



NEWSLETTER

For all residents of Sopwell

Sopwell Residents
Association

Issue 18
Spring 2011

From your editor

Well, it has been a long hard winter with all the bad snow conditions before Christmas. We can now look forward to the spring and to see the bulbs which we have planted over the last few years. Last year we planted a few more on the bank from Cottonmill Lane down to the railway crossing and we have planted quite a few bulbs in the Abbots Avenue West planters. As well as bulb planting, your committee has been working hard on your behalf. The board walk is now finished and we are planning events associated with the Nunnery Green Space. We applied for and were successful in obtaining a Grass Roots grant to install noticeboards in Abbots Avenue West and in Vesta Avenue; and we have been awarded another grant to complete the Sopwell Project.

It is good to see residents being active in the community: Leyland Avenue residents stood up against the might of Sainsbury's; and residents of Sadleir Road took on the Council over the unsightly fence by the Alban Way. We need to make ourselves heard more.

I will be resigning as Chair at this year's AGM although I will still be playing an active role on the committee. I will be compiling the newsletters and steering the Sopwell Project through to its (hopeful) publication – see below. We don't know who my successor will be but all offers gratefully accepted. Have a good spring and summer

Sandy Norman SRA Chair

Annual General Meeting 17th May

This year's AGM will be held on Tuesday 17th May in the Marlborough Pavilion. We have reverted to the earlier time of 7.30pm as we had to rush the social element of the evening last year. Please come along to see what we have done over the past year and join in discussions. We need your input! As usual Ananda will be providing refreshments and baking wonderful cakes.

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If you live in Sopwell, you are automatically a member of SRA. There is no charge to join and events are free.

Contact details

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St Albans AL1 2NQ

info@sopwell.org.uk
www.sopwell.org.uk

Lark in the Parks 26th June

All Sopwell Residents are warmly invited to the annual 'Larks in the Parks' event which will be held on 26th June between 12 and 5 pm in and around the Marlborough Pavilion, just off Cottonmill Lane. The day is designed to be an opportunity for the Sopwell community to get together, bring a picnic and enjoy the entertainment for all the family. After last year's break, MANDAID, the parent group raising funds for Mandeville Primary School, has taken over the organisation of this year's event in Sopwell. As ever, there will be a variety of acts performing for you, activities for the children and the popular plant swap stall is already booked! Entry to the event is free!

Please contact us via email larks@sopwell.org.uk or get in touch with the SRA secretary if you want to get involved either by running a stall or by contributing to the entertainment.

Ramsbury Road Open Gardens Day 5th June 2011

Ramsbury Road will be holding an Open Gardens Day on 5th June from 2 to 5pm. The entrance cost is £3 per person, in aid of our project to sponsor a seat for the Odyssey Cinema. This will be linked to the Big Lunch 2011, with a street picnic before the event. Our street sale last year, also successfully linked to the Big Lunch, was a wonderful afternoon, lots of fun for everyone, and we raised over £800 toward our seat. Proceeds from this year's event will hopefully put us on the road to a second seat!

Anne Wares

Fenny's Boardwalk and the river path



The boardwalk in the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space is now finished as I am sure most of you will be aware. I hope you all like walking on it. It feels good to be able to walk above the vegetation and observe the wildlife and it will be even better in the spring and summer. It took a lot of hard work to obtain the grant. You have no idea how complicated the process is. Still, we now seem to be dab hands at filling in the forms which bodes well for future projects. Have you noticed that there are now steps down to the Ver path? This was commissioned by Countryside Management Services and the Ver Valley Society who obtained lottery funding. Because of the success of our Boardwalk Project, they are planning to extend the crushed concrete path from

the allotments, under the Alban Way bridge and along a bit further. They are also proposing to put a fancy seat by the river! The only other area now which needs improvement is from the new steps in Cottonmill Lane to where the crushed concrete path starts as this gets really muddy. There are no funds available yet but we will see what we can do.

By the time you read this, we will also have had the launch on 24th March hopefully "opened" by the Mayor. We have decided to call it "Fenny's Boardwalk". We are not too sure who Fenny was but local residents used to call that area Fenny's Wood so it seems appropriate. There was a P.J. Fenn who was a riding master at the stables where Nunnery Stables is now so he could have been nicknamed Fenny.

CommunitySpaces As part of the Community Spaces grant, we have "sustainability" money to hold events during the year in the Nunnery Green Space. We are planning to hold a combination of educational and activity events such as: willow weaving; digging a "scrape" and planting reeds and rushes; crayfish trapping; a moth walk; and a bat walk. All of these will be open to you as residents so I hope you will join in. In addition we will have our late summer walk which will be a mixture of history, archaeology and wildlife so it promises to be even more interesting. While the walkway was being constructed, we wrote a blog. To see it go to <http://sopwellnunnery.wordpress.com>

Notice Boards



Have you noticed our new large noticeboards outside the shops in Vesta Avenue and Abbots Avenue West? These were paid for from a Grassroots Grant which we applied for last year. There is room in them for other public notices so if you want to publicise a local charitable event, for example, please get in touch. We reserve the right, however, to turn down anything which we feel is inappropriate. We will no longer be posting notices about our forthcoming events on telegraph poles, so keep an eye on them to see what is happening in Sopwell.

There are two other notice boards down by the Nunnery Green Space as well, although these are not as big.

Mandeville Primary School is fundraising after budget cuts

You will all have read the recent press reports about Mandeville Primary School in the middle of Sopwell. The Mandeville Primary School building project will double the size of the school and provide 480 school places for St Albans. In the summer of 2010, work on the project ceased when budgetary cuts were made by Herts County Council. With a £1 million package of cuts to the building project the parents have set up MANDAID and are stepping in to raise money for key features that are now missing from the scheme. This is an opportunity to maximise the learning experience of present and future Mandeville children. Some of the elements that we are raising money for are:

- Library shelving and equipment towards creating a library for the school and the community
- Key Stage 1 imaginative reading area
- Solar panels and a water harvesting system. Key sustainability features of the project include children's water and energy meter displays

- Covered learning area at the front of classrooms. This large outdoor classroom is key to introducing children to a wide range of learning that isn't possible indoors
- Additional equipment and facilities to support children from socially and economically disadvantaged families.

How you can help

- Buy a 'Mandeville Monster' milk shake at the Shaken Cow, St Albans
- Do your online shopping via our shop at www.buy.at/MandevillePTA without any cost to you. Lots of big retailers like Amazon, Play.com, Marks & Spencer's, and many more give us commission if you buy online via our shop
- Help us as a business by making us part of your corporate social responsibility programme
- Join our Facebook page for the latest fund-raising activities: www.mandeville.herts.sch.uk/fb

Christoph Lutz

Sopwell Project

Over the past few months I have gathered loads of data about Sopwell's history and people. People have been very cooperative and haven't complained about me being 'nosey'! They all say they have enjoyed talking about the past. I have enjoyed it too. I have found it extremely exciting to discover some obscure facts about our area. Certain topics are still bugging me though, such as what exactly was Sportsman's Hall, and I would dearly love to see that part of the river between Sopwell Mill Farm and New Barnes Mill to see how wide and deep it is. Are there any Verulam golfers out there willing to take me round? Anyway, because this project has grown rather, I have decided all the history and memories should be published in a book. Thanks to our local County Councillor, we have been fortunate once more in obtaining a grant from the Herts Locality budget to help towards the cost of publishing.

If anyone wants to share memories of Sopwell or has any photos I can use please get in touch. Leave a message on the website or phone 865061.

Sandy Norman

Sainsbury's: an example of resident power

We objected to Sainsbury's first planning application in 2009 which included the decked car park, as well as a mezzanine a floor and other changes to the store and petrol station. The council recommended refusal for several reasons and Sainsbury's withdrew it just before the committee meeting. My neighbours and I sent in a lengthy letter of objection plus a petition. We also leafleted local residents to let them know about the plans (as there were concerns about traffic congestion, noise, pollution, the size of the shop sign etc).

Sainsbury's then went away and came up with a more refined proposal, that omitted the car park deck and petrol station changes, was smaller scale extension and other changes were reigned in. This was consulted in February 2010 and again my neighbours and I wrote a long letter and petition. We heard nothing until a few weeks ago when the date was set for the committee meeting to make decision on the proposal on the 2nd February. So we had just over a week's notice. My neighbour happened to spot that further changes had been made to the plans since we were consulted a year ago (which the council planners actually added themselves, and in November 2010, had plenty of time to re-consult or advise us!), namely that they had included windows along the north east elevation, which would overlook our gardens and homes, not to mention light pollution 24/7. No one re-consulted us on this significant change and it was only by chance that my neighbour saw it. We were shocked about this and cannot believe that it would have been acceptable for someone to build windows directly overlooking other people's homes (albeit that they would use obscured glass).

We had seen Sainsbury's proposal being reigned-in considerably from the first application, although we were still concerned about traffic, pollution, competition with city centre, and that Sainsbury's are not being asked to do more to be greener/carbon reducing rather than carbon omitting (which we feel all new major developments should be required to do as a matter of course). So we accepted that there was a significant chance that the revised application would be granted, and the council also recommended grant with the condition that Sainsbury's donate £500,000 (to roads/buses). Our focus at the committee meeting, then, was managing the windows issue. My partner spoke against it at the meeting and we got several neighbours to attend the public meeting to show our strong opposition. David Poor (and Eileen Harris) spoke about it too, raising our points and Cllr Poor put forward some alternative options. The committee then agreed to grant on the condition that the windows are opaque rather than obscured glass and that a management plan is developed to manage delivery times (as we complained about very noisy deliveries throughout the night). Of course we would have preferred that the plans did not get approved at all for several reasons, not just the windows (we don't think Sainsbury's need another level for clothes and homeware) but aside from this, we were pleased with the outcome - the car park deck was scrapped last year and the extension plans reigned in, and the committee set conditions to address our personal concerns.

Rebecca Prebble, Leyland Avenue.

Anti-social behaviour: Parking on the grass verges

Many residents are thoroughly fed up with people who insist on parking their cars on grass verges. Over the past few months great gouges have been made in many verges which turn into muddy puddles after rain or snow. It looks extremely unsightly and leaves the ground uneven so it is difficult for the council contractors to mow them. Added to this, it spoils the look of the neighbourhood and it gives the impression that nobody cares about the area in which they live. We appreciate that there are problems with parking, especially in areas where there is a lot of building work taking place e.g. by Mandeville School, but nevertheless, it is an offence as well as being offensive to your neighbours. Please try to be considerate. If you don't, solutions will be sought to stop you, like putting up bollards or other barriers. Do we really want Sopwell's streets to be littered with bollards every few metres? The other solution being suggested is a patrol by parking wardens. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!

Did you know?

- The land on which Cottonmill Crescent stands was once allotments and before that an orchard, called Bing's Orchard. I haven't yet found out who Bing was though.
- In the late 19th century, there was a "Baths" on the river near where the present day sub-aqua club is in Cottonmill Lane. There doesn't appear to be a building so they (most likely men only) must have bathed in the river. It must have been quite deep then.
- Before the war, you could walk more or less in a straight line from the level crossing over the fields along a footpath down to the North Orbital.
- Parakeets have been spotted in the Nunnery Green Space. Good to increase our species but it might not be good for the allotment holders' and nearby gardeners' vegetables and fruit.

Guide Dogs

Guide Dogs wants a society in which blind and partially sighted people enjoy the same freedom of movement as everyone else. Here at the Guide Dogs district team office in Frogmore, we support over 130 working guide dog partnerships with blind or visually impaired persons in Herts, Beds and North London. We are working to increase this number and would very much like to hear from anyone who thinks that a guide dog could give them, a friend or family member greater mobility and freedom.

If any local groups would like to learn more about Guide Dogs we would welcome the opportunity to introduce ourselves and some of our dogs, talk about life as a blind or visually impaired person, tell you how Guide Dogs help their owners lead more independent lives and demonstrate some of the dog training techniques we use.

We would also like to mention a volunteering opportunity for "boarding" trainee guide dogs in Advanced Training. Each year, our Instructors train about 30 dogs during their Advanced Training stage. We are looking for families or individuals to care for a dog for a period of about 12 weeks, bring the dog to our office each weekday morning between 8 and 9 am and pick up between 5 and 6 pm each evening. We provide full training and supply all food, equipment and vet care. The dogs spend their days with us and their evenings and weekends with their Boarders. They work hard during the day and are tired in the evening so just need some play time and a chance to relax!

If you would like the fun and companionship of a dog, without the commitment of full-time ownership, please contact us on 0845 372 7429 or email herts&beds@guidedogs.org.uk

Useful Contacts for Sopwell Residents

Councillor Eileen Harris: 831611 Councillor eileenharris555@btinternet.com

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

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

County Councillor Martin Frearson 761878: mfrearson@ntlworld.com

Litter fly-tipping, graffiti: 0845 1258000 or a.cleanerdistrict@stalbans.gov.uk

Faulty road or pavement surface: 01438 737320 or www.hertsdirect.org/highwayfaults

Next issue

The next issue will be out in late summer/autumn 2011. If you have any items for inclusion or you wish to advertise please go to the website and leave a message. Advertisement charges: £50 for half a page and £25 for a quarter page.