

Sopwell Residents Association

Annual report 2008/9

At our last AGM we explained that we were changing our focus to specific areas where we can make a difference. One of these areas is to arrange activities to bring the community in Sopwell together, and another is to promote Sopwell's green spaces and services to its residents.

Over the last 12 months we have been working hard to make this a reality, and in 2008 we ran an even more successful Larks in the Parks event for the community with help from the community, as well as a guided walk around Sopwell. This coming year we are hoping to do even more, however, as you will have read in our Spring newsletter, we desperately need more help to keep us going.

Committee structure and changes

We have lost three excellent committee members: Jill Gipps, our treasurer, Helly Sawyer, who was committed to providing better facilities for Sopwell's young people, and Joanne Tang, who worked tirelessly with the police and neighbourhood watch, and coordinated the circulation of our bi-annual newsletters. In addition, Giles Hanford has stepped down as Chair, although we are pleased to report that he remains an active committee member.

We are delighted to report that one new member has joined us and we welcome Peter Wares to the committee.

The following members have put themselves forward for re-election: Ananda Armstrong-King, Chantal Burns, Giles Hanford, Jack Hill, Mark James, Sandy Norman, Rebecca Prebble, Chris Pudsey, Jose Sena, Rick Taylor and Peter Wares.

The following wish to be elected and re-elected as officers: Sandy Norman as Chair, Chris Pudsey as Vice-Chair, Rebecca Prebble as Secretary and Mark James as Treasurer.

We do need more members to join us to be able to achieve our goals. If you have a particular interest in youth facilities, tenant liaison, assisting in newsletter distribution or any other issue relevant to Sopwell, please do talk to us.

Activities

Larks in the Parks 2008

The annual Larks in the Parks event was held on 29 June 2008 in and around the Marlborough Pavilion. Once again, the day was enjoyed by many local residents and their friends and families. It seems that the event was even more

popular than the previous year. The event featured a talent competition and a wide range of entertainment acts organised by St Albans Arts, Sport & Leisure. The weather was fine, and St Julian's Church ran their excellent "tea and cake" marquee. Indian food was available in the Pavilion. Thank you to everyone who helped make the day another resounding success.

Sopwell Project

The SRA is committed to promoting and enhancing Sopwell and in 2008 we set up what we have coined the 'Sopwell Project'. Our long term objective is to collate a wealth of rich information, anecdotes and memories about Sopwell and to make this available to the community via our website. We also hope to produce a map and guide about the area and its green spaces.

To launch the Sopwell Project we held a summer walk around Sopwell for residents in July, and the event was well attended with 27 residents joining us. The purpose of the walk was two-fold, firstly to show residents some of our wonderful green spaces, and secondly, to enable us to participate in the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Hunt Campaign, called 'a Summer of Hugs'. As part of the walk, residents measured the girth of trees by holding hands around it. If the tree was sufficiently large, a tape measure was then used. We found 9 ancient trees including one large cedar and oaks in St Stephens field, and our results were reported back to the Woodland Trust. The walk itself was guided by one of our members, Chris Pudsey, with interesting environmental commentary together with Cllr Eileen Harris, who told us about the history of the area.

Environment

In 2008 we planted even more bulbs and we held our annual litter pick in April and collected 20 bags of rubbish and recyclable material around the area within an hour. Every year we are amazed by the amount of litter thrown on pavements and hedgerows, and it was a shame to see how quickly more litter accumulated within a few days after our litter pick.

In terms of other environmental issues, two of our members continue to be tree wardens responsible for reporting any tree problems in Sopwell.

Responses

We responded to the following (either in writing or by participating at seminars):

1. Hertfordshire Charrette, which aimed to engage the public on planning issues and design and growth.
2. St Albans City Vision and the Sustainable Community Strategy 2009 ('Shaping our District together for 2021').
3. Walking Strategy (which sets out plans to increase walking within the District and why this is important).
4. Multi-Use Games Area at the Marlborough Pavilion
5. We expressed concerns on behalf of residents about the closure of the sub post office on Prospect Road.

6. We have expressed concerns on behalf of residents about the proposed expansion of the Sainsbury's store and car park in Everard Close.

Roads and pavements

You may recall that Tavistock Avenue residents submitted a petition to Herts Highways about the state of the pavements. We are pleased to report that some of the work has been completed, although more needs doing.

Neighbourhood Watch

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

Communications

Our website has now updated and revamped by Sandy Norman and we hope you will visit it to find out what is going on in the area, give us your feedback on how we are doing, and share your memories of the area through the Sopwell Project. The website address is www.sopwell.org.uk.

We have produced two newsletters in the past year, which have been delivered to every home in Sopwell. Unfortunately these are very time consuming to produce and without more help we will not have the resources to produce another one.

We have held two open residents' meetings (although we were deflated by the poor turnout at our open meeting and quiz in November).

We have taken responsibility for maintaining the Priory notice boards and are using these to promote events and services in the area.

Conclusion

We are looking forward to Larks in the Parks 2009 on 28 July and a celebratory cycle ride to promote the new Sustrans 6/61 cycle route (date to be confirmed). We will also continue to gather rich information on the history of the area and undertake our responsibility to respond appropriately to consultations or proposals for the area. We would welcome some more help to keep us going.

How you can get involved:

- We want your feedback on how we are doing. Do you want a centralised means of finding out about events and services in the area? What sort of events appeal to you? Please let us know so we can direct our efforts.
- You can contribute to the Sopwell Project by sharing your memories or photographs of the area.
- You can help us deliver newsletters twice a year.
- You can join us on the committee and get involved as much as you wish.

Rebecca Prebble
May 2008