

BVRA newsheet

from the Banstead Village Residents' Association

Volume 24 : No 3 - Autumn 2008

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Dear Residents

This last quarter has been dominated by the deteriorating economic situation, with the drop in house prices at its core. There is, however, no sign as yet of an impact on the flow of planning applications, which continue to materialise. The good news is that the latest attempt to build on Courtlands Farm has been stopped – the appeal went in favour of the Council, and we would like to thank the Park Road Residents' Association for their efforts. The bad news is that the first moves have been made by a development company in regard to the land which Legal and General recently sold, relating to the area that lies north of Copt Hill Lane and east of the A217. Although this is technically outside our boundaries it is part of "our" Green Belt and clearly of major interest to us; we shall work with the Kingswood and Burgh Heath Associations to monitor developments, liaise with our Council and in due course mount maximum resistance to any inappropriate plans as and when it becomes necessary. More details appear in the following articles.

Co-ordination between the many RAs is becoming easier with the growing effectiveness of the Banstead and District Federation (BDFRA) which represents the northern wards of the Borough. Since the two 'Planning Forum' meetings mentioned in our last NewsSheet, we have held two of the Federation's quarterly meetings. At the last one, we elected Tony Blacoe (Park Road RA) as Chairman of the Federation and Ralph Maciejewski (Nork RA) as Vice-chairman; we now have a full complement of officers and we are grateful to Tony and Ralph for taking on these additional tasks over and above their roles in their own RAs. At the next meeting both Councillor Mrs Joan Spiers, the Leader of the R&BBC, and Councillor Miller have kindly agreed to attend; we shall be able to have a final discussion of planning matters before the consultation period on the South East Plan closes at the end of October.

Our AGM was held on 22nd May. It went well, with an interesting talk by Tim Harrold of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. The officers and members of the Executive Committee were all re-elected and there was lively discussion with the Councillors who were present. Tim Harrold's talk emphasised that the CPRE's interests in resisting breaches of the Green Belt align with our own; they are already discussing with the Borough Council resistance to development of the Copt Hill Lane site. Our residents present at the AGM appreciated their efforts to preserve the Green Belt. There was, unfortunately, a lower attendance than usual; we shall try to find a way to improve future attendance numbers.

PS: The government's decision to amend the South East Plan to require a dramatic increase in housing in our borough is mentioned lower down. Included in this NewsSheet is a separate "flyer" that has been produced by the BDFRA. We urge you to read it and act on it!

Roger Collins

(01737) 358384

POLICE MATTERS

1. Local issues

The neighbourhood police panel meeting held at Banstead Junior School on 3rd July

enjoyed much better attendance than the two previous meetings held this year.

Eighteen local residents gave up an hour of their evening to hear what the police are

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doing to combat crime in Banstead and the surrounding area.

At the meeting, Sergeant Haycock, who is responsible for policing in Banstead, gave a strategic view of policing in the area. Crime in Banstead remains consistently low in comparison to other local towns such as Redhill and Crawley. The main issues are burglary and car crime and Sergeant Haycock reminded residents of the need for constant vigilance and the need to secure homes and vehicles.

Four police forces in the country have been selected to move away from a target centred approach to policing and will instead measure their success through confidence and satisfaction expressed by the communities they serve (that's us folks). Surrey has been chosen as one of the forces to participate in this initiative. Details of how satisfaction would be measured were not provided but this panel meeting is a good start if you want to come and voice your concerns.

Residents are encouraged to report crime whenever they have concerns about suspicious activity. A number of residents at the meeting expressed concerns about criminal activity of which they were aware but which had received little attention from the local force. Sergeant Haycock explained that resources could only be diverted to areas where significant reports of crime are made. One example was a nursery in Nork which is regularly vandalised but where witnesses have failed to report activity in the area until well after the event. We are also asked to report any business vans which do not include a landline with their name.

The next meeting will take place on 20th November 2008, 7.30, Banstead Junior School in The Horseshoe. Please come and support local initiatives for combating crime.

In the meantime the message is clear - phone in to report any incidents you see as they occur.

Lindsay Iorwerth

(01737) 353906

2. Funding

In the last edition, I mentioned that Surrey Police were being threatened with having their budget increase capped by central government. At worst the council tax bill would have had to be recalculated and new ones sent out.

They did get capped - announced on June 26th - but were allowed to keep this year's budget. The effect of this will be felt in future years as £1.9m - the difference between the 6% increase proposed by the police and the cap of 5% - will have to be clawed back.

However the Surrey Police Authority announced on July 21st that they were challenging the government's decision to cap their budgets for the next 2 years.

Surrey are the equal top performing force in the country in that they tick more of the boxes on government set targets than anyone else. Referring to the change to common sense policing mentioned above, Mark Rowley, acting chief constable, stated that "we will get fewer ticks in boxes in the future and inevitably fall from our perch at the top of the league table". The bobby on the beat would be given discretion to treat minor offences as just that - minor offences. Consequently less time will be spent filling in forms and working out whether they have met a target or not.

This re-inforces the need for us to keep the police informed immediately any transgressions are spotted!

David Gradidge

(01737) 353981

LOCAL PLANNING MATTERS

Several "interesting" recent matters:

Courtlands Farm, Park Road - as reported last time the planning appeal was held at the end of May. Both BVRA and Park Road RA attended in support of the Council's case.

The PRRA's planning consultant (to whose fees we made a contribution) made some worthwhile additional points not raised by the Council, and the Inspector subsequently rejected the appeal.

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Although this is the second occasion on which unsuitable development proposals for this land have been successfully resisted, it's current open storage use is also inappropriate and we wait to see what will happen.

30 Sutton Lane - the council was about to refuse this application when the developer went to appeal on non-determination (if the council does not approve or refuse in 8 weeks the applicant can appeal against the lack of decision). The appeal was by way of exchange of letters and we await the outcome.

Amberley, Bolters Lane - the appeal was held by exchange of letters and subsequently, we were pleased to see, dismissed.

27 Lyme Regis Road - the applicant has appealed against the council's refusal of both applications, and a date for the informal hearing is expected to be in November. Any resident affected by the proposals can attend and, subject to the Inspector's decision, participate. We shall attend, as will a number of local residents who have strenuously objected to these backland schemes. Interestingly, a further application to extend the site, this time for 6 detached houses, has recently been submitted, so it remains to be seen if this may affect the appeal.

Banstead Estate - this is the name given to the 526 acres of green belt land sold recently by Legal & General to property speculators Whitecote Ltd. They failed in their first attempt to get the government to include it in the list of eco-towns, but clearly have aspirations for major developments.

They have recently indicated their intention of submitting an application for a retirement village on 11 hectares (nearly 30 acres) of agricultural land. We read that this would be based on a "hotel resort" model and include 300,000 sq ft of accommodation of up to three storeys; this would apparently include a 60 bed nursing home, 60 close care suites, 140 close care units, restaurant, café, coffee shop, village shop, bowling

green, spa, library/internet room, key worker accommodation (size unspecified). (For comparison purposes, the Banstead Waitrose store covers less than 20,000 sq ft, and 300,000 sq ft is not far short of 7 acres!)

Although the land lies within the Kingswood ward and they will have the lead role, we and Burgh Heath will be closely involved as adjoining RA's. Whatever the need may be for more retirement homes, this proposal is inappropriate for a green belt location. In view of the many adverse effects these proposals would have we have asked the council to require an Environmental Impact Assessment to be submitted with any planning application.

Fairlawn Paddock, Fairlawn Road - an application to retain buildings associated with a private stable use, and extend the use to commercial equestrian activities was refused by the council on green belt grounds. The Planning Inspector upheld the refusal and awarded the council some of its costs.

Finally: i - a growing trend of increasing pressure on green belt sites, both large and small appears to be emerging. It is encouraging to see that so far the planning policies are, by and large, robust and supported on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate, but it remains to be seen how this situation will survive in the light of government determination to force both a large increase in housing (way over that achieved each year so far, and which will put pressure on the densities applied to redevelopment sites in the borough), and review of the green belt. The current indications are that the green belt boundaries around the hub of Reigate/Redhill will come under most pressure at first. It is important that this pressure does not extend to erode the narrow and vital green belt cushion between Banstead and Sutton, or between our smaller local and separate communities.

The prospect of raising funds to fight specific proposals, on a joint basis with other RA's, is one your committee may have to address.

ii - another less significant, but interesting,

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trend is the refusal of planning permission in a few cases where the applicant has not undertaken to make the payment towards infrastructure provision that the council now requires for new developments. The council is to be applauded for extending this scheme to the whole borough, after "triallying" it in Horley, to obtain payments from developers that will be applied to various infrastructure enhancements (these are set out with the scale of charges in a planning policy statement).

Mike Sawyer

(01737) 355454

INFRASTRUCTURE

In September 2007, I recorded the state of all the gullies (drains to you and me) in Sutton Lane, Bolters Lane, Winkworth Road and the High St. A year later and it is time to see what has changed and has anything improved? Apart from early July, although it has been rather wet at times, it has not been on the scale of the Summer of 2007.

Regrettably, from looking at Sutton Lane and Winkworth Road, it is safe to say that the situation gets steadily worse with the exception of the far west of Winkworth Road. Almost all the gullies are in a worse state with many more blocked to the top with debris - and in a few cases with healthy vegetation sprouting from the grill. In my view any moderately severe rainstorm will now lead to flooding in the areas that suffered in 2007.

I have been in correspondence (August 5th with copies to all local Councillors) with the Local Highways Manager for Surrey CC regarding the state of the gullies and also the problems in Holly Lane. Here I highlighted the flood water which wells up from the manhole cover near Great Ellshams and the dangerous state of the road further down by Holly Lane East where the road margin has been eroded leaving a drop of 8" or more. In the reply (which I won't detail) it was stated, amongst other things, that the contractor, Conway, would be in the Banstead area during August working on the gullies. I can confirm that, but can see no

evidence that any gullies on the main roads have been tackled.

Today, (Sept 2nd) and after overnight rain, I had another look at the erosion in Holly Lane and was shocked to see how much it has worsened in just a few weeks. The drop looks more like 1ft in places, the white line demarcating the road edge is now missing for 20 yds or more and the mass of water-borne debris has multiplied. The good news is that there is now a cluster of red cones! I shall reply to Surrey CC reiterating the problems as I see them and will report back in the New Year.

David Gradidge

(01737) 353981

LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANS

The Local Development Framework (LDF) reached us for consultation in July and the Council held a seminar at the Town Hall. It is a large document that sets the 'strategic spatial vision' within which the planning process will take place for the period to 2026.

The LDF identifies the Council's Core Strategy and the 'preferred options' that the Council has selected to deliver that strategy, on a full range of issues - local character, housing, parking, transport, environmental and commercial policies are proposed. We have submitted our views to the Council, as have several other RAs (Nork, Kingswood etc).

The LDF, however, has in some important respects been overtaken by the Secretary of State's proposals to change the South East Plan (the SEP). This was first developed by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and sets the 'Regional Spatial Strategy' (RSS) within which all planning in the region must take place. The LDF for Reigate & Banstead must be in general conformity with the RSS. Following consultation by SEERA with Local Authorities, RAs and other interested bodies such as CPRE, through an 'Examination in Public' (EIP) in which we were, marginally, involved, the government appointed inspectors issued a Panel Report in August 2007. The whole process and the remit of SEERA were described at length by Tony Ford in our

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Autumn 2007 NewsSheet. Now, in July 2008, we have the Government's response to the Panel Report, with some major modifications to the SEP - another large document of 844 pages. The government's consultation process should lead to the final adoption of a South East Plan sometime in 2009. In parallel to this process runs the transfer of authority for planning from SEERA to another body, South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) which is even less democratic and more of a government quango than its predecessor.

At the core of the changes proposed by the government lie housing targets and the green belt. The government is calling for 1500 extra houses and flats in the London Fringe sub-region of the Borough (that's us) and 500 in the Gatwick sub-region - that's 22% over and above the numbers called for in the Panel recommendations. The Council had planned to accommodate the previous housing targets, although they are far higher than most areas of the South-East. Now they will have to reconsider how to achieve the housing numbers and whether to modify the LDF to take account of the new targets. The original targets could have been achieved without threat to the Green Belt whereas it is doubtful whether the increased numbers can be accommodated without breaching the green belt. The government's commitment to maintaining the integrity of the green belt also appears to have weakened with its instruction to review green belt boundaries - presumably to meet their otherwise unachievable new housing targets.

The R&BBC is likely to resist the increase in housing targets. Your MP, Crispin Blunt, has written to RAs to request their support in challenging the government proposals. The Council held a seminar on 20th August to discuss the LDF and the revised SEP proposals, which was well attended. The programme of action is for the Council Executive to agree on its detailed response to Government on 25 September. As this is almost at the end of the consultation period it is calling for RAs to develop their own

responses and share these with the Council prior to submission. So September will see some hard work for your committee. Individual members of the public may also participate directly; the 'Companion Document' (312 pages) to the Secretary of State's proposed changes is effectively a revised South East Plan, and can be downloaded from the internet - it's on the GOSE website.

Time is short, since you will not see this article until mid-September, but although there is no obligation on individuals to co-ordinate with the Council, as we shall be doing, you may wish to write to your MP at the House of Commons.

Roger Collins

(01737) 358384

LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN (and the other plan for Banstead)

Back in 2004, the Association participated in the preparation of a "Five Year Plan" for Banstead Village. That plan, lead by the Town Centre Management Group for Banstead, set out a series of aspirations for what the local community wish to see happen in the centre of the village over the period 2004 - 2009. In previous newsheets we have reported on the plan and on the limited progress there has been towards achieving those aspirations.

However, the Borough Council never really supported that initiative - the attempt by the community in Banstead to try and shape its own future seeming to be out of step with the Council's approach via Corporate Plans, Community Plans and the like.

In July 2006, the Borough Council commenced its own version - the Local Community Action Plan (LCAP) and started from scratch with a range of questionnaires, feedback sessions and other consultation with residents, businesses and local organisations, covering all of Banstead Village ward. Whilst this was going on, any further progress with implementing "our" Five Year Plan was put on hold.

The draft LCAP document was not issued until February 2008 and the document is available on the Council's website. It sets out

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proposed actions under a series of headings covering the items which were found to be important to the people of Banstead. In summary, these are as follows:

- Lady Neville Recreation Ground: Borough Council to implement a project to rejuvenate the pavilion (subject to securing a suitable franchise for the proposed café) and to upgrade the children's play area and other facilities within the park;

- Streetscene and the "public realm" in the centre of the village: Borough Council to identify feasible "small-scale" projects to enhance the streetscene;

- Planning and the control of development: Borough Council to continue to make available planning information;

- Recycling : Borough Council to "continue to make improvements";

- Cleanliness: Borough Council to promote the "Love where you live campaign";

- Opportunities for young people: This centres on trying to include some specific provision for young people within the redevelopment of the Lady Neville;

- Fear of crime: Investigate where sight lines for the CCTV cameras are obscured by vegetation (!)

- Highway flooding: Resolve flooding at junction of Garratts Lane and Bolters Lane;

There are also references to findings from the LCAP process to be passed to Surrey County Council for their consideration - this includes public transport, road and pavement condition and parking.

Under most of these headings there are also lists of things that the community can do. An example is that problems with pavement condition can be reported to Surrey County Council via a phone number (08456 0090090) or the Council website.

Overall, this document, so long in the preparation, seems thin on positive and meaningful actions. The only item with any substance to it (rejuvenation of the Lady Neville) is a project that is already quite advanced (see later in this newsheet).

However, in the nature of these things, the LCAP is viewed by the Borough Council as the future for community planning and hence the inclusion of the Lady Neville scheme within the LCAP has been helpful in ensuring that the project does progress and in attracting the necessary funding.

The Executive Committee have met with the Council officer responsible for the LCAP who gave some further information on actions that are underway. This has concentrated on opportunities for young people where there have been some positive efforts to engage with youngsters and to identify ways in which the local authority and other agencies can assist.

One potential benefit of this whole process is that there has been some constructive contact with the businesses in the High Street to understand their priorities. We hope that this may lead to a greater involvement of the business community in planning and supporting the activities of the village.

The Association has responded to the LCAP, welcoming the greater engagement with young people and with business that has been initiated, but lamenting the lack of any real, hard actions in this supposed "Action Plan". We have suggested that success of the plan, which covers a nominal three year period, will be judged on whether at the end of it we have:

- Lady Neville redeveloped and operating satisfactorily;

- The Village Lights continuing and with a firm management arrangement in place;

 - The frontage of Tesco revamped;

 - The flooding outside Victoria Chemist resolved;

 - A significant improvement in the standard of repair of the roads and pavements including The Horseshoe.

Currently we are awaiting a further meeting with the Council officers to see how these items may be progressed and what role the Association might play in achieving these results.

Tony Ford

(01737) 354757

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COUNCIL TAX - "an idiots guide" (concluded)

In the last publication I was less than complimentary about the quality of information provided by local councils and especially the lack of explanation.

Reigate & Banstead do attempt to tell you what has changed between one year and the next, but the lack of explanatory notes leaves you with more questions than answers. For instance the budget for Finance & Resources (whatever that is) was £6.7m in 2007/08 but a negative £1.6m - a source of income - for 2008/09 - why?!!

With Surrey CC, I complained that their one sheet of A4 hard information was being replaced by blank spaces and large script. Again large changes in budgeted expenditure go without comment. Why, for instance, did the budget for Children & Young People increase £28.9m or 27% between 2007/08 and 2008/09.

To dig down I thought, naively, that I would try the internet. Yes, you can find the full accounts, but it should carry a health warning. There are pages and pages of accounting principles before you get to the detail and then, to follow, the same again of explanatory notes. The latest accounts posted are 2006/07 - 2007/08 won't be available until October - but there are summaries if you don't like detail.

The summary for Surrey was quite straight forward; budget was compared to actual and showed a net underspend of £7m, which on a total budget of £587m looks reasonable. With R & B, however, although the headings were the same the actual expenditure varied from budget (sometimes by more than 100%) with no clear explanation. Why, for instance, has a budget of £6.2m on neighbourhood services become an actual spend of £9.3m?

When you look at the detail you start to get a headache but I'll just highlight a few points:

1. The income and expenditure accounts

bear little resemblance to the budgets as shown in the detail provided to tax payers, or to the potted versions mentioned above.

2. Pension provisions and pension fund deficits are a significant part of the detail provided. The deficits will only increase over time. I'll have a look at the 2007/08 accounts in due course.

3. Surrey CC reported that the Capital Expenditure budget was underspent by £39.5m (over 37% of the total) and again there was no explanation.

Summing up, whilst no doubt both Councils do all that they have to do by statute, they could do much better in providing explanations in their published statements.

David Gradidge

(01737) 353981

LADY NEVILLE IMPROVEMENTS

The childrens' play area and adjoining parts of the recreation ground will be closed at the beginning of next year for the planned works.

The old pavilion is to be turned into a glass-fronted coffee shop, the children's playground is to be refurbished and older children will be able to play in a new multi-use games area - all part of an overhaul due to be completed by the summer at a cost of £446,000. This money is coming mostly from Reigate & Banstead council (£316,000), plus Big Lottery Fund (£65,000), Surrey CC (£15,000) and planning gain money (£50,000). We look forward to the results of this significant investment.

Mike Sawyer

(01737) 355454

BANSTEAD LIGHTS

It appears that no-one in Banstead is prepared to ensure that our lights get switched on this year.

The plea on behalf of the Town Centre Management committee in the last Newssheet for a public spirited volunteer to supervise the checking and repair/replacement of our Christmas (sorry, for council purposes we can't call them that anymore!) Lights has had NO RESPONSE.

So this year, unless someone comes

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forward very quickly **they will not be switched on.** In a village of about 8,500 people I expected to have several calls - how wrong could I be?

And, to quote Delia Smith - **"where are you? Come on, let's be having you!"**

We only need a couple of volunteers - even just one would do! - to put in a very few hours of work to make sure that all the good work of the last few years is not thrown away.

Mike Sawyer

(01737) 355454

BRITAIN IN BLOOM

In the last Newsheet we reported that we, your local councillors and some of the local traders, had contributed to the funds available for the planters in the High Street this summer. The extra money raised was used to enhance the shopping area and, hopefully, secure a better award from the national Britain in Bloom competition than last year's bronze. Although some of the maintenance of the fixed planters has been disappointing, the panel awarded Banstead a silver medal in recognition both of these improvements and the contribution to the appearance of the High Street made by those businesses who provide their own planting schemes - eg Zizzis, Woolpack, Ciao Italia. It is hoped that next year's scheme will be even better.

Mike Sawyer

(01737) 355454

BANSTEAD WILDLIFE FIELD

We reported last time that the refurbished pond is now full of life, and that local schools visit from time to time. We asked for volunteers to help maintain this attractive area on an occasional basis, involving path maintenance, raking up cuttings in the Autumn, and from time to time keeping brambles under control. We still need more volunteers - only a few hours work - so let me know if you can help.

David Gradidge

(01737) 353981

LICENCING

We have, for some time, been pressing the council to improve the information available to, in particular, neighbours when an application for one of the many statutory licences - eg alcohol sale/consumption, music, dancing - is made. We are pleased that they now put the details on their web site so, if you see one of the small statutory notices, you can (albeit with difficulty) now find out what it is for.

We will continue to press the council to undertake the same consultation as for planning applications to remove this "hit or miss" way of discovering an application that may significantly affect our local environment.

Mike Sawyer

(01737) 355454

MEMBERSHIP & ROAD STEWARDS

We continue to do well in filling vacancies for road stewards and volunteers are always welcome. I now have a road steward for Diceland Road - many thanks. However there are 2 gaps. One is for the East of Lambert Road where we have 18 members and the other is for Grange Gardens where there are 20 members. Please call me if you know of anyone who can help.

The peak time for collecting subscriptions is September and October. Well, it used to be, but there has been a recent trend to let this slip a bit, even into February, which gives problems with the accounting year end.

It would be of great help to me if all subs could be collected before the end of November given that December is a bit of a blank. If you have any problems please let me know.

David Gradidge

(01737) 353981

CHRISTMAS PARKING

Just a reminder that each year the council allows free parking in Banstead, usually on the first Saturday in December. Details are not finalised yet but will be available on their web-site.

Mike Sawyer

(01737) 355454