

**Sopwell Residents Association
Annual General Meeting
21st May 2014 at St Julian's Church**

Minutes

Those present:

Councillor Eileen Harris	Councillor Janet Smith	Rick Taylor (Chair)
Sandy Norman (acting Secretary)	Roz Poor	Len Lewsey
Dominic Tang (Treasurer)	Adelle Stapleton	Jack Hill
Willem Hofland	Peter Wares	Anne Wares
Steve Peters	Iain Grant	Frances Burrows
Sophia Joyce	Andrew Johnstone	Sally Bauer (Verulam RA)
Christoph Lutz	Margaret Fensome	Micaela Starkey
Val Langford	Mark James	Shakir Rahman
Jennifer Taylor	Alan George (Transitions)	

1. Welcome

The chairman, Rick Taylor, welcomed everyone to the meeting and particularly welcomed Sally Bauer, secretary of the Verulam Residents Association.

2. Apologies

Received from Liz Klir, Barry and Linda Bateman, Rob Sharman and Councillor Sandy Walkington

3. To approve minutes of AGM held on 1st July 2013

The minutes had been circulated via the SRA website and were available for inspection at the current meeting. Willem Hofland proposed that the minutes were a correct record of the 2013 AGM and this was seconded by Anne Wares. The minutes of the 2013 AGM were duly approved.

4. Matters arising from the Minutes

Sandy Norman said that, under the Localism Act, it may be recalled that Carl Cheevers from SADC spoke to the meeting about choosing three local community assets. We came up with the King Offa, which meant that if the King Offa were to come for sale we could put in a bid, St Stephen's Green Space and the youth club off Leyland Avenue. St Stephen's green space has been accepted by the Council as an asset to the community. We are still waiting to hear whether the other two have been accepted. It has been a long and complicated process.

Sophia Joyce brought up the problem of the speeding traffic in Cottonmill Lane. The police are very aware of this concern. Cllr Janet Smith said that because of the work being carried out to the verges and new double yellow lines residents have discussed the speeding problem with her. The car parking department at SADC are collating all residents' comments and these will be passed on to HCC. Cllr Eileen Harris said that there were some residents in Cottonmill Lane who didn't want a restricted speed limited.

5. To receive and adopt audited statement of Annual Accounts for 2013/14

A full set of audited/examined accounts were distributed to all those present at the meeting by the Treasurer, Dom Tang and he gave a resumé as follows:

The accounts are in three sections, as follows:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| a. Sopwell Book project: Closing balance | £1,666.35 from sale of books |
| b. More Memories Project: Closing balance remaining from the Heritage Lottery Grant | £6,574.51 this represents the balance |
| c. Other activities involved in the running of SRA: Closing balance | £5,774.33 |
| d. In summary the closing balance in hand to the SRA to 31 st March 2014 amounts to | £14,015.19 |

There were no questions on the statement of accounts and Mark James proposed the accounts be adopted. The proposal was seconded by Christoph Lutz. The audited accounts were duly adopted and the chairman thanked Dom for all his hard work in keeping and presenting such thorough accounts.

6. To receive and adopt Annual Report of SRA

Acting Secretary, Sandy Norman, presented her annual report supported by a PowerPoint presentation. A resumé of her report is as follows:

Activities & Events

As part of the Sopwell Memories project, Sandy has been writing a monthly blog post so all news about the project progress will be found on blog.sopwellmemories.org.uk. The Memories Project team has had a good relationship with the University of Herts who have organised workshops and lent equipment for presentations. Sandy has given several presentations to local groups. We took a stall at the German-style Christmas market on 7th December to showcase the project, which was very successful.

Many people have been interviewed and given their memories, the interviews have been transcribed, edited and in excess of 100 uploaded on to the website together with recorded extracts. The website is now ready and Sandy thanked the site developer, Christoph Lutz and the sterling work done by Peter Segers. It can be accessed now at <http://www.sopwellmemories.org.uk>. See Item 10 of these minutes.

The project finishes at the end of August where the website will formally be launched. The community gallery has been booked at the City Museum for the whole of August to showcase the project.

Cedar tree

We decided to look into the history of the cedar tree in St Stephen's green space to ascertain its age and invited a representative of the Tree Register to help us. See item in Spring 2014 newsletter.

Gasworks site

Several members of SRA were present when the gas holders were being demolished. See item in Spring 2014 newsletter.

Autumn walk

Our annual history walk took place on 15th September with Cllr Eileen Harris who was thanked for leading an interesting and informative walk. The theme was local industry – mainly watercress growing and hatting.

Litter pick

The annual litter pick took place on 23rd March. Sandy thanked all those who took part.

Willow tunnel

The willow tunnel in the Nunnery Green Space is looking good and the children love it. The council wants Sopwell to be responsible for the tying up and training in the new shoots as it is too expensive for SADC to hire Hazel Godfrey on an annual basis. Some residents were to have been given training by Hazel on our responsibilities in the early part of the year but because of the flooding this was postponed until recently.

Bulb planting

Last November a few hardy souls went out to plant daffodils in the area on the bridge in Cottonmill Lane on the other side of the road to the entrance to the level crossing. The flowers all came up and gave a good display.

Conferences & Meetings

Sandy gave a list of activities carried out by committee meetings on behalf of SRA as follows:

- Adelle Stapleton was invited by SADC to attend the annual Green Flag Award ceremony to receive the Green Flat for the Nunnery Open Space.
- Rick Taylor attended two meetings of the Combined Group of Residents Associations.
- SRA was one of the organisations first co-opted on to the new City & Neighbourhoods Committee of SADC. Rick Taylor attended the meetings of this committee.
- Sandy Norman attended the Eid Festival in August.
- Sandy Norman and Barry Bateman attended the St Albans Local History Conference in October. Barry spoke about the Arc and Arc WW1 project.
- Rick Taylor attended the St Albans and District Strategic Partnerships Conference.

- Willem Hofland and Sandy Norman attended a thank you party for volunteer groups last December at the House of Commons hosted by Anne Main MP.

Communications

Three newsletters have been published in the past year and held two open residents' meetings. Sandy thanked the newsletter deliverers and thanked Peter Segers for managing and regularly updating the Sopwell website: www.sopwell.org.uk.

Jennifer Taylor proposed the adoption of Sandy's Annual Report which was seconded by Adelle Stapleton. The adoption of the minutes was accepted unanimously. Rick Taylor thanked Sandy for preparing such a good report and for her work throughout the year.

7. To elect management committee

Committee structure and changes

Ananda Armstrong-King left the committee last summer but we were fortunate to gain Ros Poor. All the present members of the management committee are happy to stand again but Sandy made the point that we would welcome new members. Iain Grant proposed the committee be re-elected en bloc which was seconded by Christoph Lutz.

The committee members therefore are: Barry Bateman, Jack Hill, Willem Hofland, Mark James, Sandy Norman (acting secretary), Ros Poor, Rob Sharman, Adelle Stapleton, Dom Tang, Jennifer Taylor (minute secretary), Rick Taylor (chairman) and Peter Wares.

[Post meeting note: Shakir Rahman has joined the committee.]

8. Announcements

- Batwalk – Friday, 29th August meeting up in the Nunnery Open Space. There is a charge of £2.00 per adult with children attending free of charge. There is a maximum of 30 people able to attend.
- Recent works and plans for Sopwell Nunnery:
 - The Countryside Management Service (CMS) working with SADC produced a new management plan last year and measures are now being implement. The aims of this year's plan are actions to restore the River Ver's wildlife populations and to improve facilities for visitors.
 - Restoring the Ver – The Environment Agency is co-ordinating a national, multi-agency approach to river management in line with the EU's Water Framework Directive and is to measure and improve the ecological and chemical condition of our rivers.
 - The Ver is a chalk river – one of only 200 chalk rivers found in the world making, these extremely rare and rich habitats. There is a responsibility to restore and maintain them in good health. However, the Environment Agency has assessed the status of the Ver to be 'poor'.
 - A survey discovered the stretch through Sopwell suffered from significant shading by trees. The low levels of light prevent the growth of vegetation in the river and on its banks. Few plants means fewer insects which in turn impacts on all wildlife using the river. As a consequence a number of trees were felled or pollarded during the winter to increase light levels. Some of the timber and brash from the felling is being used by volunteers to build structures in the river designed to diversity the flow and to create habitats for fish and insects, all of this with the consent of the Environment Agency.
 - Improving facilities for visitors – To improve access to the Nunnery Open space for people with buggies, wheelchairs or mobility vehicles, contractors will be building a ramp off Cottonmill Lane by the river bridge and also removing the steps from the path under the Alban Way bridge. In addition, 200 metres of the River Ver Trail path will be surfaced. This will join up the new ramp from Cottonmill Lane with the existing hard surfaced path which exists by the boardwalk. This will ensure that people can use the open space all through the year whatever the weather. Works will begin as soon as the ground has dried out.
 - Together, these projects will cost approximately £13,000. SRA helped greatly by securing a community grant. SADC and HCC have funded the rest of the works.
 - Alban Way – CMS are working with SADC on a plan to improve the St Albans section of the Alban Way. A briefing document has been circulated for consultation and a number of replies have been received. CMS are now working on the first draft of the plan. The aims will be :

- To promote awareness and interest by improving access; installing signage; providing interpretation and benches; conserving historical features and by organising guided walks.
- To promote and enhance biodiversity by managing trees and vegetation; supporting volunteer activity and establishing a Friends group.
- To ensure the standard of maintenance is maintained and relevant by keeping costs sustainable and securing external funding; ensuring safety by pro-active tree works; removing litter and responding pro-actively to misuse and maintaining surfaces and signage.

9. Alan George – Transitions

The chairman welcomed Alan George from Transition St Albans who gave a presentation on the work of Transition Streets. He started his presentation by congratulating SRA on the amount of work the Association was carrying out. He went on to talk about Transition Streets, which is an off-shoot of Transition St Albans. He described how Totnes in South Devon was the first town in the country where the Transition scheme was introduced, whereby residents got together to find ways of cutting carbon emissions, cutting fuel bills and generally being more environmentally aware. The project was launched in St Albans in November 2012 with a speaker from Totnes coming to introduce the idea. So far there are 13 groups up and running in St Albans and has extended out to Wheathampstead and Kimpton. The scheme in St Albans was originally funded by HLF but now there is money coming from SADC and HCC.

The aim of Transition Streets is a scheme by which neighbours within a street get together and meet 7 times over the course of 4 – 6 months and by following a set of written guidelines find ways in which they can jointly conserve energy, water, reduce carbon emissions, food wastage and unnecessary transport costs.

Catherine Ross is the local co-ordinator for Transition Streets in St Albans. Riverside Road is already taking part in the scheme.

Christoph Lutz asked Alan how this would work in schools. Alan responded that teachers and pupils are enthusiastic about the scheme and he didn't see why a similar scheme could not be used in a primary school.

Alan was thanked for his excellent presentation.

10. Sopwell Memories website

Sandy gave a soft launch 'tour' of the Sopwell Memories project website by going to various areas of the website and demonstrating access to the interviews. The URL is <http://www.sopwellmemories.org.uk>. The hard launch will take place at the Museum presentation in August. A photo was taken of Sandy giving her demonstration which will form part of the digital record of the project as required by the HLF grant. Sandy asked residents to browse the site and let her have any comments.

11. Open Forum

- Micaela Starkey, a resident in Gorham Drive, brought to the attention of the meeting the state of the Neighbourhood Watch sign close to the bridge on Abbots Avenue West. Rick said he would contact the Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator. Cllr Janet Smith has already been told about this and announced that there would be a police 'beat' surgery on 27th May.
- Anne Wares announced that next year will be the 150th anniversary of the coming of the Great Northern Railway to St Albans – now the Alban Way. Anne suggested it would be really nice if SRA could get together some sort of event. Sandy thought that perhaps we could be something with Jeff Lewis's team in Smallford. Shakir Rahman advised that he works for the railways and may be able to help.
- Shakir Rahman, who lives in Creighton Avenue, announced that the Muslim community has formed a group called Sopwell Community Trust. Currently they have Friday night prayers at Greenwood Park but they would like to have them in Sopwell. He asked how the residents would feel about having a Muslim community centre. Cllr Harris said that the Marlborough Club could be available to them.

There being no other discussion, the meeting was closed by the chairman. Refreshments were served.