

DrewsNews

The newsletter of Drews Park Village Association Spring 2013 Issue 29



Spring in Drews Park



DEAR RESIDENTS OF DREWS PARK

Well, here we are on the verge of spring with daffodils thrusting up from our lawns, temperatures rising, and the sound of the woodpecker echoing across Drews Park. I think that spring is the about the best time of the year and it reminds us of our good fortune in living here where we are so well placed to enjoy it at its best. The recent news that the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust will be the new owners of the cricket pitch and orchard will enhance our natural environment with the assistance of those residents

who contribute to the Drews Pond Wood Project, and we as an Association look forward to contributing where we can as well.

It has been a busy time since our last Drews News as the number of subjects covered in this edition will testify. It is an on-going process for the Committee in following up matters with our Aster Communities and I would like to thank those members who have contributed their time and effort on behalf of all.

After many representations to Aster from your committee and quite a few meetings with them, Aster acknowledged our concerns about lack of progress on certain important items. As a result at a meeting on Feb. 6th Ian Handley introduced Alex Akhigbemen who has been appointed to supplement their efforts with specific responsibility for Drews Park whilst Leanna Weller is on maternity leave.

Here are some other items which are on-going with Aster:

- Due to changes within Aster's solicitors line responsibilities the Pets Charter is not yet finalised but I am assured that a meeting with them will be set up shortly.
- We are still awaiting costs and programme for the revised road signage after considerable thought and discussion last year between committee members on how best to protect residents' amenities from visitors and their dogs.
- A new initiative to recruit extra dog wardens has been set up by Aster and details can be obtained from Aster - any volunteers?
- We are advised that remedial work to external painting will commence in May if there has been a sufficiently dry period before then.
- Further investigation is promised by Aster on the question of grass subsidence and also the deterioration of stonework facing in certain areas. Updates on all these items will be forthcoming but if you have any thoughts or concerns please contact me or one of our committee members.

Best regards, Peter Benns, Chair DPVA

SALE OF LAND AT DREWS PARK



Our attention was first drawn to this when a planning application notice appeared for development at a freehold house on the Drews Park site. This is a matter for the planners and not for discussion in this forum, but our first reaction was to say, 'well, no matter - we own that bit of land'.

It turned out we no longer did; it had been sold by Aster a full year before without consultation or any information being given to the people whose lease gave them the right: *'To use and enjoy the Amenity land for recreational purposes only in connection with the use and enjoyment of the Unit'*.

It seemed curious that land meant for our enjoyment, sitting out in the sun during the summer months, and also part of our visual amenity could be sold without notice to us, and there was considerable concern to make sure other parts of the site couldn't be hived off in a similar manner. We took legal advice and the opinion of the solicitors was that there had been a 'Derogation of Grant'. Aster also obtained Counsel's Opinion which disputed that. However, we don't see how land that was part of our reason for buying our properties should be disposed of in this way.

The committee has had numerous meetings with Aster and their solicitors over the last months, about five to date, and a system is to be set up where a sole department will be responsible for all matters concerning Aster's 'commercial' land as opposed to their social housing land, and we have obtained assurances that nothing will be done in future without full consultation and discussion with Drews Park residents.

Some of us are understandably concerned about changeover of staff in a large organisation, but we have been assured that systems will be put in place that will be handed down to future managers. Time will tell!

WHY HAVE A RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION?

The Royal Institute of Chartered surveyors, in their leaseholder handbook, strongly recommend the setting up of a Residents Association in order to monitor the progress of buildings management and to be assured that service charges correctly reflect the needs of the building.

Several years ago we were asked to pay a sinking fund charge approximately three times the annual average against work that had not been tendered for. When the Association objected our landlord took us to a Leasehold Valuation Tribunal who found in our favour and set a more reasonable charge. This success on behalf of the residents brought a membership of 107 out of the 127 owners at Drews Park. It's slightly less now that some normal turnover has taken place but many of the new owners have signed up.

What are some of the issues the DPVA have been involved in recently? The first one that comes to mind is the renewal of the listed wall near the playground in Burnham/Elm Court. The proposed new wall was so expensive that the landlords were forced to go to consultation with the charge-payers and while the end result was not to the liking of some, a large majority voted for a lower and more stable wall, costing half the price of the one proposed.

In recent months the association has asked Aster to survey the house painting. After less than two years since we paid £120,000 to have our windows and doors painted, some were peeling off and in a poor state. We negotiated with Aster that this work should be done this spring, free of charge to residents.

There have also been two instances of scaffolding being erected recently, and seemingly because the progress of the works was poorly monitored the scaffolding stayed up for months. We asked the landlord to fix an all-in cost, however long it remained up which saved residents several thousands of pounds.

Recently when we discovered that some of our amenity land had been sold off we had four meetings with Aster and their solicitors and are working on a process to make sure nothing like that can happen again. (See page 3)

A number of meetings are held annually to discuss necessary works and also to monitor costs. We go through the proposed budgets for the coming year and we check all the invoices for work done in the previous year; this way we have been able to get items mistakenly charged to residents removed. **Cont'd**

Cont'd We take up complaints where residents have not received satisfaction themselves but we have discovered that you certainly can't please all the people all the time! However, the several dozen 'thank you' emails we have received make it worthwhile. So far we have done this without membership cost to owners and much of it at committee members' expense.

To summarise, the DPVA has dealt with the following recently:

- Rebuilding of listed wall
- Free repainting of some doors and windows
- Reductions in charges for scaffolding
- Negotiations to strengthen the security of our land use
- Constant monitoring of costs to charge payers
- Scrutiny of expenditure already undertaken
- A plan to get refuse bins cleaned twice annually (they have never been cleaned in thirteen years!)
- Preparation of new specification for grass-cutting
- Insistence of gutter cleaning as the best way to preserve the fabric of the building.

Thanks to all those who have passed their thanks and recognition to members!

INFORMATION FOR RESIDENTS

In the absence of an email address or telephone number for all residents at Drews Park, and at times when Association members don't have an hour to spend putting notices through all 148 doors, important messages will be either on the bin store notice boards or pinned outside the bin stores. This can apply to notification when the lawn contractors are about to spray weed killer or, for example as happened recently, when lost property such as keys are found on site.





ORCHARD AND SPORTS FIELD

Late last year the Drews Park Village Association was approached by the Drews Pond Woods Project. An opportunity had arisen to purchase both parcels of land, set aside as amenity lands for the surrounding houses but, many of us felt, were in need of protection from possible development.

Cricket field seen from the Orchard

An item in the Gazette and Herald and leaflets posted in all houses in the neighbourhood was followed up by emails to absent owners. The amount to be raised, to include legal fees, was in the region of £22,000 plus any overage to allow for the commencement of renovation of the

Orchard, neglected for some fifteen years or so. To the delight of all involved 94 pledges of funds were received towards the purchase and at the time of writing the pledges were being redeemed and we were proceeding to contract.

Major contributors were the Wiltshire Area Board, and local Devizes business Cardwave, with local residents also donating generously. Many of you will know that Drews Park has volunteers working with Stuart Hislop, who manages the woods, and they are all raring to go now that we have a chance to do what has been needed for some time to the land, and the orchard in particular.

LOST AND FOUND

Two sets of keys were handed in to an Association member in late January and to date they have not been claimed. Notices were put up on a bin store in lower Wyatt car park where one set was found and on the electricity sub-station near the entrance to inner Bowes Court where the others were found.

In future any lost and found items will be notified on the notice boards inside the bin stores, so it's always worth having a look if you've lost something. If you lost keys in January and you still haven't found them call 739588. See also page 9 for other notices.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR ASTER

Alex Akhigbemen (1st point of contact)
Home Ownership Co-ordinator
Alex.Akhigbemen@astercommunities.co.uk
Direct dial -01380 735578
Mobile - 07715 808425

Stephen Craig
Commercial Services Manager
stephen.craig@astercommunitites.co.uk
Direct dial - 01380 735403

BOOK CLUB NEWS

As we now have a large number of active members please telephone Norma on 724950 to check availability if you would like to join us.

If not perhaps you will enjoy some of the books we are reading.

March	<i>The Last Good Man</i> by A J Kazinsky
April	<i>The River of Time</i> by Jon Swain
May	<i>The Piano Cemetery</i> by Jose Peixoto
June	<i>The Kappellan of Malta</i> by Nicholas Monserrat
July	<i>Her Fearful Symmetry</i> by Audrey Niffeneggar
August	<i>The Uncommon Reader</i> by Alan Bennett
September	<i>Bring up the Bodies</i> by Hilary Mantel
October	<i>The Places in Between</i> by Rory Stuart
November	<i>The Penelopiad</i> by Margaret Atwood

TV AERIAL AT DREWS PARK



We have been told by Aster, after several interruptions in the TV aerial service that our system, installed about thirteen years ago is on course to fail. Several of the connection boxes (the ones that look like the gas boxes) have been found full of rain water, and in addition the wiring is not 'fit for modern service'.

Aster maintenance has come up with a suggestion which would involve fibre-optic cable which could also provide broadband and phone services as well as TV. We don't have any idea of cost yet, but we have been told that costs could be lowered by residents signing up to BT services. We are aware that people may be locked in to contracts with other providers, or perhaps just don't want to move to BT, or might already be with them - we don't know how this would affect the final cost.

We'll keep you informed - and keep our fingers crossed that the current service will last for a while longer but if you have any comments, objections or alternative suggestions - LET US KNOW! drewsnews2@hotmail.co.uk

DUSTBIN CLEANING

After about thirteen years without being cleaned we are about to sign up to a twice yearly professional 'bin clean' starting on April 11th. This is a Thursday, so two days after the refuse bins will have been emptied. If you think of it, put all your bags into one bin on 9th and 10th so the cleaners will have less to do in the way of shifting rubbish. The same goes for the second clean which is scheduled for 23rd October, which is a Wednesday. This will only apply to the rubbish bins as it was felt the paper and glass bins were unlikely to smell through the summer as the refuse ones do. The cost is £286 per set of six monthly cleans, £572 for the year.

SNOWY WEATHER AT DREWS PARK



IT Tips

Some of our tips are obvious to experienced computer users but there are more and more of us starting to use them. Here is one for iPad users. To take a screen shot of something you want to keep, maybe even just an email you are afraid of losing - just press the Home (round button at the bottom) and the Wake/Sleep button (on the top right hand side) and you will hear the camera click. Then just check in the Photos section and there is your document.



RESTAURANT CORNER

The Bell at West Overton - Reviewed 6th December 2012



Visited The Bell for a 'corporate Christmas lunch' and was most pleasantly surprised at the service and good presentation of the food. So often a Christmas meal is a notch down from the normal menu, but the meal was delicious. The service was good and unobtrusive and

the staff had taken note of the menu choices made some weeks before and seemed to know who to serve instinctively! I had 'melt in your mouth' mild smoked salmon to start with a horseradish crème fraiche and capers. Delicious! The turkey was beautifully presented and a chocolate tarte with vanilla ice cream was to die for. All nine diners were most complimentary about the whole meal.

The Pub/restaurant is to be found a couple of miles past Silbury Hill on the A4, on the right hand side of the road. The normal lunch menu is reasonable with (at the time of writing 2 courses at £14.95 and 3 courses at £17.95. Food is sourced locally wherever possible. There are also Bar snacks which looked delicious and sandwiches for a more informal meal. You can eat there every day, lunch and dinner, except Sunday when lunch only is served, and there is accommodation for wheelchair users.

Phone **01672 861099** for reservations.

If you have visited a local pub or restaurant and wish to write a review please send to the editor. For obvious reason we don't print reviews of unsatisfactory meals but if you have somewhere to praise, please let us know.

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Residents of Drews Park who knew Elva Miller will be sad to hear of her death in February after a long and very bravely fought battle against illness. She was a long time supporter of the DPVA along with her late husband and Elva was also a valued member of the Readers Group. She will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

NOTICE BOARD

Each Court should have a representative. We are still looking for someone to look after 23-41 Thurnham.. It's not particularly onerous; just look out for new residents and put a Welcome Pack through their door. Phone any committee member to sign on!

(May also lead to 10% contents insurance reduction)

Adrian Wood is our Neighbourhood Watch coordinator

<u>COURT</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>REPRESENTATIVE</u>	<u>PHONE</u>
Bowes	18	Peter Bennis	739419
Burnham	6	Sue Chick	724774
Chapel	4	Kate Rodie	739704
Clock Tower	12	Adrian Wood	738424
Cooke	4	Mathew Bevan	08456219463
Elliot	11	Edward Lockwood	730709
Speer	3	Simon Evans	
Thurnham (1-22)	17	Dick Powney	739153
Thurnham (23-41)		<i>Representative required</i>	
Wyatt	6	Lisa Penington	739588

MORE NEWS ABOUT THE BINSTORES!

You will have noticed that there are now full size plastic and cardboard bins. As they are only emptied fortnightly, **PLEASE** will you flatten cardboard and squash all plastic milk and other bottles to leave space for others.

We are still seeing people's personal possessions (not household waste) in the bin stores - TVs, lamps, electrical equipment etc. The stores are not meant for this and other residents have to pay for removal of things that should be taken to the Hopton Estate recycling centre.

Failing to do this will only result in higher service charges for owners, and eventually, higher rents for tenants.

NOTE: BROKEN GLASS, PROTUDING FROM A BIN BAG WAS LEFT ON THE FLOOR OF ONE STORE. We have glass bins!!!



Theatre News

After more than twelve years arranging theatre visits for residents Mary Stevens has finally bowed out from this responsibility. Those of us who regularly go to the Wharf are so grateful for all her work and thank her very much. Mary tells

me that she will still be attending with friends but not necessarily on a Thursday. Those who still want to attend will have to make their own reservations but it's worth contacting Mary on 739599 or marystevens@talktalk.net to find out if and when she is going so that friends may still be able to go together. Reservations can be made at Devizes Books.

We will still endeavour to post the dates of productions on the web site under the 'social' tab, so go to www.drewspark.co.uk to see what's on.

Members Contact details

Peter Bennis peter@drewspark.co.uk	Chair	18 Bowes Court	739419
Adrian Wood adrian@drewspark.co.uk	Treasurer	12 Clock Tower	738424
Simon Evans simon@drewspark.co.uk	Member	3 Speer Court	730615
Christine Fitzmaurice christine@drewspark.co.uk	Member	14 Wyatt Court	726448
Gail Nugent gail@drewspark.co.uk	Member	9 Wyatt Court	618904
Mathew Bevan mathew@drewspark.co.uk	Member	4 Cooke Court	727370
Simon Roberts roberts@drewspark.co.uk	Member	11 Wyatt Court	727367

Co-opted members

Lisa Penington 739588
Ralph Meyer

Drews news Ed & Communications and Membership Secretary
lisa@drewspark.co.uk and drewsnews2@drewspark.co.uk
webmaster@drewspark.co.uk