

BVRA newsheet

from the Banstead Village Residents' Association

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Chairman's Introduction

There are several current threats to the quality of our environment – the proposed water pipeline, the introduction of on road parking charges and the proposal to close the Merland Rise swimming pool. Of these perhaps only the parking charges can be stopped, although the route of the pipeline could be modified to lessen its impact. It is also relatively temporary whereas the other two will permanently damage our environment.

The changes to the NHS are another serious matter in terms of their impact on our daily lives - in my introduction to the last NewsSheet I drew attention to the government's plans to restructure the NHS. At the time of writing there has been little new information other than confirmation that this is a serious proposal which we can assume will go forward over the next two to three years. It has the potential to change greatly how we experience services from both GPs and the primary care sector (in effect, the hospitals) but without more detail I cannot update you yet.

We are worried about the number of empty shops in the Village. The severe weather can only worsen the situation as the shops will be suffering a loss of cash flow. To cap it all the introduction of parking charges might reduce footfall in the High Street which would in our view be a cynical disregard of residents' interests.

Since the replacement of lamp posts in the High Street was postponed into the New Year, we were able to have our Christmas lights, which I hope you were able to appreciate in spite of the snow. These have only been maintained at last year's level as we have to husband our diminishing cash to cater for possible extra costs next year. The contractor Skanska has promised to transfer our electrical equipment into the new posts but will not transfer the strings of lights. These will have to be stored or replaced, in either case involving additional cost.

Unlike the last NewsSheet I cannot say that it has been a quiet period, given the endless snow and ice, I hope that by the time you read this we shall be back to 'normal', which I also hope will not be what we have recently been experiencing. In any case I do hope you all had a great Christmas and happy New Year.

Roger Collins, Chairman

Tel.: 01737 358384

PARKING

This has emerged only recently as an issue and we await the full details, since this is an internal consultation period within the council. It appears that on street parking will be charged, probably at 50p per half hour which is a higher rate than the current charges in the two car parks (although these were recently raised). Not all shopkeepers are averse to this, as it could reduce all day (illegal) parking on the High Street but equally it could reduce the number of residents visiting the Banstead shops, particularly those from 'out of town'

where on street parking remains free (Tadworth, Kingswood). The point is that our shops cannot afford any reduction in the footfall through the High Street as their cash flow is already being squeezed by high rents, rates and bad weather.

We are told that it is planned to use cashless payment methods in as many locations as possible to minimise the number of ticket machines. This would mean, as an alternative to cash, motorists could pay using a mobile phone.

The planned programme for the

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introduction of on-street parking charges across Surrey has been drawn up based on the potential income that could be generated in each area, with the highest (ie us!) starting first. If approved, the planned programme will entail introducing pay and display in two districts/boroughs, every two months, on a rolling programme starting May 2011. The whole County should then be completed by April 2012.

There is no mention of parking permits for businesses and their staff. This could put pressure on the businesses to cover the costs of staff parking if charges are introduced. Moreover, businesses such as Waitrose may worry about extra pressure from shoppers using their park, as might the Parish Council in regard to the All Saint's park. Furthermore, seeing the time some people take "cruising" for a free parking space, this is likely to increase parking in those roads adjoining the High Street (that is those that are not already used for all-day parking!). It also raises the question of the possible need for residents' parking permits. The operation and impact of any such scheme (eg would it apply to spaces in the High Street for people who live in flats in the High Street?) has not been addressed.

What is required in Banstead is better enforcement. At present it is spasmodic and inadequate, with particular problems arising in specific areas, such as the frontage of the post office, where the yellow lines are almost permanently occupied. We realise that this is a cost issue for the county council, but it is surely part of their remit to control parking in the High Street, which at present they do not do. Introducing on street charges for parking looks too much like a money-raising policy without regard to residents' or traders' interests.

Moreover, the time for the internal consultation (until January 7th) is ridiculously short. We believe that our local councillors were not warned of these proposals. If you have objections, write to your county and borough councillors. You might even contact our MP Crispin Blunt, since this policy seems at odds with the government's concept of local empowerment in a greater society.

Roger Collins

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THE SWIMMING POOL

The draft corporate strategy of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council includes a proposal to close the swimming pool, as part of a refurbishment of the Leisure Centre at Merland Rise. The Leader of the Council, Mrs Joan Spiers arranged a meeting with representatives of the Federation of Banstead & District Residents Associations to allow discussion of this proposal. The meeting was well attended and, at the invitation of the Federation's Chairman, Tony Blacoe, several members of the Save Our Swimming Pool (SOS) committee were also there. There is little doubt of the weight of opinion amongst residents in favour of retaining the pool, but Councillor Spiers stated that the Council's finances will not stretch to its replacement or continued operation unless other services are reduced or abandoned in order to release funds. The 'dry' facilities at the Leisure Centre (the gym etc) are not at risk as it is possible both to fund the capital costs of renewal of these elements and to make profits from their operation, but the wet facilities are too expensive to operate and thus do not, in the Council's view, justify refurbishment.

This is, however, difficult to understand as the councils figures have shown that it is the pool that is the major attraction. It would be tragic if the new dry facilities were to be developed on their own and fail due to lack of usage.

BVRA has written to record our view that retaining the pool should be a priority and the Council should seek alternative cost reduction opportunities. We are currently in a dialogue with Cllr Spiers to establish the precise financial parameters but at first analysis we believe that closure may be a sold pass. Nevertheless, this is a period of consultation, until the New Year when a final decision will be made. In the meantime, both the Federation of RAs and the SOS committee are putting pressure on the Council to rethink its position and if you support retention, please contact Tony Blacoe.

Roger Collins

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RECYCLING

At the same time that the council published its proposal to close the Banstead Swimming pool, other decisions were being taken (separately, but in parallel) for major capital investment in a different waste collection regime. Whilst we understand that the council's refuse freighters may need to be replaced in the next few years, we are amazed that the cost of the scheme now being adopted is so high that the new swimming pool previously promised by our councillors can apparently no longer be afforded.

We have received the following statement from the council:

"The Council has agreed a proposal to change the current recycling and refuse collection service, subject to final agreement early next (now this) year.

Work is now underway on how to take it forward, the timescales and budget.

The proposal follows feedback from residents who have told the Council that they would like us to recycle more from the kerbside, particularly glass and plastics. Research has shown that 82% of the contents of a typical bin could be recycled.

The Council also has very ambitious recycling targets to meet, with the Government requiring us to recycle 45% of waste by 2015. All Surrey councils are committed to reaching a target of 60% by 2020.

"Increase in collections

The new scheme proposes a weekly collection for food waste and paper recycling. Glass, cans and plastic will be collected fortnightly, along with non-recyclable waste. Overall, residents would receive more collections than with the current service. It would also reduce the need to take materials to our recycling centres.

Residents have asked us to try and reduce the number of new containers they would need if the new scheme were to go ahead. Therefore, paper would continue to be collected from residents' existing black

boxes. Waste which can't be recycled, would be collected from residents' existing green wheeled bins. New containers would include:

** A wheeled bin for cans and plastics (and possibly glass)*

** A small kitchen caddy for food waste*

** A larger, lockable sealed container for food waste, to be placed outside for collection*

Minimising cost to taxpayers

Councillor Julian Ellacott, Executive Member for Environment, said: "Residents have firmly told us that they wish to be able to recycle more materials from the kerbside.

"The tax on waste sent to landfill is set to rise steeply in the coming years, the cost of which would be passed onto taxpayers across Surrey. By extending the service we would also generate more income from recycling, which would cover much of the cost of introducing it. We believe the new collection service will enable us to provide the recycling options residents have asked for, whilst minimising the cost to taxpayers.

"Some residents have expressed concerns about separating out food waste. The experience of other councils in Surrey is that once residents become used to it, they find food recycling easy. In many cases people find they now buy less food than before, because they see how much they waste."

The first phase of the proposed scheme, addresses over 75% of houses in the borough. A phased and tailored approach would be adopted for flats, which are likely to need bespoke arrangements.

The final decision on whether to proceed with the new recycling and refuse collection service will be made in February 2011, when the Council sets its budget for next year and its priorities for 2011-2015".

What is not made clear is the actual proportion of this extra recycling that residents already take to our "bring sites", whether those "bring sites" will remain, how we are to store

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and remember when to put out for collection 5 (6 if we use the brown bin service) bins or boxes, how households with tiny or no front gardens would cope, and what the "downside" would be for a more modest scheme requiring less or no capital investment.

We seriously question the recycling "facts" quoted and deplore the methodology of the consultation process; consultees will mostly support the principle of improved recycling, but they were not told that the consequences would be significantly greater capital investment that would result in the council reneging on its undertaking to improve the swimming facilities in the north in step with those improving facilities in the south and centre of the borough.

The proposal for an extra 3 boxes or bins per household, with a mix of weekly and alternate-weekly collections, is impractical for householders; that it cannot (or at present no suitable methodology has been identified) be applied to flats and maisonettes does not seem to matter to our councillors, who have decided to buy the freighters that will only be appropriate to collections from 75% of households (their figure - we fear it will be nearer 60%)!

The council has got its priorities wrong.

Mike Sawyer

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PLANNING

1. Local issues: another fairly quiet period as so many householder applications now fall within permitted development. The most disappointing case was the proposal to demolish the Olive Tree ph (Brighton Road) and to extend the Romans car sales outlet. The first application was refused, but our objections to the effects on the adjoining houses and to the replacement of a building of domestic appearance with one of industrial appearance on the second application were not successful and consent was granted.

2. National matters: The Localism Bill, published on December 14th, addresses some of the many promised changes to the planning regime. However, there is still great uncertainty about key planning reforms, the issue of financial incentives and no

implementation plan, all of which are likely to have an unwanted impact in stalling much needed economic recovery because no one knows how the emerging planning system will work. The key area (for us) of neighbourhood planning remains unclear, with huge questions that we will need to have answered - we are keen to see how and in what detail we will be able to comment on applications in our area.

3. Licensing: responsibility has been passed back from the department of Culture, Media and Sport to the Home Office, which recently published the Policing and Social Responsibility Bill. This goes some way to correcting some of the failings of the 2003 Licensing Act - that is if its proposals are enacted and not "watered down". In particular the proposed duty for councils to advertise licensing applications in the same way as planning applications is one we have agitated for. Other proposals are intended to tighten up enforcement of the law on under-age sales; the ability to make a "late night levy" where alcohol sales after midnight are permitted, and to allow councils to alter their licensing policy statements as circumstances arise.

These proposals are generally to be welcomed and, it is to be hoped, will survive in the final Act.

Temporary Event Licenses are also covered but, sadly, in an effort to simplify the process there currently appears to be the risk of a licence for a week to permit 24-hour drinking at that event during the entire week - surely not the desirable outcome in all cases! NORA (another RA's association to which we belong) is taking up this, and other, elements of the proposals with government.

Mike Sawyer

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BUDGET CUTS

As we know, Central Government has announced severe cuts to the grants made to Local Government. The rough figures are 7% each year for the next 4 years.

At the time of writing (Jan 10th) I can find no information on the effect that these cuts will have on Surrey C C and Reigate & Banstead. Their news pages on the internet made no

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mention of this major event – it all smacks of the elephant in the room – nobody wants to talk about it.

Enquiries at the Local Government Association indicate that 7% is a blanket figure and each authority will suffer a larger or smaller figure based on a very complicated and no doubt incomprehensible formula. Education budgets are not part of this process.

Over the last 10 years or so the amount of grants received in most of the South East has been squeezed in favour of other parts of the country. Surrey is supposed to be rich.

Surrey C C in their note attached to the 2009/10 council tax papers stated "...in other areas, particularly northern cities, who receive up to 4 times as much Government funding..."

As council tax payers in Surrey have shouldered a disproportionately high part of the total budget, it is logical that when government grants are cut, Surrey should suffer proportionately less than other part of the country. For example out of a total Surrey C C budget in 2009/10 of £661.5m, central government contributed £125.7m. A cut of 7% in this figure equals £8.8m or about 1.3% of the total budget. A similar calculation for R & B would mean a cut of £0.5m or 2.5% of the total budget - they have been claiming annual savings well in excess of this figure for many years.

We have already heard talk of R & B getting Kent C C to run their payroll. This may well be the pattern to come. Rather than councils being merged, they will be encouraged to share services with their neighbours – a merger in all but name. Who knows they could even share their Chief Executive.

David Gradidge

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THE SHAPE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government in England is now organised in a variety of ways. The old established model of a County Council and at a lower level, Borough Councils has been subject to a number of reorganisations from the mid 1990s up to 2009. Surrey seems to be one of the few that remains intact, still being

divided into 11 local district councils.

All this change was no doubt put in place to make savings, but evidence either way is hard to come by.

In 2009, 5 counties had their local authorities (LA) abolished, so, for instance, Cornwall County Council is now a unitary authority (UA) doing everything. Two other counties were split in half so that Bedfordshire now has 2 UAs rather than one county council and 3 LAs.

In previous reorganisations, large conurbations were stripped out of county councils. For instance, Medway was taken out of Kent to form a UA, whilst in other counties like Berkshire, 6 rather small UAs were created. London has been divided into 32 UAs for a long time but certain important matters like transport are controlled by the GLA.

It is all now a bit of a mess with a variety of different models in place. It had been driven by central government but often with stiff local resistance in places such as Norfolk. No further changes look likely in the medium term.

In Surrey the split of responsibilities between county and local can be a bit difficult to understand to put it mildly. This no doubt has been one of the reasons driving the reorganisations.

Surrey's boundaries have changed over the years. It lost 5 boroughs to the GLC in 1965, gained Spelthorne when Middlesex was abolished and lost a chunk of Gatwick airport to West Sussex in 1974. Of course old Surrey still exists in postal addresses, in cricket at the Oval and somewhat bizarrely still having its County Hall in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.

Of the 11 LAs in Surrey R & B now is just the largest (with an estimated population of 136,100 in 2009). Epsom & Ewell is by far the smallest both in area and population but is the most densely populated. R & B by area is average, but is only half the size of the more sparsely populated neighbouring Tandridge and Mole Valley.

Apart from the 3 local boroughs, R & B is bounded by L B Sutton (pop 180,000) and L B Croydon (pop 340,000) and for the odd mile by W Sussex C C.

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R & B is a strange shape to say the least. Never more than 6 miles wide it is mostly between 3 and 3.5 miles wide and 12 miles North to South. The shape of the borough seems to have been determined by the main roads – A217 and to a lesser extent A23.

Contrary to some popular belief, only 36.5% of the population lives North of the M25.

Banstead Village ward is the second most populous in the borough. The urge to keep most of the wards within the borough at roughly the same size (and therefore having 3 councillors) has led to our ward being chopped off at the edges so that it no longer follows parish boundaries. A few 100yds down Croydon Lane, Woodmansterne Lane and Park Road and you are in the sprawling ward of Chipstead, Woodmansterne & Hooley. A little to the South of Chipstead Road and you are in Kingswood & Burgh Heath ward (they have Banstead Woods) and across the A217, Nork ward includes Banstead Station and 12 holes of Banstead Downs golf club.

A final example of our strange local geography is that if you come up Banstead Road past the station and carry on to Croydon Lane and then to Woodcote you travel through 7 electoral districts in 3 miles – Epsom – Sutton/Cheam – Nork – Banstead – Woodmansterne – Sutton/Carshalton Sth – Croydon.

David Gradidge

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SUTTON WATER MAIN

The Sutton & East Surrey Water Company (formerly a public utility, now a private company owned by Deutsche Bank) recently made a low-key approach to SCC to seek approval for running a new water main from Mogador to the reservoir near Asda in order to enhance the water supply to Sutton. Unfortunately they produced very little background information (they have not been much more forthcoming since then) and gave insufficient justification for either the need or the route and its impact. Work was to have

been started by now. Fortunately our Surrey and local councillors sought more information (SESWC would not respond to individual RAs) and it emerged that they were proposing to dig a wide swathe through the ancient woodland managed by the Banstead Commons Conservators.

One of the implications is for the works possibly to require closure of part of the A217, which is one of the designated access routes for the 2012 Olympics. The company has now been told that this cannot happen in the period of, or leading up to, the Olympics, and that a planning application will be required. In view of the likely impact they have also been told to request a scoping report, the purpose of which is to identify those areas of work on which they will need to produce detailed technical reports as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment report.

Whilst we have no wish to deprive Sutton's residents of a reliable water supply, it is our view (and that of the RAs along the proposed route) that the impact on our residents has not been properly taken into account. We will, therefore, along with many other interested bodies, be advising the council of the concerns we have that we believe must be addressed by the water company. We will keep you informed, but as time is very tight (only 5 weeks is allowed for the council to finalise the scoping report) any resident with technical or ecological knowledge that might influence this should contact the planning department direct.

Mike Sawyer

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SNOWY BANSTEAD

Its official – the coldest December for 100 years. In fact you have to go back to 1890 to find a colder one. This December didn't just break the record; it smashed it by a large margin.

We in Banstead know that the High Street is just about the coldest place on earth when the wind blows from the East. We also know that we get all the snow that's going and then it lingers.

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This is the third winter running that we have had significant snow and associated cold. You might have to go back to the 1940s to find anything comparable but historical statistics on lying snow are difficult to find.

In the previous 20 years, snow was quite a rarity and soon went with only February 1991 having a real snowy spell. Before that we had a series of bad winters, the most notable being 1978/79 and 1981/82, whilst January 1987 had the most severe cold spell in recent years.

The first reason we get more snow is fairly obvious – at 500ft plus we are measurably colder than the London suburbs to the North. The rough figure would be about 1.5c colder but it can be much more at times. The second reason is that the North Downs are wetter with maybe 10" more rainfall than Central London. The rising ground creates more precipitation and if the wind is in precisely the right direction - ENE – we get a snow effect caused by the Thames estuary. Too much North in the wind and it is East Kent that gets the snow.

The snow lingers because we are colder. It also lingers much longer on any North facing slopes where the sun has a limited effect. The High Street is of course notorious. On the South side it is permanent shade so it does not melt and on the North side there is the potential to melt and freeze.

Anyone got a spare snow shovel?

David Gradidge

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BANSTEAD HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP

This highly regarded local group has recently published two new books - Banstead Past and Present and Beechholme, a Children's Village, the latter about the former home on what is now The Beeches estate off Firtree Road. Both books cost £9.99 from The Ibis bookshop or the library, and are strongly recommended to anyone interested in our local history.

Mike Sawyer

01737 355454

LOCAL POLICE MATTERS

Recent warning from Surrey Police about thefts from and of vehicles - don't leave valuables on display, lock your car, don't leave it with the engine running etc.

Also, following some recent burglaries:

"During our patrols we have noticed:

Open windows! Many houses with open windows are allowing easy access to the property;

keys are being left in locks! If an offender gains access to a property by way of smashing a side window or reaching through an open window next to the back door the offender has immediate access by unlocking the door;

Insecure porch doors! Outer Porch doors are not being locked. This allows an offender easy access to the inner front door of the property allowing them to conduct their business without raising awareness from passers by.

Lock your side gates! Most importantly, lock your side gates to your properties. This is the current method of entry being used for the most recent burglaries in our area. The offenders have simply opened the side gate, gained access to the rear of the property and either smashed a rear window or used an open window to gain entry.

ANY suspicious activity should be reported to Surrey Police on 0845 125 2222 or 999 in an emergency.

Please do not hesitate to contact your local Safer Neighbourhood Team from Banstead Police Station.

Mike Sawyer

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ROAD STEWARDS

There are some vacancies for road stewards. I would be very pleased to hear from anyone willing to do this very useful job.

The main part is to deliver newsletters 3 times a year and then at a convenient time to collect the annual subscription.

You don't have to live in the road but it helps to be on the spot.

- 1 Winkworth Road Nos 85 – 165 odd
- 2 Commonfield Road Nos 42 – 82 even, 73 – 127 odd
- 3 Barnfield & Flint Close

David Gradidge

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