

Sopwell Residents Association AGM

Annual Report 2005/6

Introduction

The SRA was formed in 2003 and is going from strength to strength. All residents of Sopwell are automatically members of the residents association so all can have a say in what we do and what needs to be done. This is our third annual report.

Management committee

Our management committee continues to work hard on your behalf. Since the last AGM in July 2005, we have held 8 committee meetings where we discuss all various issues affecting Sopwell from the usual litter problems to Local Strategic Planning.

Our constitution allows us to have 15 committee members with the possibility of co-opting others for specialist tasks. The following people have put themselves forward for re-election:

Linda Bateman
Chantal Burns
Anne Fenton
Jill Gipps
Giles Hanford
Jack Hill
Joanne Hodson
Joyce Hood
Len Lewsey
Christoph Lutz
Pamela Marshall
Sandy Norman
Chris Pudsey
Helly Sawyer
Rick Taylor.

The Rev. Ruth Pyke is a co-opted member. Unfortunately she will be leaving the committee this year. We wish her well in her new parish. A representative from the Muslim community, Fokruz Zaman, attended a committee meeting as a guest in September. Jenny Owen and Judith Tucker from the council sometimes attend committee meetings to give support and guidance.

The following wish to be elected as officers: Giles Hanford as Chair, Helly Sawyer as Vice-Chair, Sandy Norman as Secretary and Jill Gipps as Treasurer.

Special thanks go to those who have resigned in the past year and who have given a valuable service especially to D'Arcy Marlborough our vice-chair and to Jo Witt who moved out of the area. We also remember Anne Kaloczi, who, after a brave struggle with a terminal illness, passed away in August. Anne, as many of you know, was our founder member. It was Anne who was instrumental in gathering us all together in St

Julian's Church Hall in 2003 to find a solution to some of the problems we have in the area. It was at that meeting that we decided to form a residents association. Although Anne did not live in Sopwell she saw its potential as a beautiful part of St Albans. She was particularly fond of Sopwell Priory and she worked tirelessly to persuade the Council and the residents to make it the beautiful place it is today. Without her we might never have been formed. We shall miss her greatly and our sympathies go out to her family. Representatives of the SRA attended her funeral and sent flowers.

Communications with residents

We had one general meeting held in the Marlborough Club in April 2006 where we had lively discussions and an entertaining panel of speakers: our ward councillors (Eileen Harris, Dawn Pratley and Janet Smith), Gill Clutterbuck (representing the Sopwell Community Partnership) and Richard Bullen of the Credit Union. Sopwell Ward PC, Sharon Foster and CSO, Jill Brown, also contributed to the success of the meeting.

We have managed to produce two newsletters during the year. Despite being amateurs at newsletter production, the newsletters are always well received. Many thanks go to all those involved in their production (Chantal Burns, Christoph Lutz) and especially to our small band of willing volunteers and their co-ordinator, Joanne Hodson, who post them through your doors. There is a high turnover of volunteers so if you have some spare time please help us deliver future issues.

Our website www.sopwell.org.uk is updated on a regular basis giving local information and links to other relevant sites. The content of all the newsletters is available for viewing on the website along with issues of interest.

The Secretary has received several communications from residents by email and letter over the year. We try to act on these as quickly as possible usually by putting them in touch with the appropriate authority.

Liaison with local Councillors, Council and other organisations

The relationship with local Councillors continues to be strong and we are in regular communication to try to resolve the issues and problems in Sopwell.

We have many links with other organisations:

- Linda Bateman, responsible for police liaison, represents SRA at the Community Safety Consultative Forum and the Community Police ward meetings.
- Rick Taylor, representing Neighbourhood Watch, is in liaison with the neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator to encourage the formation of more schemes.
- Chris Pudsey, responsible for environment and planning represents the SRA at meetings of the Environment Forum, the Abbey Line Community Rail partnership and has represented us on local strategic planning consultations.
- Len Lewsey and Jack Hill, responsible for litter and fly-tipping represented SRA at meetings of the Council's Tidy St Albans Committee (since renamed Cleaner District Committee).
- Helly Sawyer is on the Sopwell Youth Committee representing the interests of youth in Sopwell.

- Our tenant representative, Pamela Marshall, represents the SRA at meetings of the Housing Liaison Consultative Forum, the Tenants and Leasehold Participation Compact Steering Group (with Joyce Hood) and is in liaison with the council about anti-social behaviour.
- Anne Fenton represents the SRA at the Safer Routes to School working party.
- Pamela Marshall and Rev. Ruth Pyke represent the SRA at the Sopwell Community Partnership.

Also during the year (July 2005) the SRA was invited to attend a special consultative meeting of the Refuse Collection working party to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of wheelie bins. Sandy Norman, Len Lewsey, Jack Hill and Pamela Marshall were present.

Specific activities

Litter

Litter continues to be one of the biggest issues concerning residents. During the year litter picks were organised in conjunction with the Council Litter Week in March 2006. The areas picked were Sopwell Priory (including the river Ver) and surrounding areas. As well as 23 bags of rubbish, a Sainsbury's trolley and a suitcase, we found a canoe and a bubble car!

Rubbish and fly-tipping offences are constantly being reported to the Litter Hotline and the Herts Direct website.

Sopwell Priory Greenspace Action Plan (GAP)

Sandy Norman and Chris Pudsey have been in close liaison with the Countryside Management Service (CMS) to further the GAP which has been put together by CMS, SRA and SADC to provide benefits for amenity and wildlife on the Sopwell Priory site. Work on the GAP began last year with the installation of an "easy access" bridge over the ditch which was opened by the Deputy Mayor, councillor Eileen Harris on the night of last year's AGM. To further the aims of the GAP a grant was applied for from the Awards for All lottery funded programme and in January 2006, the SRA was successful in obtaining the funding. The amount awarded, £4,403.00, is being used to make improvements to the Sopwell Priory green space. The money is being used for three projects. Firstly, part of the money went towards moving the Ver Valley Walk path further away from the riverbank and improving its surface. This involved paying contractors to remove scrub and other vegetation to provide a suitable path width. Some of this funding came from a Watling Chase Community Forest small project grant. Secondly, the grant is funding the purchase of two benches to be installed within sight of the old Priory ruins. One of these benches will bear a plaque commemorating Anne Kaloczi. In addition, the riverbank along the Ver is being improved by the installation of planted coir rolls to reinforce the riverbank and improve its habitat.

Bulb planting

Thanks to a legacy from the late Anne Kaloczi, and after obtaining permission from the council, the SRA purchased daffodil bulbs to plant around the green spaces in Sopwell. 320 daffodil bulbs were planted last November at the junctions of Tavistock Avenue, Vesta Avenue, Wiltshire Avenue, Mandeville Drive, Holyrood Crescent and in Abbots Avenue West. It is hoped this will become an annual event.

Planning applications affecting Sopwell

The SRA responded to a consultation on the proposed King Harry Lane housing development. Along with the Verulam Residents Association we urged the council to reject the plans. Also we have been keeping a watching brief on other planning proposals e.g. the proposed development of a railfreight terminal at Radlett as well as private developments which are not in keeping with the area.

Community events

In October 2005, there was a joint Christian/Muslim tea party held in St Julian's Church where residents were invited to attend.

The SRA was heavily involved in organising Larks in the Parks for July this year which took place on the land beside the Marlborough Club.

Sandy Norman
Secretary
June 2006