

ISSUED BY THE KINGSWOOD RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

The ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Association is to be held at the Village Hall on Tuesday 26th March 2013 commencing at 8.15 p.m. The formal Notice is posted on the Village Hall Notice Board and the Annual Report is published in this Newsletter. Resolutions to be proposed at the AGM must be given in writing to the Hon. Secretary not less than 14 days prior to the meeting. The 2012 audited Accounts will be made available at the meeting.

ANNUAL REPORT

The Kingswood Residents Association (KRA) is a non-political voluntary organisation whose formally stated objectives are:

‘The Objectives of the Association are the promotion of the welfare of the Community through the good government of the district in relation to planning, environment, safety and conservation so as to preserve and improve the amenities of the village of Kingswood’. The KRA is separate from the Kingswood Village Community Association and the individual Road Frontagers Groups who have their own aims and objectives.

The KRA works closely with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council (RBBC) through its local Councillors to consult and influence good planning practices. The KRA also works with our County Councillor on SCC matters.

The KRA wants to work for the community as a whole so all of our Kingswood Residents are welcome to come to our AGM and join in the discussions. Whilst we hope you will join the Association you do not have to be a paid up member to attend.

Message from the Hon. President

The last 12 months has seen some significant changes in planning policies and practices some of which have been driven by the continuing economic difficulties and the acute national housing shortage. Locally the Borough Council is still trying to finalise the local plan – this is underpinned by what is referred to as the “Core Strategy” and has been worked on now for some 8 years. The latest draft plan which contains further amendments to the earlier versions has been out for consultation and will be subject to further Public Hearings before the Planning Inspector later this year. The main problems we face are caused by unrealistically high housing targets being imposed by the government and the planning inspectorate refusing to approve the Core Strategy without more site allocations. This pressure to release more land, largely instigated by the Planning Inspectorate and developers, has opened the way for developers to press for more sites on which to develop housing to be identified in the plan and as a result Green Belt land is now under threat. We have even had the Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government imply that housing numbers must take precedent over local planning restrictions which now put the local planning process into disarray. Our local council has fought very hard against this but has been forced, in the latest draft Core Strategy, to rule out future development on Green Belt. Our local MP Crispin Blunt raised these problems in debate at Westminster Hall on January 30th 2013 and outlined the difficulties being faced by Reigate and Banstead Council.

In some ways this is proving contrary to the promises made by the present government to devolve planning to local Councils and communities and to give local communities greater say. I will speak more on this topic at the AGM but suffice to say we are facing some major issues going forward if we are to protect Kingswood and other local greened areas in the North of the Borough becoming densely urbanised with the loss of green belt.

Last year I spoke enthusiastically about the possibility of joining up with adjoining RA's to establish a Neighbourhood Forum and create a local Neighbourhood Plan which promised to give us more say in how localised planning decisions would be guided in our neighbourhoods. However such local plans have also to be guided by the Core Strategy and other planning documents which as noted are still not finalised. I now have real concerns that a Neighbourhood Forum will not in the long term be very effective as a platform to give the community an adequate say.

The Banstead and District Federation of Residents Associations after much deliberation and listening to presentations by specialists have come to a similar conclusion as to the effectiveness and practicality of using “Neighbourhood Forums” for local planning. Banstead have now recently announced that they are carrying out consultation into the possibility of forming a Town Council instead which is a democratically elected body similar to a Parish Council. The practical reasons for considering this alternative are briefly:

Parish or Village Councils will have: -

- a well established long term legal status and a clear legal process for their formation.
- democratically elected "village" councillors to represent the local community
- a well established role in the local planning process and a right to have a legal voice before planning inspectors.
- the authority to produce a local plan for the area covered by the village council
- the ability to raise funding for its purposes from various sources including grants from the local or County Council or a small precept on the Council Tax.
- the ability to take over and operate certain local facilities or services such as care of village halls, recreation areas, maintenance of footpaths etc. (These smaller localised services can in many instances prove to be uneconomic and less cost effective for Councils to oversee and operate.)

This adds up to communities having greater say over what happens in their immediate neighbourhoods. Councillors appear to be divided on whether to encourage this setting up of lower tier elected councils and to some extent I can understand their concerns. Our local Councillors already play a role in our local affairs and there could be overlapping and duplication of roles with fuzzy boundaries. However apart from the fact that Parish Councils and Town Councils have a long history of working well in many areas of the country I see a further important reason why this is a good time to think seriously about having a "village council". Local government is under great pressure to reduce costs, cut back services and to deal with increasingly complex and demanding issues not least of which the response to severe economic constraints and the demands placed on the larger services. Councillors are becoming increasingly burdened by the big issues and have less time and resources to focus on those smaller local issues that can nevertheless impact substantially on our local communities. What better way than to mobilise the local communities to take on some of these tasks and compliment the work of the local authorities at a relatively low cost? Also will not local planning be better with a recognised input from the grass roots local level to underpin the planning process. This can be both practical and sustainable and far less confrontational.

Historically our local councillors have been supportive and sensitive to local views but are hampered by government policies, planning inspectors overruling decisions on appeal plus developers willing to throw money and expertise into the appeal process. Setting up a legally recognised lower entity with a detailed local plan will give more support to our local Councillors to resist bad planning decisions.

I shall now be proposing at the AGM that we press on with the project already agreed last year but with the difference that the KRA continues to work with adjoining RA's for the possible formation of a "Village Council" covering the area of the two adjoining wards comprising Kingswood with Burgh Heath and Tadworth and Walton. I hope that you will feel you can give me your support.

With best wishes to all our Residents

Gary Whitney, President.

Review of the Year and Planning

The past year has been successful but circumstances continue to get more difficult and threatening in planning terms.

Best remembered event will be the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in which many volunteers helped the organising committee draw in the crowds, and not just from Kingswood. The outcome was £9,447.08 for charity but importantly everybody appeared to enjoy themselves and the rain just about stayed away.

Many trees were saved on nearby heath land by the laying of the water supply pipeline along the A217 and any traffic delays are now long forgotten. The work completed in time for road use related to the Olympic Games.

The year has seen dramatic changes to the countrywide planning conditions set by the government with the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 but still currently undergoing interpretation and replacing over 1000 pages of former planning regulations.

This combined with Reigate & Banstead Borough Council being frustrated by a government inspector over the final draft of their Core Strategy – the basis of future local plans – is putting our distinctive and narrow Green Belt at risk to developers.

Since the departure of our Chairman (Simon Parnall) a year ago to stand successfully for election to the Borough Council as our Ward Councillor, we have sadly missed having a permanent Chairman. However Simon and our other Borough Councillors continue to work closely with the KRA are very supportive of all our residents. We wish Simon every success as we endeavour to find and appoint a replacement Chairman. In the interim our President, Gary Whitney, is endeavouring to support the KRA as well as taking a special interest in broader issues related to planning generally. We continue to seek volunteers to act as 'Road Representatives' in Copt Hill Lane, Forest Drive & Eyhurst Park. We are also looking for persons interested in participating in a "Roads & Transport Sub Committee". Volunteers prepared to give a little of their time to help would be very welcome, thereby contributing something very special to our local community. Please contact Adrienne Light who will arrange a meeting to explain what is involved.

At the time of writing (Feb 2013), the KRA in conjunction with our local councillors, have just held an inaugural two hour 'Surgery' in the Village Hall allowing residents to have direct dialogue on a one-to-one basis on subjects of local concern, everything from Planning, Trees, Roads, Traffic, Refuse & Recycling, Crime Prevention etc. The event was well attended and the general consensus was that it was a success to the extent that we are now planning to hold them more frequently.

Planning

The main difficulty with planning is that everybody involved sees the problems and solutions with a different view, some slightly different but others widely different, sometimes dictated by landscape, architectural matters, financial or other interests. Thus we have a mix of views from developers, council planners, councillors, the inspectorate and, not surprisingly, the residents. Decisions on planning therefore are rarely clear cut being greyer rather than black or white. This is now over laden by changing planning guidelines and government policies hence the changing appearance of Kingswood.

Major developments are now completing at the old BBC The Warren site, with 14 houses and 8 apartments now selling. Likewise the St Monica's Road development is at the nearing completion and selling stage. We, through a KRA working party, are involved with our councillors and a potential developer in discussion on the proposed re-development of one acre of the Station Yard area. This is an important site in the heart of the village and in a conservation area so is critical to preserving local character. Following a KRA organised local consultation in the form of a questionnaire, and with the involvement of Councillor Simon Parnall, the KRA have been working with the local Planning Department towards preparing a "Planning Brief" to guide the development. This brief has now been issued and will be available on the KRA website.

Inevitably more planning applications will continue to come in, some small, some large. We continue to seek conditions to be applied that can effectively control time of working, vehicle parking, burning of waste on site etc. but to little effect so far. Likewise we wish to see application drawings which fix the location of the proposed dwellings, particularly with regard to the boundaries. Equally important we wish assurances from the council that these dimensions and other important features are checked during construction as there have been failures in recent times. Further changes to Kingswood must be expected.

John Lang
Chair of Planning Sub-Committee

A MESSAGE FROM OUR COUNTY COUNCILLOR MICHAEL GOSLING

Dear Residents

It has been a long and interesting year. As I said last year the new roads contract has continued to show an incremental improvement with local highways and I think you will find over the next 5 years a resolution of many of the most significant areas of concern. We have a list of over 1,000 roads to be reinstated in this period. In between time a number of local roads have been resurfaced with a number on the programme for next year. Please continue to send me the matters that concern you because this is the only way that I can stay fully informed of your area of concerns.

I will repeat one paragraph from last year's newsletter which is 'Having said this I still drive around making mental lists of work we would all like to see carried out and 'normality' should be when all is right'.

I have spent a lot of time trying to bring the A217 up to scratch. All of the repairs to the reinstatement of the Water Company's ham-fisted contractual arrangements needed attention. This included the central carriageway and much of Tadworth Roundabout. I have a full list of the things I would like to see done but they are with other agencies and sometimes difficult to achieve.

You will note that Outwood Lane has been fully reinstated and the bank supported. At the same time work was carried out by Rail Track and the Water and Gas Boards although you will have noted that the Gas Board has returned yet again. We are taking steps to control utilities and their seemingly ad hoc work because it is one of the main causes of the poor highways system.

At Surrey County Council I continue with Social Care, the transfer of Public Health and the formation of the Health & Wellbeing Board and I would be pleased to speak to any interested residents on any of these matters.

As I said last year, we have found it necessary to increase our precept for the Council tax and we have done so again this year. The number of new school places continues to increase. The number of children and adults requiring intervention by social care has significantly increased and these two matters are subject of worry at national, regional and local level.

We have, I am pleased to say, seen significant improvements over the last four years in our services to residents across a broad range of subjects which has attracted much national attention.

Cllr Michael Gosling

michael.gosling@surreycc.gov.uk

MESSAGE FROM COUNCILLORS Mrs. JOAN SPIERS, Mrs. ROS MILL and Mr. SIMON PARNALL

Dear Residents,

This has been a great year for leisure facilities in our Borough. Following on from the refurbishment of the Donyngs Leisure Centre and the building of the Horley Leisure Centre, the new Banstead Leisure Centre (with two swimming pools) is at the planning stage and building work will start later this year. This is a project that Kingswood residents have campaigned for, and one which we as local Councillors are proud to be delivering. What's more, we've seen the refurbishment of the Lady Neville play-ground with new play equipment and a new café, and the refurbishment of our theatre, the Harlequin, in Redhill.

The new recycling scheme has commenced very successfully. Residents have embraced the opportunity and recycling rates have increased steadily over the months, greatly reducing the amount of rubbish that has to go to landfill and, as a result, saving a considerable amount of money that will now go towards other important projects.

Our finances are in sound shape, and we are proud that we have been able to balance our budget for the fourth year in a row without any rise in the Borough's Council Tax until the very modest increase of 2% this coming year. We have held Council Tax down whilst maintaining all front line services and without any reduction to our support for local voluntary organisations, and recently we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Surrey County Council that will ensure our Borough is at the top of the list for joint expenditure projects.

We are as concerned as you are about the attention of developers to Kingswood, and the havoc and damage that has often resulted. All three of us are working hard to ensure that the new Core Strategy and Planning Policies will give us the teeth and the right degree of control of development, and Simon Parnall, who joined as our third Ward Councilor in May, now represents us on the Council's Planning Committee.

This is a lovely ward, which we are committed to maintain as such, and we are all proud to represent you. The recent village surgery was a great success, and we will hold another in the next few months at which we look forward to meeting you.

Cllrs Joan Spiers, Ros Mill and Simon Parnall

You can e-mail your local councillors at joanspiers@aol.com, rmilluk@aol.com and simon.parnall@me.com

MEMBERSHIP

Being a member of any organisation means you are interested in what that organisation does. In particular, the KRA helps to protect our collective interests by working with the Borough Council and County Council to monitor, and – where appropriate - comment on planning applications, press for our needs and concerns in respect of roads and public transport and, in every way that we can, ensure that Kingswood remains a unique and special place to live.

To be meaningfully acknowledged and listened to, we need strength in numbers to be representative. At the end of January this year the KRA membership was 53% of residencies in Kingswood. This has since decreased due to the large

number of membership renewals due at the beginning of February. Fortunately many members have renewed membership but not all and we need to persuade those still outstanding to renew as soon as possible. We need to keep the percentage high so our voice is even 'louder' and we can represent our views even stronger.

The good news is that all the work of the KRA is carried out by unpaid volunteers and the cost of membership works out at £20 for 4 years – for the whole household. This money mainly goes to pay for the professional advice and those legal and administrative services we need to use to protect all our interests.

Becoming a member is very easy. Below are the options for joining and how to pay your membership fee.

You can either e-mail your interest and the details listed below, to our Membership Secretary, Dave Saunders - davesaun@btinternet.com. Dave will then return your membership details plus our bank details so you can electronically transfer your £20 subscription fee.

or

<p>Complete this form and return with your cheque (for £20 made payable to 'KRA') to <u>The Membership Secretary,</u> <u>Mr. Dave Saunders, 3 Oakdene, off Copleigh Drive, Kingswood, KT20 6BN.</u></p> <p>Name:.....</p> <p>Address:.....</p> <p>Postcode:..... Tel:.....</p> <p>Email:.....</p> <p>Signature: _____</p> <p><i>Information provided in any format will be for the sole use of the KRA and will not be divulged to third parties.</i></p>

Dave Saunders
Membership Secretary – KRA
01737 350718 or davesaun@btinternet.com