

From the Lookout Post - May 2014

CADRA AGM Thursday 8 May 2014 - Local Planning

In view of the changes in central and local planning policy over the past few years, the Caversham and District Residents' Association decided to make Local Planning the key subject of their meeting in May. Two speakers have been invited. Lynette Baker is the Area Planning Officer heading up the team of planning officers handling applications in Caversham and elsewhere. This makes her ideally placed to explain how planning applications are decided locally. Professor Gavin Parker, Chair of Planning Studies at Reading University, will have just returned from a two year secondment to the Royal Town Planning Institute as Director of Professional Standards and Director of Planning Aid England, a role that also includes responsibility for planning education. Professor Parker has a particular interest in Neighbourhood Planning and the application of the Localism Bill. Together, they will be able to take everyone through the principles and practicalities of local planning.

The meeting takes place at **7.30pm Thursday 8 May at Thameside School, Harley Road**. The brief AGM business and review of the past year will take place first, followed by the two guest speakers.

There is a range of opportunities where local people can make an input to planning decisions. But you need to know how! For individual applications, your interest may be triggered by a yellow notice in your street or a letter on your doormat about an application near you. Each of these applications is considered against local policies in the Local Plan, which must in turn fit with the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Council is beginning to review its planning policies and will start to draw up a new Local Plan for the Borough. This will replace existing development plan documents in the Borough, including the Core Strategy, Reading Central Area Action Plan and Sites and Detailed Policies Document. One of the earliest steps is to start to draw up a list of potential sites for development to meet different needs and also for protection of open space, wildlife or landscape interest, or where other specific policies apply. Nominations of potential sites have been invited which will then form the basis of a further consultation. Consultation is also underway on the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the clear limitations on the use of the Section 106 payments. These are the means by which developers contribute towards the added infrastructure required. For the new CIL, communities have a right to receive a proportion of the levy for local facilities.

The introduction of the Localism Bill brings "a presumption in favour of sustainable development". Alongside this, there are processes designed to give people more control over the development of their local area. Neighbourhood Planning should allow communities to help set priorities for development in their area. Consultation by local planning authorities as they draw up Local Plans in line with the, should allow reflection of local views on how the area should develop.

<http://planning.communityknowledgehub.org.uk/resource/neighbourhood-plans-roadmap-guide>

There are various other new Community Rights and Opportunities. In some other parts of the country, these have allowed local people to resolve a particular local concern. See

<http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/>

The Heights Primary School

There is now a much fuller picture of progress towards opening the school this September. Two key decisions have yet to be confirmed but announcements may be made before you read this column. The permanent location of the school will be announced once legal contracts have been exchanged. The sale has been agreed for the purchase of the site, which is within the catchment area. It has already been confirmed that the school will not be on Mapledurham Playing Fields. The second decision awaited, concerns transfer classes for Year 1 and Year 3. There are not yet enough applications for children wanting to transfer in September 2014 but a small increase may well enable new classes to start. Again, there may be announcements before this issue appears.

The temporary location for the school has been announced as the old Caversham Nursery by the Westfield Triangle, just off Gosbrook Road. This is likely to be for up to two years. Although it is not within the catchment area, the former nursery can be easily adapted into a new primary school. It already has a large amount of open space to play and learn and is well placed to benefit from other outdoor space. The team will be working with the Friends of The Heights to understand what support parents will need to make the journey as easy as possible. This is likely to include consideration of the school's opening hours, breakfast and after school clubs to help working parents.

The Council have confirmed that the school will be included in their admissions process for Reception places for September 2014. Letters will be sent out by the Council offering children places in Reception at The Heights on 16th April, National Offer Day. The new Head Teacher, Karen Edwards, has been working with the team since her appointment in November and takes up the post full time in April. Offers have been made to two Reception Year teachers. A shortlist for Year 1 and Year 3 teachers is ready and interviews will follow, if these classes are confirmed. Appointment of Teaching Assistants, a school Secretary and Business Manager will follow. Mark Richards, Deputy Head at Queen Anne's School has been appointed as Chair of the Board of Governors.

The next steps include the pre-Ofsted inspection and the 'Readiness to Open Meeting' with the Department of Education, both scheduled for May / June. A planning application for the facilities on the permanent site is expected before any construction work starts. As part of this process, the announcement of the School's permanent home will be followed by further public consultation on the detailed design proposals.

The creation of the school is a complicated process raising different concerns at different stages. We should congratulate the team on working so hard to keep everyone informed throughout the process. Those new school places north of the river are sorely needed.