Maria Lloyd: Hello and welcome to the My Local Marketer podcast, which shines a light on the success stories, key learnings and insights from people and businesses based in Reading, Berkshire. I'm your host and I've lived in Reading for 20 years and I've only recently started to appreciate what our wonderful town has to offer. Join me as I explore the local opportunities in more detail. This week we're talking with committee members of CADRA, the Caversham and District Residents Association.

You'll hear from CADRA's chair, Helen Lambert, as well as two other members of the committee, Neil Tayler and Malcolm Pemble. Helen, could you please give a general introduction to what CADRA is and what it does?

Helen Lambert: CADRA started almost 60 years ago and we're all about helping our lovely area between the River Thames and the Chilterns to be a great place for people to live. We are a membership organisation with about 550 households north of the river who can hold us to account under the terms of our constitution. But we have a wider reach beyond that through our Facebook page and our website.

We hold two open meetings a year and we get audiences of over 100. These meetings are open to everyone and not just to members. Because we have good audiences we can get really good speakers on a huge variety of topical issues.

A lot of the time CADRA are trying to track what's going on and what decisions are being made. We share that information through emails and newsletters and on Facebook, looking for where it's possible to influence decisions and help other people to influence the decisions if that's what they want to do.

We sometimes need to chase up action – things get stuck in the system and improvements need to be made. We're very much into building an informal network, both with Reading Council and other organisations. That's all part of helping to get things done and knowing who to go to for what.

We've also produced a number of projects on local history. Caversham has a fantastic history and that's part of why we love the area. Generally we try to play our part in fostering a strong sense of community in Caversham and Emmer Green.

Maria Lloyd: Could you please say a little bit more about CADRA's one-off projects, the results of them and how they've impacted Caversham.

Helen Lambert: There are a number of physical things around Caversham that you can see. There's the wind vane on top of the gazebo in Caversham Court. There's the Caversham sign. There's a heritage map on the side of the library. There's a panel about the famous William Marshall on Caversham Bridge. On each of those CADRA has helped people to lear more about where they live and to feel engaged.

One fairly recent project – the village sign that went up in 2001 – was starting to look very tired and we wanted to get it refreshed. So we managed to track down the lovely man who made it, who has a brilliant workshop with all sorts of old-fashioned wooden lathes. He's also a bodger (woodturner). We asked whether he would take the sign back to his workshop and said, yes, he would. He said: "This will be the last one I do. This will see me out."

We had to work with the council on this because it was on council land in taking the sign off the top of the post. We were in touch with the owners of the precinct and they said they would cover the costs. So we took the sign in the back of a car out to Stuart King's workshop and he did a brilliant job in getting it repainted and making some repairs.

It's actually made from a piece of oak from a tree in Caversham Park. So the oak from which is made has got its own history as well as the pictures on the sign.

Stuart did a fantastic job and then we had to get a bigger car to take it back because there were more pieces attached. Council staff reattached it and now almost every local organisation has it in their photos.

Maria Lloyd: How do you find out what people think about your special projects?

Helen Lambert: It's all very informal. We just try to keep talking to people. And Facebook plays a part.

Maria Lloyd: So Malcolm, what are you doing behind the scenes at Cadra to make CADRA run efficiently?

Malcolm Pemble: Well, there's a lot of things. Our planning list is one which, when we surveyed the members, they said they appreciated and found very useful. A lot of work goes into monitoring what's happening in planning applications within the councils, both Reading and South Oxfordshire, and looking for planning applications that have a wider interest across our area. Our website is a resource. It's got a lot of important historic information about the area, which we built up over a long, long time and it's important to keep that going. We also get letters and emails from members and they all need to be replied to.

Our website is really important because it's not only a resource for people but shows what CADRA's actually done over the 60 years.

The history goes back to the year dot. We have information about the archaeology and we have links into national databases.

Maria Lloyd: What's your favourite section of the website?

Malcolm Pemble: Probably the planning list, which is what I spend most of my time doing.

Maria Lloyd: It's a labour of love.

Malcolm Pemble: It's become more important recently because if you ever walk around the your neighbourhood you will often see planning notices that advise on next-door neighbours. Historically, the council planning officers would email or write letters to people living close to the affected properties but this is no longer going to happen. What they will do is put notices up on the houses that are going to be redeveloped. So we think the planning list is now becoming a much more important thing for people to be able to consult.

Helen Lambert: The website has got lots of different sections and there are two pages on local history. They started with our big project called *Caversham 100 Years On,* in which we worked with other organisations to focus on local heritage. We discovered a lot of places to find information and we started just listing our sources. So, over time, we've found quite an eclectic mix of bits of information, links and sources. It would be a fantastic project for someone to edit

it for Facebook, picking out snippets and sharing them because there's just so much material there. That would be great fun for someone. There are just so many fantastic stories about Caversham. These stories are what brings it to life and help people to really feel a connection.

Maria Lloyd: What's worked well for CADRA over the years?

Malcolm Pemble: Because CADRA has been established for such a long time it has been able to build up respect for the organisation. And we've picked our battles as to where we can have some impact.

We've had a strong team in the background and more recently we've built into Emmer Green where the previous association was no longer able to continue. Now we have a growing membership there and that's widened our impact right across North Reading.

Maria Lloyd: Okay, so Neil, you live in Emmer Green. Can you say what's gone well for CADRA in that area.

Neil Tayler: Over the past couple of years we've picked up from where the Emmer Green Residents Association left off and we've carried on their community projects. Notably we revamped the noticeboard in the Village Centre.

It had a very dilapidated, mouldy, rotten noticeboard until CADRA stepped in. We've revamped the noticeboard and it's now looking very brand spanking new, which is great for the community because it's a central point of information. It's a focal point for local groups to put adverts up about what's going on in the area. Now they've got a good board that's going to be there for number of years.

And we have a Facebook site which is a sort of a sub-branch of the main CADRA site and people commenting that they're really pleased with what we're doing around the area.

We've got other plans as well, like restoring and cleaning the Emmer Green sign by the pond. That's a work in progress at the moment.

One of our past projects was the Emmer Green book, which charts the origins of Emmer Green from way back, lots of photographs and lots of historical content.
It was produced by a local lady, Margaret Ormond, who still lives in the area. That went out of print many years ago but we reprinted a couple of hundred books and have distributed them around local schools. Emmer Green Primary, Highdown and The Hill all got a couple. This is so the kids can share in the local area. Just getting that book back into print was a really big project.

Maria Lloyd: So Helen, as well as what has worked well and what hasn't over the years? What challenges have CADRA come across?

Helen Lambert: Well, the membership side has gone well. We have a growing membership and our survey shows that the biggest group were those who have joined in the last five years. So we have new people coming in and, as well as the committee, we have what we call a committee support team who pick up specific issues. That's been really positive, brings new people in and it gives us particular expertise in different areas.

But it's hard to find people who have the time to commit to the main committee roles. We know that our younger members find it really helpful to be kept in the loop, as all our members do. But if you've got a young family and a full-time job, you don't have time to spare.

It's been really useful when, from time to time, we've had younger people in the team for a particular project for a year or two. We haven't any at the moment. We would really like to pick up on that again.

So we've got a communication plan to try to reach out so that more people are aware of what CADRA does and to see ways that they could contribute that would fit in with their lives.

Maria Lloyd: In order for something to work well, you need a diverse range of people from all backgrounds and ages. So obviously it's harder for younger people… they've probably got families and they've got jobs. But why do you think, despite all that, it's important to get involved in your local community groups?

Helen Lambert: There's lots of payback for the individuals. It can be really rewarding and you learn a lot. It's a very good insight into how local government works and to see where you can influence. It's really useful being part of a wider network. On environmental issues and on conservation it's an opportunity for people to bring in new skills, new ideas and new approaches.

Our team's been really good at looking after each other. We all have lives to lead and there'll be times when we're not available to do things and we have to work around and help each other. Everybody on the team is very focused on what makes Caversham and Emmer Green a great place to live.

Maria Lloyd: So if anyone's interested in politics or getting involved with CADRA you get to tap into different organisations and liaise with local government.

Helen Lambert: Yes, we get to know the councillors. We occasionally sit in or watch online the council meetings. You suss out what's happening and how the process works and where to find the documents on the council's website and all that kind of thing. Once you've sussed that out, you could discover all sorts of things, but it takes a little bit of time to get your head around it.

Maria Lloyd: How do you get feedback so you know what people think of what's CADRA's doing?

Helen Lambert: So when our emails are going out, we're always saying, please let us know what you think. We did an extensive survey last year, which was really useful. We spent time talking to people and we got some lovely comments back. Somebody said to me very recently: "I came to your open meeting, I asked a question and I felt heard. It was lovely." Somebody else said: "CADRA does the things that I would like to do if I had the time. And the CADRA monthly emails are so useful as they summarise what I need to know in an easily readable format. And I find your newsletter invaluable to find out not only what's currently going on around Caversham, but also about potential developments." So it's really heartening to hear those comments and it helps keep us going.

Maria Lloyd: I think that even if people aren't contributing their time they can still be a paid-up member? So they are helping and supporting CADRA and the work that you do. So even if someone is has no time to volunteer they can still help just by joining up to the mailing list.

Helen Lambert: Absolutely. Having a strong membership is really important to us having influence in decisions. We're not just six people in a room with six ideas. We are speaking on behalf of the community so we need to be in touch with that community and with our members.

So if you haven't thought about joining CADRA (www.cadra.org.uk), you can help give Caversham and Emmer Green a voice just by being a member. You can join and pay online through the website. We've revamped all the processes and it's quick and easy.
It's £3 for the household for the year.

Maria Lloyd: Helen, Neil, Malcolm, everyone else who's contributed their time for this episode, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. And, yes, let's get people joining CADRA!