



Leatherhead Residents' Association

We aim to:

Conserve and develop the amenities of Leatherhead.

Promote an active interest in the community and in local government.

- Foster and promote the development and enhancement of the local community for the benefit of the residents.

Autumn Newsletter 2010 – Vol. 8

Contributions to the Newsletter are always most welcome. The views expressed are those of the contributors and are not necessarily shared by the Association

*We email members when new information comes our way; sometimes emails have been returned as “undeliverable”. **If you have changed your email address, could you please let us know.** Also, if any member reading this wishes to be added to the email list, please visit the ‘Contact page’ on our website and complete the on-line form.*

We also try to keep members and others up to date on our Blog: lrassociation.blogspot.com (Those without home computers can access this in Leatherhead Library)



From our Chairman

Dear members

You will have seen from the size of this Newsletter that it seems that there is only one thing on our minds. Well that is not quite the picture. Looking back over the summer I am pleased to tell you that the Residents' Association has grown in influence within the community. We have enjoyed the confidence of Mole Valley Council Officers and we have bonded with both the Leatherhead Area Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce. We have also met regularly with our fellow Residents' Associations in Bookham, Fetcham and Ashted.

One of the topics of our talks has been the future of the Town and District Forum. We have yet to know what the Council propose to do with the Area Forums. These have performed differently in different places. But since the last Council elections the forums have ceased, meanwhile the Town and District Forum continues but without the involvement of the Council. Is this the way forward for the Town? It raises the question of whether we should seek to transform the Town Forum into a Town Council. This would have the same responsibilities as the Parish Councils in the south of the District. Whilst this would give us more local say in local matters, it would also cost us an extra charge on top of our Council Tax.

While we may worry about how we make decisions in the Town, our Councillors will be deciding whether or not to have an elected mayor or a 'strong leader'. This decision is due to be debated by the Council on the 30th November.

We live in interesting times. I wish you all a Happy Christmas.

Kind regards

Hubert Carr

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Leatherhead Town Centre: Have your say

Those of you who have lived in Leatherhead during the last 10 years or more know that there is probably no more controversial subject than the High Street. At our well-attended July open meeting, Andrew Bircher, Corporate Head of Service, MVDC Planning Department, informed us of a small budget (mainly 106 Developer Contributions) now available for use to improve the High Street and that a consultation process would take place in the Autumn.

Businesses are already being canvassed; we understand that about two thirds have now been approached. The promised public questionnaire is out and some of you have probably already completed it. But for those who have not, please get a copy and make *your* views known. The questionnaire is now available from the Help Shop in the High Street.

It is also available online; open www.molevalley.gov.uk, then under 'Have your say about Leatherhead Town centre', click on 'read more' where, after the first paragraph, you'll see in green 'Please complete the survey here.'

If you prefer, you may ring Mole Valley District Council on 01306 885001 and ask to be sent a copy. **Whatever your choice, make sure you get a copy. If you have not yet completed the survey, please complete and return it before November 22nd.**

Several of our Committee members have independently written *their own personal views* about the High Street and the town centre; there is quite a bit in common in several of these articles and at the October Committee Meeting I, as editor, was asked to produce a composite version so that you did not have to read the same things over again.

Those of you with Internet connection may recall that on the LRA Blog 'Fulvius' wrote: "*Now we have once again talk of yet another revamp of the High Street and the bit of Church Street between the barrier and the High Street What about the rest of Church Street? Coming into the town past empty shopping premises is not exactly a good advertisement for the town. What about Bridge Street and North Street? Shouldn't we be thinking about the **whole of the town centre**, not tinkering again with just part of it? Would it not make more sense to have an overall strategy for the whole town centre?*"

Caroline Brown echoes similar sentiments in her article:

The Leatherhead shopping area does not consist solely of one street, but rather of four and any plans or designs should encompass all four to give a certain homogeneity. Two of the streets are accessible to vehicular traffic all the time, the remaining two only at certain times. There is a wide variety of building style. Shoppers want comfortable and attractive surroundings so as to feel tempted to return.

The Town Centre

Hubert Carr similarly takes a wider view of the town centre than just the High Street. Indeed he begins his article with three paragraphs in which he discusses the function of the town centre itself.

We must look forward and not hark back to the past. The Centre of our Town needs to grow and change with the changing patterns of urban life. Shopping habits are changing. Specialist shops are being phased out by the Internet. The Town is not big enough to support *comparative shopping* such as in Kingston, Guildford etc. However it can provide personal services, such as hairdressers, who cannot provide their services over the Internet. *Convenience shopping* is now becoming quite widespread through Petrol Stations which are outside the Town Centre.

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But shopping is not the only function of a Town Centre. Whilst the Internet may open opportunities for some services such as banking, we do need to discuss our finances with professional advisers, such as the traditional Bank Manager, or a financial consultant. Solicitors and other professionals also tend to set up their business in the midst of Town. Take a walk up the High Street – or any of the other three streets of our Town and you will see lots of businesses apart from retail shops. Indeed the Town is now blessed with some good Restaurants and food outlets.



I believe that the Town should be a centre for the cultural establishments, where people can gather for entertainment, and such pursuits. In this we are fortunate in having an excellent Theatre/Cinema, The Institute which houses so many activities including this Association, and the Library. We have a range of well attended Churches and Chapels, and even 2 sports centres. These all form the nucleus of our District (At least the north of Mole Valley). Never the less it is a small Town, and none of these establishments are far from the crossroads

The above, of course, is Hubert's personal view; and some of the statements are, admittedly, debatable and certainly not all his fellow Committee members would go along with everything. However, I think we may agree that "We must look forward [t]he Centre of our Town needs to grow and change ...". The question is how it should grow and change. Also, although we cannot turn the clock back, it is useful to remind ourselves how we got where we are so that we can avoid the mistakes of the past and move forward.

How we got where we are

The High Street was once very different and two of our Committee have this to say:

Paula Sabine writes:

Back when pedestrianisation for Leatherhead High Street was first proposed, it seemed like a good idea, and would make Leatherhead more attractive to visitors and easier to shop in.

However, because it didn't work and many of the local traders closed down, it was decided over 13 years ago to introduce a compromise to keep pedestrianisation for 6 hours but to allow cars into the High Street before 1030am and after 4.30pm.

Because Surrey County Council didn't put in the right traffic order, cars were able to park in the High Street all day, provided they drove in before 10.30 am and weren't moved until after 4.30 pm. In addition SCC did nothing to control where the cars were parked, so cars ended up all over the place, making it extremely difficult for shoppers to move around.

To counteract this all-day parking, SCC introduced a traffic order which prevented traffic parking in the High Street between 10am and 6.30pm. The times designated were apparently because it was a standard traffic order and easily implemented. However, fairly soon, 6.30pm was changed to 6.00 pm – apparently because it was pointed out that 6.30 pm made it too difficult for theatre users to park in the High Street and then to eat in a restaurant before a theatre show!

Cheryl Allen writes:

When I moved to Leatherhead almost 12 years agoI knew nothing of the events that had led up to the closing of the High Street and the creation of a one-way system around the town. Neither did I know that a thriving town with a wide variety of shops had almost turned into a 'ghost town' after the High Street closed

For many it was distressing to see their lovely town lose shop after shop after the closing of the High Street and redirection of traffic. In early 1990s The Leatherhead Society engaged the Civic

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Trust to write a comprehensive evaluation of Leatherhead and to make recommendations to reinvigorate the dying town. **The main recommendation was a compromise that suggested opening the High Street to traffic and short term parking for a few hours a day.** SCC actually took this information on board and allowed cars to park on the High Street before 10:30 and after 4:30. It was these hours that I enjoyed when I first arrived in Leatherhead. Unfortunately SCC failed to keep cars off the High Street at the times it was pedestrianised.

Some reading the above may be puzzled that Paula says cars may not park until 6.00 pm. But this is strictly true; under the present regulations cars may only stop to drop or pick between 4.30 and 6.00 pm. But this has been infrequently enforced and in effect cars are parked on most days from 4.30 pm onwards.

No one at the July meeting wanted a return to full pedestrianization; there were a few who wanted a return to the 'old days' when traffic was allowed along the High Street at all times. The majority, however, seemed basically to want to keep the current sort of compromise. But there was concern about the way parking happens at present which often makes life difficult for pedestrians.

Parking on the High Street.

Caroline writes:

Shoppers also need to feel safe so a clear indication of where and when cars or vans are likely to appear must be offered. I personally feel that permitting cars on the street from 4.30 pm is helpful to people and, although the Swan Centre car park is free after 6.00 pm, the High Street should remain available for limited parking



And this is where, I think, the problem lies. If a car will fit a space it will be parked there and the combined result of so much parking is a clutter and a mess. The small, square paving stones were, I believe, meant to be the only parking areas in the High Street, but nowhere is the motorist told that. These need CLEAR delineation (e.g. a surrounding line of white stones, or, perhaps, dark brown ones). Somewhere in the High Street there needs to be a notice indicating the free availability of the Swan Centre car park with an arrow to show which way to turn at the top.

Cheryl writes

I believe that **currently too many cars are allowed to park on the High Street.** Various rubbish bins, statues, and benches have been placed here and there to make parking difficult. Sufficient signage to indicate parking spaces would be unsightly and road markings would spoil the look of the expensive pavements. Therefore, I think that **there should be no parking in the narrower part of the High Street on the north side of the street.** A railing should be installed between the roadway and the pavement to act as a physical barrier to parking. The **pavement behind the railings would provide a safe place for pedestrians to walk both night and day** because the uneven stones in the middle of the road are unsafe for walking. For safety some of the benches could also be placed behind these railings in a sheltered position.

Paula writes:

The Healthcheck report stated that people wanted more on-street parking in Leatherhead, and a few years ago, this suggestion was put forward, which I personally still agree with:

....

Control where cars can park, so it is not the mess it is at the moment –

- A) On the right-hand side of the High Street (the Edmund Tylney pub side) there are already areas where cars can park. Remove all the street clutter from this side and make more parking spaces. Make it obvious where the parking is allowed.

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- B) On the left-hand side of the High Street put some of the clutter on the edge of the roadside, together with some decorative iron posts or flower containers to prevent cars parking and to create a 'pavement area' where people can walk.
- C) Allow parking outside Argos and Building Supplies after they have closed for the evening, as there is room for 2-3 cars. Move the aluminium cycle racks and put in cast iron ones somewhere else. (Why did someone think aluminium was appropriate for a historic town? Reigate has attractive ones.)
- D) At the ramp area, make it obvious where the road actually is, allow parking at the top of the ramp and put iron posts on the Santander corner to stop parking on a blind bend.

....

Bookham High Street is open to traffic (in the BookhamVision survey only a small percentage wanted it to become pedestrianised) with on-street parking all the way down one-side, so what is wrong with Leatherhead having the same?

Hubert, however, would solve the parking problem by simply not having cars in the High Street. He writes:

The Town now has a centralised car park – The Swan Centre. You may complain at the size of the bays, but it is free after 6.00 pm, and opens out through the Swan Centre to the High Street. Free evening parking is available in Elm Road, and in a number of other private car parks in the Town. I do not believe that there is any case for cluttering our streets with parked cars. However there is a need for vehicles to serve some of the shops – but these should give way to pedestrians. After all it is only the pedestrians who can go into the shops, and restaurants.

Tables and Chairs on the High Street

Another controversial matter is the question of tables and chairs outside public houses and restaurants, especially when traffic is allowed on the High Street. **Hubert** merely asks: "... the restaurants are seeking the right to put tables in the Highway - to what extent is this trend good for the ambiance of the streets?" Two other members have a little more to say.



Paula writes:

Allow tables and chairs outside restaurants only where there is plenty of room. If there isn't enough room, then 'tough'. In our climate, how many months of the year can people actually eat outside? Restaurants/pubs shouldn't be able to stop on-street parking just because they think it is better for their business to allow a few people for a few months of the year to sit outside. If they want to let in the outside, they should have sliding doors which they can open in the good weather.

Cheryl writes:

Unfortunately, Leatherhead does not have the space, climate, or weather found in European towns. Some people have taken the opportunity to sit in the High Street and enjoy a sunny morning or afternoon and still cherish that memory. However, extremely few people sit outside on cold, wet or windy days. Tables available year round simply add to the desolate look of the High Street. Three restaurant owners I have spoken to do not find the tables that beneficial. In the way of another compromise, **tables should be placed in unobtrusive places and be available for the few people who do choose to eat or drink al fresco.**

Make the High Street more attractive

Ann Cardew, who joined our Committee at the last AGM, writes:

When I moved into Leatherhead, now almost two years ago, I was struck by how grey and unloved it looked. I had come from a small market town that in the summer was awash with free standing three tiered flowering baskets, sponsored by the shops with local and Council financial help.

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Couldn't Leatherhead do something the same as a start to making the High Street a nicer place to be in?

Flip Cargill, who also joined the Committee at the last AGM, writes:

As the funds are relatively small, why not tidy up the trouble spots, and add more greenery and hanging baskets to lift our spirits, as suggested by Ann.

Other counties have a town competition every year - 'Towns in Bloom'. With so many keen gardeners in the area, perhaps this is a future possibility for Leatherhead to add charm & attract more visitors and trade.

Similar sentiments are echoed by longer serving Committee members also. Thus:

Cheryl writes:

[The railings] would provide a space for a lovely group of planters for both flowering and evergreen plants.

Hubert writes"

From time to time there is a move to get rid of street clutter, but then telephone switch boxes appear, and cycle racks in the middle of a no cycling area. We used to have neglected planters in the street. They were cleared away, together with some of the trees. Other trees were allowed to grow too large blocking light from nearby buildings and we are told, threatening the foundations. Do we want a hard environment of concrete, brick, and stone or do we want to soften it with hanging baskets, trees and well placed planters?

Caroline writes:

Our frequently maligned pubs, the Duke's Head and the Edmund Tylney, come up trumps when there is a question of flowers and hanging baskets. If they did not do this, our street would be miserable in the extreme. It would be nice to see other boxes and baskets attended to by other shops. Busy Lizzies and Petunias should greet us all from every possible angle. There is some effort made in this direction by those who manage the flower beds in front of the theatre but the bases of the beds are so low down that very little can be seen. The War Memorial gardeners are also to be congratulated but, with a little determination and imagination much more could be done. The array of flowers in front of the florists, "Alan's," is also appreciated but many businesses seem to make no effort at all.

'The Waterless Feature'

The feature at the junction of Church Street, High Street, Bridge Street and North Street has few admirers it seems. But while some merely ask for it to be made more attractive, others would like to see it go.

Paula writes:

Cheer up the area where the 'waterless feature' is. Put some planters with evergreen bushes (most flower at some time of the year) to take away the 'grey' atmosphere. Move the large Christmas tree to the top of the ramp to make it more central.

Caroline writes:

The "waterless" feature at the bottom of the High Street should be a riot of colour for all to see from Church Street, North Street and Bridge Street. Heavy and stout flower boxes could easily be placed in corners of the present structure. They would not impede anyone on the street and would be difficult to steal or vandalize. We would need to build up a fund and invest it so as to provide money for annual maintenance.

Ann writes:

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As for the so called 'Water Feature', it should be taken down in the long term but meanwhile it could also be planted with flowers.

Cheryl writes:

I, like everyone else, hope for a busy thriving town that meets the needs of traders and residents alike. In the long term future I would like to see the **crossroads reopened**, for without this, there will never be an opportunity for good public transportation.

And Finally

Caroline adds this caveat

However, before any reformed parking, brightly coloured flowers or beautiful gates, regular maintenance must be ensured for what we have or propose to get. Broken paving and crumbling walls are not conducive to business or shopping.

Hubert asks:

People will have different views on many of these aspects, and now is your chance to express it. But to get any sense out of it, we must have a good response for it to be significant. We just cannot afford to make a mess of it again because hardly anyone seems to care. So please fill in the current questionnaire – we need thousands of answers – not just a hundred or so.

Let us, however, finish with **Flip's** up-beat words:

Leatherhead Town strengths seem to be:

- its wide range of cuisine,
- the unrushed atmosphere,
- the parks, river and riverside walks
- a safe place to relax and browse,
- access to shops, library, theatre and businesses that meet most needs
- something for everyone
- and all within easy walking.

The landscaping of the river and parks have been a great success, as has the development of the railway station area.

I hope that everyone interested has the opportunity to view any proposed plans, without an imposed time limit for spending these funds resulting in rushed decisions.

Yes, there has been some good work done in the landscaping of the river and in our parks, and the station area is much improved. Let us hope the same may one day be said about our town centre.

Do please take time to fill in and return the questionnaire before the 22nd November – it's quick and easy. As Hubert reminds us, we need thousands of answers – not just a hundred or so!

The Editor.

Membership

The Association would like to thank all the current Road Stewards for doing a fantastic job delivering newsletters etc. to a group of houses near where they live, and encouraging their neighbours to become new members.

They would also like to thank all outgoing road stewards for their invaluable help.

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We are, however, in need of road stewards for the following roads:

Fairfield Road, Garlands Road, Headley Road, Highlands Avenue, Kingston Avenue, Linden Gardens, Linden Road, Park Rise/Park Rise Close, St Nicholas Hill.

Please could you help us by becoming a Road Steward. We ask a Road Steward to look after a group of members near to where they live, by delivering a newsletter to them (2-3 times a year) and keeping up to date details of these members on the form provided. According to Bookham Residents' Association, being a Road Steward only takes about 3 hours a year!

If you would like to find out more about being a road steward for these, or any other road, please contact me, Paula Sabine, Treasurer or any of the committee either by email (treasurer@leatherheadresidents.org.uk), phone, or at the monthly meetings held at the Letherhead Institute.

Subscriptions

Membership of the LRA runs from January to December each year, and the subscription for 2011 is due in January for those who paid for one year (£2) in 2010, or joined in 2008 for three years.

If you have a road steward they will collect your subscription, otherwise you will have a renewal membership form attached to your newsletter.

Please do renew your membership as a high level of membership is vital if the Leatherhead Residents' Association is to continue to represent the views of the Leatherhead residents.

Paula Sabine, Treasurer

News Updates

Norbury Park Liaison Group Update

The 11 October meeting was the final of the three part series held yearly to report the activities in Norbury Park to representatives of the wider community. Park Manager, Graham Manning, was able to report the numerous 2010 projects either fully or nearly complete. Volunteer groups are significant in completing some of the work on the site. One excellent example was the removal of 3000 tree guards on a newer group of oak, ash and cherry trees. The trees had outgrown the protective, plastic tubes and were in need of the removal of lower branches to foster proper growth.

Another example of needed volunteers was a team of 50 employees of Wates, who transformed the area in and around the Bothy in a sixty-minute makeover style-- to be fair they spent much more than sixty minutes and did an excellent job. Bothy was a new term for me and it was interesting to find that it is simply a small cottage or hut to provide shelter in a hilly area. No doubt this will be very useful to walkers, who are numerous in the park.

We have been disappointed to find that the reapplication for the parking facilities at Bockett's Farm proposes to leave out the condition to provide landscaping to screen the facility from the wider view. Those in south Leatherhead who have viewed as many as 400 cars parked on an Area of Natural Beauty (ANB) will be pleased when the farm is financially able to build the car park.

The Community Garden

One of the most exciting projects in Leatherhead has unfortunately received what may prove to be a knock out blow. The site of the Community Garden has again flooded. Only a few weeks before the official opening of the Learning Centre on the site, with work right on schedule, excessive water in the Ryebrook impacted on the local sewage system and caused the drains to overflow. It is with deep

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regret that I report these facts because I know of the dedication and hard work of Simon Woodhams and Patrick McCord, who co-led the project.

A year of Saturdays were devoted to the site's development. Thames Water have some responsibility for flooding, here and in other places in the Mole Valley. It is a joint responsibility between the MVDC, Surrey County Council and the water company that sometimes leads to delays in solving problems. The LRA and home owners in Barnet Close have found this to be true in trying to find answers to their flooding issues. It is time the groups with joint responsibility fully evaluate the flooding problems and come up with some answers. We await a report and the evaluation of Thames Water to find out the final outcome.

Cheryl Allen

[Cheryl is our representative on the Norbury Park Liaison Committee and has helped out at the Community Garden on several occasions]

Transition Bookham - living lightly

See their website: <http://www.greenmoleforum.org/page/Transition-Bookham.aspx>



No, this is not a tidy pile of old rubbish, but a housing solution for the world's largest population — bugs.

This 'Bug Hotel' was designed for our insect friends by members of Transition Bookham, to encourage biodiversity in the pastoral garden of St Nicholas, Bookham. You too could cater for creature comforts and make a hotel where all the bugs in your back yard will want to stay! As you see, all you need are some recyclable materials and willing hands.

You may recall the LRA article on local transition towns in the summer newsletter? Transition Bookham is one of the most recent transition towns in Surrey and they're off to a flying start? It began with a small group of concerned, motivated individuals coming together to address how the community can respond to the challenges of environment, the peak use of oil and climate change. They are linking with many other concerned groups, and working towards making Bookham a more sustainable community.

On August 18th I attended their public meeting held in St Nicholas Church meeting room. The highlight was a tour of their work developing an eco friendly garden for the pastoral centre, including the bug hotel.

They have formed:

A Food Group

Which has launched a **Garden Share** scheme at Village Day. If you have a large garden with spare space for a vegetable/fruit patch, or you're looking for space to garden contact Esther on the .website.

An Energy Group

Which looks at ways to cut household energy use amongst other things, e.g.

- Turn appliances off at the wall when not in use.

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- Draw your curtains at night to improve insulation
- Go easy on your hot taps: running hot taps is costing you big time.

A Recycling Group

For some strange reason we have adopted an out of sight out of mind approach with our waste, but many short-time fixes are coming back to haunt us now. We throw things away but where exactly is away? There is no away.'

At the October steering meeting many of their latest ideas were discussed; these included their "Let's Talk Rubbish" public meeting October 20th.

A few of the **Hints & Tips for a green Christmas** suggested Oct 13th

- A digital subscription for a great magazine eg The Ecologist
- A 'Green Experience' break
- A rural craft course, or leaning to do something
- Plant a tree
- Donate to environmental charities

If you'd like to get inspired or join any of their public meetings, take a look at their website and calendar of events.

The November public meeting on November 27th will focus on ideas for reusing items and for 'kinder on the environment' Christmas gift ideas, with the opportunity to get ideas for making recycled cards.

Transition Dorking is screening Franny Armstrong's feature film '[The Age of Stupid](#)' on Thursday 18th November at 7.30pm in the Green Room, behind Dorking Halls. It follows the lives of six people - including a Nigerian fisherwoman who has to use Omo to scrub the oil off her catch and is caught up in the politics of climate breakdown. It stars Pete Postlethwaite and is a captivating and constantly surprising film: the first successful dramatisation of climate change to reach the big screen.'

Tickets are available for £5 from Mystery Mountain shop in Dene Street, Dorking, or by phone on 077 2443 2441.

Flip Cargill

Flip has attended Bookham Transition meetings on our behalf to consider the possibility of a "Transition Leatherhead."]

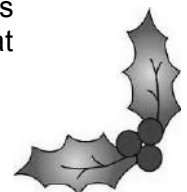


LRA Christmas Social

The next meeting of the Association is on Monday, 6th December.

As in previous years, this meeting will be a social evening at which members may meet other members, LRA committee members and local Councillors and chat over mince pies, mulled wine and other Christmas fare.

All members are cordially invited.



Advance notice:

the first meeting of 2011 will be on Monday 10th January (the 3rd is a public holiday).

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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