

SOPWELL

RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

making Sopwell a better place

SRA: a day in the market



On a fine Saturday in August, members of the SRA Committee, assisted by 4 enthusiastic residents, manned a stall at the market with a view to promoting Sopwell as a fascinating area in which to live and, of course, to sell copies of Sandy Norman's book "Sopwell: a history and collection of memories". We were allocated a stall in front of the town hall and

with the stall sporting the fine new Sopwell Residents Association banner (in St Albans colours), we laid it out with photographs and information texts. The stall soon proved to be quite a draw to the shoppers and passers-by, locals and visitors to St Albans alike. Some of the old aerial photographs, most of which were taken immediately post-war, generated considerable curiosity with locals trying to pin-point the streets they could recognise, which in turn gave rise to jolted memories and stories - especially in relation to the gas works! The five piles of Sopwell walk leaflets were quickly snatched up as were the leaflets on the Nunnery Green Space. We were supported during the day by visits from all three of Sopwell Ward's councillors, Eileen Harris, Janet Smith and Iain Grant and also by the Mayor, Cllr Salih Gaygusuz, each of whom stayed for a while and chatted to stall visitors.

Jennifer Taylor

King Offa—still waiting

You may have read in the local press that campaigners are fighting to keep a pub in the community after it closes. They are still waiting to hear whether their bid has been successful. The Cottonmill Community Group want the King Offa pub on Wallingford Walk to remain open after its closure in a few weeks' time and become a building for the community until its demolition in around two years' time. The site will then be used to build affordable housing.

The SRA applaud the CCG for their efforts in trying to make use of a building that would otherwise be boarded up and left abandoned. If you wish to contact the group, you can email them at cottonmillcg@gmail.com or find them on Facebook.

Editor



From Your Editor

Welcome to our 28th edition of the Sopwell Newsletter. There has been a lot happening in Sopwell lately and not all of it very positive. The continuing saga of the railfreight terminal; the closing of the level crossing; the change of use of the Ziggurat building into apartments and the removal of its mirrored fascia and the prospective building of another block of apartments on the adjacent Ziggurat car park. Do we really have the infrastructure to support such proliferation of housing development? It's not as though it is social housing and helping existing residents find accommodation.

However, there are many events to look forward to in St Albans.

Sustainable week (page 3). Also the Oxfam walk (page 3) and of course the 150th Celebration of the Hatfield Railway (page 4).

Barry Bateman

Contents

A Day in the Market
King Offa
Level Crossing
Bat Walk
Railfreight
Willow Tunnel
St Albans Sustainable Week
Oxfam Walk
Dog Ladders
Situations Vacant
Railway Celebrations
Community Cafe
Next Edition
Useful Contacts

Level Crossing Closure.



Many residents have been very angry about the closure by Network Rail of the level

crossing in Sopwell. The County Council had given them permission to close the crossing for 24 hours. However, Network Rail put up notices stating the crossing would be closed for 6 months. At the time of going to press, we understand that the County Council have told Network Rail to re-open the crossing immediately. We further understand that District Council Officers will be meeting with Network Rail and that Sopwell's own Councillors will also be in attendance. Hopefully, this will have been sorted by the time you read this article.

It is worth noting that Network Rail do have a national programme of replacing pedestrian level crossings with footbridges, following two fatalities, two years ago.

I would like to thank Councillor Janet Smith and County Councillor Sandy Walkington who provided such valuable information regarding this situation.

Editor

The Bat Walk

Unfortunately, Roger Havard was indisposed on the day but Michael Iseard, Project Officer from Countryside Management Services, was on hand to lead a merry group of people on their quest to learn and hopefully hear and see our local Sopwell bats. Here is Michael's report taken from an email to Roger.

(Editor)

"However with the event being fully booked and about 28 people showing up I felt that the show must go on and so it did (I have led walks before and have an interest in bats). I led a slightly shorter bat walk, and with the use of three bat detectors, we managed to spot and hear a few bats, of which I identified two different species with relative confidence (Daubenton's and Common Pipistrelle). The Pipistrelle were around the Watercress beds and the Daubenton's near the Nunnery ruins. Everyone said they had a good time and the feedback was very positive (just seeing and hearing the bats for most was a new experience). I wouldn't worry about missing the date, these things happen and in the end everyone had a good walk (though I'm sure you would have made a much better job of it!)".

Michael Iseard

Railfreight Terminal— The Last Stand

As most readers will be aware, the District Council and STRiFE have reached the limit in their attempt to prevent the development of a railfreight terminal on the former Radlett Aerodrome site. The one remaining possibility is to persuade Herts County Council, who own a significant part of the land involved, not to sell to Helioslough. To this end, those opposed to the development are invited to sign a petition via <https://cmis.hertsdirect.org/hertfordshire/Petitions.aspx> (third one down on the list). The deadline for signing is 26th September. If 10,000 signatures can be collected, HCC will have to debate the issue in open council with members of the public present.

All the main arguments have received extensive coverage in the local press. However, one issue which has not been mentioned, and which is of particular interest to us in Sopwell, is the 'country park' which is supposed to 'mitigate' the impact of the railfreight terminal. This would include all the farmland and green space on the edge of the built-up part of the ward from the railway bridge at Butterfield Lane right up to the Marlborough Club, and in the other direction all along the river to Park Street.

Over the years, the plan for the country park has been rewritten several times in response to criticism from various quarters and, when challenged, was described as only 'illustrative'. This means we don't really know what the final plan would actually look like, or how the balance between the twin objectives of increased public access and wildlife/environmental benefit can be achieved.

However, it is clear that Hedges Farm, currently a sustainable local food business of exactly the sort we are supposed to be encouraging, will be lost. The fields on our doorstep will change from productive 'working' countryside to 'amenity' grazing at best, and the farmhouse could become a visitor centre - with car park. The section of river from New Barnes to the Marlborough Club, currently not accessible to the public but valued for its landscape and wildlife, may be opened up and also 'country parked'. As part of the plan for the terminal itself, the bridleway along the ridge from Burydell to the A414 will be diverted below the ridgeline, losing the views which are its main attraction. Although it is difficult to imagine anyone wanting to come to a country park with a massive industrial development in the middle of it, an increase in visitors could potentially lead to 'casual' parking near obvious access points - in Butterfield Lane, for example, or Cottonmill Lane.

Obviously people have different views on the railfreight terminal, and some may welcome the prospect of a new country park. This article is just to make sure residents are aware that, whatever their opinion of the development, it will, one way or another, definitely have an impact on our own immediate surroundings.

Chris Pudsey

Willow Tunnel



Despite some questionable weather conditions a dedicated team of volunteers turned up to give our willow tunnel a necessary pruning. Although, none of us are experts we did our best and by all accounts our efforts were not too disastrous. A special mention must be made concerning the wonderful couple and their very well behaved baby that happened to be passing and

then stopped and joined in. Sopwell residents are the best.

We had a visit from our willow expert, Hazel Godfrey the following day and I include her email to Sandy Norman, our SRA secretary.

“Hi Sandy,

On the whole, the willow team did very well yesterday and I hope they had fun whilst doing it. I was very pleased to see that the growth on the weak side is much improved getting those overhanging trees cut back has definitely paid off this year.

Where some stronger rods had been cut, I started to cut them back further still but decided that it would be better to spend the time jotting down some pointers that you can pass to Barry for the future. So, please find attached a document that will outline a few things it would be good to do now, along with some general maintenance advice and more specific guidance regarding the rebuilt weaker side. It would seem that my lack of attendance yesterday, coupled with a good turnout of volunteers, was just the catalyst needed for the tunnel to be properly taken on by the association volunteers and a good leader has emerged to boot. Going forward, I think this points to a natural ending of the need for me to be responsible for its future maintenance. As an aside, whilst sitting on the back of my car making notes, someone on a red mobility scooter passed me by via the tunnel. I think this may have been Jack, whom I have met once before. It would have been lovely to have said hello and talked to someone about the achievement of all concerned yesterday and the very positive sense of ownership that hopefully will follow – but perhaps he didn’t recognise me.... Anyway, I hope the tips will be helpful for the volunteers and that a good working party (or maybe two!) will be forged from yesterday’s efforts. Many hands make light work and that’s definitely the way forward. My door is not closed so if you need, please do make contact. I hope the hip heals quickly and has you back on your feet soon.”

Sustainable St Albans Week 21-28 November 2015

Sustainable St Albans Week 21 - 28 November 2015 is a new event in St Albans’ District calendar. We are inviting groups across the District to run an event during the week, related to their core activity, and also related to environmental sustainability. We have lots of ideas on our website **as well as an FAQs page** Around 50 groups have now signed up for the week, including Lussmanns, Affinity Water, St Albans Centre for Voluntary Service, 18 schools, and many more groups, including your own SRA - [see the list here on our website. https://sustainablestalbans.wordpress.com/](https://sustainablestalbans.wordpress.com/)

The week is being organised by a collaboration of Transition St Albans and Friends of the Earth, with the support of St Albans District Council.

The week is in the run up to the Global Climate Change talks in Paris, and we aim to raise awareness about environmental sustainability.

We are also publishing our ‘Future Visions’ booklet with tales from various people outlining their vision of a sustainable St Albans in 2030.

Gail Jackson (Transitions St Albans)

Hike for Oxfam

Come Walk the Herts Hike for Oxfam

Sat 26 September - this lovely event, run by volunteers, is a series of circular, way marked walks starting at Heartwood Forest nr Sandridge - suitable for all ages and abilities. All funds raised go to Oxfam's water and sanitation projects in Niger, W Africa. No enrolment fee - either get sponsored or make a donation on the day. For info visit www.oxfamstalbans.org or call 01727 869775 or email: hertshike@gmail.com

Dog Ladders

At a recent SRA committee meeting concern was raised at the erosion of certain parts of the river bank, especially by the Alban Way Bridge. It would appear that dogs going into the river and scrabbling in and out have damaged the bank and an earlier agreed solution of Dog Ladders had not been implemented. However, the committee quickly got in touch with Countryside Management Services and Dog ladders will be installed once consent has been given by the Environment Agency and an application for a grant from the River and wetlands Grant Fund has been approved. Hopefully safety for both canines and humans will be achieved in the not too distant future.

Situations Vacant

Your association is run by a dedicated group of volunteers. Volunteers come and go so we need to keep asking for help otherwise we will fold. If you feel you can give a little time to help us, please email info@sopwell.org.uk



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The Alban Way is what remains of the Hatfield to St Albans railway line and this October will see the 150th anniversary of the opening of this line and a group of dedicated enthusiasts are organising a splendid celebration of this event.

On **Friday the 16th October**, there will be a guided walk from Hatfield along the length of the whole line to St Albans, exploring the social, natural and railway history. Participants can do the whole walk or join at various stages along the route. In the evening, there will be a presentation and exhibition held at the University of Hertfordshire. Numbers on both these events will be limited. See www.smallford.org for details on how to book.

On **Sunday the 18th October** there will be more activities for you to enjoy. There will be another guided walk starting from the London Road station site (St Albans) this time and again at various stops along the line there will be activities for you to enjoy. Bring a picnic and wander along the line at your own pace and enjoy a great family day out. The SRA will be stationed at the London Road end with leaflets, photographs and Information about the railway from a Sopwell perspective. We are expecting to have the St Albans Signal Box in attendance and we are negotiating with local musicians to provide some musical entertainment. Whatever the outcome, treat the day as a train journey. You can 'board' and 'alight' when you like (but don't pull the emergency communication cord!) Finalised details will be found on the Smallford web site above.

Useful Contacts

Councillor Eileen Harris: 831611:
eileenharris555@btinternet.com
Councillor Iain Grant: 811286:
cllr.i.grant@stalbens.gov.uk
Councillor Janet Smith: 763907:
cllr.j.smith@stalbens.gov.uk
County Councillor Sandy Walkington: 07802 177317
sandywalkington@btinternet.com
Litter fly-tipping, graffiti: 0845 1258000 or
a.cleanerdistrict@stalbens.gov.uk
Faulty road or pavement surface: 01438 737320 or
www.hertsdirect.org/highwayfaults

Community Cafe

The community café at St Julian's is open every Thursday from 10am until 3pm for teas, coffees and homemade cake and from 11am – 2pm for light lunches. For lunch you can choose between a bowl of lovely homemade soup and a roll, a baked potato with a choice of toppings, a bacon bap or a toasted sandwich. The food and drinks are very reasonably priced. All profits made are passed on to the community. Last November, on the café's second anniversary, £1800 was split between four worthwhile causes. It is a real Internet café in a very friendly atmosphere. Wi-Fi connected computers are onsite and available for use free of charge while you are there. Why not come along to see?

Next Edition

The next edition will be out next Spring. 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.

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