

REDLANDS RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Chairman: Philip Runacres, Acting Secretary: Jane Gillhouley, Treasurer: Andrew Eyre
Email: info@redlandsresidents.org.uk Web address: www.redlandsresidents.org.uk

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

November 2006

Dear Resident,

We normally send out a newsletter before our AGM but we have all been working on preparing our response to the Council's proposals for parking in our area leaving little time to prepare a general newsletter. I want to take this opportunity before the AGM to look at the Association itself and to ask what you as members think should be its future.

John Brasnett is stepping down from the post of Honorary Secretary and we would like to record our thanks for his unstinting contribution over many years to the work of the RRA. We are grateful to Jane Gillhouley who has volunteered to be Honorary Secretary and the post was confirmed by the committee members.

We currently have a vacancy for the post of Vice Chairman and as at all AGM's we would welcome applications from members to apply for the Officer positions: Chairman, Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Secretary and also as committee members. The current holders of these posts have indicated their willingness to continue for a further year.

The RRA has been in existence for more than 60 years and this year sees its 60th AGM. I believe this is an appropriate time to consider the future relevance of the RRA and its continued existence. For most of the time little happens in our area and the RRA seems to have little relevance in most residents' lives. Few residents think of the Association as somewhere to go for help or information and despite our efforts to introduce a web site as a source of local information few people have actually visited the website until recently. We normally receive very little feedback or requests from residents during the year.

Perhaps this is due to the limited means available to us to spend on communication with members. Our annual fees were set originally at £1 per household when the average wage was about £4 per week. Today we still try and collect the £1 per annum from members but we need to look at ways to modernise the finances of the Association – depending upon what you as members want the Association to do.

The RRA was initially formed while the area was still being developed to enable residents of the newly built homes to have a voice in the completion of the development.

The main events that have caused us to be active in recent years have been the initial plan to build the new Riverhead Infants School on the land at the London Road entrance to Brittain's Lane behind Montreal Park. We opposed the development here due to the poor choice of site and inappropriate access and we actively campaigned for the school to be built on its present location.

Since about 2000 our roads have been increasingly used by rail commuters using our roads for free parking. We believe this has been primarily caused by changes to the Train Fare structure and large increases in the cost of parking at Railway Stations across Kent. Commuters are reputedly travelling by car from as far a field as Hastings to benefit from the Sevenoaks rail service into London. I believe this recent change in parking activity is economically driven rather than due to an acute shortage of parking at Railway Stations generally and in particular at Sevenoaks. This is evidenced by the relatively few cars that park in our roads on very rainy days when they manage to find somewhere to park nearer the station – in a paid for car park perhaps?

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The upshot of this increased parking by Rail Commuters is that they park in the closest parts of the roads to the station to minimise their walk. This caused problems when they parked on the bend by Nos. 18 – 25 Brittains Lane. The council decided to stop parking in this area altogether for safety reasons and introduced double yellow lines. The Rail Commuters responded by moving 50 yards up the road to the wooded area Nos. 27 – 39 Brittains Lane. The Council then decided that was a danger spot and were going to introduce further double yellow lines along this section of the road. The RRA negotiated with the council and they agreed to reduce this to the more acceptable single yellow line but further protests by individual Brittains Lane residents and a change in the Councillor responsible for parking issues caused them to put the whole exercise on hold while they sought residents' views. This situation was going on at the time of the last AGM when we announced that we would survey all residents on their views on Road Safety and Parking in the roads covered by the RRA. At the same time Sevenoaks District Council wrote to the RRA and asked if we would consult our residents on the parking issues in our roads.

Our response was to send a detailed questionnaire to all households (around 260 houses) and to collate the results. The details of the survey can be seen on our website www.redlandsresidents.org.uk.

Some of the salient points were:

- We received 168 replies from 164 households.
- 128 believed the parking along 25 – 39 Brittains Lane to be dangerous
- 130 wanted some form of parking restriction to be introduced in our roads.
- 37 in Brittains Lane wanted some form of parking restrictions.
- Croft way was divided with 8 for and 8 against.
- 116 wanted timed parking restrictions (single yellow lines).
- Only 10 out of 168 were in favour of double yellow lines.
- Only 11 out of 168 wanted residents parking permits.

On road safety issues 121 wanted some form of Traffic management to reduce speeds in Brittains Lane.

These are just a few of the results and you should read the whole survey. If you do not have access to the internet please contact me to see a copy.

As a consequence we passed our survey results to Kent County Council to respond to the Road Safety issues and to Sevenoaks District Council in reply to their request for views on parking.

With regards to Road Safety I met with Bryan Fitzgerald who is the officer at KCC responsible for our area. We walked and drove round the whole area and discussed the recommendations arising from our 2005 survey with him and we are still waiting for his response. We had very little response from SDC with regards to our survey except to tell us they were waiting for the results from the BT Building Parking Survey which was a condition of the planning permission being granted for the BT building. This survey was paid for by BT and was carried out earlier this year – we have not seen the results of this survey.

As a road association we are entitled to attend the Town Forum a body run by SDC to consult with local groups on various issues around the town. At this forum SDC announced they were looking for two new members from the community to join the Parking Review Group (PRG) I volunteered myself, or one of our officers, to join to see if we could further our residents' aims. SDC then invited me to the last meeting of the PRG which met in August 2006. At that PRG meeting Andy Brace presented his plans on a road by road basis for all the roads around Sevenoaks Town and Station. The three people present representing Road Associations were

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asked to keep an "open mind" about the plans and to let the individual residents consider them as proposed. We were simply asked if we would help co-ordinate our own residents' responses to them. At all times the plans were presented to us as a consultation document to stimulate a response from residents. We were told that unless some form of income could be generated from the scheme there would not be sufficient public money available to introduce significant new parking measures.

The 203 houses directly affected by these proposed changes received the letter from Andy Bracey with the plans for their road around 14th October 2006. To present our residents views we have surveyed those houses and are currently collecting the replies and collating the data. If you received our survey form it is important that you return it to us so that we can present the Council with responses from all of those affected. We have had feedback from some roads that as well as completing the survey they are coordinating their own response as an individual road and we welcome this and all other individual responses that have been sent to the Council and to Michael Fallon MP.

At the AGM we will be asking residents to indicate whether they consider the RRA has a continuing role to play in co-ordinating residents' views and representing them at public bodies.

Or are residents best served by representing themselves individually?

If you do want RRA to continue then do you want it to actively campaign on Road Safety and Parking issues or just be a forum to react to changes being imposed by SDC or KCC on RRA residents? Campaigning for parking restrictions following our 2005 survey has not brought us the change the majority wanted but something far worse than was then envisaged by any of us.

The new committee formed at this AGM will have to decide whether there is sufficient support to continue the RRA or whether it has served its purpose and it is time for it to be retired.

If it does continue the membership fee, aims and rules of the association all need to be reviewed and modernised.

I look forward to hearing your views and meeting you all at the 60th AGM.



Philip Runacres
Chairman, Redlands Residents' Association