

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Use it or Lose It!

In spite of next door Preston Ward being recognised as a deprived area, with consultants employed to advise on regeneration schemes, the Borough Council is seriously considering selling the site of the Banstead Leisure Centre in Merland Rise to finance a 'dual use' School and Public sports facility at the Beacon School. Allegedly a survey revealed that the Preston site was not being used sufficiently by local residents! **The plan is facing strong local opposition from its satisfied users, as we review on the following pages.**

Our Councils are facing difficult financial decisions as government funding is being held back, and recycled in higher grants to Councils in the Midlands and North. The County Council is trying to save £25 million on an annual basis. We think that the Tattenhams Library was saved from closure (again) after the original plan to cut 12 libraries in Surrey was reduced to only 6. The Youth Centre in Merland Rise is to be retained, but the Banstead Youth Centre at the Horseshoe is very likely to be shut. **Facilities not obviously seen to be justifying Council funding will face closure.**

Epsom Hospital

After so much "consultation" locally, the decision by the Minister for Health to make St Helier the Critical Care Unit beggars belief. If you feel strongly about this issue please lobby your M P, Chris Grayling. The Borough Council is considering asking for a judicial review of this perverse decision, taken after all parties had agreed to the Sutton site.

Car Parking Charges at Tattenham Corner

Despite our representations and the views of residents favouring the status quo, car parking charges are now coming on stream at Tattenham Corner, but only for stays of over 3 hours. This will provide the spaces to allow shoppers to use the shopping parade. We fear that rail commuters will now clog up nearby streets with all-day parking, particularly as the charges are the same as those in town centre car parks. We will monitor the impact of this change.

Our Councillors

2005 saw changes of Residents' Association Councillors at both County and Borough. Cllr Norman Harris stood down from the County to concentrate on his position in neighbouring Nork, and as leader of the R A Group at the Borough Council. Nick Harrison was elected to County Hall in his place, and already a number of residents are grateful for his assistance. Our newly elected Borough Councillor, Jill Bray, has settled in well and serves on the board of the RB Housing Trust. Together with Bob Harper and the R A committee they have attended to matters raised by residents.

Contact details of all three councillors are shown on the rear page of all newsletters.

Keeping in Touch – Our Own Noticeboards

Sites have been agreed for installing our own R A Noticeboards at the Tattenham Way shops and at Tattenham Corner, so we can keep in touch between editions of the Newsletter.

Police

P C Louise Bowen (now Louise Magness) has transferred to Nork and Banstead. At the time of this newsletter we are awaiting her replacement who will work with P C Alan Hornett.

Road Stewards

The R A lost some road stewards and gained others but we still urgently need more volunteers to maintain deliveries. **Please do consider spending just a little of your time to help.** Give me a call!

John Butcher

PLANNING UPDATE

Upland Way: Currently the plans to build in the central garage site are being revisited by the Housing Trust, in response to Planning Officer concerns with the design and trees. The potential extra parking and traffic in this cul de sac remains a major concern of the residents. We have served the County Council with notice to establish the rights of way not previously registered, for both vehicles and pedestrians through the site.

Beech Grove: We reviewed the previous application on this site and the loss of trees in our Newsletter last summer. Although the Council's refusal to grant planning permission was upheld on appeal, the developer has submitted new plans, which we expect to go before the Planning Committee shortly.

Great Tattenhams Methodist Site: Following the congregation's move down the road to form the United Church of St Marks, the site has been put forward for development. It is proposed that the monies raised be used to provide additional community facilities and youth services on the St Mark's site. The Council has required the Church to provide evidence that the site is surplus and not needed by another congregation, as well as details of tree protection and committing to the positioning of the building (originally submitted in 'outline' form only, thus potentially enabling the eventual developer to change the proposal). Again, we expect this to go before the Planning Committee shortly.

Brighton Road: A major development application has been received for 12 flats and 6 houses on a site currently occupied by only 3 houses. If approved, this would be a substantial change in the character of the area, and create a precedent for further applications. Neighbours have submitted some well argued objections.

PLANET PLUTO NAMED BY LOCAL RESIDENT

With the successful launch of the probe to Pluto from Florida's Cape Canaveral in January, there emerged the story that there is only one person still living on Earth who can claim to have named a planet. And she lives in our area! That person is Mrs Venetia Phair (née Burney) of Yew Tree Bottom Road, a retired teacher and one time Road Steward.

One morning in March 1930, Venetia Burney was having breakfast with her grandfather Falconer Madan, a retired librarian at the Bodleian Library. Mr Madan was reading the *Times* when he came across an article about the discovery of an as yet unnamed new planet by the young American astronomer Clyde Tombaugh at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. Venetia Burney on hearing this news, suggested the name Pluto to her grandfather who was so impressed with the name that he decided to contact his friend Herbert Hall Turner, the professor of astronomy at Oxford.

When Mr Madan made contact with Mr Turner, the astronomer agreed that the name Pluto (another name for the Greek underworld, Hades, a cold and bleak world far away from the Sun) was an excellent choice, and sent a telegram forwarding the suggestion to the Lowell Observatory.

Over a month later, on 1 May 1930, the name Pluto was formally adopted and Venetia was presented with a five pound note by her grandfather for her inspiration.

One rumour that Venetia wishes to counter is that she had named the planet after the Walt Disney cartoon dog which also first appeared in 1930. It has been conclusively proved that the dog was named *after* the planet and not before. Clearly, Venetia's interest in Greek and Roman myths and legends at the time inspired her to suggest the name Pluto for this dark and distant planet.

BANSTEAD SPORTS CENTRE – THE FUTURE

The Borough Council Executive has set out its approach to the future of the Banstead Sports Centre with possible serious consequences to residents in the north of the Borough.

They consider that the Banstead Sports Centre in Merland Rise has reached the end of its viable life. With the sub-contract out to Cannons Health and Leisure ending in 2008, the Council therefore has no choice but to consider its future. Councillors were adamant that to have only the Donyngs Recreation Centre in Redhill would not be acceptable to residents in the north or south of the Borough. So far as the north is concerned, officers therefore were tasked with producing a plan to replace the Banstead Centre. However in its recently approved Corporate Plan, the majority group decided that the funds necessary to meet its leisure needs were significant and could not be met by the Council alone. The appraisal therefore started from a basis of sharing the cost with a partner.

Possible Sites for the New Sports Centre

Three possible sites for a new Centre were considered - The Beacon School, Merland Rise and the De Burgh site in Preston:

The Beacon School has for some years had a desperate need to build a new sports hall on their site. The County Council has not provided funds and it's unlikely they can build something for themselves without outside help. The last proposal some two years ago was with a private partner to build a Sports Centre, providing the sports hall for the school, but also facilities for use by the community. This plan met strong opposition from the residents of Picquets Way and neighbouring roads, because of parking and traffic issues. The plan foundered when the partner was unable to proceed.

The site in Merland Rise could have been redeveloped with a new building but it was decided that the land would have to be sold to provide the necessary funds for the new Centre.

The De Burgh site was excluded because the land was owned by Surrey County Council and had already been designated for housing.

The Solution?

With the above arguments, the solution presented itself - Sell the Banstead Sports Centre land and build a new dual-use Wet/Dry Sports Centre with Beacon School, using additional land taken from Tattenhams Recreation Ground. In addition, demolish the public conveniences and the pavilion in the Recreation Ground and enable users of the pitches in the Park and Recreation Ground to use changing facilities in the School. Finally allow Beacon School to manage the Recreation Ground and possibly the Nork Park pitches.

With the decision taken to prepare a business case based on this plan, the R A Councillors have put forward a string of questions that they feel need to be answered:

- What is wrong with the present Leisure Centre, with more than 4,000 visits a week?
- What does 'dual-use' actually mean? Will the public be able to use the Sports Centre at all times or will residents lose access to the facilities during school opening hours? Will the Borough Council simply be providing Beacon School with their much needed sports facilities – but allow the community access only at limited times?
- What will be the impact of this Centre on Picquets Way and surrounding roads?
- If the Banstead Sports Centre site is to be sold, what community facilities will remain in the so-called Preston regeneration area?
- What facilities will be provided in the new Sports Centre bearing in mind that Beacon School is already cramped on the site? How large is such a facility likely to be and will it overbear the street scene?
- How will Beacon School as landlord manage the site and who will be responsible for future maintenance? How can Beacon School be expected to manage the Centre with long opening hours? Will, and if so, how can Beacon School manage the Recreation Ground and Nork Park pitches?
- Will Warren Mead Football Club and other players be content to using such distant changing facilities in Beacon School? Will these facilities be made available at all times?

Public Response

Users of the Banstead Leisure Centre clearly value it highly, and have formed an SOS campaign to save the Sports Centre. They challenge the assumption that the Merland Rise facility is no longer 'fit for purpose', and say that Council officers have not taken into account the many and varied activities at the Centre throughout the day – not just swimming, but the gym, exercise classes and many more.

The SOS Group has collected more than 1,000 signatures to a petition, and many attended the last Council meeting, and questioned the proposals.

The Council leadership have been clearly surprised by the strength of feeling, and have emphasised that the proposals are draft, and will go out to full public consultation. No decisions have been taken. A public meeting has been promised.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Spiers, has promised that any new facility will be available at all times to the public, and that a full report will be prepared on the problems with the current facility. She also committed that she "wouldn't see provision for the Preston area decreased". Cllr Ellingham, the Executive Member for Leisure, also stated that the Council held the whip hand in any negotiations with the Beacon School ("It's up to them to negotiate with us"), and has begun to spell out how he feels "the leisure offer could be improved to meets the needs of the 21st Century". (Tell us in plain English please!)

Consultation

This approach to provide a new Sports Centre in the north of the Borough is clearly a contentious one. Please make sure you have your say in the upcoming public consultation.

The full paper, setting out the Council's proposals can be found on the Council's web site, under the agenda/minutes for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 7th February.

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT UPDATE

In our last Newsletter we discussed the onward creep of unelected regional government, and the creation of larger and larger bureaucracies.

We are pleased to note that the Chief Constable and the Police Authority are standing firm and resisting attempts to merge Surrey into a regional South East Police Force. They have pointed out that the merger costs are unacceptable. They have worked out other ways of dealing with the Government concerns of tackling terrorism and organised crime – through specialist regional squads. Surrey is one of the most effective forces, despite having almost the lowest central government grant. It has pioneered many local community policing initiatives now taken up by other forces.

The Home Secretary is looking to his powers to see if he can force a merger. The Chief Constable has said that if forced to merge, then the only acceptable merger is one with Sussex, rather than a larger regional force.

BANSTEAD YOUTH CENTRE

Because of the loss of Government funding, and a decision to put more money into care for the elderly, it is proposed to close the Youth Centre at The Horseshoe.

The Centre has an extensive programme of youth work, involving over 180 children and young people from ages of 7 to 21, plus a waiting list of 27.

In addition there is a pre-school and toddler groups, with 40 members and 54 on the waiting list. There is also a wide range of adult use of the facilities when not required by the Youth Service.

One of the problems is that the Youth Centre funds the overall cost of the building, with the other users not carrying their full share of the costs. In Bookham, where there is a similar threat of closure, the community is stepping in to take over the running of the entire centre. Is this possible in Banstead?

If you're interested in the future of the Centre, then a meeting is being held at the Centre itself on Saturday 18th March at 11:00 am.

