

LOWER SUNBURY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION



2006 SPRING NEWSLETTER

Benwell Centre closure proposal - the fight with Spelthorne continues

The back cover of the March edition (No 74) of the Spelthorne Bulletin will have us believe that, despite a vigorous campaign to prevent the closure of day centres, the Council's position has not changed. They appear to be resolute in their determination that the closure of the Benwell Day Centre will go ahead; and that its closure represents part of the 'improvement of services to older people.'

The Association remains implacably opposed to the closure of this thriving Centre and has united in its purpose with the Sunbury Common Residents Association, Kempton Park Residents Association and the Green Street Action Group in a campaign to persuade the Council to rethink its position.

To date, the combined membership has:

- co-ordinated the writing of letters of objection
- launched massive opposition at an over-capacity public meeting attended by the Leader of the Council and ward councillors.
- achieved extensive and regular press coverage, and publication of letters.
- presented a public petition at full Council.
- asked public questions and delivered prepared statements at successive Council meetings.

We recognise the necessity for Spelthorne to make savings, but LOSRA does not believe that cost-saving alternatives have been explored with sufficient vigour or imagination. Increasingly, it seems that the highly profitable sale of assets constitutes the

real imperative behind the proposed closure. It is now known, for example, that feasibility and site valuations were being conducted well before July 2005, a full six months before public consultation had even started.

The Association has stated publicly that it believes the Consultation Leaflet itself presented ~~flawed statistics and false assumptions~~; that it was specious and ultimately, insulting. It is an outrageous insult to the intelligence of Spelthorne residents that the Council seriously expected us to believe their laughable suggestion that closing the Benwell Centre would bring about an improvement in services to the elderly. To date, the Council has not responded to these criticisms.

The reasons for opposition to closure are a matter of public record but central to this opposition is the absolute rebuttal of the Council's assertion that 'independent living' amongst older people is not aided by the retention of day centres. The Council is utterly alone in this. The Association's position, and one supported by, amongst others, the Audit Commission and Age Concern is the exact opposite - that independence in old age is in fact facilitated by the use of day centres.

Councillors have put themselves to the electorate and have responsibility to manage services on our behalf. Sometimes it's a difficult task but we have a right to expect transparent good faith. The

Benwell Day Centre is a capital asset which belongs to us, the local taxpayers; and it is our views on the disposal of capital assets which must ultimately prevail.

One of the worst aspects of this saga has been the way that councillors and officers have gone missing, and hidden behind flimsy procedural arguments to avoid exposure to public questioning. Cllr. Gerry Ceaser spoke at the packed public meeting at the Benwell Centre, but many people suspect there has been a deliberate campaign (some would call it a conspiracy) to minimise the degree to which Councillors and officers have had to put their heads above the parapet.

You still have an opportunity to make your views heard. The issue is to be finally decided by full Council on Thursday 27th April at 7.30pm. This is a public meeting and you are urged to attend. In the meantime, if you agree with us, please e-mail or write to all the Sunbury East and West councillors, and indeed all the other Spelthorne councillors to say how appalled you are at their performance on this issue, and urging them to keep the Centre open. Look under 'Your Council' at www.spelthorne.gov.uk for details.

This is a vital issue. Flogging off public assets like the Benwell Centre is just a short-term fix, and is not a viable strategic solution to financial problems. Councillors and officers should be accountable to Council Tax payers, and this issue is a good place to start ramming that lesson home.

Your presence needed at the Area Forum Wed. 28th March at Bishop Wand

The Area Forum provides a valuable opportunity to meet your local councillors one-to-one and to make your views heard on any local issue. (see page 17 of the March (No. 74) edition of the Spelthorne Bulletin).

Historically, the Forum agenda has been formulated by the Council and the quality of answers to questions from the public has, in many cases, been unsatisfactory. This is not a judgement; simply a recognition that, without prior warning, a respondent can only give an intuitive or 'best guess' answer, or no answer at all, if the full facts are not available to him/her at the time. Unsurprisingly attendances have been poor, and apathy and cynicism is rife.

To address these problems, the Association is currently negotiating with the Council to change the format in order that the Forum itself becomes more meaningful. It follows the belief that the Forum is ours and should therefore be community driven. We expect a say as to what is put on the Agenda and, that in order to elicit accurate and detailed responses,

written questions may be submitted in advance.

The Association sees these changes as being key to achieving the local accountability that the Local Government Association is so keen to promote. The rest will be up to us. Area Forums do not come round frequently; when they do, we must make it our business to attend and to make them really count.

We have submitted a number of questions for the next Forum on current issues, including the Benwell Centre, so please come along and demonstrate to Spelthorne Council that they are under the closest scrutiny.

We need to be sure that Councillors recognise that they are there to represent the interests of their constituents, and that they and officers will be held accountable for their actions.

The next Forum is imminent : Tues. 28th March 2006 at Bishop's Building, The Bishop Wand School, Layton's Lane. 7pm - 9.30pm.

Green Street development application rejected

A new application to develop flats and houses on the site of two properties at the top of Green Street was rejected by the Planning Committee in February. These properties were part of the site where development was resisted at the Englemere Homes public inquiry in 2004.

The Green Street Action Group did a great deal of work on opposing the application, and made representations at the Planning Committee. Keith Johnson of GSAG was able to congratulate the planning officer on a thorough and balanced report, which recommended refusal of the application.

The arguments regarding the character of the area and the various local plan policies had been well-established at the public enquiry, and were just as relevant in this context. For once, Surrey County Council also opposed the application on the grounds of traffic danger, which was an important factor.

It remains to be seen whether the developers come back with a scaled-down scheme. We have to hope this was a speculative punt, which has been seen off, but if they do come back, the troops will be ready to repel them again!

Spelthorne passes phone mast plan

The application by Orange Telecom for a mobile phone mast in the corner of Sunbury Park near Green Street has been approved by Spelthorne Council.

A large number of objections were received from residents as well as LOSRA, and thanks are due to those individuals who devoted considerable time to drumming up objections.

The Planning Officers raised no objection to the scheme. It is quite disturbing that a matter which was of such obvious concern to residents was dealt with by officers under delegated powers rather than discussed at the full Planning Committee. The quality of local democracy is undoubtedly being eroded by moves such as this.

Spelthorne's approach in the face of a major utility company would no doubt be justified by saying that they would be liable for costs had they rejected the proposal and lost if it had gone to appeal. However, since we have succeeded in resisting such masts on other local sites, it is very sad, and indeed somewhat perverse, that the Borough has seen fit to allow one to be erected in its flagship public park.

New Kempton Park track opens

Kempton Park's floodlit all-weather track opens on March 25th. We have to say that the lighting columns are every bit as obtrusive as we feared. However, it's done now and we need to monitor the impact that it has on traffic and whether other nuisance is caused by the expanded schedule of meetings.

Kempton Park have done a good job in communicating with residents over the development, and say they are always ready to listen to complaints. Along with Kempton Residents' Association, we will be keeping an eye on things. Please keep us informed of any specific problems.

SSAGE

www.ssage.org.uk

Sunbury and Shepperton Against Gravel Extraction

Campaign scores first victory as Vicarage Farm is dropped

SSAGE is delighted to announce that Vicarage Farm in Halliford Road has been removed from Surrey County Council's list of proposed sites for gravel extraction.

Following the initial round of consultation during last year, Surrey County Council officers recently submitted a document to SCC's Executive setting out the "Preferred Options" of sites to go forward for further consultation. Vicarage Farm, which was on the original list of possible sites, is not among these preferred options:

Development of the site, which is bordered on three sides by dense housing would have meant years of misery for local residents. Gravel extraction is known to create pollution, potential risks to health, threat of flood and increased traffic.

We were confident that the arguments against the site were very powerful, and it is clear that officers agreed. The long year of lobbying, site visits and meetings with the Council, working to create awareness and gather support from local residents, has brought its just reward.

SSAGE would particularly like to thank all those who wrote letters and emails, distributed newsletters, manned stalls at local fairs and contributed to the fighting fund. Gaining the support of local County Councillor Frank Davies, Spelthorne MP David Wilshire and, of course LOSRA has also been valuable.

Fight for Watersplash continues!

But whilst the group is relieved that Vicarage Farm has been excluded, the news that Watersplash Farm in Fordbridge Road is still amongst the proposed options is both a

disappointment and a major concern. However, the victory over Vicarage Farm now enables SSAGE and LOSRA to focus their combined efforts on the arguments over Watersplash Farm, where we are also confident that we have a very strong case on a number of grounds.

SSAGE Chairman Nick Hutchings is quite clear as to the way ahead:

"We would like to stress that at this stage the inclusion of Watersplash Farm is a recommendation only and that the final decision is unlikely to be known until 2007. It is important that the residents of Sunbury and Shepperton continue to support SSAGE and to voice their objections. We shall be lobbying members of the executive committee and will continue to fight extraction from Watersplash at the Public Inquiry and, if necessary, through opposition to any planning application to work the site."

Cllr Frank Davies summed up the prospect of extraction at Watersplash:

"I am delighted that Vicarage Farm has been excluded from the preferred options but am extremely concerned about the prospect of extraction from Watersplash Farm."

Increased traffic in an area which is already heavily congested, likely ecological and environmental damage that will accrue from the loss of a valuable piece of open landscape, the risk of pollution to the River Ash and possibility of flooding are just a few of the negative impacts. Looking at the bigger picture, Spelthorne has, over many years, provided enormous

quantities of materials for the benefit of the South East generally and now deserves a respite."

A period of public consultation on the "Preferred Options" will take place between 28 April and 9 June, with exhibitions where local residents will be able to question council officials and view the plans. SSAGE is still awaiting confirmation of the dates and venue for the exhibition but urges residents to take advantage of the opportunity to express their concerns in person.

Further information is available on the SCC website:

www.surreycc.gov.uk/mineralsplan

SSAGE can be contacted via their website, www.ssage.org.uk or via email

Spelride - anger at threat of closure

Spelthorne have denied that any decision has been taken about closing the Spelride bus service for older residents. Drivers had told users of the service that they have already been given notice.

Spelthorne's officers have countered that this is merely an administrative requirement, and that if the decision is made not to close the service, the notice to the drivers can be withdrawn.

What is clear is that they are actively considering ending the service, which is the only practical way for some elderly residents to make certain important journeys.

It is clear that no aspect of local services is safe from the bean counters with their laptops. Don't stand for it! Complain to your councillors!

Transport for London and Travel London agreed towards the end of last year that the driver meal breaks and changeovers for the 235 route would be moved to Brentford, spelling an end to the operation of a makeshift bus depot at the lower end of Green Street.

This change has been implemented, and although there is still a significant presence of buses, the problems associated with the driver changeovers have largely gone.

The reason there are still sometimes two or three buses parked there is that there is some leeway built into the timetable to allow for traffic delays etc., so they have to sit there for a while. We know that they are so sensitive about being there that they sometimes sit elsewhere along the route, including

further up Green Street, to keep out of the way.

There have still been odd instances of drivers keeping engines running and urinating in Sunbury Park, but management are highly sensitive to complaint, so if you see anything untoward, report it to Doug Goodison, the manager responsible at Travel London, on 07810 770494. Please also advise a LOSRA committee member, so that we can pass the complaint on to Travel London.

The situation is not ideal, but at least we have averted the possibility of having a permanent depot there. Thanks are due to all the residents who have kept on top of this issue for the last three years or so.

The Friends of Sunbury Park organisation has secured funding from Spelthorne to undertake enhancement projects in the Park. The first initiative is to identify sites for nesting boxes to sustain and improve the bird population and range of species, and get them installed. This is under way at time of going to press.

There is a continuing programme of work using existing contractors to manage the vegetation and habitat in the Park, and we hope that further funding in the new financial year will enable the Friends to get further wildlife surveys carried out, and obtain informed advice on a holistic management strategy, not only to enhance it as an asset for residents, but to improve it as a wildlife habitat.

Pamela Cabannes	4 Forge Mews	76113
Tony Cannings	90 Manor Lane	789750
Elleke Carling	3 Croysdale Avenue	882726
Pat Carrick-Allan	Adelphi, Parke Road	
Don Cunningham	2 Parkwood Grove	889033
Peter Francis	Linden Lodge, Woodlands Drive	770661
Cathie French	173 French Street	789157
Roger Harding	Sunmead Cottage, Green St.	782744
John Hirsh (Chairman)	21 School Walk	781363
Andy Mason (Secretary)	Fairlawns	
Anne Nowicka	9 The Pines	885545
Mike Rigby (Treasurer)	26 Queensway TW16 6HB	789013
Patrick Smith	6 Maryland Way	
Paul Watts (President)	87 The Avenue TW16 5HZ	788449
Alan Wells	100 Thames Street	784632
David Woods	47 Sunna Gardens	786806

There are full details in the Embroidery Newsletter which should accompany this, but we would note the rapid progress which is being made with the Embroidery Gallery in the Walled Garden, which is nearing completion.

It is planned that the Gallery will be opened by late June, and it promises to become a major asset within the community. We will have more information in the Newsletter announcing our AGM which will be distributed in June, but in the meantime we look forward to the achievement of an extraordinary vision, which is a tribute to the strength of Sunbury as a community.

We are now collecting LOSRA subscriptions for 2006. We are continuing to deliver more newsletters because of the gravel issue, so costs have increased, and your subs will help us meet these. Please help us by dropping your subscription in to one of our three collection points using the tear-off slip below. You can deliver it to any of the following local shops: Skinners in Avenue Parade; Londis in French Street; Twirltour Travel in Green Street. Our thanks to these businesses for their help in providing this service.

Please find enclosed my annual subscription of £2.00 for family membership of the Lower Sunbury Residents' Association for the calendar year 2006.

Name :

Address :

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e-mail address

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