

BVRA **newsheet**

from the Banstead Village Residents' Association

Vol: 23 No.2 - May 2008

Notice of Annual General Meeting

**The Executive Committee extends to all members of the Association
a warm invitation to the 61st Annual General Meeting to be held at:**

**THE CHURCH INSTITUTE, HIGH STREET, BANSTEAD,
on THURSDAY 22nd May, at 8.00 pm.**

AGENDA

- 1. Welcome by Chairman.**
- 2. Minutes of the 60th Annual General Meeting will not be read, but a summary will be distributed to members at the meeting.**
- 3. Presentation by Mr T Harrold, chairman of the Surrey branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England.**
- 4. Chairman's report.**
- 5. Presentation of audited accounts for the year ended 31 January 2008 - printed on the back page of this NewsSheet.**
- 6. Election of Officers, Executive Committee and Auditor for the year 2008/2009.**
- 7. Welcome to our local and county councillors, followed by Open Forum debate of local issues.**
- 8. Any other business.**

Please bring this invitation with you to the meeting.

BANSTEAD VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Chairman's Introduction

Events in the Village seem to have been relatively quiet over the three months since our last NewsSheet. Perhaps our concerns about the economic situation have made us all a little introspective and less active. As usual, however, several key planning issues are looming; Mike Sawyer will deal with the details in his planning section, but I would like to draw attention to the pending appeal on Courtlands Farm which will take place on 21st and 22nd May. We will be working closely with Park Road RA to resist the developer's plans. We also have approval from the Leader of Reigate and Banstead BC to co-ordinate with their responsible Planning Officers in preparing submissions to the enquiry.

There have been developments in regard to the Banstead and District Federation of RAs. At the initiative of the Kingswood RA the Federation called an 'extraordinary' meeting, designated a Planning Forum, which was attended by both Councillors and RA representatives. The aim was to address ways to co-ordinate the response of RAs in the northern borough to planning proposals, and to improve the planning functions of the Council. A second meeting was later held at which Cllr Joan Spiers, having recently taken over the planning portfolio, gave the assembly detailed responses to the issues raised at the first meeting. Amongst other commitments she undertook to ensure co-operation between the planning and enforcement sections, which would address some of the main concerns of BVRA about the lack of enforcement of planning conditions placed on approved projects. Cllr Spiers also suggested that a Council portfolio holder might attend the Federation's quarterly meetings to discuss an issue identified for that meeting. It was agreed by RAs present to use the next Federation meeting at the end of April to agree on a programme of key issues for future quarterly meetings and invite the appropriate portfolio holders from the Council in good time to ensure a regular dialogue between RAs and Councillors.

A running concern of BVRA and residents has been the trend in the provision of health services. Since the conscious decision made by the NHS not to build a new critical care hospital but to redevelop St Heliers, there has been a deafening silence about the future of Epsom hospital, most specifically with regard to the provision of emergency and critical care. The southern borough has easy access to East Surrey hospital at Redhill but for our residents in the northern wards, any further diminution of Epsom's role is a serious concern. Since it lies outside our area of responsibility BVRA has little clout in this regard and we urge residents to lobby their MP to work for the preservation and enhancement of Epsom hospital.

Don't forget the AGM on Thursday 22nd May at 8pm in the Church Institute. We have chosen a Thursday to avoid any risk of clashing with football, as last year, so we hope to see the number of residents in attendance rise dramatically in view of the local importance of preserving our green belt.

Roger Collins (01737 358384)

PLANNING

1. SEERA

It appears that Government is preparing to ride roughshod over residents' views with new proposals to shift housing, planning and transport powers from councillor-led regional assemblies to unelected quangos responsible for economic growth.

Recent consultation by Government on last July's Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration puts business-led regional development agencies (RDAs) in charge of housebuilding and transport investment at the expense of elected councillors who currently lead decision-making through regional assemblies.

Cllr Keith Mitchell CBE, Chairman of the South East England Regional Assembly, said:
"These proposals are another kick in the teeth for local democracy. Our approach to regional planning has

been evidence-based and inclusive. Councillors have worked closely alongside business and community interests to agree a viable and realistic way forward for their regions only to see that work cast aside because it does not match Government's own views".

It looks as though Ministers are pushing through these plans in a bid to streamline regional decision making yet data from the eight English regional assemblies currently responsible for strategic planning show that the biggest delays in the current system are down to Government itself.

Assemblies across the country have drawn up and consulted widely on new regional plans in less than two years on average. Some of those plans have now been stuck in Whitehall awaiting Ministerial approval for longer than they took to prepare. Cllr Mitchell also said: "Streamlining starts at home. If Government wants to

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speed up the planning system it needs to begin by putting its own house in order", and criticised the proposals for failing to address key practical issues for the future, such as funding and the need to keep expert planning skills.

Other concerns arise from the way the Planning Bill is being amended by the government as it passes through parliament - the trend is towards central control of key areas such as housing numbers and green belt release.

2. Local planning issues:

Courtlands Farm - as reported last issue the developer has gone to appeal. This is now due to be heard on 21/22 May, but it is not known when the Inspector's decision will be published. We had asked for the appeal to be held at Banstead to allow as many local people as possible to attend. Unfortunately this request fell on deaf ears and it is being held at Reigate Town Hall. This is yet another example of an insidious attack on the Green Belt – a small and superficially acceptable development which, however, would certainly set a precedent for building on our Green Belt if it succeeds.

We are, however, pleased that the Council is letting BVRA and PRRA prepare our case in harmony with theirs. We hope this will be to the benefit of all.

30 Sutton Lane - we submitted objections to the council about the proposal to redevelop this site with four 3-storey houses. Our main objections were to the size and impact of the houses, and to some extent their siting. We were pleased that at the last planning committee the councillors agreed to defer consideration of the officers' recommendation to grant approval, and hold a site visit. Whilst this does not necessarily mean that they intend to refuse the application, at least they will be able to see how this proposal would be out of character and have an adverse impact on the street scene and on neighbouring properties when making their decision.

Just in case the scheme is approved, however, we also objected in the strongest possible terms to another element of the developer's proposals - the intention to re-use the concrete that is dug up on site when constructing the new buildings. Whilst this seems on the face of it to be a "green" concept, the equipment used is heavy industrial crushing and grading machinery.

Not only does this cause noise and dust, it is difficult to see how the import and export of materials - eg the crushing of concrete from other sites - can be prevented. We have asked that this be rejected as totally unacceptable in a residential area.

Amberley - we anxiously await the Inspector's decision.

Bus Shelters - many will have noticed the recent appearance and almost immediate hiding-up of the foundations for a new shelter outside Waitrose. For those of you who were inconvenienced by this and wonder what is going on - we don't know! Both BVRA and Waitrose had objected to Surrey C C when they advertised the application under the Highways Acts. Apparently the contractor jumped the gun as we are told the matter is still undecided. We have approached our county and local councillors in an effort to prevent this unattractive obstruction to the high street and will await the county's decision with great interest.

Mike Sawyer (01737 355454)

INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Roads:

Each April, I now make a visual inspection of the local public roads and try to form an opinion as to their general state and then whether it has changed since last year. I now have 3 years data and a pattern is slowly emerging.

Of the 86 roads covered by BVRA, 9 are busy main roads, 33 are through roads and 44 are cul-de-sacs.

No road has been resurfaced since Wilmot Way some 8 or so years ago. The good news is that most of the very worst roads as reported to Surrey C C have been attended to - in part. The bad news is that these roads and others with pot holes have only had a piecemeal job done and often, but not always, to a poor standard in terms of workmanship and materials used (see each end of the High Street for bad examples). Grange Meadow, Chipstead Road, Great Ellshams and Longcroft Avenue have all had work done but remain in a poor or very poor condition. Longcroft Ave with the ongoing gas repairs can only be described as a mess.

Over the 2 years, roads judged as good (34) have remained so, although like Diceland Rd some may be somewhat uneven. The rest seem to fall into 2 general categories. On the one hand are those roads built to a poor standard in the first place which pothole on a continuous basis and with the patches extending over ever

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increasing areas. Buff Avenue, De Burgh Park and Pound Road are in this category and all may well be good in parts! Then there are the majority that are steadily wearing out. The top surface starts to wash away, then the top starts to disintegrate and finally the layer underneath gets reduced to elongated areas of rubble. It starts as a slow process but gathers pace. Great Ellshams, North Acre and especially Yewlands Close are good (ie bad!) examples.

The main roads, with their heavy wear, can get rapidly worse in a much shorter time. Woodmansterne Lane now has major faults, the South section of Bolters Lane is falling apart, the High Street is a mass of dips and bumps and then there is, as ever, The Horseshoe

All in all, the situation gets steadily worse.

2. Signage & Road Markings:

We are told that the posts with signs saying "At any time" alongside double yellow lines can be removed. At a rough count there are 20 such posts in the vicinity of the High Street and a few more further afield. In addition there a dozen or more signs attached to other posts that can also be scrapped. Anything to reduce roadside clutter is welcome.

Road markings and especially white lines are in a poor state and some so faint as to be useless. Sutton Lane with all its twists and turns is in need of attention and I am going to urge Surrey C C to get this seen to as a matter of urgency.

David Gradidge (01737 353981)

POLICE MATTERS

Following the re-structuring of police and community contact which was outlined in the autumn newsletter, there is no longer a formal police presence at the monthly BVRA Executive Committee meetings. Feedback on police activity in the Banstead/Nork area is now orchestrated via the Neighbourhood panel meetings which take place every four months at Banstead Junior School in The Horseshoe at 7.30. This is an opportunity for local residents to ask questions about local police matters and receive information on local initiatives to combat crime. Regrettably the recent meetings have been very poorly attended - only five residents at the meeting on 6th December 2007 and only slightly better in March 2008. If you are at a loose end on 3rd July or better still if you feel strongly about crime reduction in the area, come along to the next

panel meeting, voice your concerns and hear about what action you can take to prevent crime in Banstead and the surrounding area.

At the last meeting our local PCSO Jackie Phillips reported 19 crimes in the Banstead area for the previous month. This is about average in our area and consisted mainly of criminal damage, cars scratched, fences knocked down and the like. Following a recent mail drop to roads where there were no neighbourhood watch scheme, 14 new neighbourhood watch groups have been established. A neighbourhood watch group can consist of one road, a group of roads or a block of flats. If you would like to establish a group in your road you can contact Jackie at the police station or on e-mail at phillips11442@surrey.pnn.police.uk.

Areas covered by a neighbourhood watch scheme experience less crime than those with no neighbourhood watch.

Finally, be cautious when answering the door to young people selling household items door to door. Some will be part of a properly organised scheme to help young unemployed people earn their own income - legitimate schemes are supported by Surrey Police - and a vendor must carry a pedlar's licence. Callers of this type with no licence should be reported together with any other suspicious activity on the police contact number 0845 125 2222. This is the number to report any "normal" crime or suspicious activity.

Lindsay Iorwerth (01737 353906)

CHURCH INSTITUTE FRONTAGE

Some years ago, the Association contributed towards the work that was done to open up the frontage of the Church Institute, by removing the high hedge, constructing steps and planting shrubs. Those changes made a big difference to that part of the High Street.

Recently however the planting has begun to look a little bedraggled and the area has become much more open with the loss of the tall beech following wind damage, and the removal of a second tree which had started to die off.

The Association has proposed to fund some landscaping work along the frontage - to tidy up the existing shrubs, remove invasive saplings and brambles and to plant additional shrubs to fill some of the gaps. Agreement has been reached with the Parochial Church Council and this work is due to be done in May.

Tony Ford (01737 354757)

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COUNCIL TAX - an idiots guide:

We all pay the bills, but how many understand how it works. Having delved into the figures for the last 10 years I am only a little wiser. However, what I am is incredulous at the tortuous system that has been devised to levy what amounts to an indirect tax on income.

I shall try to keep to the facts leaving the reader to draw their own conclusions.

Reigate & Banstead provide the bills and are responsible for collecting the money and chasing up defaulters. However they are only responsible for about 13% of the expenditure. Surrey account for 74% and Surrey Police the other 13%. More on the way this split has changed later.

How much you pay depends on the value of your property and which band it falls into. However the values are based on open market capital values as at 1st April 1991. For instance band D, the one normally quoted, has a range of values from £68000 to £88000. The highest valued properties in band H pay double the amount of those in band D. Updating to current market values and so removing the inevitable distortions that have crept into the system is such a hot political topic that it has been quietly shelved for now, but apparently not dropped entirely, just delayed!

You now pay almost exactly double the amount you paid 10 years ago. The Retail Price Index (RPI) used as the basis for increases in pensions etc has gone up by 31.5% in the same period.

Each year the 3 contributors to the tax try to explain in leaflets we all get where the money goes and how much they want for the coming year. Over time these leaflets have got less informative. The expenditure headings generally get less, and worse, they change at regular intervals. More on this later.

What is more informative is the explanation of the changes from one year to the next.

The most important fact to grasp at this stage is the fact that central government makes very large grants to all three bodies, that they control the amount of the grant each year and that the level of grant has fallen substantially over the last 8 years. Let us look now at 3 things - the changes in the budgets before grants, the changes in the level of grants and the consequential effect on council tax. Are you still with me - for it gets worse?

The % changes over the last 8 years have been -

	SURREY	POLICE	REIGATE
Increase in budget before gov grants:	+73%	+60%	+45%
Gov grant 2000/01 as % of budget:	58.4%	69.3%	47.5%
Gov grant 2008/09 as % of budget:	56.6%	51.9%	39.7%
Increase in amount borne by council tax:	+71%	+137%	+60%

From this you can see that all 3 bodies have increased their budgets by very substantial amounts above the RPI but none more so than Surrey C C. Note that the RPI has increased by 26% over this 8 years. Government grants have more or less kept pace with the increase in Surrey's budgets, but the other 2 have suffered severe cuts - none more so than the police. The increase in the police share of council tax is 5 times the rate of inflation!

The reasons for these changes are complex to say the least and I will try to go into these in detail in part 2 due in October (you can't wait can you?).

Firstly we are not comparing like with like. Over the years central government has passed down a whole range of their responsibilities to local government who will say that they have not been recompensed properly for the additional work taken on. Secondly local government has incurred a raft of new duties and costs. Examples have been counter terrorism measures, landfill tax and the cost of meeting government set targets. Thirdly local government is probably subject to above average cost inflation and I suspect here that the increase in pension provision is a factor but the figures are hard to come by.

I will close this part by commenting on the information provided to tax payers. In general the amount of information and its quality have declined year on year. The headings under which spending is classified change constantly and the continuity from year to year even when the classification is the same is confusing to say the least.

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First a look at Surrey C C. You still get one sheet of A4, but the space used for hard information has probably halved over 8 years - more photos, bigger print etc. They have changed their expenditure headings 4 times over this period. Whereas you once knew how much was spent on Fire & Rescue, it does not get a mention now. Education, by far the largest single item, became Schools and Services for Children, then Children and Young People (including libraries and adult education) and then the same heading but without libraries and adult education. In the last 3 years a Dedicated Schools Grant (of £553.2m in 2008/09) has replaced most of the blanket grant which used to cover all expenditure.

Once you got an idea of how many full time equivalent employees they had but no longer, no doubt in part due to outsourcing of services. We used to get "changes from last year" but that went 5 years ago.

The Police have been more consistent providing the equivalent of 2 sheets of A4. The format has hardly changed and the figures follow through from year to year quite well. How the spending has changed has a consistent level of detail year on year. Expenditure headings are more or less unchanged - it is much more straight forward no doubt. The number of front line officers is detailed, however Civilians became Police Staff in 2004/05 and numbered 1665 in 2006/07. By 2007/08 they had changed to Operational Police Staff of 1499 and Support Police Staff of 722. The number for Community Support Officers meanwhile disappeared.

In the text accompanying the figures, they are increasingly vociferous in their complaint that they get the lowest government grant per person of any county. They also claim that they have one of the lowest if not the lowest crime rate in England and that further cuts may well jeopardise that state.

What they didn't specify this year was that the increase in the budget was 6% but after only a small increase in grants the council tax element has increased by 9.7% In the press (April 7th) it now appears that the government are proposing to cap this increase at 5% with the police given 21 days to appeal. At worst this could mean a cut in police services and then a recalculation of council tax.

But of course if the grant had kept pace with the police budget - need I go on.....?

Reigate & Banstead have provided a 12 page booklet

over the last 6 years, but only about 4 pages are devoted to detailing where the money goes. The rest details plans and achievements and only in 2004/05 did we learn that rubbish collection cost nearly £1m but this detail hasn't been repeated.

Here again expenditure headings have changed but have been superficially stable over the last 5 years. What has changed is the content of each heading and given that they don't provide comparisons with the previous year it becomes very confusing. However they do provide some reasons for the increased budget year-on-year on a consistent basis.

Examples of the inconsistency of the figure work come from a comparison between this year and last year. Neighbourhood Services increased from £8.2m gross to £11m gross, whereas Finance and Resources changed from £11.7m last year to £3.5 this year all without explanation. What is included in each heading is a bit of a mystery - what, for instance, is in Corporate Plan Themes at £1.47m?

My favourite expenditure heading, alas now long past, was Recreation including Cemeteries.

To be concluded.....

David Gradidge (01737 353981)

THE BANSTEAD LIGHTS

You may recall our request for someone to step in and replace Pam Goldsack to look after the annual lights display. The need is now urgent, and if no-one comes forward it is likely that Banstead will no longer be able to maintain and expand its winter tree and lamppost mounted lights display. The need is for time rather than money (although, as ever, donations would not be unwelcome!), so PLEASE will someone who might be prepared to help speak to me, to our chairman, or to any member of the committee.

Mike Sawyer (01737 355454)

BANSTEAD WILDLIFE FIELD

The refurbished pond is now full of life and local schools visit from time to time. If you would like to help maintain this attractive area as an occasional volunteer, there is plenty of work to be done. This involves path maintenance, raking up cuttings in the Autumn, and from time to time keeping brambles under control which is quite a challenging job.

Let me know if you can help.

David Gradidge (01737 353981)

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NEW NATIONAL BUS PASS

The decision by all local authorities in Surrey to permit the start time of 9 am for the new bus pass (rather than the delay to a 9.30 start originally agreed) is welcome and has averted much confusion and inequality across boundaries.

The finishing time remains with the national scheme at 11 pm.

Shirley Conacher (01737 351210)

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

The Council of Voluntary Services has recently re-launched the Message in a Bottle service. This initiative was originally launched in May 2004, funded by Surrey County Council's Local Area Committee in Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, working in partnership with Tandridge District Council, and with other local organisations.

The scheme is designed to assist people living on their own by placing information on their essential medical details within the home in a location that can be easily found by appropriate services, such as ambulance staff, in the event of an emergency. This information covers not only their personal information but whom to contact in an emergency and details of their GP; the time saved in responding to an emergency can be crucial and many lives have already been saved through this service.

The kits, comprising the plastic bottle and message forms with instructions on how to use it and where to place it in the home, can be obtained either from the Help Shop in the Horseshoe or from a number of other organisations such as Age Concern and the Council. Any of our residents who feel that they may benefit from this service, or who know someone else who may, are encouraged to obtain the explanatory leaflet from the CVS, or indeed why not get a bottle from the Help Shop?

Roger Collins (01737 358384)

CARECALL

CareCall is a Surrey PCT initiative working closely with the CVS. It is a service developed in direct response to what people said they needed to assist them to manage their own health better, particularly those people vulnerable to health problems. It is a telephone service manned by trained and experienced nurses who can become your own particular health coach. You can ring

in on the free phone number below between 7am and 11pm in the week and 9am -1pm on Saturdays. As part of the service those people leaving hospital will receive a call within 72 hours from their discharge from hospital - and those needing regular telephone calls in order to support their well-being and health.

Since the service requires the use of patients' anonymous data from their GP record, to comply with the Data Protection Act CareCall currently depends on being approached by those who wish to use the service. Residents who feel they may be at risk for health reasons, want to know more about their health, or know someone else who may, are encouraged to contact CareCall on 0800 0284207. At present this only applies to those people who are registered with a GP in East Surrey.

Roger Collins (01737 358384)

U3A BANSTEAD

Our new group, "Exploring Art", meets locally as well as visits to galleries. If you are interested, please contact:

**Janet Green (0208 642 7111), or email
janet@green@yahoo.co.uk.**

AGE CONCERN (BANSTEAD)

Just a reminder that when your mobile phone and charger, printer toner or cartridge finally expire Age Concern can send them for recycling. For this they get a small (and much needed) contribution to their funds, so please take any such time-expired items to the Age Concern office in the Civic Centre, The Horseshoe.

Christine West (01737 352156)

MEMBERSHIP & ROAD STEWARDS

The final total for 2007/08 is 2108 an increase of 40 over the previous year.

Whilst this is good news, there is still plenty of scope to increase membership particularly in many of the newer developments.

I am keen to target Diceland Road, one of the rare established roads where we have few members. To that end copies of the last NewsSheet will be hand delivered to all households there and then followed up with the next NewsSheet in May. If you know of anyone who is keen to act as Road Steward, please let me know.

A vacancy still exists for the East section of Lambert Road where we have 18 members. Again, if you can help give me a phone call.

David Gradidge (01737 353981)

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INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST JANUARY 2008

	2007/2008	2006/2007
	£	£
INCOME		
Subscriptions & Donations	3192	3127
Sundry Income	50	0
Interest received	120	85
	<u>3361</u>	<u>3212</u>
EXPENDITURE		
Production of News Sheets	1602	1358
Subscriptions	30	30
Printing, postage, stationery & telephone	672	126
Hire of rooms	424	528
Web Site	228	0
Sundry expenses	144	288
Donations-Christmas Lights & Sound System	0	700
Provision for repairs to the Institute frontage	300	0
Survey Expenses	0	433
Excess of Income over Expenditure	-39	-251
	<u>3361</u>	<u>3212</u>

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST JANUARY 2008

	31/01/08	31/01/07
	£	£
NET ASSETS		
Treasurer's account - Lloyds TSB	585	251
Deposit account - Lloyds TSB	6000	5000
- Halifax	0	1145
Debtors net of Creditors	-109	-181
	<u>6476</u>	<u>6215</u>
REPRESENTED BY		
General Fund as at 1st February 2007	6215	6064
Less deficit for the year	-39	-251
Add Fund for the Preservation of Amenities	0	402
	<u>6176</u>	<u>6215</u>
Provision for repairs to the Institute frontage	300	0
	<u>6476</u>	<u>6215</u>

J D G Gradidge
16 The Maples
Banstead
Hon Treasurer
April 18th 2008