



NEWSLETTER

Sopwell Residents
Association

Issue 13
Autumn 2008

Welcome from the editor

Welcome to the Summer/Autumn edition of the Sopwell Residents Association newsletter, the newsletter which reports the goings on in Sopwell. In this edition there are reports on this year's Larks in the Parks day, the previous residents' meeting and the Sopwell tree hugging walk. Also in this newsletter, we want to share with you our thoughts about an exciting new project, called the Sopwell Project which we hope many of you will want to become involved with. Please let us know your views.

Just a reminder, that all those who live in Sopwell are automatically members of the Sopwell Residents Association. We do not charge a fee to become members. Open meetings are just that, open to all, no charge.

Another reminder: some kind soul has donated his or her time to delivering this newsletter to your door. If you wish to join this happy band of volunteer distributors please contact Joanne Tang on 766557. She will be most grateful.

Contributions to this newsletter are welcomed. These can be in the form of letters or emails or short items relevant to Sopwell. Make it clear that they are contributions and whether you want your name included. We reserve the right to censor if necessary! Sandy Norman

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Sopwell Residents Association

43 Leyland Avenue
St. Albans, Herts
AL1 2BD

Email: info@sopwell.org.uk
Internet: www.sopwell.org.uk

Come to the quiz on 23rd September

Please make a note in your diary for our next residents' get-together which will be on Tuesday 23rd September at 7.30pm in the Marlborough Club, Old Oak, Cottonmill Lane. We decided to have a change from our usual format of speakers and discussion to something more social. This meeting will take the form of a quiz. So sharpen up your brains and turn up!

If you want to come along already "teamed up" that is fine. Alternatively, just turn up and you can join a team on the night. There will be a prize for the winning team and a wooden spoon for the losers!

Hopefully it will be a fun occasion and an opportunity to meet new friends. Light refreshments will be provided at the end.

Larking around

"Good Food, Great Weather, Fantastic entertainment Just the ticket for a lazy Sunday afternoon with the family!!" This is how one resident summed up this year's Larks in the Parks held in the Marlborough Club grounds on Sunday 29th June. Its success was due to the wider range of visiting acts and displays. The weather was also kind. Although initially it appeared to be threatening heavy rainstorms, in fact only a passing cloud managed to send down a token shower after which the sun found a break in the clouds and then, sun hats became sensible headgear.

Live music, including Sopwell has Talent came in various forms. We had the Road to Hull, Jazz musicians, a vocal duo, and songs of an Operatic style, also with a couple of fill-in songs from our MC, Adam Hunt.

The craft activities, including painting plaster of Paris models, plus face painting, tattoos, and games and puzzles (with prizes) kept everyone busy. The recycling bus from Cambridgeshire (itself a recycled library bus) brought in weird and slightly scary -at least to the grown-ups- standing effigies made from cans and bottles. African drumming supervised by Risenga Makondo kept a circle of about twenty participants busy thumping and foot stamping and trying to follow his instructions.

The marquee with the cakes, teas and coffees proved a hit especially as there were tables and chairs to sit down at this year, and was very busy all day! The Indian food, placed inside the Marlborough club house, was very tasty but could possibly have done with having more prominent advertising as it seemed a bit tucked away. However, it all went! Many families brought their own picnics and gathered near to the large oak tree.

The plant stall raised £30.00 which will be used to buy bulbs for another planting foray around Sopwell. If you have any suggested locations, please do let us know.

The climax of the afternoon came with the BMX stunt travelling road show which proved a grand finale to the day. The kids loved watching these very expert young men lift, twist and drop their bikes onto tiny platforms, narrow poles and over high jumps, all of which seemed impossible to do until they proved otherwise.

All in all an excellent day out, and a chance to relax and let the kids really enjoy their freedom with entertainment laid on hour after hour. We do however desperately need a couple of new volunteers to help with the planning of next year's event. If you would like to help or would like to know more, please do contact us at info@sopwell.org.uk

Jack Hill, Joanne Tang and Ananda Armstrong-King

Tree hugging in Sopwell

Seventeen adults and eight children turned up to the "Celebrating Green Sopwell" walk and tree hugging event on Sunday 27th July. We met in the car park of St Stephen's Church at 3pm on the hottest



day of the year. The purpose of the event was twofold. First we wanted to show the people of Sopwell how many wonderful green spaces Sopwell has: we are fortunate to live in the ward in St Albans District with the largest amount of green space, much of it bordering on the green belt and Watling Chase Community Forest. Secondly, the SRA had agreed to take part in the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Hunt Campaign called "The Summer of Hugs". We had to measure the girth of the trees by holding hands around the trunk, so giving the tree a hug. If they qualified as being suitably ancient, we then measured them using a tape measure. An oak tree needed three adult hugs to qualify, a cedar tree was five, a chestnut was four and so on. We thought we would only find a few trees qualifying as ancient but in fact we found nine, most of which were found in St Stephens churchyard and field. Our biggest, and therefore likely to be the oldest (although

we cannot be sure), was the magnificent Cedar of Lebanon in the churchyard.

This measured 9m or seven adult hugs! It really is an impressive sight so if you have never seen it, do go and have a look some time. Historical rumour has it that Henry VIII courted Anne Boleyn under this tree! Most of the other trees we measured were oaks but we did find a qualifying horse chestnut and also an ash. All this data will be sent to the Ancient Tree Hunt campaign. Everyone thought it was great fun to join in the hugging of the trees, especially the children. The children were most useful in negotiating the tape measure around awkward trees.

The main walk took us from St Stephen's field through the estate using the back alleys, which we guess used to be field paths and which still retain several large oaks from the old hedge-lines; along the river and through fields; past New Barnes Mill; into the Marlborough Club grounds to view part of the magnificent Ver Valley; and then back through the estate, passing the landmark poplar trees above Homebase, to our starting point.

As well as the tree hugging and guided walk, Councillor Eileen Harris told us about some of the history of both the church and its surroundings and New Barnes Mill. Everyone was impressed that not only did we have a superb walk, we also learned some history as well! Many thanks to Eileen for her research and to our environmental specialist, Chris Pudsey. We plan to have another walk next year which will take us through the other part of Sopwell- so watch this space! Sandy Norman

Green Flag

For the second year running, Sopwell Priory has been awarded the prestigious Green Flag award for a green space. To read more about it and Green Flag please go to <http://greenflagaward.org.uk/winners/GSP001438>.

More about trees

Two members of our committee, Jack Hill and Sandy Norman, have signed up to become tree wardens and are now "plugged in" to the tree wardens network. From 26th November to 7th December is National Tree Week which is an important event in the tree wardens calendar. This is an opportunity for residents to have a say on where they would like more trees planted in Sopwell. We do have some idea but we would like to hear from you. We need to pick spots where the trees will be looked after ie watered during dry spells and where they are less likely to be vandalised. Please let us know where you think the best places are and we will do our best to get them planted.

If any of you would like to become a tree warden – very little knowledge needed as training is given – the next introductory session is on Saturday 29th November from 10 – 3pm. There will be a talk by someone from the Tree Council and then an afternoon session outdoors. It is good fun! If you are interested, phone the Trees and Woodland section of the Council on 819372 or email treewardens@stalbans.gov.uk. The venue is probably Verulamium Museum.

Prospect Road post office

Sopwell Residents' Association formally wrote to the Post Office's Consultation Team to express the concerns of many local residents regarding the possible closure of the post office in Prospect Road. Key issues that residents appear to be worried about include accessing alternative post offices (particularly our elderly population), possible closure of the shop, and increased pressure on other post offices in the area (and therefore longer queues). The concerns expressed in our letter have been formally recorded by the Post Office's Consultation Team as part of the six-week local public consultation process, and we trust this, together with other responses received by the Consultation Team (including a petition that was available in the post office), will be given due consideration as part of the decision-making process, and that the Post Office continues to provide this valued and critical service in Prospect Road. Further information about the Post Office's proposals can be obtained via the following website: www.postoffice.co.uk (click on 'network change update' on the right hand side of the screen and follow the instructions). Once a decision is made details will be available on the Post Office website and a poster should be displayed at the Prospect Road post office.

AGM 2007 report

The AGM for the year ending 2006/7 took place on 21st May in the Marlborough Club. The outgoing Secretary, Sandy Norman, thanked those members who had left the committee: Christoph Lutz, Pamela Marshall, Len Lewsey and Anne Fenton. New committee members: Mark James, Ananda Armstrong-King, Rebecca Prebble, Adam Hunt and Jose Sena were welcomed. It was reiterated that new blood on the committee was always needed. The focus of the SRA has shifted during the past year to being more proactive while aiming to bring the community together and to try to make Sopwell more "greener". Sandy Norman then introduced her successor, Rebecca Prebble who was taking over following the AGM.

The speaker for the evening was Councillor Robert Donald who stepped in at short notice in place of Herts Highways. He gave an interesting presentation entitled "Historic St Albans becoming Hertfordshire's premier community", in which he discussed the current challenges facing the Council and what actions are being taken: keeping the District special; reducing our carbon footprint and traffic congestion; improving the state of our residential roads and pavements; improving our leisure facilities, recycling, providing more affordable housing; and keeping Council Tax rise below the rate of inflation. In the second part of his presentation, he described the Local Strategic Partnership, which is a body representing the local community set up by the Government to produce and implement the Community Strat-

egy. Several residents queried the fact that the strategy was lacking in facilities for the youth of the district. Councillor Donald pointed out the youth facilities are not the responsibility of the District Council but come under the County.

A statement was read out from Richard Stacey of Herts Highways, who apologised for not attending the meeting. He said that all roads and footways are prioritised each year but that it was not possible to do everything at once. To clear some of the maintenance backlog the County Council had committed an additional £20m over the last two years and planned to invest a further £10m this year, as part of one of the council's seven key challenges ('dealing with worn out roads and pavements'). To have an input into the annual maintenance programme, residents may give feedback via the local county councillor or by contacting Richard Stacey and asking to make a representation at the Highways Joint Member panel meetings. Residents may report a fault by phoning 01438 737 320 or via

www.hertsdirect.org.uk

In the open forum session, there was a discussion on the pros and cons of reopening the car track in the Marlborough grounds.

The meeting finished with refreshments which included a splendid 5th birthday cake made by Ananda-Armstrong-King.

Police

The next mobile police station at Sainsbury will be on Friday 26 September from 9.00 - 2.30 pm.

Volunteer drivers needed

Age Concern St Albans is looking for drivers for their meals on wheels service supporting older or vulnerable people in St Albans. From Monday to Friday - between around 10.30am and 1pm - our team of volunteer drivers deliver a hot meal to those in need. If you are a car driver and think you might be able to spare any time or would like to find out more please contact 856741.

The Sopwell Project

Everyone knows that St Albans is steeped in history. There are many published works on our Roman forbears, the Abbey, the churches, the market etc. but equally Sopwell can boast of having several places of historical interest e.g. St Stephen's

Church, Sopwell Priory. We can also boast of having the most areas of green space in the district. We also have a long stretch of the River Ver. We need to blow our own trumpet to let others know what beautiful surroundings we live in. We have to look beyond the litter and the supermarket trolleys and celebrate our environment.

To this end, some of us on the committee are collating as much information we can find about Sopwell's history including recent history with the aim of turning it into a community project. We also want to plot our environment to discover what it was like and how it has changed in the last 100 years or so. We are hoping that the end result will be an interactive computer map of the area accessible via our website. We are also hoping as a by-product to produce printed fact sheets or guides to various points of interest which will be useful for visitors as well as residents. This aim should feed in to one of the District Council's priorities of "*protecting, enhancing and promoting our history, culture and green landscape*" which may mean we could be eligible for funding to make it a well managed and professional product. We are very excited about it and we hope you will be too. We are still in the initial stages of thinking of how we can progress this community project and we would really welcome your thoughts and ideas about it: whether you would find this an interesting project; whether you have access to information which could contribute to this project; and whether you would be willing to help us. There must be loads of you out there with a story to tell.

Contacts:

Councillor Eileen Harris: 831611 or eileenharris555@btinternet.com

Councillor David Poor: 833670 or David.Poor@btinternet.com

Councillor Roger Axworthy: 812681 rla@notmhs.fsnet.co.uk

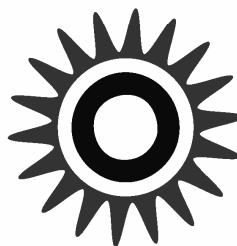
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