

Winter 05 Newsletter

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT: IT'S ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN GUILDFORD !

You might have thought that Government plans for regional government had been dropped when it lost the referendum to set up the Regional Assembly in the North-East of England. If it couldn't get regional government accepted in that area, what chance in other parts of the country?

However, Guildford is home to the Government Office of the South-East (also known as GOSE), and the South-East England Regional Assembly (or SEERA), which cover the banana-shaped area stretching from Kent to the Isle of Wight, and then round up to Milton Keynes. There are also other regional QUANGOS, such as the South-East England Development Agency and the "Healthy Region Forum".



SEERA is a "representative" assembly that is increasingly controlling major regional local government functions and strategies. Two-thirds are councillors sent there by their Local Authorities, with the remaining one-third nominated "economic" and "social and environmental" partners. The whole process is thoroughly undemocratic and unrepresentative, moving major decisions further away from the electorate. It's an unnecessary and expensive additional tier of bureaucracy. Interestingly, a majority of SEERA members voted to abolish the assembly, but this was defeated by the weighted voting system.

The South East Plan

The major piece of work in progress at the moment is the South East Plan. Surrey has successfully argued (so far) to keep the number of new houses in the County down to the current rate of building – 2,360 each year. Primarily, this will be by redeveloping existing towns and villages (increasing the density of build), rather than by reducing the Green Belt. A percentage of affordable housing will be required on major sites.

Within Surrey, Reigate & Banstead has been allocated the highest percentage of new development. This is because in recent years there has been a substantial wave of building in the Borough - on old industrial sites and the conversion of former hospital premises. There are concerns that the availability of new sites has peaked, putting more pressure to buy up and build on areas like Tattenhams.

A second concern is the investment in new infrastructure (including transport, water and sewerage, education, community and health facilities) which will be essential to ensure that new development does not add to existing pressures. Regionally it has been estimated that there is a funding shortfall of at least £1.9bn for the necessary infrastructure to meet the demands of new development. The draft of the South East Plan proposes that development should only take place if the necessary infrastructure is provided. Whether the Government will come up with the money is in question.

And There's More to Come

It's not just housing. More and more services – the Police, Health and Fire Services - are being re-organised on a broader basis, making regional government a reality. See inside for further details.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Regional Government & The South East Plan

In this issue, our front page is about the onward march of regional government, and the South-East Plan. On the page opposite, we cover other regional initiatives. These are “broader” matters than those we usually cover.

But the bigger picture is relevant to what happens locally. For example, our last Newsletter dealt with the issues arising from a local planning application in Tattenhams. This story demonstrated the practical impact of the increased demand for redevelopment and the need for our Borough Council to carefully assess all planning applications against the Local Development Plan, and to protect the environment.

With respect to new larger NHS, Police and Fire organisations, it is up to these new bodies – if and when they are established - to show how they can reconcile local needs and focus with the larger problems and financial challenges they undoubtedly face.

Autumn Meeting

This year we had two subjects of interest that were well presented by the respective speakers.

Stephen Wallis, Managing Director, Epsom Downs Racecourse spoke about his plans for the Downs. These include the redevelopment of the Grandstand to overcome health and safety issues, and to provide a better facility for race-goers and to provide a mixed-use location. The plans include a 120-bed hotel to replace the wooden building near to The Rubbing House. Mr Wallis thought there was enough room for parking, outside of race-days themselves, possibly supplemented by using the internal yard of the old Derby Stables (next to the Derby Arms). If you want more details, refer to their website: www.epsomdowns.co.uk.

Duncan Knox from the Surrey Safety Camera Partnership spoke about the benefit of cameras as a tool for casualty reduction, but admitted they were not the answer to all speeding problems. The Partnership’s new approach to road safety cameras will see some around Tattenhams replaced and others supplemented by electronically activated vehicle warning signs. The accent will be on safety rather than just taxing road users, and any income from fines will in future be used for additional signs and to maintain safety equipment.

Questions from the floor concerned the merits of signs/cameras versus speed humps and other measures. The absence of speed control measures in Great Tattenhams was also raised – after research, Mr Knox has now confirmed that the road does not meet the criteria as a casualty hot-spot (defined as a minimum of 4 reported collisions per kilometre over 3 years, with a minimum of 20% of drivers exceeding the speed limit).

Tattenham Corner Bus Shelter

The replacement shelter is long overdue and with the likelihood of an extra-cold winter, your County Councillor has been urging speedier progress. The advertising company that installs the shelters (provided for free, but paid for by the advertisers) have been in dispute with the County Council. The lawyers now seem to have resolved their issues, and we will not have to wait too much longer.

Mediation Service

Occasionally problems arise with neighbours, relatives or friends that appear to be impossible to reconcile. There often is an acceptable way of restoring goodwill. It just needs the right approach. Help can be obtained via **01737 - 248559** or **mediation.easy@btinternet.com** which is an independent, impartial and free service.

Borough News / Recycling

I hope everyone is now receiving the **Borough News** now that is being sent via the mail, rather than with the free newspaper. Please let us know if you are not getting a copy.

The latest edition has an article on recycling and every site in the Borough is listed. The changed collection dates for Christmas and the New Year are shown on the rear page. Plastic bottles take up a large space in wheelie bins but can be disposed of at the sites in Asda, Tattenham Corner and Longfield Crescent in Preston.

Electric Blankets

At a recent public safety event, 47% of electric blankets failed a test. Do have yours tested!

Local Crime

Neighbourhood Watch reminds us to be vigilant over the current months when theft figures customarily escalate. Presents lying in houses for the Christmas period offer choice pickings to thieves. Please secure your premises thoroughly whenever you go out, and do not leave belongings on show in your vehicles. High on the criminals "must have" list this year are portable navigation units - so make sure that only you remove them from your car! Be aware of bogus callers. Always check I/D. If in doubt – shut them out.

For urgent police assistance, dial 999 (Minicom users: 01483 - 539999).

For non-emergency police calls, dial 0845 – 1252222. Let's hope you do not need to ring at all.

I wish all residents a safe and enjoyable Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

John Butcher

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT IS COMING

Health

At present, our local doctors, dentists, pharmacists, cottage hospitals, clinics, district nursing and similar services are run locally by the East Elmbridge and Mid-Surrey (EEMS) Primary Care Trust. This body was only set up two to three years ago, and there are five similar organisations covering the county. Many PCT's are struggling with their responsibilities and are not yet breaking even – you may have read elsewhere that EEMS is restricting its podiatry services.

It is now likely that these organisations will be merged into a single primary care trust for the whole of Surrey, with a new Strategic Health Authority for Surrey, Sussex and Kent. The aim is to "strengthen commissioning and reduce bureaucracy". The challenge of bringing it all together will be huge, and a distraction for NHS frontline services. There will be new one-off costs, and the historic losses will be put into a big pot, with no one taking responsibility for them. Recent academic research has shown that above a certain size, then economies of scale in the NHS are elusive.

Police

A new minimum size of police force has been set to deal with the challenge of terrorism and providing certain specialist police functions. The lower limit has been set at 4,000 officers, although parliamentary scrutiny has shown this to be an arbitrary figure. There are only 2,000 in the Surrey Force, and merger with neighbouring forces is likely – possibly Sussex and/or Hampshire. Performance statistics show that 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. There were other ways of dealing with the Government concerns – for example, specialist regional squads. We hope that local focus and accountability is not lost in this merger.

Fire and Rescue

So far, this is the least impacted service, with arrangements limited to a new regional control and call centre, located in Hampshire.

GOOD NEWS FOR COMMUTERS

London area Travelcard Fare Zone boundaries are being extended from 4th January 2006. This follows consultations between Transport for London, train operating companies, such as Southern and South Western Trains and local transport user associations, including the East Surrey Transport Committee, on which the Tattenhams Residents' Association is represented.

On the Tattenham Corner branch line all stations will be in Zone 6, as will Banstead, Epsom and Epsom Downs. Travelcards will also be valid for Croydon Tramlink and Bus Service 166. Commuters currently buying a combined Train and Travelcard Season Ticket should benefit from this decision - notwithstanding the increases in fares scheduled for next year. More details should be available soon in booking offices or from www.southernrailway.com

Southern Railway will be withdrawing its discount for Sussex Coast services as the performance has improved in both reliability and time keeping. However Metro services, which include both Caterham and Tattenham Corner lines, still have some way to go to reach their target performance figures, so we should continue to enjoy a discount for a little longer.

NEW LICENSING ACT

Amidst controversy, the new Licensing Act came into force at the end of November. Will it bring 24 hour binge drinking or a new continental café culture?

In our area, it has really only affected the Tattenham Corner Beefeater Restaurant, which applied for an extension of hours, plus a music and dancing license. Local residents, supported by the Residents' Association, objected on the grounds of anti-social behaviour and additional noise, particularly from extra late night comings and goings.

The results were mixed. Residents secured very strong conditions attaching to the music license, restricting the number of events, and also a clause forbidding music from causing a disturbance. ("At all times any music shall be inaudible in any residential property"). The brewery requested the sale of alcohol to all guests until 00:30am, but this was restricted to midnight, same as the current permission, but now you do not need to be having a meal at the same time. Extra time for each of the four days of Bank Holidays weekends was requested, but this was limited to a half hour only on the Sunday before Bank Holidays and Christmas Eve / Boxing Day.

The manager made a good impression on the Licensing Committee, stressing that the Beefeater is a food pub and is not aiming to bring in a drink-only crowd. Residents are concerned that the marketing strategy of the brewery can change, without the need to apply for a new license. However, a productive dialogue has been established, and the manager has taken on board a number of our suggestions.

ROAD STEWARDS

We are grateful for the support from our team of road stewards over the years and pleased that several new residents have volunteered recently. Due to boundary changes, moving and increased work obligations we have lost more stewards than we have gained and **there are serious gaps across Tattenhams.**

If enough people come forward roads can be split into smaller rounds; perhaps you have someone who could share a section with you? If you can help, please contact a committee member – see contact details on last page. Roads – and parts of roads - urgently requiring stewards are:

Brier Road	Broad Walk	Campion Drive	Chapel Grove	
Chapel Way	Chavecroft Terrace	Downs Wood	Emily Davison Drive	
Gorse Close	Hewers Way	Long Walk	Mallow Close	Morston Close
Norman Close	Oatfield Road	Picquets Way	Royal Drive	
	The Drive			

.... AND NOT SUCH GOOD NEWS

The Council is considering the introduction of charges for users of the Car Park at Tattenham Corner, because of the problem of all day commuter parking and its impact on the viability and vitality of the shopping parade. The charge would be for long-term parking – more than 4 hours.

You may recall that the Residents' Association ran a survey on the parking problem earlier in the year. We had about 50 responses. Although there was agreement that there is a problem, there was no consensus on the solution. Only about 15% supported the introduction of charges, and a clear majority favoured the retention of the status quo.

The Council has claimed the exercise is not a revenue raising scheme as such, as they will not be increasing the charges for parking in Banstead Village this year. Some of the points put forward by you were:

Problem has been caused by the railway company: Most agreed that selling off the car park at Tadworth for housing has forced more commuters to Tattenham Corner, as has restrictions on employee parking at the Legal & General offices in Kingswood.

Increased use of public transport: It was pointed out that we're all being encouraged to use public transport rather than the car. Providing free parking helps with this. It also helps the Tattenham Corner branch line to remain viable.

Charges will encourage long-term parking in nearby unrestricted streets to the detriment of residents: Some respondents (and not just commuters) said that charges for the car park would encourage commuters to park for the whole day in the nearby residential streets (e.g. Emily Davison Drive, and parts of Tattenham Crescent, Tattenham Grove, Great Tattenhams and Downland Way) and this would increase problems. Perhaps better, some of you argued, for short-term shoppers to park, if needed, in the residential streets for the 20 minutes or so that most of us require?

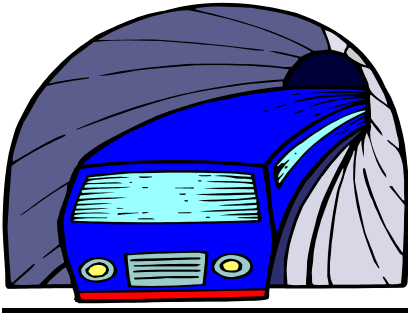
Enforcement of the parking restrictions by the shopping parade is essential if spaces are to be available for shoppers: Some said that enforcement of the parking regulations by the shops (which are a "maximum two hours with no return within two hours") is what is needed if the aim is to provide spaces for shoppers. The Car Park is a little distant from most of the shops, and if the Parade is to be viable and vibrant, then the convenience factor needs to be emphasised by having spaces available immediately adjacent to the shops. A "maximum one hour arrangement" could also help – provided of course the regulations are enforced.

The Residents' Association has undertaken some limited surveys in the shopping parade and car park area. There is a line of parking (10 - 12 spaces) in the car park usually available at 8:30am when the commuters have parked and gone on their journey by train, and at that time the spaces in front of the shops are generally unoccupied. Most of these parking places become occupied in the 8:30 to 9:15am period, a good proportion apparently by people who work in the nearby offices and other businesses.

We have presented your views to the Council, and asked them to defer the 1st January implementation date. We are concerned that charges will not solve the problem, and at the very least, they should undertake a more detailed analysis and survey of the parking issues, and to consult with both shopkeepers and residents before moving ahead.

SPENDING A PENNY COSTS OVER £7

The Borough Council is making good progress towards the savings target of £1.5 million necessary to balance the books. £90,000 will come by eliminating the six automatic public conveniences in Reigate and Redhill town centres. Each unit costs £14,000 a year, and as they are used very little, the average cost per use is approximately £7. We'll update you on other initiatives and their impact in our next Newsletter!!



DIAL-A-RIDE SERVICE SET TO CONTINUE

The threat to withdraw the Dial – A- Ride service for the elderly and disabled has been overcome. It is claimed the new streamlined and more efficient service to be provided by a specialist non-profit partnership will save about £100,000 per year. Three new buses will replace the present old, expensive and unreliable buses.

The service will still be subsidised by the Borough Council. In consultation about the service, 90% of users, not surprisingly, thought it should continue. However, 75% of other residents also gave their support.

The Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee are concerned that a three bus solution will not prove to be satisfactory, as the partnership's recommendation was for four buses. They will therefore review the new service in 12 month's time. All users are urged to give feedback by completing the new customer comment cards on each minibus.

PARENTS BEWARE

Residents and parents with children at local schools should be aware that waiting restrictions are now legally enforceable outside schools. Don't say you weren't warned!

CCTV

You might be sceptical about the value of Closed Circuit Television, such as we have at Tattenham Corner and at the Leisure Centre, as a long-term deterrent to crime and anti-social behaviour. Amazingly, in the last quarter, a total of 116 arrests in Reigate & Banstead were reported as due to CCTV. Not all in our area, we're happy to report!

FIREWORKS

With fireworks no longer seeming to be just a 5th November event, residents have asked us what the law is.

There is now a curfew which prohibits the use of fireworks during night hours (11pm – 7am). Exceptions allow the use until 1am for Chinese New Year, Diwali, New Year's Eve and until midnight on 5th November.

It's also an offence for under 18's to possess or to let off fireworks in a public place. Party poppers, sparklers, cracker snaps, throw downs, serpents and novelty matches are exceptions.

Also, some fireworks on sale are really only suitable for public displays and are not meant for the back garden.

