number of issues still outstanding, without agreement on which the Local Plan process cannot be continued. The longer this goes on, the greater likelihood that opportunistic developers will lose patience with the process and submit planning applications on Green Belt sites, some of which were already earmarked for development prior to the withdrawal mentioned above.

LOSRA is aware of at least one developer, whose planning application on Green Belt land had previously been approved, having appealed against the withdrawal of the site from the Plan. To what extent, if any, the recently announced Government Best Value inspection (see separate article) will affect the ongoing timetable remains to be seen.

## Spelthorne Council operations under scrutiny with Government "Best Value Inspection"

On 8th May 2024 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) commissioned a Best Value Inspection to be undertaken at Spelthorne Borough Council. This is to provide the Secretary of State with direct, independent assurance that the council has 'arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, with regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness'.

Lesley Seary has been appointed as the Independent Best Value Lead Inspector and will report back her findings to the Secretary of State by 30th August 2024.

Spelthorne Borough Council have been liaising with DLUHC since May 2022 due to the Authority's Capital Risk. The letter further explains that the Council has extremely high levels of debt and borrowing. As of 31 March 2023, Spelthorne's debt was £1.096bn, which was 87.1 times the Council's core spending power (CSP) and 52.4 times its total service expenditure (TSE). Spelthorne has the second highest level of debt for a local authority in England.

- The Lead Inspector has been asked to have due regard to;
- Governance and the strength of associated audit, scrutiny and risk arrangements, with particular attention to the governance arrangements and decision making conducted across the Authority.
  - The capacity and capability across the organisation, but particu-

## Planning application for Battery Energy Storage System on Green Belt – decision due soon?

The extraordinary proposal to build a huge Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) on Green Belt land adjacent to the Charlton Lane Eco Park should be nearing a recommendation by the Spelthorne Borough Council planning department. The expiry date has however now been extended again, to Friday 28 June - perhaps showing that this unprecedented, complex and technical application is not an easy one for the planners to assess.

LOSRA continues to be completely opposed to this development for many reasons. We believe that it is a high-risk development on an entirely inappropriate site and one that has been defined only in outline by incomplete and inconsistent documents and drawings. As such it represents an existential threat to the environment and safety of Sunbury and adjacent habitations and infrastructures. There would appear to be strong local agreement with this view; at the time of writing there are 279 public comments published on the application's entry on the council portal, of which 272 are objections.

Under normal circumstances, there could be no question of such an industrial complex being built on Green Belt. However the Applicant, Sunbury BESS Ltd., claims that 'very special circumstances' should allow this development to go ahead. The Report that sets these out was in the original set of planning documents. LOSRA's comments on the application include rebuttals to the claimed very special circumstances. We do not believe, for instance, that the development would offer any particular 'support for the rural economy', nor is the claim that it is a 'temporary development' – for 40 years! – at all credible.

The most concerning aspect of this proposal remains that of safety. The application is widely inconsistent as to the development's actual storage capacity – varying from 184MWh to 800MWh in the Very Special Circumstances Report alone – but we believe the actual number, based on summing the specified BYD batteries, is around 400MWh – a massive amount of chemical energy, stored across 96 modules of Lithium batteries. There is no formal response as yet from the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (it was unable to access the application documents) and few firm proposals in the Applicant's 'Framework/Outline Safety Management Plan' to manage what is acknowledged to be a 'catastrophic' level of risk should a battery thermal runaway fire take place. That alone should result in this proposal being rejected.

larly the finance function, and whether this is sufficient to meet the Best Value Duty.

- The adequacy of the Authority's plans and capacity to address the recommendations made by the CIPFA capital review and to control its debt levels and reduce them over time.
- What an appropriate level of capital risk would be for the Authority, with regard to the statutory guidance on Best Value Standards and Intervention.
- The Authority's capacity to implement the new housing strategy.
- The impact the investment portfolio and its management has had on service delivery.
- The prudence of financial decision making.
- Continuing to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised.

In response since March 2023 Spelthorne Borough Council have outlined the measures they have put in place. This includes a new 5-year Corporate Plan agreed in February 2024. From the 1 April 2024 the Council has strengthened its internal audit resilience by joining the Southern Internal Audit Partnership.

There has also been the Implementation of a new Development Delivery Strategy to explore joint venture housing and disposal options for individual sites.

# Lower Sunbury Hedgehog Project gets off to good start

We hope that many of you will already have seen publicity for The Lower Sunbury Hedgehog Project in Sunbury Matters, on the LOSRA website and e-bulletin, and on various Facebook pages. The Project is a campaign initiated by LOSRA in partnership with Friends of Sunbury Park, Spelthorne Natural History Society and Spelthorne Borough Council, with the aim of arresting the decline in our local hedgehog population and if possible improve their numbers. The launch tied in with the British Hedgehog Preservation Society's Hedgehog Awareness Week from 5<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> May.

Hedgehogs are in danger across the UK – the population has declined drastically through loss and fragmentation of habitat, and we see very few hedgehogs these days compared to 20 years ago.

We can all help. Hedgehogs thrive in domestic gardens, where they find the ideal variety of food. However, they travel a kilometre or two at a time during the night as they forage, meaning they need to move easily between gardens. We can play our part by making a small hole (5 x 5 inches, 130 x 130mm) at ground level in

our garden fences and walls for them to get through. This small action can create what's known as a 'hedgehog highway', increasing their foraging and mating prospects.

Lower Sunbury is ideally suited to provide large areas of linked hedgehog habitats, with roads that have many houses with good-sized bordering gardens, some linking to parks, playing fields, school grounds and other open spaces to make even more effective "hedgehog highways". If we all make a small effort to enable them to move, and make our gardens more hedgehog-friendly, and if we keep an eye out for them and log sightings, we will know how they're doing, and potentially make a difference to their population.

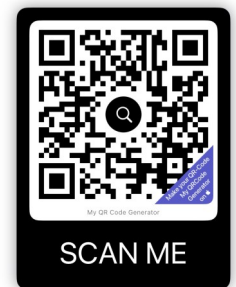
We want to cascade this message across the community, through schools, Neighbourhood Watch groups and any other organisations and residents who want to get involved – it's an ideal project for local residential Whatsapp groups as well. We think the project will appeal to schools as a valuable learning tool and something that stu-

dents can positively get involved in, and at least two infants and primary schools are already participating, so we're off to an excellent start.

The Project has a Facebook page which you can reach by scanning the QR code or with this address: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/426944583187007>, and the LOSRA website has a dedicated page devoted to the Project as does the Spelthorne website.

The resources and information you need about helping hedgehogs in your gardens can be found on the Facebook page along with information as to how record your sightings, and the fact that you have linked your gardens, on a national interactive map called [The BIG Hedgehog Map](#) by Hedgehog Street, plus other useful links.

We hope everyone feels this a worthwhile initiative - we think it could be great way to foster a real community spirit in helping these delightful animals who are on the IUCN 'Vulnerable to extinction' red list for British Mammals.



## Monksbridge opens its garden on Sat. 8th June for a fun day in aid of Sunbury Embroidery Gallery Development Appeal

On Saturday 8th June The Sunbury Embroidery is holding its annual fund-raising OPEN GARDEN from 11am to 5pm at Monksbridge, one of Sunbury's grandest and most historic houses.

It promises to be an afternoon of fun as the Pascoe family open their beautiful riverside garden for the day to raise money for the Sunbury Gallery Development Appeal.

For those who have not visited the garden before, it is a marvellous place, and it's a privilege to be able to enjoy a relaxed and entertaining day in such a superb environment, and to stroll down to the river frontage to take in the views.

Central to the day will be three stunning performances on the lawn at 12.00, 1.30 and 3.00pm by the fantastic Spelthorne Gymnastics display team, one of our local success stories.

In addition to the Gymnastics Displays, there will be:

- Live musical entertainment throughout the afternoon from The Red Hot Strings
- Sandwich lunches
- Afternoon teas
- Glasses (& bottles) of fizz
- Ice Cream
- Mouthwatering homemade cakes
- Boat rides
- A raffle and much more. Raffle prizes include £100 Fortnum & Mason Hamper, 2 Tickets to see Lee Mack during 2025, 4 Tickets to St. Paul's Cathedral, and many more.

Tickets: £5.00 (children under 12 free)

Monksbridge is in Thames Street at TW16 5DP

## River Thames Scheme: any benefits for Lower Sunbury?

The statutory consultation period for the River Thames Scheme (RTS), which started on 22 January, ended on 4 March. LOSRA committee members attended several of the consultation events and reviewed many of the scheme documents; we submitted a detailed range of comments (which we also posted on the LOSRA website) to the RTS project. All such comments should be being reviewed by the project team prior to producing a Consultation Report setting out its response and detailing the changes made to the scheme as a result. This will in turn support the RTS submission to DEFRA for the granting of a Development Consent Order (DCO) for this Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

While awaiting publication of the Report we continue to develop our understanding of the scheme and its effects on Lower Sunbury. In doing so we are mindful of the description of the scheme given in the RTS's Notice Publicising a Statement of Community Consultation in accordance with Section 47 (6) of the Planning Act 2008, namely that: 'The Scheme presents a landscape-based approach to creating a healthier, more sustainable, and more resilient communities (sic) by reducing the risk of flooding and creating high quality natural environments.'

LOSRA is fully supportive of those aims for our community, and those who saw our list of submitted comments will recall that we focused on three areas linked to the flooding risk reduction and creation of a high-quality environment. We are still not convinced that Lower Sunbury will actually see a reduction in flood levels as a result of the scheme. We have continued to study the Flood Modelling Non-Technical Summary document and have queried several statements and apparent anomalies in it with the RTS team; we are awaiting responses to some of these.

In terms of the Lower Sunbury natural environment, the verdant riverside view from Kings Lawn will be spoiled by the building of the new weir across the river on Sunbury Lock Ait. Moreover the scheme's proposed Active Travel Route, which might have provided some benefit to Lower Sunbury residents, is only accessible via the Thames Path on the south side of the river. We have said, and continue to say, that our long campaigned-for bridge for pedestrians and cyclists at Sunbury should be included in the RTS scheme in order to provide access to this benefit for our residents.

# LOSRA needs more Committee Members

LOSRA, the Lower Sunbury Residents' Association, has been active for over 50 years, and represents the 4,000+ households in the Lower Sunbury area. All members of the Committee are volunteers. There are 5 officers – President, Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary. In addition there are up to 10 other full members. The Committee meets monthly on the 2nd Tuesday evening except during August.

Current Committee members come from a variety of ages and backgrounds and all are residents – it is a condition of membership of the Association that members are resident.

The LOSRA Committee has several vacancies. There are no formal qualifications for Committee membership; a keen interest in local affairs, a willingness to get involved, commitment to the monthly meetings, and a lack of personal axes to grind! This is an opportunity to join and contribute to our wide-ranging committee to further empower our community.

We work very closely and have excellent relationships with Spelthorne Borough Council and local groups and businesses. We know many are interested in helping within Lower Sunbury and making the community a better place, and being part of the residents' association is a fantastic opportunity to do so. We learn from each other in our various areas of interest and are looking to bolster our knowledge and skills base.

We are especially looking for people whose background involves IT/Communications and also Administration and Social Media skills. There are no age limits, but younger people are particularly encouraged to apply who are interested in sustainability and school travel and making Lower Sunbury a better place for future generations, so a wider representation of residents' views is possible, and continuity can be achieved as existing members retire/leave the area.

Prospective members are encouraged to attend a committee meeting before committing themselves to gain first-hand experience of how meetings are conducted. If they then decide they would like to join us, they can be co-opted by the committee to join until the next AGM in June.

If you are interested to get more information, in the first instance, please apply to Colleen Cuthbert, Secretary.

## Friends of Sunbury Park Cattle grazing resumes in a verdant-looking Sunbury Park

It's a sure sign of spring when the cows arrive in Sunbury Park for a summer of grazing on what this year, with some weather that's been both very wet and occasionally quite warm, has resulted in very lush and plentiful pasture.

This year we've got nine Aberdeen Angus steers, which are neutered bulls raised for beef production, and they look pretty big and mature, so may be in their second summer.

There were ten when they arrived, but one of them managed to escape into The Pines before being herded back in - no harm arose to people, property or the cow, fortunately, but it's worrying that the Council had not checked all the gates and fences to make sure they were secure before the cattle arrived. We suspect the errant animal got taken away, so they're down to nine.

They are a confident and relaxed bunch, apparently unconcerned by people and dogs being around them, and are generally out and about, clearly thoroughly enjoying their environment. It would be hard to imagine a happier, healthier-looking group of animals.

Having them there helps improve the biodiversity of the grassland by encouraging wild flowers and herbs to take root, and providing a better environment for invertebrates, and it also keeps the rank grasses from growing tall and rotting down, obviating the need for expensive mowing in an area which is tricky to mow anyway. Your continued co-operation in avoiding the cows being troubled by dogs is much appreciated.

### THE LOSRA COMMITTEE

Jyoti Banerjee	8 Harfield Road	07973 323440
Colleen Cuthbert (Secretary & Membership Secretary)	8 Maryland Way, TW16 6HR	01932 783606
Iain Findlay (Treasurer)	58 Thames Street	01932 783739
John Hirsh (Vice-Chairman)	21 School Walk	07515 637474
Neil Huntingford	Summer House, Wheatleys Ait	01932 783761
Chris Hyde	29 Queensway	07854 147935
Oliver Parr	Orchard House, Thames Street	01932 765229
Stacey Pinto	37 Sutherland Avenue	07894 834277
Nigel Spooner	36 Kingsmead Avenue	07887 898874
Paul Thompson (Chairman)	12 Brackenwood	07788 107500
Paul Watts (President)	87 The Avenue	01932 788449

### LOSRA MEMBERSHIP FOR 2024 PAYMENT OPTIONS

#### By Standing Order

You may pay by setting up a standing order with your bank. Please make payments to Lower Sunbury Residents Association at Barclays Bank, Account number: 90581194 Sort Code: 20 46 73. Subsequent payments to be made on 1st January each year. Please use LOSRA with your house number and post code as a reference.

#### By cheque or cash

The annual subscription is still just £5 per household and voluntary donations are always welcome. For payment by cheque or cash, please use the form below and deliver to Colleen Cuthbert, Membership Secretary, 8 Maryland Way TW16 6HR or any other committee member as listed. Alternatively drop your payment into Skinners Newsagents/Post Office in Avenue Parade, or The Good Estate Agent/Twirltour Travel in Green Street. Please make cheques payable to Lower Sunbury Residents Association .

#### Via PayPal

This can be done on the website at [www.LOSRA.org](http://www.LOSRA.org)

#### Life Membership

There is also the option of Life Membership of £100 with a one-off payment.

If you are not sure that you are up to date with your payments or you need more information about membership, please contact Colleen Cuthbert, Membership Secretary, on 01932 783606 or by email [colleen.cuthbert@btinternet.com](mailto:colleen.cuthbert@btinternet.com)

Thank you very much for your continued support.

Membership payment slip 2024 for CHEQUES OR CASH

I wish to pay the annual subscription to LOSRA for £5.00 per household and a donation for £..... (please enter amount, if you would like to make a voluntary donation)

Name/s. ....

Address .....

Post Code.....

email .....

Telephone..... Date .....

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