

LOWER SUNBURY RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION 2023 SPRING NEWSLETTER



LOSRA

www.LOSRA.org

Local Government Association 'Peer Review Challenge' says Spelthorne is 'high performing' but highlights lack of cohesion in Council decision-making

Spelthorne Borough Council asked the Local Government Association to carry out a corporate peer challenge in November to test the robustness of its processes and practices, and has just published the report.

Worryingly, this found the behaviour from some Council members – both to each other and to officers – had hurt morale at the authority and made it harder to recruit and retain staff.

The LGA said senior councillors need to make the most of the "talent, knowledge and experience" in the council's staff, as well as work better with one another, to set a long-term strategy and achieve consensus to move policies forward.

This lack of consensus, not yet helped by the adoption of a new committee system, is causing delays to decision-making, costing the authority £170,000 (later revised by the Chief Executive to £200,000) a month in the form of debt servicing and delayed development, the report said.

"There needs to be a recognition that the current lack of cohesive working is affecting the council's reputation, is costing the council money, affecting staff morale, and could ultimately affect the delivery of council services for residents and businesses" the LGA says.

Bethan Evans, local government governance trainer and adviser, states that good officer and member relationships are crucial to the effective running of a council.

"If a council is dysfunctional at sen-

ior level because of difficulties between members and officers, it impacts the setting of budgets, the shared impetus to get on with change and showing central government that it is effective," she said.

"It has a direct impact on the effectiveness of its services, and also on the confidence that its local taxpayers have in their own council."

She said recent auditor and best value reports that have highlighted the issues in local authority governance – Spelthorne is far from alone in experiencing problems – have prompted councils to discuss their practices to ensure they are fit for purpose.

"What is clear from all of these reports is that the issues are usually not specific to that authority, but are linked to decision-making and the trust and respect between people who are leading the organisation," Evans said.

"I do not think any council can be complacent, because they can learn from every one of these reports."

The LGA review said Spelthorne must revisit its induction training for new members, and provide additional finance training for councillors and officers to improve the understanding of risks facing the authority.

A council spokesperson said the authority has already developed a member training programme for new councillors ahead of this year's local elections.

"The council will take forward all the recommendations highlighted in the feedback report from the corporate peer team through an action plan, which will

be developed and reported through the corporate policy and resources committee," they said.

"The council recognises the benefit of continually seeking to refresh the financial management skills of both councillors and staff and will be running training for both in the coming year, to further improve the way reports present financial information."

At a recent LOSRA Committee attended by the Chief Executive he was at pains to point out that, despite the difficulties highlighted, Spelthorne is generally deemed by the LGA to be a "high performing" Council. With 39 members representing no fewer than seven different parties together with three independents, it's not surprising that disagreements over matters of policy will emerge.

Nevertheless, the tone of the report should be a matter of grave concern to our members and the communities responsible for electing them. Apart from gumming up the works so that decisions take too long, £200,000 per month is an unconscionable waste of council tax-payers' money and should focus the minds of all those intending to stand at the elections on May 5th.

The issues highlighted in the report are vital because they have put the Local Plan at risk and exposed every part of Spelthorne, including Lower Sunbury to the threat of predatory planning applications for Green Belt like Kempton Park.

We have every right to expect grown up debate which should drive Council policy, not the sectional interests of individual members for whom playing to the gallery trumps their borough-wide responsibilities.

What a load of Potholes!

If you drive, or cycle, around Lower Sunbury, you would probably have been keeping a close eye on the road ahead – not just for pedestrians, other road users or speed traps - but for an increasingly pervasive phenomenon – the pothole!

Potholes are a serious hazard for road users, which can not only cause thousands of pounds of damage to tyres, wheels and suspension for car and van drivers, but also serious injury, even death, to more vulnerable road users like cyclists and motorcyclists.

This is not just a Lower Sunbury issue of course, it is a general problem across the UK. However, Surrey has in recent years had more of an issue than most. In 2018 the county was named pothole capital of the UK with almost twice as many road craters reported than any other county (data compiled by website Fill That Hole, run by Cycling UK).

Potholes are more prevalent during spells of rain and freezing temperatures – we've had a lot of that lately as you are aware! Potholes are caused when rainwater seeps into the porous road surface and then freezes in subsequent sub-zero temperatures. The freezing water expands,

weakening the asphalt. Heavy traffic can then break up these weak spots causing potholes to appear.

This can currently be seen in many of Lower Sunbury roads, one bad example being Harfield Road. The poor condition of the road has been exacerbated by heavy use due to diversions involving Lower Hampton Road because of roadworks near the Hampton waterworks junction.

A recent report from Surrey county councillor, David Lewis, showed that the Surrey public have been reporting nearly 1000 potholes each week. Although highway inspectors have found many of these are duplicate defects already reported, it shows the scale of the problem.

Surrey takes this issue very seriously and currently has 25 pothole repair teams (2 to 3 times the usual number) repairing 1500+ potholes per week.

Our own County Councillor for Lower Sunbury and Halliford, Buddhi Weerasinghe, has been very proactive in dealing with the problem. He has already worked to allocate funds to resurface parts of Green Street and Church Street, but is in close contact with Surrey

highway engineers to negotiate allocation of resources to our local road surfaces.

If you Google "Sunbury Potholes" on Facebook, you can see how active he has been in liaising with local people on this issue.

The recent Central Government budget announced that a further £200m will be provided to local authorities, on top of the already announced £500m, to tackle potholes, so hopefully this will help expedite solving the current issue.

Local councils have a duty to maintain the roads and are generally quick to respond, but they can only fill a pothole if they know about it. If you want it repaired, you have to report it.

Lower Sunbury residents can therefore help by reporting potholes directly to Surrey Highways or via Cycling UK's FillThatHole website. The latter was set up so all road users can have an easy way to report potholes and road defects wherever they find them. Cycling UK contacts the right people to get the roads repaired. Don't assume that someone else has reported it, report it yourself!

www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roadworks-and-maintenance/report-a-highway-problem/road-or-cycle-lane-issues

www.fillthathole.org.uk

Decision awaited on planning application on Green Belt site at Hazelwood Drive

The Green Belt plot adjoining Hazelwood Drive, Lyndhurst Avenue and School Walk has had a chequered history, passing from one corporate owner to another, including, bizarrely at one stage, British Rail.

It had been owned by Angle Properties for a number of years before the Company sold it to Bellway Homes who have now applied for planning permission to build 67 homes on the site. The closing date for representations has now passed.

LOSRA has always opposed development on Green Belt land and our position remains unchanged. However, after the outrageous increase in assessed housing need from 167 dwellings to 618 per annum determined by central government, it was inevitable that some sacrifices would have to be made.

As part of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) in 2017 an independent Green Belt Assessment was produced for the Council by ARUP. The purpose of the Green Belt Assessment Stage 1 was to provide evidence of how different areas perform against Green Belt purposes as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

This study identified a number of weakly performing local areas and several local areas for potential sub-division. In conjunction with a local residents' campaign group, LOSRA succeeded in having the sizeable Green Belt plot at Stratton Road removed at the Stage 2 Assessment, but had to accept that Hazelwood was "weakly performing" against the criteria and was much more difficult to defend. The widest public consultation was nevertheless a commendable feature through the various stages of the Council's preparations of the Local Plan and to which all residents were invited to contribute.

Following the inevitable application by Bellway Homes, the principal objections relate to the number of dwellings (which fall within the maximum allowable) and the impact on the infrastructure. We now await the decision of the Planning Committee.

What's happening with 20mph speed limits

Surrey County Council has recently consulted on proposals to extend the existing Thames Street 20mph zone along a 75 metre section of The Avenue between Thames Street and Saxonbury Avenue. Local residents told SCC that they were in favour of extending the 20mph zone to include this short section of The Avenue, as it would reduce vehicle speeds and improve safety.

This part of The Avenue attracts pedestrians and a lot of low speed car manoeuvres to access and leave the car parking bays outside the shops. The consultation closed on 24 March. Any objections and comments will be considered by SCC before a decision is taken to go ahead with a preferred scheme.

SCC have also consulted on proposals to legalise the maximum speed limit of 20mph in the vicinity of Stratton Road, Ravendale Road, Rooksmead Road and Sunmead Road. Despite a speed limit of 20mph apparently already in place in this area, SCC discovered that it had no legal backing. Local residents were in favour of keeping the 20mph as it has had a positive impact in terms of improving safety and reducing vehicle speeds. The results of a speed survey showed that mean traffic speeds were low enough to support a formal 20mph speed limit in compliance with Surrey's Setting Local Speed Limits Policy. The consultation closed on 25 November 2022.

The general background is that in setting speed limits, highway authorities are guided by government policy, their own policy, research, the views of local residents and local speed surveys. Signed-only 20mph speed limits are most effective in areas where speeds are already relatively low. Research shows that where the mean speed is already at or below 24mph, there is likely to be general compliance with a new 20mph speed limit. 20mph limits can also be appropriate where mean speeds are higher, but in that case engineering measures like traffic calming will need to be considered. Further details are available on the Surrey County Council website. Requests to change speed limits should be submitted to Surrey Highways via their website or by calling 0300 200 1003.

Proposed new 19m high 5G tele-communications mast in Thames Street loses planning appeal

Readers may recall an article in LOSRA's 2022 Spring Newsletter concerning the association's opposition towards an application to Spelthorne Council by CK Hutchison Networks (UK) Ltd to site a new 19 metre high 5G mobile phone mast and associated cabinets on the pavement in Thames Street, within the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area.

More than 300 letters of representation from concerned residents objected to the proposal on a range of issues related to the self-evidently inappropriate siting, not just within the Conservation Area but close to residential properties and a primary school.

Thankfully, on 7 March 2022 the application was refused by the local planning authority on two grounds, namely that *'The proposed telecommunications mast, by virtue of its siting, height and bulk, would appear visually overbearing and incongruous in the surrounding street scene and would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and the character and setting of the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area.'* and that *'The applicant has submitted insufficient information to determine whether the siting of the proposed monopole and associated equipment would*

have an acceptable impact upon highway safety.'

Subsequent to this refusal, in July 2022 the applicant submitted an appeal to the Secretary of State, seeking the overturning of the council's planning refusal. The Inspector appointed by the Planning Inspectorate visited the site on 3 January 2023 and issued the Appeal Decision notice on 30 January; the appeal was dismissed. In a 5 page document the Inspector detailed the reasons for the dismissal, which were focused on three main issues:

- the character or appearance of the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area;
- highway safety in the area; and,
- if any harm would occur, whether this is outweighed by the need for the installation to be sited as proposed, taking into account any suitable alternatives.

The likelihood of a 5G mast being sited in the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area has therefore gone away for the moment, and it does not appear that C.K.Hutchison Networks (UK) Ltd has submitted an application for an alternative site as yet. However, we will of course remain vigilant!

Legal dispute between Surrey and Suez over 'EcoPark' resolved

In February, Surrey County Council announced that the long-standing legal dispute between the Council and Eco Park operator Suez had been resolved via a Settlement Agreement, whereby Suez will continue to run the site until 2029.

The Council had announced in March 2021 that it had launched legal action against Suez over delays to the Eco Park after 'exhausting all other options available' and it is this action that has now been resolved.

The site on Charlton Lane in Shepperton has had a long and troubled gestation since construction of the advanced Energy from Waste (EfW) plant started in the summer of 2015. Its technologies involve the processing of food waste to produce a burnable biogas ('anaerobic digestion') and the heating of solid waste to produce steam ('gasification'), both of which are used to generate electricity that can be fed back on to the local distribution grid.

Local concerns about the wisdom of siting such a large industrial plant in a suburban environment have inevitably been many and varied. A Community Liaison Group was set up, involving local residents' associations (including LOSRA), councillors, SCC officers, Suez

managers and residents.

This has met roughly quarterly (lockdowns permitting) to discuss the various issues, which have included odours, noise, and traffic amongst others. At the same time a major complication had been the 2021 merger between the French Suez and Veolia Groups, which at one stage seemed likely to result in their selling the Suez UK subsidiary to the Australian asset management company Macquarie.

In the end the Suez Group exercised its legal 'right of first refusal' and agreed to retain the UK subsidiary, thereby avoiding a potential change of ownership of the Eco Park operator.

It is to be hoped that the resolution of the ownership uncertainty and legal dispute will enable Suez and Surrey County Council to focus on getting the plant into stable, continuous and efficient operation.

It is equally vital to ensure that the current issues that are adversely affecting residents living near the plant, such as the noise of frequent alarms, are rapidly addressed. The Eco Park Community Liaison Group has a vital and ongoing role to play in this regard.

LOSRA and Lower Sunbury Business Community meet with Surrey Police And Crime Commissioner

Facilitated by Buddhi Weerasinghe, County Councillor, who was unfortunately detained on business abroad on the night, LOSRA Committee members and Monica Jones from the Lower Sunbury Business Community met with Lisa Townsend, the PCC, who was accompanied by two uniformed Officers. The list of questions submitted in advance, were speedily answered as Ms Townsend had another meeting to go to after an hour.

We learnt that a new Surrey Chief Constable has been appointed – Tim de Meyer, currently ACC at Thames Valley. Spelthorne has a new Borough Commander, replacing Maxine Cilia. The number of warranted Officers increased by 333, from 1930 in 2018/19 to 2159 in 2021/2. New Officers now need to be qualified to Police Degree level.

Surrey is the 4th safest county in the country for crime, and 2nd safest for homicide; however, the nature of crime has changed, with 42% now being fraud, with many new Officers tackling this using technology behind the scenes invisible to the public. On the positive side, burglary is reducing and combatting 'County Lines' drug running has been a real success.

More PCSOs are being recruited, to work with warranted Officers in teams where the need is highest, reflecting the nature of the crime. The PCSOs are more likely to be seen 'on the beat' engaging with the local community.

Parking has now become the overall responsibility of Surrey County Council, and not the Police, unless e.g. a vehicle is causing an obstruction. Legislation would be needed to change this.

On anti-social behaviour (ASB), all incidences are recorded and information is used to identify and anticipate trends. However, some ASB does not constitute an illegal act so Officers are sometimes limited in what they can do to remedy the situation. Interaction with schools is now largely through specialist agencies e.g. drug charities.

Residents are strongly encouraged to join their local Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) group. Officers find the information provided most useful and NHW in turn produce very helpful information for resident members.

No questions were submitted by Lower Sunbury residents, despite LOSRA having pre-announced in the last newsletter that they would be welcome.

Thanks to Buddhi Weerasinghe for facilitating the meeting, and Lisa Townsend for listening to our concerns.

LOSRA celebrates 50th anniversary at enjoyable and well-attended social evening

LOSRA's 50th anniversary celebration announced in our last newsletter duly took place at Sunbury Cricket Club in October, and it was a highly successful and very enjoyable event.

Many thanks to all those of you who came and shared the occasion with us – we had a very good turn-out across the evening, who were treated to excellent hot food served by the expert chefs at Surplus To Supper, with the curry and lasagne prepared purely from surplus produce from the supermarkets – a proper community event.

It was fun to meet everyone in an environment where we didn't have an axe to grind or a point to make, and people were very generous with their donations as well.

It was such a good evening we are thinking of having one every year rather than wait another half-century!

THE LOSRA COMMITTEE

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Photo ID now needed for voting in person

In case, you were not aware, you will now need to show some kind of photo ID when you vote in person at this May's local elections.

Accepted forms of document are passport, driving licence, Blue Badge, Older Person's Bus Pass, Disabled Person's Bus Pass, Oyster 60+ Card, Registered Blind SmartPass, a Proof Of Age Standards Scheme Card and one or two other government-issued documents.

If you don't have any of these, you can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. You can apply for this online, or by downloading a form, or by contacting the Council by phone to request a paper form to fill in and send to the Council. You may also be able to apply in person. You don't need photo ID to vote by post.

There is a helpline at 0800 328 0280 if you need to find out more. It's obviously crucially important that you are able to vote!

Special Music Night at Sunbury Cricket Club raises £1,000 for Mayor's Charities

The organisers of the Music Nights at Sunbury Cricket Club once again devoted one of their events to a Charity Night in aid of the Mayor of Spelthorne's Charities, which has become an annual tradition.

On March 10th nine musicians from various bands in the local music fraternity, performing free under the name The Chain Gang in honour of the Mayor's Chain of Office, played a rip-roaring evening of rock 'n' roll, '60s R&B, blues, country and classic rock to a packed room and raised over £1,000 which goes to the charities supported by this year's Mayor Cllr. Sue Doran from Stanwell, which are the Spelthorne mental Health Association and Stanwell Family Centre.

There were twelve councillors from across the borough there, including five former Mayors, along with a county councillor and Spelthorne's Chief Executive, so it's an event that not only does some good but helps keep Lower Sunbury firmly on the map in the corridors of power.

Please help by paying your 2023 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 2023 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 6JHR 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.

Membership payment slip 2023 for CHEQUES OR CASH

I wish to pay the annual subscription to LOSRA of £5.00 per household or a Life Subscription of £100.00

I wish to make a donation to LOSRA of £.....

Name/s.

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