

THAMES DITTON AND WESTON GREEN RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2007 - 2008

It is hard to believe my year as Chairman of the Residents Association has gone so quickly and I am called upon to give this Chairman's Report for the year just passed. It has been a busy year as we seek to deliver against our objectives; namely to protect the amenities and further the interests of inhabitants of the area and encourage a community spirit.

I am pleased to report that we still have a strong and increasing membership and I would like to thank our membership Secretary Peter Haynes and all his volunteers for giving everyone the opportunity to join.

I am also pleased to say that we still have five Borough Councillors, representing residents on Elmbridge Borough Council. Last May voters elected Karen Randolph to Thames Ditton ward following the retirement of Edward Rowe and returned the indefatigable Tannia Shipley to continue her sterling work on behalf of Weston Green.

In addition Peter Hickman continues to represent us, along with our neighbours in the Dittons Ward, on Surrey County Council.

I do feel that it is a great advantage having RA councillors at Borough and County level to represent the interests of residents without the need to be mindful of or constrained by a national party agenda. They work ceaselessly to make sure the Council Officers at both Elmbridge and Surrey are aware of the issues of the moment, to represent the residents' interests in council affairs and to make sure the councils fulfill their obligations on our behalf. You will be aware of all they do through our regular reports back to residents.

Keeping you informed

As an association we seek keep you fully informed regarding events affecting the community and the work we are doing on your behalf and we have three main channels of communication with you.

Most importantly we provide the opportunity for face to face, two way communication in our well advertised Open Meetings. These are held every couple of months and are open to all residents whether members or not. This provides the opportunity for people to hear

directly from RA councillors and officers, as well as ask questions and to provide input. This is not yet something emulated by the national parties.

We also publish news about our activities in Thames Ditton Today which is delivered quarterly to all homes in the area. At this point, I would like to thank Keith Evetts our magazine editor, our contributors and our new photographer Scott Horton. Scott took over from Tony Harris to whom thanks are also due for his years of support to the magazine. Also a big thank you to the volunteers who distribute the magazine. We get regular feedback from residents on how much they appreciate it.

With our final channel of communication we have moved firmly into the internet age with our excellent website. Currently we get around 6,000 visitors a month and it provides people with the opportunity to let us know what they are thinking as well as hearing the local news.

As we do report regularly through the year I intend to just highlight a few examples of the work of the past year.

Planning

We live in an attractive and sought after area, we also live in a time of a voracious demand for housing and subsequently development.

Graham Cooke, our committee member for planning has done a sterling job on behalf of the association; monitoring development applications, making representations where proposed developments are inappropriate and assisting local residents in making their voices heard. We are aware that there is a demand for housing and that no community can stand still, however we want to make sure development is appropriate for the area and does not adversely affect the inhabitants.

We make representations on a large number of planning applications and I intend to pick out just a few to illustrate our year which has had successes, some disappointments and some salutary learning points for us all.

16 – 18 Embercourt Road, land behind Thistledene

There have been a number of applications to develop this land, the first being for a two storey development of 6 apartments which we reported to you at the last AGM.

The final application for a single storey development still with 6 apartments was refused at committee thanks to efforts by residents and councillors. Disappointingly permission was granted on appeal. This does raise a concern for us since the Planning Inspector rejected issues related to high density. It would appear that we now have to show that high density applications will cause harm rather than merely cite the local planning guidelines.

13 Queens Drive

There have been 3 applications for development at 13 Queens Drive to which residents have strongly objected. The first two were refused at appeal, however, as expected, the developer continues to come back with proposals that do not appear to be substantially altered. So, as always, we need to continue to be vigilant.

The High Street.

And then there is the High Street. Many of you ask what is happening here in the heart of Thames Ditton. The properties from 25 to 31 the High Street are all owned by one company seeking to develop its holding.

Permission to build houses to the rear of number 25 and to demolish and rebuild the office building was granted back in 2001. However the work only really started to take shape last summer at which point it became evident that the buildings did not look like the plans, drawings and specifications submitted in the application. Most noticeably perhaps, the external appearance of the new office building fronting the High Street.

Persistent efforts by local residents (over 100 letters were received by the Planning Officer) letters from the RA and the Conservation Committee resulted in meeting between Graham Cook Cllrs David Lowe and Peter Hickman t and Town Planning Office Richard Elliot to discuss residents concerns. This resulted in a stop order being issued until the developer undertook to rectify some, if not all of the concerns.

This issue has brought to light unsatisfactory shortcomings in the detail accompanying planning approvals in Elmbridge's Conservation Areas, and in Council staffing required to enforce their implementation.

There have been numerous applications to develop 29 and 31 the High Street and with the support of Karen, David and Ruth Lyon we have opposed these on a number of points, in particular the attempt to reduce retail space in favour of accommodation. We believe that it is imperative to maintain the retail and office space in TD to ensure that we have a real village and avoid becoming a pretty dormitory.

It is disappointing that there is no overall plan for development of this important part of the village. The number of individual applications tests planning officers, residents and ourselves when looking to keep on top of what is actually going on and the overall impact of the plans.

Parking

At last year's AGM Martin Wilberforce reported that we had again taken up the initiative on the long-running problem of car parking and that Surrey County Council was about to start a public consultation process. Well, that public consultation process is still running its course. Through this last year we have seen SCC send out questionnaires to households, draw up some different proposals and request feedback from residents on those proposals. Thanks to the efforts of Peter Hickman, our Residents' Association County Councillor there have been three presentations of the proposals by SCC officials in the library. These presentations were also attended by Peter and Karen Randolph and were widely advertised by us to ensure people had the maximum opportunity to make their views known. Currently SCC is updating its proposals based on the feedback given; although we are still waiting for a questionnaire to be distributed to a number of roads around the station.

SCC tells us that it will continue to take account of representations until the final stage of the process at which point the Area Subcommittee will debate and agree a final proposal which will be put in writing to those in the affected areas for a final yes or no decision. At this point I would like to thank Peter Hickman for the effort he has put in and continues to put in to keep this on Surrey's agenda, make sure the process is thorough and provides full opportunities for consultation. Also to Ben Ellis who was our Convener for Highways and Drainage (until other work commitments meant he had to give up the role) and did a lot of the early work involved in capturing residents,

concerns and suggestions. Hopefully, by the next AGM, the Association's Chairman can report back the results of all the hard work regarding parking!

Policing

We are fortunate to live in a low crime area; however the decision by Surrey Police in early 2007 to stop holding PCPG meetings (Police Community Partnership Group) concerned local residents. We invited the Elmbridge Neighbourhood Inspector Paul Yearwood, to address our July open meeting on future plans for consultation. As a result of that session it was agreed that Surrey Police would hold a short panel session to report back to residents and hear their concerns, just before our Open Meetings. This has the advantage of keeping local consultation going and we will continue to press for an occasional senior presence at those meetings.

Highways & Drainage

Fortunately this year has not seen a major issue with flooding in the village at the height of the flooding around the country, water here rose no higher than the decking at The Swan. Our efforts to get Surrey to unblock some of the drains in the village meant that there was less standing water than previously around the village roads.

As you know, flooding around Esher Station has been a perennial problem and one that does not have a once and for all fix, the pesky trees keep growing, ditches fill with debris and the problem resurfaces. However in February Tannia Shipley succeeded in getting Network Rail, Surrey Highways to join herself and Peter Hickman and undertake an extensive review the whole area and agree a programme of work to keep the area clear. However we do note that local householders also have a part to play in maintaining drainage ditches in their gardens.

One of my favourite website pieces was the imaginative "Dittons in Bloom". For some months last year Peter Hickman had been trying to get Surrey County Council to discharge their obligations to keep our streets and footways clear of weeds. In August the latest of a number of excuses was that they had no resources available because they were "heavily engaged in 'Cobham In Bloom'".

We therefore photographed the weed growth round these villages as **'Dittons in Bloom'** a ground-breaking example of street garden design spearheaded by Surrey CC Highways Department with some

contributions from Elmbridge Borough Council. This was picked up by BBC Regional news and local media. The exposure had the desired effect and over the four weeks that followed both councils took action to clear the weeds.

This is a good time to record my thanks to Keith Evetts for the website for which we have had plaudits from as far away as the Isle of Man!

Public Health

County Councillor Peter Hickman and Borough Councillor Ruth Lyon both sit on the SCC Health Scrutiny Committee and they, along with the Friends of Thames Ditton Hospital led by Karen Randolph, continue to challenge the Surrey Primary Care Trust's decision unilaterally to close the remaining NHS beds at Emberbrook. Breaking news is that the Chairman of the SCC Health Scrutiny Committee has received a letter from the Surrey PCT stating that the contract with Four Season for the 4 beds at Emberbrook Care Centre still existed unchanged. As this is not the message given previously we are seeking urgent clarification. We know that it is important to local people to have intermediate and postoperative care available locally and we are keeping the pressure on.

In conclusion

Christmas Fayre

Once more we supported a very successful Christmas Fayre with a large numbers of residents taking the opportunity come and socialise and foster that community spirit which makes this a special place to live. We provided the Christmas tree for the village as we head into spring we have once again provided a number of bulbs to brighten us up; thanks to John Lyon for planting them. As we look forward Maureen Sheldrick is going to stand down as Elbridge BC at the next election. She has served residents of Weston Green tirelessly since 1992 and at this point I would like to ask Ruth Lyon to come forward and make a presentation to Maureen in gratitude for all her hard work.

~~and the Borough Council in a number of roles, latterly as a member of the Community affairs overview and scrutiny committee and the Council Planning Committee. I think that the highlight of Maureen's time as councilor was when she was Mayor from 2001-2002. She has said she found this to be a thoroughly enjoyable time and loved~~

~~meeting the huge number of volunteers who so willingly give their time to the community. She will be remembered for her magnificent Mayor's appeal when she raised £68,000 for Hearing dogs for Deaf People the charity she had chosen to support for her Mayoral year.~~

Thank you very much Maureen for all your hard work. I have briefly touched on the good work of all the other councillors and thank you all for your efforts.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, our Association can only prosper with the participation and support of its members and on behalf of the Officers and Committee I would like to thank you all. Thank you.