

LOWER SUNBURY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION 2021 SUMMER NEWSLETTER



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Opening of Sunbury Ferry signals a triumph of community co-operation

Sometimes we find ourselves having to publish stories with a negative flavour, so it's great to be able to report a real good news story about an ambitious plan that has had a hugely positive outcome. The Sunbury Ferry Community Project is a prime example of what can be achieved when councillors, officers, local businesses and residents work closely together to bring an idea to reality.

In 2018 Spelthorne Borough Council set up the River Thames Task Group (RTTG) with the broad remit: To advise the Leader and Cabinet on the views of councillors, local business, visitors and other stakeholders about issues pertaining to the River Thames and how the river environment and the visitor economy of the Borough might be further enhanced by actions over which the Council has control or influence.

The RTTG was an innovative think-tank led by Shepperton Councillor Vivienne Leighton, which co-opted a small number of local businesses and community representatives as members of the task group to use their experience and local knowledge to contribute ideas and practical expertise. The RTTG drew up a list of projects to utilise and develop the river and riverside environments for the benefit of residents, businesses and visitors. Projects ranged from quick fixes like improved litter clearance, riverside landscaping and better visitor signage, to more ambitious projects like addressing illegal moorings, providing more public moorings, a new jetty in Staines for river cruise boats and a ferry crossing in Lower Sunbury.

As the projects were progressed and refined, Task Group members took on individual responsibilities, with support from council officers and organisations. Attempts to engage with stakeholders like Elmburgh and Runnymede Councils and the Environment Agency met with varying degrees of success.

And then everything went on hold as the Covid pandemic spread and we all went into months of lockdowns and uncertainties. As we all grappled with a completely different way of life, members of the Task Group stayed in touch and moved the projects forward where possible.

In Lower Sunbury, in gaps between lockdowns, work continued improving areas like Kings' Lawn, where railings were repaired, paving relaid and planters refreshed. Articles in Sunbury Matters and on the LoSRA website showed that the ferry project was still progressing, albeit slower than originally

intended. Working by telephone and Zoom meetings, Neil Huntingford, the LoSRA representative on the Task Group and leading on the ferry project, completed a feasibility study that concluded that a ferry service was a realistic proposition but only if there was initial investment and it was run by local volunteers.

The project might have floundered were it not for persistence and determination to overcome the challenges to be overcome if the service was to be launched by this summer. There was a boat to be designed and built, an eco-friendly engine to be sourced, locations to be agreed and prepared on both banks, and legal and operational issues to surmount This

lected, including those with years of boating knowledge and experience through to others who had little experience but wanted to learn and support the project.

Among the volunteers are a head teacher, an airline pilot, cabin crew, a retired police chief inspector, a Surrey councillor, a film editor, a boat surveyor, NHS workers – indeed people from all walks of life. As soon as lockdown allowed, training took place at Queen Mary's Reservoir to enable 12 volunteers to qualify to a national standard and become skippers on the ferry. The rest of the volunteers have trained as crew.

Despite all the obstacles, Sunbury



was where community collaboration and co-operation won through.

Neil had recruited Simon Harris, a member of Middle Thames Yacht Club, to help him with the growing list of tasks to be completed if the deadline was to be met. While Cllr. Leighton worked with Jackie Taylor, Spelthorne's Head of Neighbourhood Services and other council officials to secure initial funding and arrange the building of landing stages on both banks, Neil and Simon used the knowledge and advice of local boat operators to achieve the design and building of the boat and its innovative electric engine. Elements of the project, such as disabled access to the ferry and the riverbanks had to be deferred until more funding could be found.

And then to the volunteers. One article in Sunbury Matters and the LoSRA website quickly amassed over 60 local residents willing to help run the ferry service. Thirty two were se-

Ferry Ltd, a not-for-profit community company, launched the new service on Saturday 3rd July. Operating weekends 10am to 5pm through to late summer, the service is proving to be an overwhelming success. Over two thousand passengers used the service during this July, even though there was heavy rain most weekends! Check out the ferry website for more information: sunburyferry.co.uk

This article can only give a brief overview of all the hard work put in by numerous people and organisations over the past three years to make this much needed project such a success. Thanks are due to all involved, especially the volunteers and official supporting organisations: Spelthorne Borough Council, Halliford School, Middle Thames Yacht Club, LoSRA, Surrey County Council. It just goes to show what can be achieved when a whole community pulls together.

Re-alignment of Spelthorne Council adds new urgency to the delayed Local Plan process as developers cast predatory eyes on Green Belt

Spelthorne Borough Council started the long and tortuous process of updating its Local Plan in 2017 and the process still has some considerable way to go with further revisions likely, and another consultation stage due before it is submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. The absence of an updated Local Plan and proposals by the Council that green belt can be built on raises the concern that Spelthorne's precious green belt will be under threat from developers.

Local Plans are a vital part of the planning system, and help shape how our local natural and built environment is protected or developed and ensure that any development is as sustainable as possible, taking account of social, environmental and economic needs. Planning law requires that planning decisions are in line with Local Plans, unless there are exceptional reasons. They are prepared by the local authority but subject to public consultation and therefore provide the local community with its best opportunity to influence the future of the local area.

Spelthorne's Local Plan has been delayed for several reasons. We all know that the Covid pandemic had a devastating impact from Spring 2020 and, of course, council officers and members justifiably had to turn their attention to the pressing needs of the community during the worst of the pandemic. We congratulate them all on their fantastic work to look after the community during this difficult time.

But other factors have also had an impact on delivery of the Plan. A particularly controversial aspect of the new Local Plan concerned the proposal by the Council to release some green belt land to meet the government's future housing figures,

which requires over 600 additional housing units in Spelthorne each year over the 2020-2035 period of the Local Plan. The proposal was strongly resisted by many opposition councillors and many local residents, including from Lower Sunbury.

Also, there have been significant changes in the political structure and leadership of Spelthorne Council. Since the latest consultation on the draft Local Plan closed in January 2020, there have been three Mayors and three Leaders. Also, two of the political parties have split followed by a further split in one of the break away parties, meaning that there are now eight different political groups within the Council.

In January 2020 Spelthorne Council was under Conservative control with Conservative councillors occupying the main leadership positions, whereas now no one party has overall control and there are no Conservative councillors in leadership positions. This has been accompanied by changes in the membership of key committees overseeing the development of the Local Plan. These changes are likely to lead to different approaches to how the Local Plan is shaped.

There was also a brief change to the government figures. In summer 2020, the government consulted on a revised method for calculating housing need which reduced Spelthorne's future additional annual housing need from 606 (now 611) to 489 per year. In November 2020 Spelthorne Cabinet decided to proceed with the lower figure, however in December 2020 the government abandoned the revised method and reverted to the original figures.

So where is the Local Plan now? We will resist speculating on the relative influence of representations in defence of green belt from residents and opposition councillors, changes in the leadership of the Council and the churn in the housing figures, but what can be said is that the initial proposal to release nineteen green belt areas, including four in Lower Sunbury, has been revised. It can also be noted that the Stratton Road site, which was subject to much campaigning by local residents, is no longer on the list.

A new list of twelve green belt sites as candidates for housing development, now including three in Lower Sunbury, was put to the Environment and Sustainability Committee on 13 July 2021. The revised list was agreed at that meeting, but it was emphasised at the subsequent Council meeting on 15 July that the list is indicative and subject to further assessment and discussion within the Local Plan Task Group.

It was also decided that the Council would obtain independent advice and support in formulating a strategic vision for the borough and the agreed vision would be incorporated into the Local Plan by the end of October 2021.

Any changes to the Local Plan would need to be completed in readiness for the next public consultation in February 2022. That will be the final consultation before the new Local Plan is completed and then submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, who will set a date for the Examination.

As you can see, the development of the Local Plan is still very much under way. However, our green belt remains at risk and the proposed list of sites for development could change again. We will inform you when the final consultation becomes available.

Surrey County Council takes legal action against Suez over EcoPark delays

The issues surrounding the ill-fated EcoPark project came to a head in March when Surrey County Council after "exhausting all other options available.", entered legal proceedings against Suez, the developer, as a result of delays to the anaerobic digester and the gasifier

This followed an internal report presented to Surrey's cabinet which said "*Whilst the provision of a number of the services in the contract are on track, the delays to the delivery of the AD and the gasifier have prompted the council to review its contractual position and to explore what remedies it may have in the resolution of the issues arising.*"

Surrey have maybe realized that what we have said all along about the impracticality of the technology might be right and they need to protect their and the taxpayers' interests. SCC has yet to receive £63m of the waste infrastructure grant of £205m because of the delays.

In its proceedings SCC claimed declaratory relief against Suez as part of a waste disposal project agreement. This includes the passing of the longstop date; the failure by Suez to meet the requirements for an acceptance certificate; and that, in consequence, Surrey is entitled to issue a notice of termination.

Since then a High Court judge has

ruled that the dispute will not be heard in the court instead going to arbitration.

Meanwhile we understand that the anaerobic digester sort of works but not to full specification and handles all Surrey's food waste. The 'gasinerator' was always destined to fail as the technology of burning Refuse Derived Fuel is not suited for gasification, as we have always stated.

We hesitate to say "We told you so" once again, but eventually SCC are going to have to apologise for not listening to what acknowledged experts in the community have said for years.

Meanwhile we wait to see the outcome and what can be salvaged for the community, which is saddled with a vast and overbearing facility that is unlikely ever to do what it was meant to do and stands as a monument to political hubris.

Thames footbridge remains firmly on the agenda with application for major infrastructure funding

Although the Sunbury Ferry marks a significant step in connecting with the other side of the river, it is not a complete solution and LOSRA's long-standing aspiration of a pedestrian and cycle bridge across the Thames at Lower Sunbury remains a very active project.

This year Surrey County Council launched a Community Projects Fund called Your Fund Surrey, which makes available a fund of £100m to be deployed on significant infrastructure projects within communities over the next five years.

The Thames footbridge would be an ideal project for this scheme, and in June we submitted an application for funding. Below is the application that went in. We naturally hope that the application might have a reasonable chance of succeeding as it ticks all the boxes.

"The River Thames is a natural barrier for many Surrey residents for easy, direct access to their county's riverside amenities, shops and businesses, which in many cases are just a few hundred meters away across the river. Access to these destinations is typically met using the main road bridges in the county at Walton, Chertsey and Staines. These trips are usually taken by car with its associated problems of congestion, pollution and noise over and around these routes.

Sunbury is a historic, amenity-rich part of North Surrey cut off from its

Surrey neighbours, south of the river, in Walton, Weybridge and Molesey by the majesty of the Thames. Travel between Sunbury and Surrey south of the river is most often taken by car. The roads to these bridges are notoriously fast, busy and dangerous due to various factors including proximity to M3 and M25 motorways, gravel extraction and other industrial traffic and proximity to Heathrow airport. The nearest river crossing between Sunbury and Surrey, south of the river, is Walton Bridge, which is two miles from Sunbury's riverside village.

A proposal to construct a cycle/footbridge over the Thames connecting Sunbury to the Thames Path National Trail is not new. Under the auspices of the Thames Overways Projects (TOPS), it was very much on the political agenda at the turn of the millennium. Sadly, however, whilst receiving widespread support both from local communities and special interest groups including Sustrans (Sustainable Transport (British Cycling Organization)), the project was eventually shelved due to competing funding priorities.

Since the TOPS proposals, Sunbury's (East and West wards) population has increased by over 10% (2011 census), but with no commensurate improvements in local infrastructure amenity. The planning approvals since the census will undoubtedly have increased this figure; and yet further growth is predicted in the list

of preferred allocations for Sunbury in current Local Plan proposals.

A consultation, commissioned by LOSRA, by a professional communications company, was undertaken over four months in 2015. Nearly 1,000 residents on both sides of the River Thames submitted their views as a part of that consultation, which indicated that 93% supported the idea of a river crossing between Sunbury and Walton.

A footbridge from Sunbury to the Thames Path would improve access for walking, running, cycling and the amenities at Walton Xcel Leisure Centre (thereby contributing to a positive impact on health and fitness levels). It would also allow motor-free access for commuting to places of work and schools and also to restaurants, pubs and shops at Walton, Weybridge, Kingston and beyond, thus contributing to a reduction of motorised traffic and associated congestion, pollution and noise.

A multi-user, footbridge would also allow direct and cleaner access to Sunbury's amenities for Surrey residents south of the river, including the riverside pubs and restaurants, parks, art centres (eg Riverside Arts and Millennium Embroidery) and sporting amenities (eg Kempton Park, London Irish, Sunbury Cricket club), which could make a positive contribution to the local economy plus encourage and facilitate Active Travel to large corporations like BP and SAP."

Can we help make Active Travel Plans for schools a reality?

The experiences of the last 18 months or so have focused people's minds on a raft of new ways of thinking about how we organise our lives, one of which is that changing attitudes to work/life balance offer an opportunity to look at how kids travel to school, and give the community a chance to develop proper Active Travel Plans.

Active Travel is based on the acknowledged facts that active travel to school - walking, cycling or on scooters - wakes up the mind and body. It also helps to reduce congestion and pollution and improve safety around the school gates. Children who walk, cycle or scoot to school from an early age have more road sense and an improved ability to travel independently and safely.

Sunbury is unique in the number of schools located in such a small area, and schools have widened their catchment area. To help reduce congestion, pollution and parking problems, and give school students the benefits of more exercise we need to encourage schools to

develop Active Travel Plans and sign Active Travel pledges.

Surrey County Council currently approach each school individually to support them with their own school travel plans; engagement differs depending on the school. School travel plans, overall, tend to not be a high priority and require a passionate member of staff to champion them. We don't get the impression that to date they have made much difference to active travel and reduced congestion within Lower Sunbury.

New LOSRA Committee member Stacey Pinto, previously a professional travel planner in local government, has a keen knowledge and interest in this subject. She believes we need to approach School Active Travel in a new way, with parents getting together to encourage every school to sign up to an Active Travel Pledge, including principles on how to implement, educate and encourage active travel endeavours within their catchments and the community as a whole.

Rather than a piecemeal approach,

organisations like LOSRA could help to get a Sunbury-wide awareness of, and commitment to, the Active Travel principle. All schools encourage activity for pupils within the school day and they can go further by encouraging pupils to travel to school on foot, bike or scooter.

All local schools have the same challenges and can learn from one another. If we can encourage the youngest children to be brought to school sustainably it sets an excellent precedent as they grow up and develop a healthier lifestyle. If we live within Lower Sunbury, schools are generally within 20-30 minutes' walk, or less for cycling, and parents should think about whether it's possible for them to do this, and encourage the school to adopt a co-ordinated Active Travel Plan.

It's a challenge, but co-ordinated action by parents and teachers could help expand the idea across the area, with schools sharing ideas. The more we get cars off the roads, and reduce parking and congestion around schools, the more attractive walking and cycling will become.

At the moment, this is very much an aspiration, but maybe, as individuals and schools become aware and committed to the idea, a proper strategy for implementing Active Travel Plans could evolve.

Friends of Sunbury Park **Cattle grazing returns to Sunbury Park**

As you will be aware, cows have returned to Sunbury Park for the summer grazing season. There were no cows in the Park last year because it was decided by Spelthorne Council in consultation with the Friends of Sunbury Park that with the Park being such a valuable and well-used area for people to exercise during the Covid emergency when so many other activities were restricted, it would make sense not to have them during that time.

There are fewer of them this time – nine in total, and they are quite small – and they will be in the Park until the early autumn, maybe about four months. Having cows in the Park is the best way to manage the grassland in terms of keeping down the rank grasses and improving biodiversity. Mowing is expensive and difficult in the Park, and the cows' grazing habit, tearing at the grass and exposing small areas of earth, helps the seeds of wild flowers and herbs to become established.

We are aware that with quite a few new dog owners using the Park, there have been several instances of dogs harassing the cattle and chasing them round the Park, but things seem to have settled down and the cows seem more settled and visible in recent weeks.

We know that while many people enjoy having the cows there, others find it an inconvenience in a number of ways. We thank everyone for their co-operation and forbearance in the implementation of this approach to managing the Park, which is designed to have lasting long-term benefits.

If you see anything untoward regarding the cattle or need to report an incident contact customer.services@spelthorne.gov.uk

Cyclists an increasing feature in the village

At the risk of inviting an avalanche of angry mail from the community's cyclists a number of people have expressed concern about the number of large pelatons of cyclists racing through the village at weekends.

Some have been observed ignoring the "Cyclists Dismount" signs during the recent roadworks, even cycling at speed on the pavements.

It has been suggested that some of them are going so fast because they are using an app on their mobile phones that logs their competitive time through certain stretches of roads, one of which is along Thames Street through the village.

If this is the case, it seems absolute madness to include a stretch of narrow traffic-calmed Conservation Area in a stretch where people are doing unofficial time trials. We will make enquiries to find out more about the app. If it's true we can at least ask the designers of the app to take the village out of the timed area.

We support cycling as it brings many health and environmental benefits and welcome measures to encourage more cycling. But all road users, including cyclists, should obey rules, like red lights, and respect the needs of pedestrians. If you are a cyclist please ride responsibly..

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Please help by paying your 2021 LOSRA subscription

It's great to be back with a printed newsletter to supplement our web site news service and e-bulletins—it's not been practical during Covid restrictions to ask our volunteer distributors to go door-to-door to deliver them, so this is our first one for 18 months.

We've been meeting virtually, and it's been business as usual behind the scenes, but with no newsletters, and subscription-collecting opportunities like our Annual General Meeting, plus the Regatta and Christmas Fair, not happening, our paid-up membership has fallen off a bit.

Please help us by paying your 2021 subscription using one of the methods set out below. Many thanks.

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