

# BVRA news sheet

from the Banstead Village Residents' Association

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I trust you have all enjoyed the summer break. Contrary to all the forebodings of drought, our gardens and countryside are looking verdant - a sight to cheer the spirits.

We duly celebrated our Golden Anniversary at the May Annual General Meeting in a time-honoured way. My particular thanks are due to committee members who arranged the drinks and nibbles and the display of photographs of Banstead, past and present, which attracted a good deal of interest. The meeting itself was marked by a lively debate on many local issues, and we thank our Councillors for their contribution.

The Association's new year (1997/98) has been marked by a number of important issues which will affect the lives of our community. Firstly, the introduction of wheeled bins and re-cycling boxes is due to take place by the end of September. This issue contains a "Supplement" of information which you may care to keep. Secondly, the provision of a new Civic Facility to replace the Banstead Council House has run into unexpected difficulties raised by the Borough Council in Reigate, and David Rudd explains this in his article.

I hope this NewsSheet fulfils its role of keeping you informed of what is going on in the Village. As usual we are publishing a full list of executive committee members, with their addresses and telephone numbers, together with those of our Councillors, to enable you to make contact about any problem or if you need advice.

## Committee News

We are delighted to welcome our new honorary secretary, John Nicolson, and committee member, Mrs. Hilary Drew, to the fold; they were duly elected to serve at the AGM. This leaves just one vacancy on our 19-member committee - would you like to volunteer? If so, please let me know (Tel: 357463).

At its first meeting on May 27th the incoming committee re-elected David Rudd to serve as Vice-Chairman and, in the absence of any other nominations, Peter McLaren agreed to continue as Chairman, albeit reluctantly.

## Banstead Civic Offices

Thursday, July 31st was a very disappointing day for Banstead, and for our neighbours in Nork, Burgh

Heath, Woodmansterne and Tattenhams. A full meeting of the Borough Council decided by 23 votes to 18 *not* to go ahead with the scheme for new Civic Offices which we had been led to believe were seriously intended as an extension to the Day Centre in the Horseshoe.

Over the past several months, we and the Banstead Society had been working closely with the Borough officers, Councillors and consultants to define the scheme. Through this process of community liaison and consultation, it had been refined and developed, culminating in a presentation of the plans on 9th June by the Council Leader, Cllr. Dr. Ormerod, to a meeting of local organisations. Those plans showed:

- meeting room accommodation to replace the Council Chamber, which we shall lose when the Council sells off the Council House on the Brighton Road,
- other improvements to the Day Centre to make it more available to a wide range of organisations and
- an enlarged Help Shop and Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB).

In that form the scheme would have provided:

- better utilisation of the Borough's assets by (in the Councillor's words) "improved meeting facilities for evening and weekend use and a meeting room available all day",
- a natural focus for community activity in the Banstead area,
- a community building of which we could all be proud, the opportunity for which will not recur for many years.

Cllr. Ormerod described those plans as providing a first class Civic Facility for the residents of the north of the Borough. We agreed with him.

We were therefore flabbergasted to learn in mid-July that *only* the enlarged Help Shop and CAB would go ahead because (in the words of Cllr. Ormerod's explanatory letter): "Unfortunately, the cost of providing [all] those facilities has steadily increased and is now way over the original budget". The meeting room and the other improvements to the Day Centre are to be referred to a "Strategic Planning Group to consider if the expenditure represents good value for money and to look at it alongside other priorities for capital expenditure."



We have not had access to the cost estimates but we have managed to glean some of the figures. The whole scheme would cost about £800,000 but the original budget was only £200,000. In other words we are supposed to understand how the estimates rose *steadily* during those months of consultation by four times without the officers and councillors realising that their budget was grossly inadequate when they presented their plans to us - only a few weeks before they shelved them.

Either that or they had a very good idea what the financial situation was, but glossed over it at the presentation - perhaps for fear of generating an adverse reaction of the kind expressed at the public meeting last November. Members who were at that meeting may recall that it passed a motion deprecating the Council's minimalist approach to the provision of community facilities in Banstead and calling upon it to recognise the legitimate wishes of the people in the north of the Borough.

Meanwhile the Council House, which was expected to be sold for £1.6 million, will now, we believe, raise £1.8 million. That increase seemed to augur well for our Civic Offices, but the Council's largest 'other priority for capital expenditure' is the Town Hall redevelopment in Reigate. The meeting voted to allocate £7,591,361 to that redevelopment - up from £6 million a year ago, according to a newspaper report then. The seven-figure accuracy is of course spurious; moreover some Councillors (who had access to the calculations) pointed out that the Institute of Chartered Surveyors had recommended a higher allowance for inflation of building costs than had been included in that allocation and some building firms had thought it should be much higher still. Several Councillors reckoned that £9.5 million would be more realistic and one of them put it at £10 million.

Perhaps £10 million is too pessimistic, but to those of us who have worked both for contractors in the private sector and for the government and have observed how central and local government projects frequently overrun their capital estimates, it has an uncomfortable ring of reality, amplified by the Council's ineptitude in estimating the cost of the Banstead scheme until they had wasted months of their time and effort and ours. Cost estimates *can* be realistic as projects are worked up in detail along the line, but sharper sanctions than those which Councillors and their officials have to face seem to be necessary to make them so.

The latest published estimate for the enlarged Help Shop and CAB is £313,950 (another example of spurious accuracy). We support the Help Shop and CAB staff having more spacious premises, but we doubt whether they need cost over £300,000. Our Councillor, Brian Cowle, proposed an amendment to

throw them back into the melting pot, along with the other elements of the scheme, partly because piecemeal development always costs more than integrated development, but he was defeated by 23 votes to 19.

The voting was obviously ruled by the current party alliances throughout the meeting. In our ward, Cllr. Bill Bryant voted with Cllr. Brian Cowle in favour of going ahead with the full scheme for Banstead. Cllr. Geoff Sinnerton had apologised for his absence from the meeting.

The Council will apply (in effect to itself) for planning permission for that full scheme, in case the Strategic Planning Group finds after all that it would be better value for money than the Group's other priorities. But we all know that phrases like 'value for money' have no objective meaning. They are buzz-phrases behind which officials and politicians conceal their real, political reasons for their decisions.

The Council does not have to consult its voters before taking its decisions. It can just take them and accept the consequences at subsequent elections, but as local government becomes more and more pervasive, that method is seen to be too clumsy. A few years ago we ceased to be called rate payers or Council Tax payers and became 'customers'. We in BVRA thought that was just a PR stunt, but it did seem to go with a genuine desire for consultations and we have put an enormous amount of voluntary time and effort into consultations on a range of issues. In spite of all the hiccups, our High Street improvements, which have parallels in other parts of the Borough, are perhaps the best example of what can be achieved in that way. But the consultations must be genuine, otherwise they do more harm than good.

We have not been consulted about our new civic centre; we have been manipulated.

David Rudd

### Banstead Fair

Unlike last year, this year's Fair held on July 12th was blessed with fine weather and was very well supported by the community. BVRA's stand, on which were displayed plans showing progress made with the High Street Initiative and photographs of Banstead in by-gone days, attracted much interest.

As in past years, Downview Prison's stall sold out of its plants and containers and, in the process, raised £327 for the benefit of the MENCAP charity.

We regard this event as of great importance, since it brings together many elements of Village life and the generous folk who support the organisations concerned in a demonstration of community spirit. Long may it continue.



## **High Street Initiative**

With the completion of the new parking bay opposite the Church Institute (and the eventual erection of the correct signs to allow people to park there!), we are starting to see the emergence of a logical set of parking spaces identified in the High Street. The new bay, with its ends defined by built-out pedestrian crossing points, with its edge defined by the dashed white line and with signs stipulating "Parking for 1 hour. No return within 2 hours" sets the standard for how most of the other parking spaces in the High Street will be laid out. Except at the bus stops and pelican crossings, it is intended to have only two types of marking:

- double yellow lines around the corners of junctions, denoting "it is dangerous to park here, so don't", and
- proper parking bays with their white edging, denoting "you're welcome to park here, so please do".

The aim is to do away with the present haphazard arrangement of single yellow lines and unloading-only bays that causes confusion and resentment amongst those wishing to park in the Village to visit our shops, and has led to the present widespread abuse of the system. We anticipate that the lines will be repainted later this year or early next.

Also due to happen within this financial year are alterations to the junctions with Wilmot Way, Glenfield Road and Harbourfield Road. This will narrow down the side roads, to make it easier for pedestrians to cross and to restrict the dangerous U-turns that some motorists make at these points. The work will also provide opportunities to gain new footway areas, to create new spaces for tree planting and to implement other "environmental enhancements" (for example, extending the grass strips along the frontage of The Timbers). The designs, which are currently being worked up, must however include measures to prevent pavement parking and must not result in the creation of a "sea of tarmac" for the footway. We hope to provide more details of the scheme in the next issue of the NewsSheet.

Tony Ford

## **Pavement Parking outside Dillons**

Readers of this NewsSheet will recall that efforts made by several members of your committee have resulted in a number of bollards being installed by the Council on the pavements in front of Dillons at the western end of the High Street with the intention of stopping vehicles from parking on the pavement there. Unfortunately some Royal Mail van drivers are still managing to manoeuvre between the bollards with the result that they obstruct the pavement, risk injuring pedestrians and cause damage to the paving.

What remains to be done to stop this? A Royal Mail official has told me that the drivers concerned are responsible for observing the law. I am collecting evidence with a view to getting the police to prosecute the offenders. Anyone who sees a van on this pavement is requested to make a note of the time and simple details of the van and telephone me (or my answerphone) on 01737 212051.

Chris Penfold

## **Planning Matters**

Since our April issue, the Council has refused planning permission for developers to pull down Stone Lanterns in Woodmansterne Lane and to replace it by four 4-bedroom detached houses. The Council then started to prepare a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) for five large trees and a group of ten smaller trees in the grounds. The applicants responded by buying the property immediately and cutting down one of the large trees before the TPO was served. They then applied to replace the house with two 5-bedroom detached houses, one of which would extend over the place where that tree stood.

We understand some neighbours are objecting to this new application, though whether in such numbers as previously we cannot tell. Last time, the Council received eleven individual letters of objection and a petition with 27 signatures, but there is always the risk of 'objection fatigue' when there is more than one application for the same property.

For our part, we have pointed to six separate planning policies which the new application would violate - four in the Borough Local Plan and two in the Surrey Structure Plan. So, again, the Council will have enough grounds for refusing the application if they have a mind to do so. We are keeping our fingers crossed.

Of the other four outstanding applications in March, two were modified in respect of the features to which we had objected and will probably now go ahead.

The other two are for retrospective permission to continue with a non-agricultural use of part of a farm on the edge of the Green Belt. They are the sort of application by which the Green Belt is slowly - almost imperceptibly, but cumulatively - eroded, year after year, because farming is much less commercially profitable than other land uses on the edge of any prosperous urban area. In this case, we are worried because the non-agricultural use went on for eight years before the farmer was persuaded to make his applications, and he now need only stave off the Council for another eighteen months to enable him to continue without planning permission. We shall continue to urge the Council to 'get on with it'.

Meanwhile, our planning applications group has diligently scrutinised a further 50 applications, positively welcomed one (which has been granted)



and objected to nine, all now outstanding as far as we know. Members have often found important features - sometimes 'for' and sometimes 'against' - which were not apparent at first sight. Sometimes we disagree at first, but we nearly always come to a unanimous view after discussion. In fact, in more than a hundred applications we have examined since I took over this job from Tony Ford last October, I can recall only three on which we had to take a vote.

David Rudd

### **Banstead Wildlife Field**

The wooden bench presented by the BVRA was installed in May, as planned, to commemorate the Golden Anniversary. Work has been carried out to install more footpaths, and two more raised beds have been constructed for the sensory garden. An additional area for seating near the pond is underway, and construction of the dipping platform is now well advanced. A number of different species have been seen in and around the pond, including newts, adult and young frogs, and dragon flies. Of the trees planted last year, some 86% have survived. Unfortunately, three chestnut trees near the flats at the south-west corner of the site, had to be removed as they were found to be unsafe. These will be replaced by oak trees further away from the flats, and will be planted in the coming autumn or winter. The grassland area has been surveyed and the number of species was found to have increased from 105 to 168 since last year. Overall this is an indication of successful site management and all those responsible are to be congratulated.

The Official Opening Ceremony of the Wildlife Site will take place on Thursday, September 18th 1997 at 2.15 p.m. for 2.30 p.m. and BVRA members are welcome to attend and support this worthwhile Village initiative. As stated in the last NewsSheet, the Wildlife Field is located by Basing Road off Bolters Lane.

Dennis Woolmer

### **Waitrose Store**

Following complaints from members that the number of charity collections at the doorway of Waitrose had become something of a nuisance, we discussed the matter with the store manager who has agreed to limit the number of collections in the future.

Shirley Conacher

### **Borough Times**

The Borough's newspaper which hitherto has not been distributed to several areas of Reigate & Banstead should now, in theory, reach every household. The Council has contracted with Royal

Mail to undertake the distribution. If by some chance you do not receive a copy please tell the Council Tel. 01737 242477.

If the August issue 1997 is anything to go by, the Borough Times mostly features news of happenings and developments in the south of the Borough!

### **Former Sutton Lane Depot**

Many of you who have witnessed the building activity on the former Sutton Lane Depot site have been most concerned to note the disgusting state of the pavement and grass verge in Winkworth Road. Access for lorries should have been via Barnfield, but no supervision of the contractor's activities seems to have been exercised by the Council. We have reported the damage to the Borough's Dept. of Environmental Services and, hopefully, matters will be rectified - NOT at council tax payers' expense!

### **Who wants to be a Volunteer?**

The Banstead Volunteer Bureau is located in the Help Shop, The Horseshoe, Banstead. The Bureau is quite simply a central point where people who are interested in volunteering can come and chat about volunteer openings which are available, and be referred to the appropriate voluntary organisation.

There are many different types of voluntary jobs available such as working with elderly people, children, administrative work, driving etc. and many more. Whatever your age and skills there is going to be something for you.

Voluntary work can be very interesting and rewarding. Perhaps you have retired, been made redundant, have children at school, want a stepping-stone back to work or simply have an hour or two to spare a week. If this is the case then voluntary work could just be what you are looking for.

The Bureau covers Banstead and the surrounding areas. We are open every Thursday from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. Tel. 01737 373124 (24 hour Ansaphone).

### **Message for Road Stewards**

Just a timely reminder that membership subscriptions for the year ending January 31st 1998 (still £1 per household) are due for collection and return to the Treasurer by November 30th 1997.

Our last year's membership reached an all-time high of 1,876 households, and the committee hopes this can be increased to 2,000 by the Millennium. We realise, however, that several road stewards have already achieved 100% membership in their areas but we hope the remainder will be able to recruit just one or two additional members.

Peter McLaren