



Cobham and Downside Residents' Association Newsletter, Autumn 2020

From the Chairman... Welcome to the Autumn 2020 CDRA newsletter. Six months into the COVID crisis and I think most of us are struggling with the impact of the restrictions. The CDRA has worked with many other local and government organisations supporting the community, and it's worth checking our Facebook page www.facebook.com/cobhamanddownside for latest information.

With the proposed government White Paper on planning, the importance of the Elmbridge Local Plan is paramount and you will find details on both in this newsletter. Our planning sub-committee, under the leadership of Steve Wood, is heavily engaged with other residents' groups to provide input both to the council and also to national government. We expect the Local Plan to be formally proposed in late 2020 and we continue to challenge the government's excessive (and growing!) house building targets imposed on Elmbridge.

As always, we've been assisting residents in objecting to inappropriate planning applications and have had some significant wins. We have another addition to our committee and so will be able to increase our involvement in policing, traffic and plan further activities on the natural environment.

As we are unable to hold our twice yearly meetings in foreseeable future, we are considering moving to a virtual Zoom format and would really appreciate your feedback on whether this would work for you. Email us at info@cdra.co.uk or call our secretary.

As always I would like to thank Curchods estate agents for covering the cost of postage of this newsletter for us. Finally I would like to thank Anne Bryant who is retiring after nine years helpful service on the CDRA committee, we will miss her. **Ian Clifford, Chairman CDRA**

The Local Plan, Housing Targets and Planning Reform

The Local Plan

The Local Plan is a put together by Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) to look at the needs and opportunities within the borough and covers things such as housing, health provision and schools. There are many stages to the approval of the Local Plan, including initial evidence gathering, public consultations and consideration of the feedback. The draft Elmbridge Local Plan had been scheduled for examination in public in September, but this has now been delayed. The CDRA together with three other local residents' associations have written to the EBC expressing concerns about the process and the published evidence being used to prepare the draft Plan,

particularly the lack of updated housing targets and cooperation with the other Surrey boroughs.

The Local Plan was expected to be approved in the New Year but may now be delayed following the Government's issue of two White Papers for consultation on a completely new Planning Act as part of Boris Johnson's economic plan to 'build, build, build'.

The White Papers

The White Papers, both of which can be found on the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government website, would be the first complete overhaul to our Planning system since 1947 and is hugely significant for Elmbridge and Cobham and Downside in particular.

Planning for the Future covers the full planning system reform, while *Changes to the Current Planning System* provides a new method for calculation of housing numbers each borough is expected to provide development land for. This uses an algorithm which loads extra housing into high value areas based on the assumption that if house prices are high, there must be a high demand for them.

The result is that Elmbridge's target, which rose from 225 homes per annum in 2011, to 474 in 2016, 623 in 2019, has now risen to 774. This is a building rate of nearly three times the current rate.

Although there is the threat of development of local Green Belt, particularly Chippings Farm in Cobham, this would also require increasing housing densities in our residential suburbs. In fact, Elmbridge Borough Council has already begun permitting blocks of flats in Fairmile Lane, Stoke Road and Green Lane. This threatens the character, infrastructure and environment of our communities.

The CDRA does not agree with other local organisations that a single argument against use of Green Belt will serve Cobham well. Our councillors are focusing on saving Green Belt but they must also take account of residents' concerns on increasing density.

The CDRA, with the other resident associations, have made new representations to Elmbridge Council, Dominic Raab, the Secretary of State for Housing Robert Jenrick, and Elmbridge Council questioning the flawed housing algorithm and flatted solutions to housing density. **STEVE WOOD, CDRA**

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

TRAINS: amended timetable, half-hourly Monday-Saturday; hourly Sunday.

BUSES: 715 and 513 operating as normal. 408 is amended, 2 hourly service Monday - Friday

Cobham Chatterbus: full service

Bus drivers are accepting cash but will not give change. Capacity is restricted, but as bus usage is so low at present this is not a problem.

For all public transport face coverings must be worn except children or if medically exempt.

Concessionary travel on Monday – Friday from 9.30 a.m.

Elmbridge Borough Council's Covid-19 Response

Since the imposition of the lockdown in the middle of March, Elmbridge Borough Council has been focusing on supporting the community and businesses across the borough. Some statistics are below:

1780 business grants equating to £24.6 million have been processed and the car parking charges were waived until 1st September 2020;

100 high street retailers have accepted the £250 grant to support their reopening;

Three Elmbridge foodbanks have received financial support;

The Cobham Link service, which supports adults with learning difficulties, has provided daily calls to its members as well as weekly Zoom catch up meetings and information packs.

1300 – 1400 Meals on Wheels are being delivered every week, a 50% increase. In total, more than 26,500 Meals on Wheels have been provided by a team of Elmbridge's Community Support Services staff and volunteers;

Twenty-eight rough sleepers and 40+ homeless households have been provided with temporary accommodation;

8242 vulnerable residents are being supported with regular calls. There have been more than 2000 calls each week.

*The financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Elmbridge will be around £9 million for the current year. This is made up from £3.5 million in additional costs and £5.5 million in loss of income. This will have long term implications for the Council as only 40% of the deficit will be funded by the government's compensation scheme. However, the experiences of the last six months have been unprecedented. There has been a huge support from Council staff, community groups and volunteers, to whom residents from across the borough owe their thanks. **DAVID LEWIS, ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCILLOR – OXSHOTT & STOKE D'ABERNON (INC COBHAM FAIRMILE) WARD***

Meet our new committee member... **Brian Teale** is married with three grown up children, four grandchildren and has lived in Sandy Drive for more than 40 years. He is a Chartered Engineer with over 40 years experience in the Construction and Property Industry as a client and has a background in Contracting, Consulting and Project Management on major commercial projects in the UK, Europe and oversea. He is retired but still provides consultancy advice on Business Management and Development.

Surrey County Council and COVID-19: Keeping Surrey Safe

For Surrey County Council (SCC) the COVID 19 pandemic has been particularly busy and challenging since the council is joint lead of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) with Surrey Police and the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service. The LRF is responsible for co-ordinating the countywide response by all agencies, including health, district and borough councils, and the voluntary community and faith sector, as well as key functions of the Council itself, like Public Health, Adult and Children's Social Care and Education.

A snapshot of some activities co-ordinated by the LRF is shown in the diagram below.

The key focus of the LRF over the last few weeks has been monitoring and restricting the spread of the virus in the county. SCC's Public Health team is constantly monitoring the local data and acting fast to contain any increases. For example, an increase in numbers of infections in Woking led to targeted communications to encourage increased vigilance there. Working with partners, as well as using sophisticated geotargeted social media messages and traditional local media, people were encouraged to change their behaviour and the number of infections fell. It may be that stronger measures, possibly even 'local lockdowns', may be needed in the months ahead.

September has seen a rise in infections in Elmbridge, including Cobham, so we all need to required and coughing and sneezing into a tissue to keep our area open.

Recently the LRF has held planning exercises on worst case scenarios to ensure Surrey is prepared for the winter: Covid 19, winter flu, floods and storms, exit from the EU and related civil contingencies. **MARY LEWIS, SURREY COUNTY COUNCILLOR FOR COBHAM AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN**



Changes to our Unitary Authority Structure

As well as the two White Papers described elsewhere, a third White Paper *Recovery and Devolution* was expected in September. As a result Surrey County Council (SCC) had been looking at abolishing individual 'second tier' councils, i.e. the borough councils such as Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC), in favour of a single unitary authority for the whole of Surrey.

EBC was maintaining an open mind on the matter and seeking advice from consultants on the pros and cons. There are a number of alternatives such as two, or three unitary bodies for the county rather than just one.

The CDRA was concerned that although there

could be potential cost savings and benefits of scale for the central government, there was likely to be potential loss of local democratic accountability. Planning issues would be acutely affected, as local planning committees would be a casualty.

However central government recently announced that there will be no further restructuring of local government for the time being. While this is a disappointment to SCC, borough councils are pleased at the U-turn, but concerned at the time and money that has been wasted by SCC particularly in the middle of a pandemic.

Councillor James Browne on the new Planning White Paper...

We asked Councillor James Browne, as our only active Borough Councillor, his opinions on the new Government White Paper. He wrote...

The Government's recent White Paper on (further) planning reform will inevitably affect the timetable for production of Elmbridge's new Local Plan. The headline issue from the White Paper is the new 'standard method' for calculating Elmbridge's housing requirement. The target figure increases from the already excessive 623 new units per year to 774 per year. This is driven by the Government's conclusion that affordability can be improved by increased housing construction.

Elmbridge can increase numbers from the current 300 / 350 built per year by increasing urban density, for example by allowing taller buildings to be constructed in appropriate locations and perhaps building on under-used car parks. Brownfield sites will be prioritised for housing. Our borough needs more smaller homes with gardens so that those on lower incomes can get on the housing ladder. This

may well mean accepting some flatted developments in our local area – primarily on main roads where there are good transport connections. However there is no prospect of hitting the planned target without substantial release of Green Belt land in the borough. If that happens, Cobham and Oxshott will be in the front line as our Green Belt does not adjoin the London sprawl.

The recent period of lockdown caused by the Covid-19 virus has made all of us appreciate even more the fact that we live in a green and pleasant part of England with attractive open spaces for walking and relaxation. I and my colleagues representing Cobham and Oxshott, Stoke d'Abernon, Downside and Hatchford are firmly opposed to Green Belt release and in this we have the support of our MP, Dominic Raab. We will work with the CDRA and other local organisations such as the Cobham Green Belt Group to protect the open green spaces which all our residents value so highly.

During full lockdown the CDRA kept busy and:- kept the community informed of local information using our website, facebook, emails and letter; helped individual roads provide assistance, including shopping, to residents who were shielding and collected clothes, toys and electrical games and delivered them to a reception centre for the extra young people going into care in Surrey due to the stress on families during lockdown. We continue to post local news on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/cobhamanddownside