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2006

THE NEWSLETTER

CIRCULATION
3,800

DORRIDGE & DISTRICT RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

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NO DON'T

...throw this in the bin!

We know that a local newsletter doesn't exactly grab the attention of everyone who lives on our patch. But if you haven't done so before, just take a moment this time to read this issue and perhaps understand why we bother.

We live in quite a unique area, clearly separated from Knowle by Widney Road and Grove Road, and from Solihull and Hockley Heath by wide swathes of countryside. So Dorridge, Bentley Heath and Four Ashes exist as a kind of extended village with two shopping centres, its own services and its own railway station. We believe the area should also have its own identity, created by the people who live here and protected and maintained by them with the help of a vigorous local association – this association, the DDRA. And the Newsletter is our way of keeping all the 3800 or so households we deliver to up to date with what is going on around and about us. In doing so we hope that we will encourage in you a sense of local identity and a feeling that you don't just live in a place, but that you belong here and are part of a community which cares for its surroundings and seeks to look after them in such a way that this will always be a part of Solihull where people will enjoy living and will want to preserve for future generations. So please read on, and if you see anything you wish to comment on or question us about we can be contacted via the e-mail or phone numbers printed at the top of this newsletter.

NOW HERE'S A FUNNY THING!

Almost as soon as the above article was finished two more pieces arrived by e-mail, both concerned with the same theme of community, so clearly this is an issue worth exploring. So here goes...

WHAT IS DORRIDGE?

The recent application to demolish 40 Avenue Road and replace it with apartments prompts a resident – one of the 80 or so objectors to the scheme – to wonder how Dorridge is identified in planning language. It is Rural in the definition of the Rural Audit but is not considered so by planners. It is not part of the Birmingham/Solihull conurbation but neither is it a market town serving a rural community. It is a village, but does not fit into the picture of an isolated settlement. 'Settlement within the Green Belt' could be one description but this confers no status for special consideration against planning applications.

Whatever it is called, Dorridge – together with its neighbour Bentley Heath – should have a more strategic development plan. There is no vision, and planning decisions are reactive, responding to individual applications as they are received. The route to change is led by developers, with residents and Council Planning Officers trying to reject unwelcome Planning Applications rather than initiating change based on controlled development.

So is this the time to think about preparing a Village Design Statement? These are successfully used in other parts of the country and are often adopted by Councils as planning guidance notes. Hampton-in-Arden has such a plan. It would focus people's



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minds on what is worth preserving locally and where improvements can be made. We live in an area with a mix of architectural styles but Dorridge has its Conservation Areas which could provide a starting point for a style with simple guidelines for development which might avoid some of the examples of pastiche which have been built recently.

Finally, this is an area in which wild life flourishes in many forms and this should be maintained in a plan which respects the need to preserve habitat, particularly in the case of the gardens which are so rapidly falling victim to the developers and which form part of the 'wildlife corridors' essential to the mobility of our largely unseen neighbours. So where do we go from here? If you have a view, get in touch.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE?

The Government has introduced a White Paper titled 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' with the stated aim of 'giving local communities more influence and power to improve their lives', and with an emphasis on the structure and powers of local authorities such as Solihull Council. Services referred to include those affecting Community Safety, Housing and Planning, and Community Cohesion, all areas in which the DDRA takes a keen interest and which affect the work that we do.

On planning issues we have seen a goodly number of effective local action groups modify or even see off development plans which would adversely affect our area, and DDRA is working ever more closely with the Council's Planning Officers. But in rejecting an application the Council has to show that it has complied with Government Planning Regulations and not simply acceded to local pressure. Thus the ultimate power lies not here, but with the Planning Inspectorate based in Bristol and the rejection of an application by the Council's officers can be overruled by the Government's Planning Inspector following a successful appeal by the developers. There is

nothing in the White Paper to suggest that this is going to change but DDRA will nevertheless continue to offer vigorous support to residents who legitimately challenge schemes seen as inappropriate in this part of the Borough.

How about Community Safety? There have been many initiatives designed to curb Anti Social Behaviour and the most recent one in our area is Community or Neighbourhood Policing. We have found this to be a very positive change, with a small group of officers dedicated solely to Dorridge, Bentley Heath and Hockley Heath and dealing not just with ASB but all crime in the area. Unfortunately ASB does occupy much of their attention and the Officers tell us that they are often surprised and concerned that parents appear to have little knowledge of or interest in what their children are doing in the evenings and at night. A recent survey amongst European nations showed that the British were the least likely to intervene if they saw acts of vandalism. With Community Policing we have some 'top down' change; what we need now is a more 'grass root' response from the public. Of course people will wish to respond at different levels but at the very least we should be reporting incidents to the Police as and when they are witnessed, and contacting them if we have credible and reliable information regarding actual or potential criminal activity.

AND NOW – NEWS FROM THE NICK.

Sergeant Ann Strachan and her team have now relocated to Shirley Police Station and you can contact them on 0845 113 5000 – Extension 7928 6264, or by e-mail at a.strachan@west-midlands.police.uk.

You can read the team's latest newsletter in full on the DDRA website, www.dorridge.org.uk, but in summary it gives a mixed picture for our patch, with an increase in criminal damage and vehicle crime between April

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and September, but a fall in burglaries, robbery and crimes of violence.

Under Operation Mulberry high visibility patrols continue and a number of youths have been arrested for drunkenness offences, criminal damage, attempted robbery and public order offences. Three of our troublesome youths are on bail with curfew conditions. To approach the problems from the opposite end moves are afoot to set up meetings between adults and young people, to increase cooperation between the Police and Youth Organisations, to step up education within schools, and to carry out test purchases of alcohol at local off-licensed premises to try to curb under-age sales. A dispersal order, whereby groups can be ordered by the Police to separate, is also being considered.

And don't forget that you can meet members of our local team in the Mobile Police Station on Forest Court Car Park between 10.00am and 12.00noon on Tuesdays November 7 and December 5.

YOUR POST CODE CAN SAVE YOU MONEY.

We probably all know, but don't often remember, that Insurance Premiums are largely based on Post Codes. So by securing our homes, cars, property, we preserve the integrity of B93 and thus help to keep insurance costs lower than they are for similar protection in areas with higher crime levels. It's just a thought!

WE'RE NOT EXACTLY FLUSHED WITH SUCCESS...

...but our e-mails to Councillor Bell about our toilets have at least re-opened the debate. On October 9 Cllr Bell e-mailed to say that an independent commission would be looking at all toilet closures – including Dorridge – and would report before Christmas. Details would be copied to DDRA. On October 13 he was in touch again to announce that Lee Stevenson

at the Council House (we have no other detail of Mr Stevenson) is the Scrutiny Officer who will collate the information for the independent panel. At that point the make up of the panel had not been finalised but it was hoped that as much information as possible would be gathered and presented, with a decision in December. We do not know how the information will be gathered or from whom, but DDRA has not been asked for its views. We'll let you know the outcome in due course!

FASTER TRACKS TO BIRMINGHAM.

Network Rail has now been given approval for the complete re-signalling of the line between Birmingham Snow Hill and Leamington Spa. The line will be controlled from the new signalling centre at Saltley and may lead to the eventual closure of the box at Bentley Heath. Additionally the junction at Tyseley is to be remodelled to allow for higher speeds, thus avoiding the present low speed chicane used by Chiltern while Virgin Trains sweep past on the fast line. The work should be completed by the end of 2007 ready for the December 2007 Timetable, at which time the Central Train franchise will end and may be awarded to Chiltern Railways although a decision on that has not yet been reached. The net result will be faster journey times into Birmingham and from Birmingham to London .

MSA PUBLIC INQUIRY DELAYED.

The Public Inquiry into proposed Motorway Service Areas at M42 Junction 4 or Catherine-de-Barnes has been postponed until next June/July at the request of the principal petitioners for each site. For the rest of us it gives longer to prepare our own defences. SAMSAG (Solihull Against Motorway Service Area Group) will meet again on 15 November AND DDRA WILL BE THERE! We will keep you informed of progress on our website.

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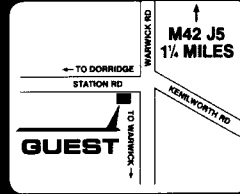
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GOT SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT?

We have re-glazed our green triangular notice board in the square and it is now available for posters and notices about local shows and other events. We only charge £5 for one month's display – contact Pam Nunn on 77 2806.

WALKING WITH LIONS.

Not a new BBC Nature Programme, but another chance to join as many as 500 walkers after Christmas for the Knowle and Dorridge Lions' 14th Festive Walk. Starting at the National Trust's Baddesley Clinton House there are three signposted routes of 4, 7 or 10 miles. Details, entry and sponsorship forms at www.KnowleandDorridgeLions.com.

AND A BIT OF BRIGHT NEWS FOR CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR.

The Christmas lights in Dorridge will 'go live' on Monday 4 December, and we are grateful once again to the lighting team at Solihull Council for their efforts on our behalf. Then in the Spring the embankment on Station Approach should be a blaze of yellow as several hundred daffodil bulbs planted recently by DDRA members burst into life.

AND LASTLY, JUST £1 WILL BUY YOU....

....one of our beautiful new redesigned DDRA membership cards. Produced on good quality card in a tasteful shade of green the new issue is at the printers at this very moment and the prudent will rush to pay now to secure their new card and a full year's paid-up membership of the DDRA throughout 2007. But that's not all. The new card will carry not only your membership details (and any personal information such as blood group should you wish to add it) but also a list of useful telephone numbers etc for you to carry in your wallet or handbag. And of course the card will be your entry ticket to our Annual General Meeting on March 1st, when the feature spot will be taken by a member of the Warwickshire Air Ambulance team. So don't delay, **ACT NOW** by sending your £1 per head to any of the addresses below. We know you won't be disappointed so there is no money back guarantee!



DORRIDGE ACT OF REMEMBRANCE

At 0915 on Sunday 12th November the Royal British Legion held their annual Act of Remembrance at the Dorridge War Memorial in Arden Square. The Legion's three standard bearers were in attendance, the Legion's wreath was laid, two minutes silence was observed and the Legion's bugler sounded the Last Post and Reveille. 42 residents attended.

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