

## **LOSRA'S ACHIEVEMENTS**

During the thirty years or more since LOSRA's inception it has worked on a huge number of issues. Some of these have been short-term battles, usually resisting assaults by developers on key sites, but most have involved long-term campaigns, extending over years or even decades, placing considerable pressure on resources and demanding considerable persistence.

Not all campaigns have been successful, but we like to think that the Association's track record is generally creditable, and that the results of the efforts can be seen in the quality of life which residents enjoy in the village.

### **TP26 – The Linear Park**

The obscure code TP26 was the original reference given to a plan, originally put forward by Surrey County Council in the 1930s, for a by-pass road for Sunbury Village. This was to follow the line of the open land from Staines Road East near the junction with Harfield Road, along Oakington Drive and across French Street, The Avenue to Green Street. The likelihood would also be that it would be extended across the Green Belt to the A244. This land is known by various names, the most common simply being The Gap.

This project sat on the stocks until the 60s with no immediate prospect of being built, but never abandoned. Some people supported it strongly, as it would apparently relieve traffic in Thames Street, but many opposed it, on the basis that the residential area had developed and expanded during the 30-40 years since the plan was tabled, and the proposed road would drive a busy road straight through the middle of it. In addition, it was felt that a road across the Green Belt would inevitably open it up for development.

It was on the basis of this issue that Lower Sunbury Residents' Association was formed in 1965, breaking ranks with the Sunbury Society, which was either generally supportive or equivocal on the TP26 proposal.

LOSRA campaigned for TP26 to be abandoned by Surrey CC, and simultaneously campaigned for traffic management measures in the Conservation Area, to obviate the need for a by-pass. In 1987, the project was finally abandoned. However, this was not the end of the story.

It was proposed that the land be returned to Spelthorne and maintained as a Linear Park, and this proposal appeared in a draft Local Plan. However, in 1989 Surrey County Council put forward plans for houses to be built on parts of the land. LOSRA vehemently argued against this at the Public Inquiry into the Local Plan, and the Inspector rejected the housing idea.

We hope that there will be no further plans for houses on any of this land, although there have been occasional scare stories that Spelthorne might make such proposals when they finally gain ownership from Surrey (negotiations are still in progress to effect the transfer). Hopefully, the land will remain as public open space for residents to enjoy as a convenient safe walking and cycling route, and as part of the network of

green spaces that enable people to walk from one end of Sunbury to the other, and to the river and village, in pleasant traffic-free surroundings.

### **Traffic in Thames Street**

This has been a problem for as long as anyone can remember, and, for some residents of Thames Street, was obviously part of the controversy over TP26.

LOSRA campaigned continuously on traffic issues over many years. The first major success was during the 70s when we succeeded in getting a lorry ban and weight restrictions imposed – people complain now about occasional vehicles flouting the laws, but imagine what it was like when there were no restrictions!

During the 1980s, before the requirements for traffic calming schemes were relaxed, we campaigned to get various traffic management measures introduced, including pedestrian refuges.

However, as traffic calming schemes became more widely accepted, we included a special section on Traffic in our proposed Conservation Plan in the early 90s, proposing various calming measures including speed bumps. After a consultation exercise, Spelthorne agreed to install the current scheme of speed platforms, mini-roundabouts and signage.

Not everyone regards it as a universal success – there will always be problems of noise of cars going over bumps and accelerating away at the end of the scheme - but there is no doubt that vehicle speed in Thames Street has been controlled by the scheme, and given the impracticality of closure and pedestrianisation and closure, it is probably a reasonable compromise.

### **Sunbury Leisure Centre**

Older residents of Sunbury have fond memories of the open air swimming pool on Rivermead Island. In truth, it was slightly incredible that it was ever built there – an ugly post-war structure in the middle of a riverside beauty spot, which was only open in practice for a few weeks a year, and where the water was never heated.

It was not practical for logistical reasons to upgrade the pool to indoor heated status, but the existence of this facility got in the way of the possibility of Sunbury getting its own leisure centre for community use. We campaigned for better facilities, and eventually Spelthorne came up with a proposal for a dual-use centre based around the existing 20-metre 4-lane swimming pool at Bishop Wand School.

The problem with this was that the community already had access to this pool outside school hours pool organised lessons, so in reality it was not adding anything to our leisure resources. In addition, local residents immediately affected were concerned about traffic etc.. We had a difficult decision, in that we were effectively saying ‘no’ to a proposal for a leisure centre, and Spelthorne could have walked away.

However, we put forward the arguments, organised public meetings, and Spelthorne Council looked at other possibilities, of which one was a dual-use centre at Sunbury Manor, with a brand-new 25-metre 6-lane pool, for which the Borough was bold

enough to make funding available. This excellent Centre was opened in 1993, and it is difficult to imagine the community without it now.

As a result, the old open-air pool on Rivermead Island was demolished and the area returned to greensward, and, however much the nostalgics mourn its passing, they surely have to agree the island is better the way it is.

### **Skiff Club on Rivermead Island**

During the 1980s a proposal was put forward for the building of a Skiff Club on Rivermead Island. This would have been a new club, in an area already well-served by existing skiff and punt clubs at The Dittons and Walton. However, this club was very much intended to take advantage of the highly-regarded punting stretch alongside Swan's Rest and Rivermead Islands, used during Sunbury Regatta.

The planned building was a large structure opposite the pedestrian bridge, with bar and social facilities as well as boat storage. This was opposed by many residents led by Dennis Bicknell, whose wife Helen was a LOSRA committee member. Denis set up PRIAD (Protect Rivermead Island Against Development), which worked alongside LOSRA to oppose the scheme.

For some reason, a number of Spelthorne Councillors were politically committed to the project, and the project was given planning permission in the face of vehement local opposition. Despite this, we continued to fight its implementation, based on lack of parking (a councillor championing the project said if we took that line they would allow a car park on the island!), and other issues.

We had no argument with the idea of a skiff club in Sunbury, simply that it was wrong to develop on a public riverside beauty spot such as Rivermead Island. We researched a number of alternative sites in the area, one of which has subsequently been developed as the Hampton School boathouse, and suggested them, but to no avail.

Fortunately, the delays and arguments caused the steam to go out of the Skiff Club's membership and fundraising efforts and they never had the money or support to begin the development before the planning permission lapsed after three years. By this time, support for the project on the Council had waned, and the project was dropped.

### **Heathrow-Gatwick helicopter link**

In the days before the opening of the M25, British Caledonian launched a helicopter service between Heathrow and Gatwick airports, with large craft overflying Sunbury four times an hour.

The noise nuisance created by this had a serious effect on many residents, and when their licence came up for renewal, we fought a lengthy battle at the public inquiry in London against the continuation of the service. We succeeded in securing a ruling that when the licence would be reconsidered when the M25 was fully opened, providing a quick route for shuttle buses.

When the M25 opened, we approached the Civil Aviation Authority and Secretary of State to ask that the service be withdrawn. There was a further inquiry into the

renewal of the licence, as BCal wished to continue running the helicopters, but the inspector ruled that the original decision was a correct one and their licence was refused.

The recent growth in unfettered private helicopter traffic along the Thames and on the H9 route from Heathrow to the river is an indication of how much nuisance helicopter noise can be, and this was a worthwhile campaign.

### **Orchard Meadow**

Sunbury Park was saved for posterity in the 1970s by an enlightened decision by Spelthorne Council to compulsorily purchase it to be made available as public open space, much to the chagrin of developers who saw it as a profitable opportunity gone begging.

Orchard Meadow, between the Park and Thames Street remained in private ownership, and the owners were keen to develop it for housing. For the best part of 20 years, LOSRA successfully opposed a succession of planning applications and development proposals, which were turned down on the strength of the Meadow's Green Belt status.

Whenever the Local Plan came up for review, this Green Belt status was questioned by the owners, and several times we had to appear at Public Inquiries to support Spelthorne in defending the Meadow's integrity as Green Belt. When the Borough finally got round to creating a plan for the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area in the early 90s, the owners of the Meadow floated a scheme for retirement homes on part of the Meadow, with a small area left as open space, even taking a local shop to mount an exhibition in an effort to get public support.

We took part in a public debate at the Planning Committee where LOSRA and the Meadow's owners made presentations about their aspirations for the Meadow. Fortunately, the Council continued to rely on the Green Belt designation as the basis for their policy.

In the late 90s the Meadow was put up for auction, and with LOSRA's encouragement Spelthorne decided to bid for it. Unfortunately, bidding went above the price advised by the District Valuer, and it was bought by another development company. After a year or two of impasse as LOSRA pressured for action, Spelthorne took the quite momentous decision, given the political climate of the last 20 years or so, to apply for a compulsory purchase order. Inevitably, it went to a public inquiry, and the Inspector found in favour of the CPO.

The rest, as they say, is history. Spelthorne did a round of consultation about plans for the Meadow's future, and after a year or two of work the Meadow was officially opened at Easter 2003.

The reason this is such an important case study is that if LOSRA had not consistently defended the Meadow's Green Belt status during times when circumstances in Spelthorne were not quite as they are today, the political will might not have been there to resist the pressure to let it go. However, the eventual result is a classic

example of what can be achieved when groups such as LOSRA work in concert with the Council to deliver on the community's aspirations.

### **Conservation Area Plan**

Throughout the 80s we were constantly reminding Spelthorne Council that they has a statutory duty to create a plan for the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area, and eventually in the early 90s they started the process of drafting and consultation.

Rather than rely on the Council's efforts, we decided to draft our own plan to establish a benchmark against which Spelthorne's could be measured. A huge amount of research was undertaken, looking at similar plans from all over the country to ensure that we addressed all the important issues in the most professional way possible.

The resultant plan, laboriously created in the days before desk-top publishing and ubiquitous PCs and laser printers, was a highly impressive document, dwarfing Spelthorne's official effort. It gave us a platform from which to participate authoritatively in the ensuing public inquiry, and influence some of the key decisions, notably that on Orchard Meadow.

Unfortunately, subsequent planning decisions seem to have somewhat lost the plot in terms of building design in the Conservation Area, and we no longer have a regular forum which oversees the Plan's implementation. Nevertheless, it does give us a template of policies which enable us to argue sound cases on planning matters that affect the Area.

### **Sunbury Trail**

One spin-off from the Conservation Area Plan was the Sunbury Trail booklet. As part of LOSRA's participation in the Steering Group overseeing the implementation of the Plan, we undertook to design a booklet as a Guide to the Sunbury Trail.

This is a circular walk, beginning at the Magpie Car Park, and taking in all the main features of the Conservation Area. The walk goes along Thames Street, up the Markway footpath beside the Salvation Army centre to the Linear Park.