

Sopwell Residents Association

Annual report 2007/8

This is our 5th year of existence and this is our 5th annual report. It is hoped that residents agree that setting up the SRA was a worthwhile achievement. This year we have started to change our focus somewhat and to concentrate on specific areas where we can make a difference – not just chasing our tails. When we first started, residents pointed out that they were concerned about litter, parking on the verges, abandoned supermarket trolleys, anti-social behaviour etc. Most of these issues can and should be handled by our very able ward councillors, the Council itself, Herts Highways and the police. It seems pointless spending our limited time, therefore, in tackling these issues ourselves. This is not to say that we are going to ignore them completely. We will always be a contact point and we will be taking part in raising awareness e.g. the annual litter pick. Nor can we be the voice of Sopwell when it comes to public consultations. We cannot ascertain the views of all the residents but as concerned residents we will put forward a viewpoint which will hopefully be a rational and sensible one. So we are trying to focus our attention to improving the community in more specific ways.

One of these is to have more activities to bring the community together. We are now committed to at least one community event in the year: Larks in the Parks, but hopefully we can find more opportunities to bring the community together. Another is to make Sopwell “greener”.

Committee structure and changes

We have lost several good committee members this year: Christoph Lutz, who set up and ran our website and is very active on Larks in the Parks; Pamela Marshall our very keen and able tenant representative, Len Lewsey who tackled our litter problems

and Anne Fenton who rarely missed a committee meeting. We miss them greatly. However, we have been successful in encouraging other residents to get involved so we welcome Mark James, Ananda Armstrong-King, Rebecca Prebble, Adam Hunt and Jose Sena. As we say at every public meeting. We still need more of you to keep this Association alive.

The following people have put themselves forward for re-election: Ananda Armstrong-King, Chantal Burns, Jill Gipps, Giles Hanford, Jack Hill, Adam Hunt, Mark James, Sandy Norman, Rebecca Prebble, Chris Pudsey, Jose Sena, Helly Sawyer, Joanne Tang, and Rick Taylor.

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

Activities

Larks in the Parks 2007

The Larks in the Parks event was held on 1st July 2007 in the Marlborough Club grounds. It was an excellent event with about 300 members of the local community coming together and enjoying a fantastic get-together in the midst of the beautiful surroundings of the Marlborough Meadow, with it's fine views of the Cathedral and Verulam Golf Course. A variety of 'travelling entertainment' organised by St Albans Arts, Sport & Leisure, performed on the day. From the local community, Adam Hunt, did a good job in providing music including a range of all time favourites. St Julian's Church ran an excellent "tea and cake" marquee and sold all their cakes. And there were many other fun things to do. A big thank-you to everyone who helped in making it so enjoyable. Hopefully this year's event will be equally successful.

Pride in the community: Sopwell a beautiful place to live.

The SRA is committed to improving the environment around Sopwell. In April, two of us walked around the ward to see where there were opportunities to make Sopwell even more beautiful mainly by planting more trees and bulbs but also persuading the Council to take a more proactive role in managing our green spaces. Sopwell is privileged in having several areas of green spaces. This year we planted even more bulbs, so we are making progress.

The Council has launched a voluntary Tree Wardens Scheme and two of our committee have joined up. This means that we will be keeping a close eye on local trees. If you wish to plant a tree in your street, phone the Trees and Woodlands Section of the Council on 01727 819372.

We organised two litter picks in Sopwell on the weekend of 6th and 7th April. Because we managed to advertise it this year in our newsletter, we were able to persuade concerned residents to lend a hand so it was not just the committee collecting. On the Saturday we met outside Mandeville School and picked around that area . We collected six bags of rubbish and three of recyclable bottles and cans. It is amazing how many cans and bottles are just dumped in the hedgerows and on the street by uncaring people. We also reported several bags of rubbish and fly-tipped items. On the Sunday, we did our annual pick of the Sopwell Priory green space and nearby roads. Despite the very cold weather we had a good turn out of willing helpers who managed to pick several more bags of rubbish and recyclables. However the overall number of bags is reducing every year which suggests that either we are dropping less or the Council litter contractors are more hard working. We hope that it is the former but I suspect that it has a lot to do with Jack Hill, our dedicated litter-picker who is never seen without a large plastic sack and a picker in hand!

Responses

Last July we responded to the Council core strategy issues and options consultation document. Recently we expressed our concerns about the two planning applications for takeaways in Vesta Avenue and Abbots Avenue West.

Roads and pavements

Tavistock Avenue residents submitted a petition to Herts Highways about the state of the pavements following a nasty accident to one of its residents. This resulted in an inspection and an agreement to eventually replace the paving slabs with tarmac. It also revealed many illegal crossovers: cars had been breaking the slabs when driven onto paved front gardens.

Tenant activities

Our tenant representative, Pamela Marshall, campaigned and was successful in helping tenants improve their Council properties including getting the Council to put double glazing replacement windows in the Monks Close properties.

Neighbourhood Watch

The SRA continues to work with the police and the Neighbourhood Watch.

Abbey station adoption

The SRA decided to go ahead and adopt the Abbey station. The Abbey Community Rail Partnership asked the local community to “adopt” all the stations along the Abbey flyer route as part of a programme of turning round unstaffed and uncared for stations in order to bring them into the heart of the community. This in turn encourages better use of public transport. Most of the stops have already been adopted but as no group had come forward to adopt the Abbey station the Sopwell Residents Association agreed to help out.

There are two types of station adoption: the first is for station monitors to act as the “eyes and ears” and regularly report problems to the train operating company; and the second is to undertake a variety of activities which would improve the look of the station e.g. provision of garden plants and bulbs etc. At present we are just looking to be station monitors and if this proves successful we will look into greater involvement. We are asking for more volunteers. The role is not at all onerous and should not take more than a few minutes every couple of weeks or so.

Communications

Our website has suffered a bit over the past year as our web manager has not had the time to update it. However, we are now working on changing our web service provider and to get another committee member to undertake the management. Improvements have been made recently.

We have produced two newsletters in the past year and held two open residents’ meetings.

Conclusion

As we have stated many times, this is your association. Your views count. If you do not approve of what we are doing or aim to do, please let us know.

This is my last annual report as I am stepping down as Secretary this year. I will continue to take an active role on the committee mainly in environmental matters.

Sandy Norman
May 2008