

LOWER SUNBURY RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION 2025 NEW YEAR NEWSLETTER



LOSRA

www.LOSRA.org

Thames Street Action Group aims to beef up the Lower Sunbury Street Improvement Scheme

Planning, designing and delivering safer, healthier and more attractive streets that encourage more walking and cycling is a self-evidently worthwhile objective which Surrey County Council is promoting across the county. As part of the initial group of schemes being taken forward in Surrey, the Lower Sunbury Street Improvement Scheme was initiated in autumn 2023 with an area-wide consultation. Over 150 local residents provided feedback with comments ranging widely over issues such as dangerous driving, poor quality pavements, inadequate pedestrian crossings and anti-social parking.

In the the spring of 2024, a detailed Early Engagement Report was produced which summarised the issues that had been identified and set out possible solutions in different parts of Lower Sunbury. These include new crossing points (for instance in Green Street close to the shopping parade and near to Heathlands Close), introduction of Copenhagen style crossings with raised blocks, and the introduction of a 20mph limit throughout Lower Sunbury as far as Darby Crescent.

Many of the proposals have been well received but by no means all. For example, the proposal for a central pedestrian refuge close to the entrance to Sunbury Court Island has met with strong objections by residents of the island, who are naturally concerned about the inevitable loss of parking spaces on Lower Hampton Road. This highlights the inevitable trade offs that are involved when new traffic arrangements are introduced.

To discuss the particular issues affecting Thames Street, a meeting was held on 5th October in the Adult Education Centre in The Avenue - at the same time as the wider LSSIS presenta-

tion. It was a lively event, well attended by local residents as well as councillors and our new MP, Lincoln Jopp, who emphasised the need for all parties to work closely together.

Those who live on Thames Street, which carries the greatest amount of through traffic in Lower Sunbury, feel that the proposals do not go nearly far enough. As a result, and with the strong leadership of Thames Street resident Patrick Leaney, a Thames Street sub-group has been formed to focus on Thames Street's particular issues. The sub-group has met on-line with most of the relevant parties, including the Borough Commander.

Thames Street has some particularly narrow sections, especially around its junction with The Avenue, and has other stretches where on-street parking can be very problematic. HGV traffic (whether permitted or not) and fast moving cyclists are other hazards. Driving on pavements is a common occurrence, dangerous to pedestrians and residents alike. Moreover, it is home to the majority of period houses which help give Lower Sunbury its special character, and a number of these properties are being caused structural damage by passing HGVs.

In the near term the Thames Street sub-group is looking to see speedy implementation of simple measures such as the repainting of faded yellow lines and enforcement of existing restrictions. In the longer term, more significant changes such as the installation of cameras or chicanes need to be explored. Of course, little of this can happen without both SBC and SCC's buy-in and financial investment, and the sub-group will continue to press for the necessary permissions and funding. Watch this space...

Lower Conservation Area Appraisal - your chance to have your say

If you have lived in Lower Sunbury long enough, you may recall that LOSRA was instrumental in drawing up a plan for the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area (LSCA) which led to Spelthorne Borough Council's own plan. Modest changes were made to the boundary in 1992 but nothing has changed since. So, after 30 years, it is only right that SBC should be conducting a new appraisal. Indeed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 local planning

authorities have a duty to review the constitution of a conservation area from time to time. The LSCA Plan is intended as Supplementary Planning Guidance, i.e. is non-statutory, but is a material factor in Council planning decisions.

The principal changes proposed for the LSCA are that its area be extended to include Hawke House and its neighbouring properties, as well as Darby House and Sunbury Court to the east. A number of exclusions are also proposed, including some modern development on the west side of

Green Street and on the north side of Thames Street.

It is LOSRA's view that both sides of a street within the Conservation Area should be included, whatever the quality or period of the buildings. This can ensure a greater degree of oversight in areas where there is a clear need to protect the character of the location. Thus, for example, Berkeley Mews should be included within the Conservation Area, as well as Thames Corner.

LOSRA has asked the Council to extend the consultation period. Anyone with an interest in the Conservation Area is encouraged to read the Appraisal (planning ref. 24/01074/CAA) and to submit their own comments.

Increasing flood risk on the Thames focuses attention on schemes to alleviate the impact

The River Thames, as a resource and water highway, has encouraged communities to develop along its banks over many centuries, resulting in demands on the river over time, including water extraction, commercial transport and leisure activities. There have been many attempts to contain and control the river, from the early flash locks of the 1800s where mill owners and barge owners competed for access, through to current lock and weir systems and the Thames Barrier built in 1982 to protect London against flooding.

Residents who live along the river as it flows through Lower Sunbury are only too aware that those 'contain and control' systems fail with increasing regularity, resulting in flooded homes and dangerously fast river flows.

The effects of climate change and over-development of historical flood plains means the problems will only get worse, and there is no obvious fix, but there are two official bodies that are working to develop solutions that will have an effect on Lower Sunbury for many years to come.

The River Thames Scheme (RTS), under the ownership of the Environment Agency (EA), is a major project to mitigate flooding including building two new water channels to divert water away from certain urban areas as well as some dredging and upgrading of weirs. Residents will know from numerous consultations

and articles that the RTS appears to be little benefit for Lower Sunbury and there are questions over its projected timeline and budget limitations given that the EA is woefully under resourced and staffed.

The other official organization, that has been flying somewhat under the radar, is the Thames Landscape Strategy (TLS). This is a partnership organisation of fourteen major riverside landowners such as the EA and local councils including Spelthorne and Elmbridge. The TLS works to conserve, enhance and promote the Thames from Weybridge to Kew. The organisation is based on a document that is a 100-year vision to guide change along the river. Created in 1994, it was updated in 2012 and is starting to be updated again to reflect current flood risk and climate change predictions.

Until now, there hasn't been a detailed chapter for Sunbury in the strategy. During 2025 the TLS is planning to work with LOSRA and the local community to embed Sunbury into the strategy. Rather than try to contain the river in manufactured channels and walls, the TLS considers how historically the river has naturally used flood plains and reed beds during floods. It is a strategic vision to make a basic change in how we approach riverside management, improve flood risk mitigation and embed community values and priorities, and to combine this with delivering wider benefits like enhanced envi-

ronmental quality, recreational opportunities, heritage protection, culture, and economic growth.

The TLS has a collaborative approach to working with local authorities, stakeholders, and communities, sharing resources and knowledge to develop a sustainable future for the Thames.

As part of the update of the strategy, the TLS will be conducting a Landscape Character Assessment based on the wealth of local knowledge that the Lower Sunbury community has to offer. They will have discussions with LOSRA in the New Year to capture an accurate view of the heritage of our stretch of the river.

It seems obvious that these two major organisations should be working closely together, and indeed thanks to the TLS, there are some links slowly being formed, especially as the EA is coming to the realisation that the main thrust of their River Thames Scheme can no longer be about flood prevention but flood mitigation. Their latest consultation focuses on green spaces, two new footbridges and active travel paths, all around the areas upstream of Walton Bridge. Again, we will see little benefit despite our constant representations for a footbridge in Lower Sunbury.

We look forward to working with the Thames Landscape Strategy team and we will continue to petition the Environment Agency for benefits from the River Thames Scheme for Lower Sunbury.

Spelthorne asks Planning Inspector to resume Local Plan examination after an 18-month hiatus

The following article is reproduced with permission from the Staines Town Society, with thanks to Anne Damerell:

VINDICATED!

For two years, as the draft Local Plan emerged from consultation, Staines Town Society and many other residents' organisations have supported it and urged its acceptance. Not that we like it particularly, but we appreciated it was a carefully constructed compromise between what residents want and what the government insists we must have, i.e. 611 new housing units per year, mostly flats rather than houses of course.

This borough is full and cannot accommodate an extra 611 flats a year for 15 years without significant disadvantage. The draft Plan aimed to limit the damage by building on some weakly performing Green Belt land in order to reduce, but not remove, the impact of high-rise flats in the towns. It was therefore attacked from both sides (Save Our Green Belt and High-Rise Hell) by people who refused to accept reality – that the 611 target is una-

voidable – and instead criticised the Borough Council for failing to produce a plan they liked.

There has been considerable turmoil in the council. One side accepted the draft Plan and sent it to the Planning Inspectorate for the necessary examination. The other side came out on top in the May 2023 local elections, and promptly asked the Inspector to halt the examination. Since then various changes have been proposed, to remove the Green Belt sites, to exclude certain riverside sites in Staines, to liaise with the Environment Agency re sites at high flood risk, etc.

Things have now changed. First, the Elmbridge Local Plan, which proposed a housing allocation much less than the Government requirement, was emphatically rejected by the Planning Inspector. The implication is that a Spelthorne Plan which failed to allocate enough housing would also fail. Then the new government announced that Plans in progress could continue with the previous targets, but if for example Spelthorne

abandoned the draft Plan and began again, the target would be 755, not 611.

Panic! Suddenly the draft Plan they had been despising was the best thing since sliced bread. SBC has written to the Inspector politely requesting him to resume the examination as from May 2023. We understand that he has agreed but are not sure if any of the recent modifications are included or rejected.

The residents' groups who originally supported the Plan feel that their stance has been vindicated, but regret that the Council has wasted a year and a half before accepting the reality.

So in the end we may have a new Local Plan up & running next year. We won't like some of it but will have to accept that, as Maurice Chevalier said about getting old, *"it is better than the alternative."*

As we go to press, we have learnt that the Examination has now been scheduled to recommence in January/February 2025, which is good news.

Meanwhile, the Government has published details of an overhaul of Planning Committees in order to fast-track measures to tackle the housing 'crisis'. It is to be hoped that in sweeping away genuine impediments this does not leave local council Planning Committees toothless when objecting to undesirable developments.

A New Year message and round-up of other stories from the LOSRA Chairman

2025 - our 53rd year. 2025 marks the 53rd year of LOSRA's founding. Visitors to our various events will have seen the display panels showing some of the projects LOSRA has been influential in working on over the years. This newsletter covers some of those current issues.

LOSRA is in the fortunate position of having built up substantial reserves against unforeseen eventualities but these can be eroded very quickly, especially when specialist legal advice and representation are required, as was the case last year with the paused Local Plan Examination in Public.

Fortunately, much of the work we do is no or low cost, largely because of the expertise we have on the LOSRA committee. It is essential we keep our reserves replenished so I urge you to pay your 2025 membership subscription (and make a donation if you can) – at just £5 this represents amazing value – please see the final page for details about how to pay. Our Treasurer is a Scot, so heartily endorses the expression 'many a mickle makes a muckle'!

Lincoln Jopp

We were pleased to welcome our new Spelthorne MP – Lincoln Jopp MC MP - to our stand at the Christmas Fair. He has an open invitation to attend LOSRA Committee meetings to help him keep up to speed with issues of concern to our community – indeed, he is already a paid-up LOSRA mem-

ber as a resident of Sunbury. We look forward to developing a close working relationship with him in the coming year.

Spelthorne Partnership Assembly

Initiated in August this year, this is the new name for what was previously called the Residents Association meetings. These occurred infrequently and were of limited value. Importantly, the new ones are open to any resident to attend and put pre-submitted questions to the Leader & Deputy Leader of the Council. Minutes are published and can be viewed at <https://www.spelthorne.gov.uk/SPA>. We look forward to working with the Council in 2025 in a constructive and positive way.

Best Value inspection

Over a year ago, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) asked the professional body for public sector finance, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), to review Spelthorne Borough Council's investment portfolio and borrowing position. An independent inspector was appointed to undertake a review of Spelthorne Borough Council to seek assurance that the Council complying with its Best Value Duty. The Inspec-

tor was due to report to the Secretary of State by 30th August, but at the time of writing, the inspection has yet to be completed. It is to be hoped that when it is, and is published in 2025, the result will be a positive one for Spelthorne Borough Council and its residents.

Government Planning changes

Meanwhile, as noted in the Local Plan article on Page 2, the Government has just published details of a major overhaul of Planning Committees to address the housing situation

We don't have room to reproduce them here, but they make for interesting reading, and you can find them at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-overhaul-of-planning-committees-to-get-britain-building>

Surrey Rights of Way Improvement Plan consultation

This opened on 15th November and is open until 9th February – see <https://www.surreysays.co.uk/environment-and-infrastructure/rowip-24/>

It's quite a lengthy (61pp) but interesting document. On an initial skim through it is rather sad to see Spelthorne scoring lowest in Surrey on a number of relevant metrics. LOSRA will be submitting a response as are also several opportunities to push our long-standing campaign for a foot/cycle bridge, including Objective #7 and Action #17. To keep in touch with this and other issues, if you haven't already done so, sign up for our regular weekly e-bulletin – see www.LOSRA.org.

Finally, on behalf of the LOSRA Committee, I wish you a peaceful Christmas and prosperous 2025.

Sunbury BESS: history repeats itself, but with a twist

Readers may remember that last June the original application to build a Battery Energy Storage System on Green Belt land adjacent to the Eco Park was withdrawn by the developer, Sunbury BESS Limited (SBL), just a week before it was due to be considered by the Spelthorne Borough Council planning committee, with an officer's recommendation for refusal.

SBL submitted a new application in September, for a scheme that did not differ materially from its predecessor.

That scheme was scheduled for determination at the planning meeting on 10 December, again with a recommendation for refusal. But with just four days to go, the revised application was also removed from the planning meeting agenda, which now simply notes that 'In consultation with the Chair of the Planning Committee, consideration of this item has been deferred'. So, what on earth is going on?

It would seem to be highly unusual for an application to be deferred in this way after the planning officer's comprehensive report, setting out several reasons

for refusal, had already been published on the Council's website.

The planning officer has however now stated 'that the planning application was deferred following the applicant submitting amended plans following the Council's recommendation for refusal of the scheme. After careful consideration and discussion with the Chair of the Planning Committee, it was decided that the application be deferred subject to consideration of the revised proposals. Once we have received detailed plans of the amended proposals these will be uploaded onto the website and neighbours will be re-notified and the amendments given due publicity.'

We further understand that there is an extension of time until 2 May, allowing the application to be presented back to one of the February, March or two April Committees.

There is no indication as to what these 'revised proposals' are, but we believe that they may relate to an objection by the Environment Agency to the

design of the surface water drainage system being proposed for the site. This featured as a key reason for refusal in the planning officer's report and relates to the site having been used in the past for landfill purposes.

In its statutory consultee response, which was only published in the application's documents list on 9 December, the EA objected, stating that 'The site is underlain by a historic landfill, the contents of which have not been fully understood. Infiltration drainage of surface water via shallow soakaways could mobilise contaminants within the landfill material, aiding migration towards the underlying Kempton Park Gravel Member, a principal aquifer. Given this, we do not have confidence that groundwater quality beneath the site will not deteriorate as a result of this development.'

This is interesting, in that the drainage design is also required to ensure that no fire-fighting water, which is likely to be contaminated through contact with burning lithium batteries, is allowed to reach that 'principal aquifer'.

The applicant would seem to have significant work to do to provide a design that ensures that both these requirements would be met. We will continue to monitor this issue closely and provide updates on the LOSRA website.

Friends of Sunbury Park: A busy and positive year

The last year has seen The Friends of Sunbury Park go from strength to strength. The year began with the launch of their latest booklet "The Fungi and Lichens of Sunbury Park." This now completes the series describing the nature of Sunbury Park and fulfilled one of the aims of the Friends to make residents and visitors more aware of the wonderful nature that can be found throughout the year.

In March the group were represented (with Spelthorne Natural History Society) at the Charity Day held in Shepperton Village Hall. This was an excellent opportunity to meet local elected officials and visitors to explain the importance of Sunbury Park and the work carried out by The Friends.

In May, 9 cows returned for the summer season and, due to the very wet spring discovered plenty of food for them to graze upon. Apart from an early escape into The Pines, the cows were generally well behaved and we look forward to their return in Spring 2025.

An important initiative launched by LOSRA and which The Friends were delighted to be involved with was the launch of the Lower Sunbury Hedgehog Project. This led on from the project conducted in 2023 by The Friends to discover whether there were hedgehogs in Sunbury Park. Sadly the results were inconclusive, but, buoyed by the interest shown, a new project was launched that involved residents of Lower Sunbury. A Fa-

cebook site was initiated that currently has eighty followers, with many short films and information about these lovely mammals being posted. Talks have been given in local schools highlighted the importance of hedgehogs and what we can do to prevent their decline.

The Facebook page of The Friends now has over 1300 followers and is a terrific way to provide information to residents and followers. In addition, talks have been given to local groups about The History of Sunbury Park, The Friends, and the nature of Sunbury Park. More local talks are planned for 2025.

The main conservation activity in 2024 concerned the development of a south facing sandy bank that overlooked Thames Street near St Mary's church that appeared as a result of the remedial works conducted on the wall abutting Thames Street in 2023. In June, the Friends were helped by Egham and Staines Conservation Volunteers in clearing this area of invasive bramble and weeds to prepare for the planting of more appropriate vegetation to attract and encourage pollinator species, especially solitary bees of which several species can be found in the park.

This exercise was then repeated in Autumn and wild flower seed planted that, hopefully, will result in a lovely wild flower meadow next Spring and Summer. Further development of this site will take place in 2025 in conjunction with the Spelthorne Borough Diversity Officer to further encourage insects and other wildlife in the area. Additional conservation work is also planned to control bramble.

The Friends would like to thank all those that have offered encouragement and support to the group over 2024 and look forward to an even better 2025.

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Please help by paying your 2025 LOSRA subscription

We are now into a new year as far as LOSRA subscriptions are concerned, so it would help us greatly if you could chip in with your contribution, which remains pegged at £5.00 per annum, with an alternative of Life membership for £100.00.

We have our usual programme of newsletters and other activities to fund, plus the ever-present threat of needing to pay for legal advice and representation for major planning issues.

You can pay your subscription by using one of the methods set out below.

LOSRA MEMBERSHIP FOR 2025 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, 101 Green Street. Please make cheques payable to Lower Sunbury Residents Association.

Via PayPal

This can be done on the web site at 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 further information about membership, please contact Colleen Cuthbert, Membership Secretary, on 01932 783606 or by email colleen.cuthbert@btinternet.com and we will be pleased to advise.

Thank you very much for your continued support.

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