LOWER SUNBURY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

2016 AUTUMN NEWSLETTER

LOSRA

www.losra.org

Local Plan Consultation starts in earnest with deluge of documents

Apologies - it may not sound exciting, but it's vital to the future of Lower Sunbury

We've been reporting over the last couple of years on the preparations and initial sparring over the nature and process of the consultation on the new draft of the Local Plan. Mainly, we have been concerned about the apparent determination of Spelthorne Council to sideline residents' groups as far as possible in the important preparatory stages.

In the last couple of weeks we have received the first three documents to be circulated as part of this process and they do nothing to allay our fears as to the way the process is being deliberately skewed in favour of developers and corporate vested interests.

We have no desire to make our newsletters as wordy and dull as possible, but it's useful to understand what these documents are about, so here's the background:

1. Green Belt Assessment Draft Methodology: *This sets out the methodology through which an up-to-date objective assessment of the Borough's Green Belt will take place against the criteria within the National Planning Policy Framework. This study does not seek to identify any sites to be released for development, only whether the Green Belt fulfils the purposes as defined in the NPPF.*

2. Sustainability Appraisal/ Strategic Environmental Assessment Draft Scoping Report: *Sustainability Appraisal (SA), including Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), is a statutory requirement for all Local Plans and considers the sustainability credentials of a Local Plan and its policies through social, environmental and economic considerations. The SA Scoping Report is the first stage of the SA and its purpose is to set out relevant plans or programmes which may influence the Local Plan; collect baseline information and identify sustainability issues and problems; and provide the Sustainability Framework against which options, policies and strategies of the Local Plan will be assessed.*

3. Spelthorne Functional Economic Area Analysis Draft Report: *This report seeks to define the Functional Economic Area (FEA) for Spelthorne. The draft report concludes that Spelthorne sits within a Heathrow-focussed FEA, and holds its strongest links with Runnymede, Hounslow, Hillingdon and Elmbridge. The report has been produced in line with national policy and planning guidance, which requires local authorities to have a good understanding of the wider economic area of which they are a part, so that they can clearly identify which neighbouring authorities they need to work with under the Duty to Cooperate.*

These documents are respectively 52, 120 and 65 pages long, full of technical jargon and management-speak.

Now the good bit - the consultation runs for just FOUR WEEKS from the day the online link to the documents was sent out until 7th November. That means that residents' groups and individuals have to absorb around 250 pages of highly specialist material and come up with their submissions and objections within that time.

The LOSRA chairman immediately wrote to Spelthorne objecting to this, saying: "*Whilst this may not be unreasonable for those businesses on the building, design and development side of this process, who have much greater staff and resources to respond within this very short time frame, to expect the people who could be most adversely affected by an unfavourable outcome of this exercise – Spelthorne residents, and Sunbury in particular, given that Kempton Park is the biggest single block of Green Belt - is totally unreasonable. Furthermore, no advance notice of your impending intention to consult on these issues was given, so residents have had no chance to prepare. To expect residents to respond to all 3 papers in tandem is also unreasonable. They should at the very least have been issued consecutively, which might have allowed a more informed response, which is surely the object of the exercise?*"

As a result of this, John Brooks, Spelthorne's Assistant Head Of Planning, came back and extended the period for responses to the second and third documents by two weeks - still far to short, in our view, to give ordinary people a fair chance to respond properly.

If you would like to read the documents, they are available at https://www.spelthorne.gov.uk/article/3014/Consultations-and-representations

One reason why this is all so important is that the next thing to happen is that Spelthorne have issued a "Call For Sites", with the introduction "*As part of the process of reviewing the Local Plan, the council is carrying out a Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) to provide up-to-date information on the land that might have the potential to deliver housing and space for economic development within the Borough. To help inform this process, the Council is carrying out a Call for Sites and is inviting developers, land owners, individuals and other interested parties to submit sites that they consider may be suitable for accommodating development.*"

There will now be a free-for-all where landowners, housebuilders, developers, Uncle Tom Cobley and all will be staking their claim, confident that in the *laissez faire* context provided by central government and highly equivocal statements about Green Belt development, they will have a chance of getting their site on a "presumption in favour of development" list.

And guess what will be the first such submission to be made? Yes, you've guessed it - Kempton Park.

This is going to be the start of a long battle over what gets into the Local Plan. We cannot expect every resident, however concerned about the future of the local environment they are, to absorb every detail of this stuff. However, please keep an eye on the web site, and register for the e-bulletins, because we may well be asking people to write letters or e-mails to register objections, and where possible we will give some guidance as to things to say.

LOSRA will be addressing all this in detail, and might also spend some money on specialist advice to make sure our arguments are as strong as possible. Be assured we will be defending your interests.

Campaign to get Spelthorne into Zone 6 gathers pace.

Is it a 'no-brainer' or is there more to it than that?

As many of you will know, a campaign is under way, led by Ashford resident Olivia Coskie, to have Spelthorne's railway stations brought into Zone 6 of the London transport network.

An online petition attracted 2,000 signatures, and the proposal appears to have majority support within Spelthorne Council, although they are not, of course, the responsible authority in these matters.

One factor which gave the campaigners cause for encouragement was the news that Smart Ticketing is to be introduced at local stations, which would appear to pave the way for any such development.

However, it seems that South West Trains would oppose any such move, as it would naturally reduce their income per passenger from the stations in question.

On the face of it, this would seem to be a positive proposal - there would be benefits for residents who travel into London for whatever reason, and Spelthorne Council and business groups have talked up the boost it would give to shopping centres, and local businesses through cheaper travel and greater accessibility.

However, others have articulated a very different view, conscious of some of the downsides suffered by residents who live close to stations at the current limits of Zone 6, such as Hampton.

Inevitably, those places attract people who drive to the nearest Zone 6 station to get cheaper fares and park their cars all day as close as they can get to the station. That would inevitably happen around Sunbury station if it were in Zone 6, and the potential for chaos on local roads anywhere within walking distance of Sunbury Cross, which are already pretty much at capacity just from local commuters, would be significant.

Equally likely would be even greater pressure for housing development in the area, and the Zone 6 advantages would be talked up by developers in their "sustainability" reports it would make housing on Kempton Park look an especially attractive proposition.

It's for those kind of reasons that LOSRA has not adopted a clear stance on this issue one way or another. There are certainly elements of the "be careful what you wish for" syndrome here.

Opinion in the area seems to be divided, and it may be something that people will have to pursue according to their own instincts, while we simply, for the moment at least, keep a watching brief while we also keep people fully informed.

Developers apply for more units at former London Irish site in The Avenue

Crest Nicholson, the developers of the former London Irish site in The Avenue, now known as Park Avenue, have applied for the mix of units on the site to be changed.

An application, as an addendum to the approved scheme for the site, has been lodged with Spelthorne Council. In their design and access statement the company states: "*Following considered evaluation of current and anticipated market conditions and demand within the context of the Park Avenue development as proposed and the surrounding local area, it is felt that the area fronting the entrance green which previously proposed the addition of four large 3-storey, 5-bedroom villas (plots 52-55) would be better served by a single 3-storey centrepiece appartment building.... Parking provision for the proposed building meets the local authorities parking standards and provides a total of 36 parking spaces of which 24 are allocated. Additionally the 4 unallocated spaces on the adjacent street have been retained.*"

The developers intend to meet their affordable housing obligation based on the precedents set by the previous consent and the viability work undertaken previously. It is proposed that the 35% proportion of affordable housing agreed in regard to the implemented consent be mirrored in this application. Based on a net gain of 20 additional dwellings, this would require a contribution toward seven off-site dwellings of £335,125.

Obviously, they have discovered in the changed uncertain economic climate they can't sell the proposed bigger houses on the site for the stratospheric prices they were asking, especially with miniscule gardens, quite apart from the increase in stamp duty on houses of this price However, one can't imagine that people who have already bought houses on the site will be particularly enamoured with the prospect of their outlook being changed from that of other nice houses to a large block of flats.

LOSRA has objected on the basis that it would change the character of the development and locality and impact on the amenity of existing residents.

London Irish apply for 50-seater stand at Hazelwood

Many residents, and especially those who were involved in the original application by London Irish to develop the Hazelwood golf course, will already have received notice of the application to install a moveable 50 seater covered stand on the north side of the main pitch (it would actually be on the west side). LOSRA Committee members met with the applicants on Thursday 29th September and were given a full explanation of the reasons behind the application which are summarised in the application thus:

"*In order to provide a very small amount of seating, particularly for our less able members and to ensure full compliance with disability discrimination legislation the proposal is to erect a 50 seat covered stand on the north side of our main pitch between the 10m line and the 22m line.*

The dimensions of the stand are 6617mm long by 3000mm wide and 2927mm high. The stand is a simple covered seating area that is pre-fabricated and delivered as one piece and fixed to the ground. It will be painted green on the outside to blend with the surroundings and the seats will be of a similar green colour."

LOSRA has absolutely no reason to doubt the good faith of the Amateur Club who are sponsoring the application but we would remind residents, that in order to protect the tranquillity of the cemetery and environment of nearby residents, we secured this important condition at the 2011 Public Inquiry:

'Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification), no moveable structure for the use of spectator accommodation shall be erected on the land'. Reason: 'to ensure that the noise scenarios remain accurate and valid, in the interests of protecting the amenity of visitors to the nearby cemetery and the living conditions of nearby residents'.

LOSRA has opposed the plan in order to maintain consistency with our previous stance and to protect the integrity of the provisions of the planning permission.

Spelthorne purchase of BP site breaks the mould of Local Authority finance

Many of you will have seen the news that Spelthorne Council has purchased the site of BP's offices in Sunbury Common. In case you didn't see it, here's the text of the Council's press release:

"*Beating national and international competition, Spelthorne Borough Council has purchased the BP campus in Sunbury-on-Thames. The funding given to Spelthorne Borough Council by central Government will be withdrawn completely in 2017-18, a situation which is forcing Spelthorne to find innovative ways to fund services and create new revenue streams, whilst continuing to keep a tight control on costs.*

To fund the project, Spelthorne Borough Council has borrowed money at a very competitive rate of interest from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB). Under the terms of the agreement, BP will remain as tenants at the Sunbury site, leasing back the offices from Spelthorne Borough Council for a minimum period of 20 years. The arrangement will generate a significant income for the Council year on year.

The BP campus is the largest privately owned office park in the UK and is currently home to approximately 3,000 employees. The site comprises 11 office buildings which provide 620,000 sq ft of accommodation, with surrounding land and car parks. The purchase was recently approved by Spelthorne Borough Council and BP and encompasses the entire campus, excluding the South West corner. The acquisition forms a key part of the Council's strategy to develop new ways of generating long term income streams to protect its services.

Cllr Ian Harvey, Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, said: "Securing the Council's financial stability is our highest priority and after exploring several options and taking advice from a number of independent experts, we are confident that this forward-thinking agreement represents a very sound investment for Spelthorne. It will be key in helping us to close the budget gap and protect the vital services which our residents and businesses need and deserve. We have had an excellent relationship with BP for many years and we are very pleased to be working with them on this exciting initiative."

Peter Mather, Head of Country UK, BP, said: "For almost 100 years BP has had a significant presence at Sunbury-on-Thames. Here we have conducted research, developed leading technologies, and run our global businesses. We are pleased to commit to at least a further 20 years at the site through this new and exciting long-term relationship with Spelthorne Borough Council."

As our headline notes, this seems to break the mould of how local authority finance works. Normally, public assets get farmed out to PFI companies with health and education authorities and organisations like HMRC then saddled with crippling annual repayments to use those assets. This seems to reverse that process.

On the face of it, it seems like a bold, imaginative and innovative approach to dealing with the growing crisis in the funding of local services, and on that basis the Council is to be congratulated .

It slightly begs the question as to why this isn't a technique that is more widely known about - once again, credit is due to Spelthorne for their professional knowledge and expertise.

No doubt other local authorities are already casting around for such opportunities - Spelthorne were maybe fortunate to have such a huge and valuable site within the borough.

Given the way that having stuff like that on the Government's balance sheet was such anathema that PFI was dreamt up, it's hard not to think that central government might try to stop local councils from borrowing such large sums,. Hopefully it's too late for them to stymie this particular project.

Changes to appointments system on the way at Sunbury Health Centre

Those of us who are patients at Sunbury Health Centre will be fully aware of the difficulty of getting an appointment on the day and may well have resorted to queuing up outside at the crack of dawn.

We heard from Dr Gill at the LoSRA AGM of the many logistical problems they face providing health care services to a patient population of over 18,000 in a building designed to cope with only 6,000.The annual patient survey confirms the high quality medical care and services provided by the dedicated staff at the Centre but the battle for better facilities will run for some time to come.

In the meantime, the Health Centre staff, supported by the Patient Participation Group (PPG), have been working hard to make changes to the appointments system in a bid to cut down the need to queue to get an appointment on the day. The new changes will come into effect from the 28th November and relate to how and when 'on the day' appointments are released for booking.

In essence, on-line booking and automated telephone booking will be available from 6.00am Monday to Friday and will be the best way to book. Reception will not open until 8.00am. The changes will be fully detailed on the Health Centre and PPG websites and in leaflets available from the surgery.

The next PPG Open Meeting, when there will be an opportunity to hear from the staff about these and other changes, will be at the Health Centre on Monday 7th November 6.30 - 7.30pm. The meeting is open to all patients. The meeting will also be an opportunity to see the PPG's new art display initiative, where local artists have kindly loaned their work to brighten up the recently decorated waiting room.

Did anyone - including Surrey County Council - realise just how vast the so-called EcoPark development was going to be?

Driving past or visiting Charlton Lane Community Recycling Centre, the huge size and visual impact of this large industrial complex upon the Green Belt is becoming all to obvious.

The Anaerobic Digester is well advanced with external finishing work in progress along with installation of mechanical equipment. The Gasification facilities have been started with foundations and internal walls being erected.

To meet deadlines and secure government subsidies construction hours have been extended and are now 7.30 am to 6.30 pm weekdays and 7.30 am to 2.30 pm on Saturdays. They need to commission it by the end of the year, and this seems rather unlikely, looking at what's left to do.

The layout of the community recycling centre continues to be restricted and, as a result, waiting times are affected, particularly at busy times. On 1st October weekday opening hours returned to 8 am to 4 pm. Saturday opening hours continue to be extended from 8 am to 4 pm until the end of construction. Sunday opening hours remain unchanged at 9am to 4pm.

Concurrently, SCC have approved the final CRC parking layout, which appears to ensure that the access to the CRC will be no better than that currently experienced. In particular the Green disposal facilities will be reduced to 25% of those previously provided.

Suez (formerly SITA - isn't it weirdly Freudian that they should choose to rename their company after a well-known political disaster?) have reported that they have received few complaints and interpret this as user satisfaction. If you're not happy about the situation, please tell both them and Richard Parkinson, the responsible officer at SCC. At the moment they think they've ground everyone into resigned submission. Maybe it's time to put that right.

Local ageUK branch is keen that more people know about the services they offer to people over 50

The local branch of ageUK approached LOSRA recently and asked if a representative could come to one of our committee meetings to explain the help they can offer to older people, so that we can maybe help by making more people aware of their services.

None of us on the Committee were aware of the things they do, so it's a fair bet that a lot of other people don't either, which is a pity as they are very practical day-to-day ways of giving different kinds of assistance. The services include:

- *Information & advice:* Free, independent unbiased on the phone or in person wherever suits you, on things like benefits, local services, and even reading post.
- *Independent Living Service:* Help with shopping, cleaning, laundry, collecting prescriptions or just companionship and odd jobs round the home.
- *Befriending:* If you just need some company, a DBS-checked volunteer will regularly visit you for chat and a cup of tea.
- *Activites & outings*: There are a range of social activites that you can get involved in.
- *Transport*: There are minibuses, with tailgate lifts, that can be hired, with a volunteer driver, at very reasonable rates.
- *Handyperson service*: Approved handymen and women will give you a free estimate for jobs that need doing at rates that you know will be fair.

Some of the services are free, while others are chargeable at modest rates. You can call the local Runnymede & Spelthorne office on 01784 444200 or find them on-line at wwwageukrs.org.uk

THE LOSRA COMMITTEE

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Walled Garden wins Best Small Park Gold Award for second year running

We are delighted to report that for the fourth consecutive year in The Walled Garden in Sunbury Park has won a Gold Award and the title of Overall Best Small Park in the South & South East in Bloom Awards recently. Sunbury Cemetery also won a Silver Gilt award in the Best Cemetery category.

As we said last year, this would not have been possible without the continued and unstinting support of Spelthorne Council, especially in these straitened times. Congratulations also to the staff at the Embroidery Gallery for their contribution in maintaining the Walled Garden's reputation as the landmark feature of Lower Sunbury.

Residents' campaign under way to raise funds for judicial review to stop riverside sports hub in Walton

Local residents' have been operating a crowdfunding campaign to challenge Elmbridge Council's decision to grant itself planning permission for a huge sports stadium in the green belt, next to the Thames opposite Lower Sunbury.

This is inappropriate development which will wreck the tranquillity, views and enjoyment of one of the most beautiful stretches of the River Thames, popular with cyclists, walkers and boaters alike.

Matches and crowds will create noise disturbance on both sides of the river, but ironically the Council says they cannot use acoustic screening, because that would conflict with the 'openness' of the Green Belt area.

Over 2,500 local people signed a petition calling on Elmbridge Council to remove the floodlighting and look for alternative sites away from the banks of the Thames, but the Council brushed it aside. Only a Judicial Review will stop this going ahead. The hearing date has been set for 6 December at the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand.

For further information, please visit:
https://www.facebook.com/SaveOurThamesSide

Sunbury Cricket Club Ist XI wins Surrey Championship Premier Division again

Congratulations to Sunbury Cricket Club, whose 1st XI won the Premier Division of the Surrey Championship this season, for the second year running. They were also Surrey 20/20 champions, underlining the strength and versatility of the squad. The Surrey Championship is one of the UK's toughest leagues, and the Club won their honours with a side which mainly comprised players who came through the Club's top class Colts' set-up, having lost the services of their top-class overseas player, South African Test wicketkeeper/batsman Dane Vilas, after just a few games.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

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Please find enclosed my annual subscription of £5.00 for family membership of the Lower Sunbury Residents' Association for the calendar year 2015. In addition, I would like to make a donation of £…….. (AUT15)

Name:…….. Address : …….

……Tel. no. : …….. E-mail address……...