



# 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 & promote the development and enhancement of the local community for the benefit of the residents.

## April AGM - OUR TOWN

**When: 7:30, Monday April 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Where: The Letherhead Institute**

A panel of three professionals will be speaking on current community issues: 'Poors' Allotments, the Greenbelt Review, our 'Market Town'. If you, like us are concerned, please join us.

**Andy Smith**, Surrey Branch Director of CPRE, will speak about the Mole valley Green Belt, and green spaces.

**John Howarth**, Director of the charity "Action for Market Towns" and Chairman of the Leatherhead Area Partnership, brings a wealth of information about Market Towns. He will tell us what has happened to other Town Centres when they had to compete with out of town developments.

**Lucy Quinnell** brings in words and slides, to tell the story of how she led a campaign to 'save' Teazle Wood for the sake of ecology and community. Come and hear her current concerns and actions.

### **Alarm as Allotment holders attend February 25<sup>th</sup> Consultation**

We were concerned when we heard that allotment holders might have to move, and that the MV Executive wanted to develop the site in association with Merton College, Oxford's 20 acres of Green Belt land.

Drop-in consultations were occurring as this went to print. Our concern became alarm, that the Council would even consider a major development in the Green Belt without prior public consultation or completion of the Green Belt Boundary Review (see page 12).

Outside the Church Hall, a group of allotment holders' worst fears were being expressed: "This looks like a done deal. So much for Localism!" Whilst we certainly will not know the fate of the allotments by the AGM, it is not too early to ponder what effect an out of town development might have on our Town Centre. The LRA are uniting with concerned groups in the community.

**Please come and share your thoughts, knowledge and ideas.**

## A Butcher in a Former Bakery?

According to the Leatherhead Health Check, high on many Leatherhead residents' wish list is a butcher - after all there were once three butchers in Leatherhead - surely the town could support one.

At the recent Leatherhead and District Forum meeting, we were told that there is considerable interest in the purchase of the Harrington Bakery building. With three buyers showing interest there is optimism that one of the purchasers might strike a deal.

In each case, the potential buyer has shown an interest in the first floor but prefers that the ground floor be sublet for use as retail premises. The idea is that the space could be divided to house several small businesses. Peter Snell, owner of Barton's Book Shop, has followed the progress of the sale with interest. He is aware that a butcher would like to locate in such a site in Leatherhead. Peter believes that these small shops would attract people to our town.

Will we get a butcher? Watch this space!

Neate's Butcher, near Neate's Alley, 1895

## Planning Sub-Committee Participate in Consultation

The Landscape Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) identifies important characteristics of the landscape throughout the District. Comments were invited until 1<sup>st</sup> March.

The draft Landscape SPD identifies important characteristics of the landscape throughout MV. It draws information from landscape character studies that already exist, including the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan, and other County and Regional studies. The focus is on rural areas and the landscape setting of towns and villages.

The LRA Planning Sub-committee viewed maps of Leatherhead and the descriptions that had been given on each of 6 areas of Leatherhead. The task was to make sure that significant natural landmarks, and important characteristics of the landscape, had not been left out.

Whilst most descriptions were adequate, we were able to highlight a few additional items and suggested new names for some of the maps. Importantly, we were able to point out that Teazle Wood was not mentioned in the descriptions.

We were asked to identify areas that would benefit from enhancement. We named several but most significantly: The Rye Brook in Teazle Wood, clogged with silt and Japanese Knot Weed, and the Water Works on Hawk's Hill which badly needs screening with planting of trees and bushes.

## The Help Shop has moved to the Library

Despite all efforts, the Help Shop has moved to the Library in Church Street. This was a cost cutting exercise to avoid high rents in the town centre. Thank you to those who took time to sign the petition.

Many preferred the High Street location because of high visibility and convenience. None of us wanted to see yet another empty shop on the High Street.

Looking on the bright side, it was pointed out by several people who signed the petition, that there is free parking near the Library. Some say that the move almost guarantees that we will not lose our Library, as it now serves two functions in the community. It seems that those working in the help shop are pleased with the move and consider it will definitely be of benefit to all.

Like the Library, the Help Shop will be open weekdays except Mondays. It will also be open on Saturday mornings, and for a trial period, Saturday afternoons.

## Leatherhead and District Forum

At one time, the Leatherhead and District Forum (LDF) meeting was the place to be if you wanted to keep up with what was going on in Leatherhead.

The 13<sup>th</sup> February 2013 meeting of the LDF was reminiscent of the meetings of past years. This was because council officers, most Leatherhead Councillors, and chairmen of all local residents' associations were present. A receptive audience was on hand, perhaps because there are 3 significant consultations presently going on. In addition, some interesting things are happening in Leatherhead.

The agenda included reports on policing of the area, a project to introduce Local Radio, the Council's thoughts on Barnett Wood Lane allotment sale, an introduction to the Leatherhead Food Festival, an update from the Theatre, a Festival Committee Report, the latest on the Help Shop and Epsom Hospital, the result of the car park survey and retail audit and an update on possible development of the Harrington Bakery building.

### Historical Perspective

About four years ago the Leatherhead and District Forum (LDF), originally the Town Centre Forum, was at the height of its success. In fact, both Dorking and Leatherhead forums were so successful that the MVDC thought that it would be a good idea for everyone to have a forum. In order to accomplish this, the MVDC created four forums with members from all towns and parishes in the district, and withdrew financial support to the LDF.

Ashted and Leatherhead were paired to form the Ashted and Leatherhead Forum. No one was ever completely happy with this arrangement that survived for more than a year. Most people were uneasy with the council's agenda that scheduled little time for questions.

For that reason, the LDF struggled on and some people attended both forums. It was fortunate that we held on to the remnants of the original forum, as cuts meant that the council forums were abandoned. The council support of the LDF, once removed, was never fully restored. We therefore lost a minuting secretary and free room hire (free again now after 2 years). We also lost council officers, no longer paid to attend. Despite all set backs, Chairman, Heather Ward *carried on faithfully*.

In the meantime, it is good to see a healthy interest in what is happening in Leatherhead and the surrounding area. The next meeting will be 17<sup>th</sup> April at Park House with a 5:45 start. All welcome.

## Second Open Garden Event Planned - 9<sup>th</sup> June 2013

**Spend a day out and enjoy seeing what your fellow residents have done with their gardens.**

Following the successful Leatherhead Open Gardens last summer, the Environment Subcommittee immediately began planning a similar event for 2013. We have at least 6 new gardens, plus the Community Garden (also open Saturdays 10 - 3), allowing a further opportunity for folk to drop in whilst in the garden viewing mood. Some hanging baskets will be available for sale at the community garden, and a raffle will be held, to win volunteer help in your garden.

See LCG activities: <http://www.leatherheadcommunitygarden.org.uk/upcoming-events.html>

The money earned last year provided the funds to buy and plant the planters at the west end of the High Street including Nat West Corner. Many enjoyed these plants. We believe the design of the High Street, once it is redeveloped, will include some large planters. We have promised to take some responsibility for planting and watering these also. The more we earn, the more we can do.

Put June 9<sup>th</sup> in your diary now. Tickets will be available in Barton's Bookshop from mid May.

### **Appeal for Volunteers**

This summer we will be keeping the planters in the High Street watered. Can you help our team?

In addition, we are planning a litter pick or two again. Whilst not an Olympic Cycle Race, there will be the excitement of the Prudential Ride London 2 day Festival of Cycling which will come through Leatherhead on August 4<sup>th</sup>. To help out with either, please phone Cheryl now on: 01372 370091

## Leach Grove Wood

Early in 2012, with the backing of LRA, I put in an application for Village Green Status for Leach Grove Wood, due to: 1. Concern about the state of the wood, not maintained for many years, and 2. Concern that the wood should have some protected status to prevent future development, based on the fact that Surrey County Council in the 1980's were planning to sell the wood to developers, plus with changes to legislation, nothing is safe.

In October 2012, I discovered the wood already had a classification of Strategic Open Land which according to the Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2009) indicates that open space, sports and recreation facilities will be safeguarded from development. It seemed to me and the Open Space Society (OSS) solicitor, that this meant we had been using the woods with permission, which meant this was a 'knock out blow' to my application. So I withdrew my application.

However, with the advice of Councillor Tim Hall, I am now in the process of 'resurrecting' my application as, having spoken to a leading solicitor in this area, it would seem that this was not a 'knock out blow' and that the Strategic Open Plan may not offer much, if any, protection.

I have sent him all the papers, and await his assessment of our case. Meanwhile, it's in my thoughts that it may be wise to reinstate Leach Grove Protection Society, and look at ways of caring for this much loved patch before every tree falls down! I'll keep you posted. F Cargill

## Cherkley Update

Last year, as you will remember, the LRA Committee objected to the Longshot planning application, for an exclusive golf club on Leatherhead Downs, and the conversion of an historic private house, in immaculate condition, to be converted into an expensive luxury hotel and spa complex. Caroline Brown addressed both meetings of Mole Valley's planning committee on our behalf last spring. We were of the opinion that the scheme should be strongly opposed because it was a departure from the Local Plan, offering no overriding benefits to our residents, our natural environment nor to the economic well-being of our town.

Some argued that a prestigious development like this would bring prosperity to Leatherhead, yet it is the wrong side of the A24, two miles from the station, and its wealthy members and hotel guests are unlikely to be attracted to our town centre. Furthermore the prohibitive cost of the debentures means that the membership will be drawn from London and further afield.

The developers promise a significant number of employment opportunities, but there is no employment shortage here. Currently our supermarkets draw many of their workers - more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of their work force - from outside the area. Our town is suffering from an inadequate road system and insufficient car parking provision. The development is more likely to exacerbate housing and transport problems than to solve a non-existent unemployment problem.

So in December 2011 our committee agreed that the development should be refused on planning grounds - a view that was supported by the Council's Planning Officers. Yet in April 2012, the Development Control Committee voted on the motion proposed by Cllr. Dickson and carried by the chairman's casting vote to side with the developers. Objections from Mole Valley's residents outnumbered the supporters by 2 to 1, so we were expressing the majority view and felt let down by those councillors who chose to ignore both local objectors and Mole Valley's planning team.

Therefore the LRA is supporting the judicial challenge mounted by Cherkley Campaign Ltd (CCL). We agree that if this development goes ahead it will wreck a highly visible and accessible landscape and chalk grassland habitat. Perhaps more importantly, it will set a dangerous precedent not only for Mole Valley's Green Belt and Surrey Hills AONB, but also for any protected landscape and sensitive site in the country. Richard Buxton, a leading environmental and public law firm of solicitors, submitted the application for judicial review just before Christmas. Queen's Counsel has advised that the CCL has a strong case. The High Court hearing to quash the decision to grant permission will be later this year.

Cherkley Campaign continues to be chaired by Tim Harrold, Vice President of CPRE Surrey and a member of the Surrey Hills Board. Our former secretary, Ray Brown, is a director of CCL along with six other residents from Leatherhead, Dorking, Mickleham, Tyrrell's Wood, Cherkley and Givons Grove. The membership comprised of over 100 local residents, includes Ben Tatham, President of Friends of Box Hill and former Mole Valley councillor for 43 years, County Councillor Hazel Watson; Richard Roberts Miller, who also addressed the planning committee on behalf of Mickleham Parish Council; board members of the Surrey Botanical Society; and Sir Brian Unwin, who is also President of the European Centre for Nature Conservation. Cherkley Campaign has the backing of the Campaign to Protect Rural England at county and national level because this is seen as such an important test case.

The heavy earth moving machinery seen recently on Cherkley, was in connection with the archaeological surveys that will in due course form part of the Historic Environment Record. There is evidence of Bronze Age farming on this part of the North Downs - making the Roman road of Stane Street which runs through Cherkley look modern in comparison. Meanwhile the ecological value of Cherkley's uncultivated chalk grassland remains in dispute between Mole Valley and Longshot. Until this is resolved, the application of total herbicide and construction of the golf course cannot commence. Chalk grassland is a rare priority biodiversity habitat (ie species rich), and perhaps if councillors had appreciated this and the quality of the landscape and listened instead to the advice from Natural England, the National Trust and the Surrey Hills Board they would not have granted planning permission in the first place.

## A Community Radio station for Leatherhead

At a recent meeting of the Leatherhead & District Forum, local resident Graham Pountney and his colleague Steve Ray set out a vision of what a Community Radio Station could be like, if the Leatherhead Community felt it might benefit from having one. Mr Ray has established two stations (Vectis Radio, I.O.W., and Hawks Radio, Harlow, Essex) which continue to serve their respective communities.

There are now almost 200 full-time community radio stations broadcasting in the UK today, with more going on-air every month. Whilst it is difficult to exactly calculate listenership, it is likely that 10% of populations served by community stations are tuning in at least once weekly. This produces at conservative estimates 1,000,000 listeners per week in the UK. Leatherhead area would not be alone!

This represents a unique opportunity to enable local advertisers across the UK to connect with the goodwill and community access represented by this sector. It was explained that the 'Radio Station' is an internet – broadcaster, with its own web-site, to which people and businesses can 'tune in' to listen to on-line. The station can broadcast 24 hours a day – since it is 'managed' by a computer. The Station should be a "non-commercial radio station" run by a 'not-for-profit limited company', and the suggestion is that such a Leatherhead Community Radio Station should deal with everything local.

Judging from what has happened at Hawks radio, a Leatherhead Radio Station could:

- play music, broadcast local news, weather and chat, local advertising;
- connect with the local football club;
- report school information;
- provide experience for young people researching, writing and reading news items;
- provide Alternative Education;
- broadcast live programmes.

With regards to Funding, the body "Awards for All" can fund enterprises like a community radio station - and they come in to see how the money is spent, by checking invoices etc. After such grants expire, sponsorship of programmes is possible, not necessarily linked to advertising, but local businesses can advertise in the broadcast programmes. Running costs are low – and additionally the Station can support local Charities by mentioning them - and helping them with a free advertisement. £50 can support an Alternative Education programme, and monthly running costs can be as low as £200.

The sort of simple premises required, are simply a room with internet connectivity, ideally a visible space for sitting and greeting, and a teaching area with the Station broadcasting from a closed off area. Perhaps a vacant shop in the Swan Centre or a donated space elsewhere?

Vision Statement: Mole Valley is a great place to live and grow up: but sadly many people do not always recognise this and fail to fully embrace the skills and people we have around us. The Community radio station wants to attempt, with others, to bridge this gap and support our future; to include the Youth of today and all those Community groups who work tirelessly to better everyone's experiences in our local area.

The station would be designed as a 'Not for Profit Social Enterprise' to operate from 8am to 6pm, with local DJ's promoting local issues for local people of all ages.

If you are interested in meeting in March 2013 to cement the local interest in this Community project, please contact: Graham Pountney - 01372 372429, [gmpountney@btinternet.com](mailto:gmpountney@btinternet.com)

## ANYONE FOR A SPOT OF POTHOLING?

### LOOK NO FURTHER THAN FORTY FOOT ROAD!

For a relatively short road, Forty Foot Road has had its fair share of attention at LRA meetings. The woeful condition of the section of road from Poplar Road to Mencap is indeed cause for concern, with the un-adopted status of the road the reason why there is never a satisfactory action.

By definition, an un-adopted road is a highway not maintained at public expense.

At regular intervals, though not often enough, sections of Forty Foot Road are resealed, courtesy of Surrey County Council, but to little avail - it quickly disintegrates again!

Legally, responsibility for maintaining a private road rests with the owners of properties with frontages on the road.

Along with the owners of some beautiful houses, the Beeches Nursing Home, Woodland School SCC, Mencap, the Scout Hut, the Hospital, the Recreation Grounds, all have frontages on Forty Foot Road. The only vehicular access to the Highlands Road Allotments is via Forty Foot Road, and the residents of Highwoods and Beech Holt must use Forty Foot Road to access their properties. Therefore, there are many in the community who risk flat tyres regularly if not daily.

At the January LRA meeting, it was agreed Flip Cargill would contact each of the interested groups and organize a meeting with Councillor Tim Hall to plan the best way to resolve this impasse. All but the Scout Hut and MENCAP have so far been contacted, and are keen to meet.

Hopes were raised when the Duchess of Gloucester visited Leatherhead for the official opening of Woodland School. However the Royal visitor, just like the locals, was subjected to the 'bumps'!

It will be interesting to see what the meeting with Councillor Tim Hall brings. Possibilities are highlighted here:

1. There are statutory provisions for un-adopted roads to be adopted and thus become highways maintainable at public expense. In these times of budget cuts and austerity this would not provide a quick fix, but as much of Leatherhead utilizes the recreation ground, this may be the fairest solution.

The Woodland School, the Beeches and the Recreation Ground generate the lion's share of traffic, with the road getting a pounding from minibuses, ambulances and cars, so a fair spread of the community is represented here.

2. Another option would be to establish a fund, as other private roads do, that would steadily build, so that at the time a road needs to be resurfaced, (now!) the money would be available.

3. Toll gate to raise money! J

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## Serfdom, Modern Style, Can this be Possible?

by Caroline Brown, LRA Planning Sub Committee Chairman

On Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> February, interested parties from the LRA took a walk through Poors Allotments (off Barnett Wood Lane and Bypass Road) and were vividly reminded of medieval strip farming. Here were about 10 acres of intensely cultivated ground, tended by, perhaps around eighty people. The "Overlord" is Mole Valley to whom the rents are paid. However, MV is seeking a higher return on these acres and, therefore, together with the owner of two more adjacent plots (Merton College, Oxford) they have decided to put all 3 plots together to see what the open market could offer.

Many hundreds of years ago, peasants and serfs worked and toiled on the land to feed themselves and to pay their rents. This money enabled their Lords and Masters to protect and fight for them in times of war. The workers had no right to the land themselves and could be ordered off it for rent failure or if the Lord wanted it for other purposes. As is the case now, the finely tilled strips of ground were frequently the result of many years or even generations of careful husbandry and the soil fertility could not be replicated by other strips elsewhere.

2013 - Two of the three plots (around 20 acres) are in the Green Belt, but the allotments are not. The combined site is most conveniently situated near Junction 9 of the M25 so no customer need ever set foot in tiny, awkward Leatherhead. Also, it is believed that the Green Belt Status would be easy to remove in view of Government relaxation over Planning rules and the overwhelming need to provide more housing somewhere, somehow. Also note that these are, according to MV planners, non statutory allotments which gives the council the right to move them.

Included in the plan is the offer to the current Allotment holders of some plots of similar size and slightly more facilities on the other side of the M25, near the end of Links Road. Apparently an access road could be provided together with toilet and taps. Unfortunately, the majority of Allotment holders come from the homes and gardens of North and Central Leatherhead and would find it really tiring having to trudge all the extra way to the new site to which there is no public transport. To add to their difficulties the alternative site is heavily waterlogged for much of the year.

One must emphasize that nothing has been decided yet, but the sheer convenience of the site now advertised may make it extremely attractive to a large number of commercial entrepreneurs. Leatherhead itself has a number of empty shops, which would make ideal "retail outlets" or even "factory shops". But perhaps you and your neighbours think that a large retail park would be excellent for the area? Or perhaps a business park or a hotel would be more suitable? The Leatherhead Residents' Committee is concerned about such developments and the loss of the Green Belt. How about you?

The Leatherhead Residents' Association is pledged to do all it can to prevent further decline in the town and its surroundings. We have well established communication with the various departments of Mole Valley. Do come and voice your views at an LRA meeting. (Prior notification would be helpful).



## LCA and LRA

People often confuse the Leatherhead Community Association (LCA) and Leatherhead Residents' Association (LRA). Hilary Porter offers the following descriptions of each group.

**The LCA.** Trustees are responsible for maintenance of the Letherhead Institute using income from lettings of office accommodation and community areas within the building. The LCA is responsible to the Trustees for the lettings of the communal rooms, and provides an excellent programme of social, cultural and educational events and courses, for both members, and mostly for non members. With issues such as changes to the High Street or matters concerning Health of the community, the LCA participates in consultation and is strictly non-political. Membership is not restricted to Leatherhead residents only.

**The LRA** is also non-political. For a time the LRA became an affiliated Civic Society known as the Leatherhead Society, and membership included residents from Leatherhead, Ashted, Fetcham and Bookham. It later returned to its original name, the Leatherhead Residents' Association, still including North and South Leatherhead constituencies, but excluding non Leatherhead residents unless they had specific links within the Leatherhead area.

The LRA liases with the Local Council officers, Councillors, the Chamber of Commerce and Surrey County Council, representing the concerns of Leatherhead residents over matters of planning, housing, highways, environment, green belt policies, transport, health services, parking, noise, crime, licensing of pubs, road congestion, park and open spaces etc. We also continue to liaise with the Residents' Associations for Ashted, Fetcham and Bookham.

The LRA is affiliated with the LCA but membership to both requires paying a small annual subscription to each organisation. Occasionally, the LRA and LCA unite in a common cause such as below.

### **Sir Paul Beresford requests public meeting about Epsom Hospital**

The LRA and LCA are hoping to co-host a public meeting, requested by our M.P. Sir Paul Beresford. This will take place after the Better Services Better Values clinicians have announced their decisions about relocation of hospital services. These announcements will be followed by a consultation period from May to June. In the meantime, we have the assurance that Epsom Hospital will not close, although provision of some services may be reduced and relocated. The date is not available as this goes to press.

### **Recent Letter from Chris Grayling**

A big thank you to all the people who attended the public meeting at Blenheim High School about the future of Epsom Hospital on February 7<sup>th</sup>. More than 500 people attended. My apologies to those who could not get in, but at the very least you contributed to a strong message about views in the local community.

A whole range of concerns were raised at the meeting, and it was absolutely clear that proposals for local NHS services do not command the universal support of local doctors.

I have written again to the Better Services Better Value team to ask them to publish a whole range of detailed documents about their work, including giving us details of the capital spending and work that would be needed to transfer services from five hospitals to three, about the impact on Surrey hospitals and Surrey ambulance services, and about travel times from the local area to potential sites for future acute services. I am far from convinced that this work has been done to anything like the level that would be needed to justify the proposals. No announcement should be made about the future location of services unless there is clear evidence that this work has been done properly. I will continue to keep everyone locally posted about developments. Kind regards, Chris Grayling.

## From the Leatherhead Theatre

Firstly we would like to say thank you to all our patrons who have helped with our seat refurbishment. As I write, over 400 seats have been refurbished (see note below). There is still the opportunity to name a seat for a loved one or to commemorate a special event. Please do get in touch with us at the Theatre, if this is something you would like to do.

Our Spring/Summer brochure is now available from The Theatre. This includes a variety of live events in our auditorium from now until August. We have committed ourselves to offering Leatherhead an exciting range of entertainment from ballet to an evening shared with the stars of BBC Radio's Test Match Special. Details of our Repertory Company's upcoming play 'In Quest of Light: The Battle for Tartuffe' can be found in our new season brochure. The play was written by local playwright Amanda Lomas, who responded to our call for local scripts in 2012 to celebrate the inauguration of the company.

We have recently revised our Friends scheme. We no longer charge our Friends of the Theatre a card transaction fee when paying on debit card in person at the Box Office, as well as maintaining the current fees. As we want to broaden our Friends database we have introduced two new types of membership to the scheme. A family and student membership have now been added; the current benefits to our single and joint memberships apply to all members of our Friends scheme.

Work will be taking place on enhancing our disabled access to the auditorium; which will provide an additional disabled seating area at the front of our auditorium for those with mobility difficulties. This is due for completion prior to the first Disabled Arts In Surrey Festival at the end of April.

**The Food Festival - April.** All of Leatherhead is getting involved. We too will be participating. Tickets for the Chefs On Show events at The Theatre on both the Friday 5<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> are now available. You can also purchase tickets for the cookery master classes, being held at Vecchia Trattoria in the High Street, from our Box Office. We look forward to seeing Leatherhead celebrating its local food talent and coming alive.

**The Drama Festival** May will see us welcome the tenth anniversary of The Leatherhead Drama Festival. The festival's committee have done exceedingly well to raise the funds for this year's festival and we look forward to once again welcoming Amateur Dramatic groups to our stage as they compete for 'The Sir Michael Caine Drama Awards'. The Junior week competition starts on the week commencing 6<sup>th</sup> May, and Senior groups take to the stage from Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May. Winners will be announced on the GALA Awards Evening on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May. Tickets will be available from our Box Office shortly, please keep visiting our website for details.

Our film schedule has now been confirmed through to early April and we are hoping to convert to digital format in the near future. With both films and live events we plan to have something for everyone and to be able to welcome you through our doors for an evening's entertainment with us.

Note: The listed building status of the theatre required that the seating be replaced like for like. Refurbishment turned out to be the most economical option, with the work done progressively over time by local furniture maker Dawson's Reproductions.

Warm Wishes

The Leatherhead Theatre team.

**01372 365141** <http://www.the-theatre.org/>

The Mole Valley District was one of the first Councils in England to develop and have approved a Local Plan for applying planning policy. Many Councils still do not.

## The Neighbourhood Plan and Localism

The Localism Act 2011 seemed to complicate matters. This act introduced new powers for people to develop their own Neighbourhood Plan. This gave people the opportunity to participate in a process of finding out the kind of development local people want. These desires can then be turned into planning policy if all rigorous guidelines are followed. Of course, the Neighbourhood Plan must take into consideration all government policy including a Local Plan, if it already exists.

A number of LRA committee members attended various workshops that attempted to explain Localism, which always seemed like a desirable aim. However, developing a Neighbourhood Plan has turned out to be a complicated process. It included creating a forum of up to 60 representative people and researching to find out a consensus of opinion among residents. We were told that after all the hard work (around 2 ½ years), the Neighbour Plan might be rejected.

In order to prove that it is possible for a town to successfully create a Neighbourhood Plan, MVDC selected Bookham. Bookham Residents Association (BRA) with over three thousand members was the obvious choice because at the time, the town was just completing a Health Check called Bookham Vision. Over Sixty percent of residents had participated in the survey so BRA already knew what people desired. A MV grant of £20,000 meant that funds for carrying out the work were in place from the beginning. The rest of us have watched and waited to see how Bookham dealt with the task.

Early in 2012 the CPRE sponsored a Localism workshop. Two Bookham speakers impressed upon those present how difficult it had been to achieve what they had done to date. This was true in spite of council support and the help of Senior Planning Officer, Suzanne Parkes, who had worked with them to help guarantee success.

In Autumn 2012, the Ashted Transition Group decided to attempt a Neighbourhood Plan for Ashted. Some of us wondered if Leatherhead should follow suit. In December 2012, we approached the MV Planning Department for advice on this.

### **Leatherhead Neighbourhood Plan: To Be or Not to Be**

In February 2013, Mole Valley Senior Planners, Jack Straw and Suzanne Parks met with the LRA Committee and Mr. Straw explained very clearly why Leatherhead had little hope of being able to emulate Bookham and form its own Neighbourhood Forum. There are various statutory reasons for this. A minimum of 21, (42 better and 60 optimum), people representing all areas and ages and interests of the town would need to volunteer before the end of October. Leatherhead covers a wide area physically and the population is very diverse so this alone would be very difficult to achieve.

His advice was that we should make use of the MVDC skills and time and act in conjunction with them. What is more, our involvement would come before any (major) planning applications went in.

One of his chief concerns was that we should have a good bank of land available for housing, which would, thereby, give good protection to us against pressure from London and other unsuitable applications for buildings in unsuitable locations. Without this ability to provide alternative sites, no Planning Inspector can dismiss appeals, as housing is always required.

This brought up the subject of an impending consultation concerning the Green Belt. If a loss of certain areas of Green Belt is contemplated, that particular area will have to be proved to be no longer meeting the criteria for which it was originally established; in other words it is no longer maintaining the character and integrity of its neighbourhood. Miss Parkes then showed us a map of Leatherhead surrounded by broken, purple lines that indicate how this Belt could be broken up into different, distinct sections for evaluation. It seems distressingly likely that some lengths of the Green Belt will have to be sacrificed.

This in turn led to the 32 acres of allotment, and farm land between Barnett Wood Lane and the bypass, being discussed (see page 8). Currently partly in the Green Belt and owned jointly by

Merton College and MVDC it is seen as an exciting commercial possibility by some councillors. Others see it as the possible death knell of the High Street, as a retail park could suck all shoppers away from our historic centre.

Other worries arising from these ideas were also expressed: namely the pressure on our infrastructure and our narrow, bottle-necked roads.

At the February meeting of the MVDC Executive Committee, a 150 page document outlining the procedure for reviewing the Green Belt in the MVDC was approved. At the same time, a consultation procedure was agreed. The comprehensive procedure will include around 5000 individuals and groups, and will end on March 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **The Greenbelt Boundaries To Be Reviewed**

With a growing need for housing to cope with the needs of the expanding population & higher house prices in London, the coalition government has come to believe that only with the release of some Green Belt land will they be able to deal with the housing needs.

To pre-empt government demands, the Mole Valley Land Allocations plan and Green Belt Boundary Review will look at only the Green Belt nearest the built up areas of the MV.

The idea is to evaluate how well each bit of the Green Belt fulfils the 5 purposes of Green Belt land.

These are:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;

- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;

- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;

- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;

- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling urban land.

The Green Belt locations that function best to fulfill these purposes will be the ones that are kept.

The ones that no longer function well may be released for development.

Our Planning subcommittee looks forward to participating fully in this consultation. The result will be published near the end of the year.

Some of us believe that developing the green belt, the easy option that creates the most profit, should not be allowed until our numerous brown field sites have been developed. The result of the consultation will be published near the end of the year.

### **You can make comments on the Green Belt boundary review until March 28<sup>th</sup>:**

[www.molevalley.gov.uk/localplans](http://www.molevalley.gov.uk/localplans) Follow the link to the Green Belt boundary review page.

Request a comments form, and return it to the Planning Policy Team, Mole Valley District Council, Pippbrook, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 1SJ, or in person to the MVDC Offices in Dorking or our Help Shop.

Caroline Brown and Cheryl Allen

## COMING EVENTS

### **April 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Leatherhead Food Festival - Market, Cookery Shows & Master classes**

The inaugural Leatherhead Food Festival is a must for all Surrey Foodies. The Festival takes place throughout Leatherhead and offers loads of entertainment and activity options for families. Festival Events include: a pop-up Master class Cookery School with celebrity chef Valentina Harris, Chefs-on-Show Cookery Theatre in Leatherhead Theatre with top chefs, a Farmers' Market offering local produce and food, Cookery Craft Market, Festival sample dishes in the town's restaurants and cafes, Cookery competitions, Foodie Quizzes, Children's activities including pizza making, Wine tasting and wine pairing classes, Talks and book signings. Tickets for the master classes can be purchased at the Theatre Box Office.

### **April 8<sup>th</sup> - LRA AGM 7.30 p.m. Guest Speakers on current issues**

### **April 20<sup>th</sup> St. Georges Day**

Flags will be flying with a festive atmosphere as St. Georges Day celebrations come to Leatherhead.

### **MAY 6<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> The Tenth Annual Leatherhead Drama Festival**

Juniors - May 6-10<sup>th</sup> Adults - May 13-17

### **MAY 18<sup>th</sup> - CPRE - AGM 11 a.m. & Conference 2 - 5 p.m. Dorking Halls**

### **June 23<sup>rd</sup> - May Fair Fundraising Event for Well Loved Loco**

You may remember the Hawthorn Leslie 3837, the loco that was once located behind the Leisure Centre? It was relocated, and is now in the process of being preserved.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> May, Brian Davis is holding a multi charity May Fair at the Mole Barn, behind the Leatherhead Leisure Centre, along with a sponsored motorised treasure hunt on behalf of the Hawthorn Leslie 3837 Preservation Society. [www.hl3837.org](http://www.hl3837.org)

Stalls are priced on a sliding scale with the least expensive going to charities. The treasure hunt will take you into the countryside, towns and villages of Surrey and Sussex and promises to be great fun. If you'd like to take part, further details are available from: [brian.davis1947@btinternet.com](mailto:brian.davis1947@btinternet.com) or by post at 63, Cannon Grove, Fetcham, KT22 9LP

### **June 30<sup>th</sup> - Don't miss the annual Leatherhead Duck Race**

## Remember Your LRA Member Local Discounts

Simply show your membership card at:

Edmund Tylney Pub	30-32 High Street	(20% on food only),
Vecchia Trattoria	24 High Street	(10 % until the end of April)
Barton's Book Shop	2 Bridge Street	(10%)
ATS Euromaster	85-89 Kingston Road	(10%)

Discounts are not available in conjunction with special offers.

## Interested residents needed to help with community projects

The LRA committee work hard to make Leatherhead a better place. If you, like us, feel strongly about contributing to your community, we urge you to share your thoughts and skills with us. Come along to a meeting or two - we have Interest Groups, which are non-committee groups, open to anyone with an interest in those areas. We need people of all ages to help us represent the entire community. We are in need of a Minutes Secretary and typist, and an administrator - someone with PA or management experience or organising skills. Please phone us for a chat if this interests you. 07986 430935

## LRA Meetings

In December 2012, for practical reasons, the committee voted to have 6 closed, and 6 open meetings annually, with a speaker at 3 of the open meetings. Our former secretary, Ray Brown had suggested several times that we could use the newsletter, to inform our members of the kind of meeting that will be held in the months following its publication. This is our meeting schedule for the next five months:

**April 8<sup>th</sup>** - AGM - Speakers - Andy Smith, John Howarth and Lucy Quinnell

**May 13<sup>th</sup>** - Closed meeting

**June 3<sup>rd</sup>** - Open meeting

**July 1<sup>st</sup>** - Open meeting - Speaker - possibly the Police Commissioner who has asked to visit us

**August** - Closed meeting

**If you have a pressing issue** that you would like to speak about on the night of any closed meeting, please show up at the door at 7:20pm to pass on your concerns, and someone will be there to listen to you. We will include reminders in the Ashted & Leatherhead Local LRA articles, with details of speakers closer to the time. Please note these dates in your diary.

We occasionally email members when new information comes our way.

Sometimes emails are returned as 'undeliverable'.

**If you have changed your email address, please let us know.**

If you wish to be added to the email list, please visit the 'Contact page' on our website and complete the on-line form.

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

If you have any comments or concerns, please write, email, or contact us through our website, which includes, blog, facebook, and twitter.

We thank those who have contributed to this newsletter.  
The deadline for contributions for the Summer newsletter is June 14<sup>th</sup>.