



## **Chairman's Report 2009**

Dear Residents

Overall, we seem to have had a very busy and successful year. In some areas we have progressed well - in others not so well. As usual there is 'good' news and 'bad' news. I will cover both, generally in chronological order, and try to be as succinct and brief as possible.

### **9 - 21 Haslemere Avenue**

Last year you may remember a vigorous campaign by residents, Councillors and our local MP were successful in having the planning application for the redevelopment of 9-21 Haslemere Avenue, for affordable housing, turned down.

What was surprising at the time was that the decision by the Planning Committee was 8 - 1 in our favour. We thought at the time that such a conclusive rejection would result in the developers (Wandsworth Housing Association) going back to the drawing board and producing a redesign. However, developers lodged an appeal and were successful in having their appeal upheld. In general the Planning Inspector did not consider any of the points of rejection to be sufficiently material. Work has to commence on the development within three years of the appeal decision. In the circumstances, this decision was a surprise and a great disappointment. But we have learnt that, when it comes to planning decisions, life is full of surprises!

### **The Fair 2009**

A decision was made in January this year to hold another Fair in June. A huge amount of personal time and effort goes into organising something of this scale. DeNica Fairman, who has co-ordinated our efforts for the last two years, will be giving us a brief report shortly. However, I hope you will have had a chance to read her very comprehensive report in the latest newsletter. I also made some comments in my report in the newsletter and so I will not repeat myself other than to say a huge thank you to DeNica and all the committee members and volunteers who organised the day, and a big thank you to all of you who attended and made it a great success.

### **Wimbledon Park Guide**

Earlier in the year, in conjunction with Richard Jones of the Tennis Gallery in Arthur Road, we produced the very first Wimbledon Park Guide. We were greatly assisted by Stephen Chaplin, a local artist, who contributed the wonderful artwork, and also Richard Oxborrow from the AELTC.

I indicated in the letter which accompanied the guide, distributed to each household in the area, that the idea was born out of the recognition that so many people arrive in WP throughout the year, usually emerging from the Tube Station, and look for directions to the Park or the AELTC and Museum. We also want WP to be a thriving business and residential community. We hope the guide will help alert visitors to the shops, cafes and restaurants which are available in the area. Also, during Wimbledon Fortnight, more and more people are using WP as the stepping off point for the tennis. This represents a solid

opportunity for business in WP. We hope that between now and 2012, when AELTC will be the Olympic venue for the Tennis, we can work with the AELTC to improve the profile and benefits of WP as a Tennis arrival and departure point.

Some of you may be aware that The Merton Chamber of Commerce is heading up an initiative called 'Wimbledon going for Gold' in conjunction with the Council and other sponsors. This is aimed at giving a higher profile to Wimbledon in the lead up to the Olympics. A number of ideas are being considered and one which already has the green light is an upgrading of the frontage of Wimbledon Station. This will be great for Wimbledon Town Centre and the Village but will do nothing for us here in WP. We are on our own!

### **Wimbledon Park Business Group**

We do not have a local Chamber of Commerce but recently a local business group has been formed called the Wimbledon Park Village Business Group. This group consists of a small number of local businesses and is the embryo of what we hope will become an effective body to represent the interests of the business community in the local area. If you are interested in joining the group, contact Aaron Abraham or Nicky Davie of Edward Jones in Arthur Road (our sponsors tonight).

### **The Wandle Project**

An exciting idea was brought to the committee, earlier this year by Cécile Bridgens. The aim of the Wandle project is to create (if at all possible) a more direct access to the River from WP and in particular create a more direct link between the Park itself and the Wandle Valley Regional Park. The present access is via Weir Road which is not very convenient or attractive. This might be accomplished through Durnsford recreation ground or possibly the Haslemere industrial estate. Some of you may be aware of the Wandle Valley Regional Park project which is being led by a combination of organisations including LBM, Groundwork and the South London Partnership. This project which is backed by the Mayor and LDA envisages a park running all the way from Croydon to the River Thames at Wandsworth.

The sub committee group, led by Cécile Bridgens, who are going to run with this project, are hoping to engage with Groundwork and others to lobby support and maybe even some funding. However, a key issue to be tackled will be rights of way. If anyone is interested in joining this group, they should contact Cécile Bridgens.

### **The South London Waste Plan**

The consultation period for this plan expired on the 16<sup>th</sup> October. A few of us attended a workshop at the Civic Centre and then arranged a meeting in WP with the Project manager and lead planning officer. Although only a small number of residents attended, it was a very useful meeting and helped us all understand and appreciate some of the key issues. The WPRA did not submit a response but was happy to facilitate the meeting, which resulted in a number of residents writing letters and responding to the on-line questionnaire. We will try to give this matter some coverage on the website.

### **Merton's Draft Core Strategy Consultation**

This consultation ran from the 7<sup>th</sup> September to the 16<sup>th</sup> October. The 'core strategy' is central to the preparation of the Local Development Framework, which will replace the UDP. I am afraid that we do not have the resources or time to tackle a consultation of this nature. However we are members of the Wimbledon Society, which has a very effective Planning Committee, and the Society has submitted a response to both that consultation and the South London Waste Plan. For those of you who are interested these documents will appear on the Society's website shortly.

### **Christmas Lights on Arthur Road**

The Christmas lights that you see every year on Arthur Road are funded jointly by the Cresidents, WPRA and local businesses. Douglas Dallimer has always organised this with the Council for which we are all very grateful. This year the Council advised Douglas that the existing lights were no longer fit for purpose and new ones would be needed.

The Council will be providing lights in the main town centres but nowhere else. So we will have to continue to provide our own. The Council has organised a sponsoring project and has invited residents and businesses to pay for lights on the basis of £300 for each light for three years. The Council will take responsibility for supplying the lights, putting them up, taking them down and storing them. I am happy to tell you that the Cresidents are sponsoring three lights, the WPRA three lights and local businesses three lights. Therefore we can look forward to Arthur Road looking suitably festive again this year. Particular thanks are due to Douglas for not only organising the Christmas Lights but also for his very successful efforts in going round local businesses collecting sponsorship.

We would also like to thank Veronica Sarkhel, our new social secretary, for the innovative and generous idea of inviting different roads to a series of neighbour's evenings at Dalchini, to sample her delicious food. Veronica is donating £1 of every meal sold to the Christmas Lights.

### **Wimbledon Park Hall**

Meetings were arranged late last year between the developer, Mr Hussein, his architect, LBM estates department and myself to discuss the static position of the project. The extremely difficult economic and financial environment which developed late last year has meant banks were withdrawing from financing commitments made earlier. The extreme delays to the Hall project, have been caused, in our view, by the sheer lack of proper attention by LBM, resulting in a doubling of the project costs, Bankers unwilling to provide finance and of course considerably lower property prices. We suggested that LBM might consider injecting some \$106 monies into the project to cover the increased cost of the community centre which was estimated at £400k. This suggestion was investigated by Howard Joy and his colleagues but was flatly rejected.

I subsequently wrote to the Leader of the Council, complaining about, what the WPRA viewed, as a dilatory performance by the Council in the handling of this project and suggested that we might meet to discuss the Council's obligations to the residents of WP and undertakings that were given to the community at the time the Hall was sold for redevelopment. I am afraid I have to report to you that the Leader of the Council, David Williams categorically denied in his replies that the Council had any obligation or responsibility to the Residents of WP in this matter and the contract between the Council and the developer was a 'private sector matter' and not any responsibility of the Council. From this exchange it appeared that the Council is entirely disinterested in the problems of the residents of WP despite the fact that they have received over £1mn for the Hall site and all we have is a pile of rubble.

Subsequent to this exchange, meetings took place between the WPRA Hall sub group and two of our Councillors, Tariq Ahmad and Oonagh Moulton, both of whom had been copied in with the correspondence and were concerned about the response from their Leader.

We advised Tariq and Oonagh that it was clear to us from the minutes of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and subsequent Cabinet meeting in July 2004, together with accompanying reports relating

to prior discussions, that the money received from the sale of Wimbledon Park Hall was to be spent on a replacement facility in Wimbledon Park.

We also advised them that, given the time that has elapsed with this project and the incredibly negative response from David Williams, we were, unless they could organise a meeting with their colleagues to try and resolve this situation, minded to seek Counsel's opinion regarding the 'performance' of the Council and also file a complaint to Local Government Ombudsman about the dilatory manner in which this whole affair had been dealt with by the Council.

I am glad to report that Tariq and Oonagh worked very hard to arrange a meeting which took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> September with a range of officers and Cllr Diane Neil Mills, Cabinet member for Finance and Regeneration. Tariq chaired the meeting and a number of issues were discussed. Clarification was required on a number of points which resulted in Officers being asked to investigate a number of key issues and report back within ten days.

As a result we now have received, from Cllr Diane Neil Mills, a copy of the report, prepared by Howard Joy, Property Management and Review Manager for LBM. Regrettably the report is unsatisfactory in a number of ways and does not give us the reassurance which we are looking for on the issue of the money received by the Council for the sale of the Hall. In fact it would appear that the money has been spent on paying off Council debt.

Our committee had already discussed the matter of the cost of going to Counsel for an opinion and has sanctioned that expenditure up to an agreed level. Subject to any intervention on behalf of the Council, we will proceed with our earlier stated intention of seeking Counsel's opinion on the matter of the Specific Performance and the filing of a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

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Looking ahead, what's on our agenda for next year?

In summary I see these as our main priorities:

- Continue to work with the developer and Council to keep the hall project on track
- Continue to build the financial reserves of the association
- Consider holding another Fair in 2010
- Consider becoming a Registered Charity
- Increase the membership
- Improve the website
- Continue to support other local organisations
- Keep working for a better Wimbledon Park

Finally, a huge thank you to the officers and committee members for their tremendous commitment and enthusiasm throughout the year.

Iain Simpson  
Chairman  
22<sup>nd</sup> October 2009