

October 2012

## Welcome

This edition of the DRARA Newsletter reports on the Association's AGM, held on 2 October, continues with our series on local businesses, takes a look at one of the most innovative building developments in recent years in Hill Top Road, and features someone who has done an amazing thing this summer.

The guest speaker at the AGM was Iman Monawar Hussain who is one of the Deputy Lord Lieutenants for Oxfordshire. As well as outlining his work as a Deputy Lord Lieutenant he spoke about his proposal to establish a Jubilee Legacy Fund to ensure an enduring legacy for East Oxford. The Legacy Fund would support work that would empower women and young people through education and mentoring and promote inter-faith projects. He will be holding a number of meetings with interested groups and individuals over the coming months, and we will report on this in future editions.

Summaries of the Association's work over the past year are supplemented by a piece on consultations being held by the City Council on Planning Policies for the City as well as proposals for the Lincoln College and Jesus College playing fields that are adjacent to our area. The consultation will start soon and we think it is important that as many people as possible make their views known. As Richard English points out, it is the last opportunity to comment and influence policies and proposals that will have an effect on the neighbourhood for years to come.

Finally, the details and roles of the committee members will be published in the next newsletter in December. I announced that this is the last year that I will be willing to serve as Chairman. I will finish in 2013, at the AGM. It has been very interesting, hard work but very rewarding. However, I think it is now time to hand over.

*Elizabeth Mills, OBE*

## DRARA Annual General Meeting

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### Overview of the past year – Elizabeth Mills, Chairman

We look back on a very active year in which we have held some great events, and achieved several of our key objectives.

We have continued the work on local planning, environmental action and organising social events, as well as providing input to the local Council Sites and Housing Consultation, the Police Neighbourhood Action Group, the Oxford East Residents' Associations Forum (EORAF) and the East Oxford Area Forum. Our activity and profile are demonstrated by the press cuttings we generate – and I would like to express particular thanks to Martin and Margaret Coombs for their meticulous work in compiling our Press Cuttings Book. Thanks are due to many other local residents for their hard work to ensure all our activities were accomplished with style, efficiency and above all, fun!

One key objective was the implementation of the Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) for the area. The lines have been painted, and it will go live in mid-October. Whilst the CPZ has consistently received support from a sizeable majority of the residents there are many who regret the necessity, and there is concern that its implementation might encourage even more speeding up our narrow streets.

Another objective was to see a registration scheme for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) introduced throughout the City. This year the City Council has taken steps to register HMOs in the City. This is very important for DRARA because of the high proportion of HMOs and the impact that they have on the local neighbourhood. HMOs are of course extensively, but not exclusively, occupied by students. For some time

we have pressed the universities to take effective steps to deal with the disruptive and anti-social behaviour that a small number of their students regularly display. Both universities have appointed student wardens. These initiatives do appear to be having a positive impact – the number of complaints about student behaviour has reduced over the past 12 months. We also welcome the City Council's more pro-active

approach to preventing and dealing with the anti-social behaviour of a small minority of students, as evidenced by the appointment of an active and effective Enforcement Officer - a positive response to the pressure from DRARA and other local residents' associations.

Your committee met six times during the year. The sub-committees – Events and Environmental Action – have also met regularly.

#### **University Liaison Report (Ivon Asquith)**

- Brookes announced they will be reducing student numbers by 750 to 1,000 over the next three years, which should free up more space for long term residents.
- Fuzzy Ducks on Wednesdays at the O2 Academy has ceased and been replaced by an evening organised by the Brookes Student Union and the Academy Music Group.
- The number of Student Community Wardens is being increased by both Universities, making a total of 20 compared to none two years ago. Brookes are increasing their SCWs from six to 12; they will continue to have three in the DRARA area. Oxford has increased theirs from four to eight; they will have four in East Oxford but not the DRARA area.
- Both Universities collaborated with the City Council in the summer in organising a Student Moving Out Campaign, encouraging students to recycle and donate unwanted goods to charity.
- Complaints received by Brookes in the DRARA area in 2011-12 fell by 40%, from 45 to 27.

#### **Environment Action Group (EAG) report (Claire Ball and Anna Eden)**

The Environment Action Group (EAG) has been meeting regularly since early 2009. The aims of the group are: *to support practical ways of reducing energy use and to promote environmentally friendly lifestyles*. The EAG produces a monthly 'Green Flash' – on a variety of green topics – which is circulated by email to all DRARA subscribers and has regular updates in the DRARA newsletter. The EAG has had an active year, which included the following:

- A series of 'Carbon Conversations' – a programme of 6 structured sessions was arranged by the EAG, with trained facilitators from Low Carbon Headington providing support for a group of 6 people (October 2011-February 2012).
- Re-cycling, 'messy gardens' and street cleaning: The EAG coordinated DRARA members' input to the city-wide OxClean campaign in early March, concentrating on litter clearance in DRARA streets and the surrounding area. A leaflet aimed at reducing the number of 'messy gardens' was produced,

in collaboration with the City Council, and targeted efforts focusing on the 'messiest' gardens have resulted in noticeable improvements. Two EAG members – Maggie Lloyd & Anna Eden – have visited two of the City Council's recycling plants to learn more about what happens to our re-cycled household and food-waste.

- Trees in the Street: Responding to pressure from the EAG, the City Council eventually replaced a new tree/sapling in the chicane half-way up Divinity Road on the left. It was decided to dedicate this tree to the memory of Catherine Walker, beloved wife of Edward, who died last year. 'Catherine's tree' was named and celebrated with a small gathering in June.
- 'Guerrilla Gardening' comes of age: The Environmental Action Group organised DRARA's fourth 'Guerrilla Gardening' session in April 2012, continuing to plant & maintain the flower beds in the chicanes in our area.

#### **Planning Report (Tom Knollys)**

DRARA has maintained a close watch on planning applications in the DRARA area and the planning

and licence applications on the Cowley Road for pubs and club hours.

*Planning applications in DRARA area:* the only significant applications in our area have been for two proposals for replacement houses in Hill Top Road, nos 61 and 71, both of which have been approved, but only after modifications in response to objections.

*Planning in East Oxford*

*St Clements Car Park:* the initial plans for the redevelopment of the existing car park to provide 140 student rooms and reduced number of parking places failed to gain planning permission. The developer then proposed a phased development, keeping a reduced number of parking places during construction and partially addressing one of the objections, which has been approved, in spite of overwhelming objections from the local business community and residents' groups (including DRARA).

*Travis Perkins Site, Chapel Street:* an amended plan for 190 student rooms was approved.

*Warneford Hospital:* an application to retain the old Highfield is under consideration. DRARA has objected to the extra parking proposed but suggested it would be satisfied if the old unit was retained for a limited period of time to facilitate refurbishment of other wards.

*Old Road Campus/Park Hospital:* Oxford University has consulted widely and extensively before putting in an outline application for the

redevelopment of the Park Hospital site and incorporation into the Old Road Campus. The main impact on the DRARA area would be the increased number of parking places, potentially adding to the volume of traffic on local roads.

*O2 Academy:* in March an application to vary planning conditions to extend the opening hours was refused.

*City Arms:* retrospective permission is being sought for the large umbrellas and TV screens in the fenced off seating area outside the pub. The noise from customers watching the TVs affects those living nearby, for quite some distance, and DRARA has objected to the application, but suggested restricted hours might be acceptable.

*Houses in Multiple Occupation:* Since 24 February 2012 change of use from a house in single family occupation to a shared rented house in Oxford has required planning permission. No applications have yet been made in the DRARA area. Only a handful of applications have been made in Oxford.

*Heritage Asset Register and Assessment:* Oxford City Council is preparing a register of locally important heritage assets located outside designated conservation areas to inform planning decisions in the city. The character assessment for the DRARA area was reported on in the April 2012 newsletter.

## Planning Consultation

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### **Oxford City Council's Proposed Sites and Housing Plan**

A Public Examination by a Planning Inspector on the City Council's Proposed Sites and Housing Plan took place in the Town Hall for two weeks in September. DRARA and the Bartlemas Action Fund were represented by Richard English and we made comments on the issues outlined below.

Policy on the location of student accommodation (HP5). We supported the City Council proposal to limit the impact of purpose-built student accommodation on residential areas but pushed for even tighter language on student accommodation only being allowed if located adjacent to a main thoroughfare. We hope this policy will not be watered down as the Universities are pushing for more flexibility. One potential issue is whether self-contained graduate accommodation stays under the student accommodation policy and its restrictions or is classed as residential, and so not subject to same restrictions.

Policy on Design, character and context (HP9): We pushed for stronger wording on one of the new criterion that any proposed "development exploits opportunities to sustain and enhance heritage assets and their setting, and makes a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness". If this stays we will have a good result.

Lincoln College and Jesus College Sports Grounds whose western edge on Bartlemas Close forms part of the setting of the Bartlemas Conservation Area.

- A part of Jesus College sports ground (not the cricket pitch) is likely to be allocated for residential development with 25% open space retained.

- Lincoln College sports ground and cricket pitch is also likely to be deemed suitable for residential development if replacement of cricket provision is found. Our arguments for 25% open space to be retained on the Western Boundary was not accepted. This is inconsistent. We did achieve some positive wording that any development proposal will need to contribute to the character of the Bartlemas Conservation Area.

**Bartlemas Nursery Site and East Oxford Bowls Club:** Finally, we argued successfully, we believe, for the Nursery site not to be put back into the list of suitable sites in the Plan due to its small size and extreme sensitivity. The old East Oxford Bowls Club land is also seen as too small to be included as a suitable site in the Plan but both sites could be subject to speculative proposals.

### **Consultation on the Plan.**

The next stage is a further six-week consultation period on the City Council's main modifications to the Plan which is likely to take place from 12<sup>th</sup> October to 23<sup>rd</sup> November. The Inspector's report is due out at the beginning of February 2013.

It will be very important for DRARA and local people to make sure that our views are heard loud and clear during this next consultation. It will be our last chance to push for changes to the plan.

As soon as the modifications are published we will let you know. If you want to be emailed about them please let Richard English know at [r\\_d\\_english@yahoo.com](mailto:r_d_english@yahoo.com). Otherwise you can be updated on the whole consultation process on the Council's Planning website link here:

<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/SitesandHousingDPDExamination.htm>

## **Obituary**

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### **Pamela and Robert Currie**

*This obituary for Pamela and Robert Currie was published in The Times on 20 September 2012. They had lived on Southfield Road for over 10 years*

Pamela died on 1st September 2012, aged 71. Emeritus Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall, formerly Pringle Fellow and Tutor of the Hall and Lecturer in German in the University of Oxford. Her husband Robert died on 13th September 2012, aged 72. Emeritus Fellow of Wadham College, formerly Fellow and Tutor of Wadham and Lecturer in Politics in the University of Oxford. Both much loved parents and grandparents, colleagues and tutors. They are buried together in the Chilterns where they wandered, and talked, and watched the red kites.

## **Features**

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### **Changing Neighbourhoods**

*In the last DRARA newsletter we included an edited version of the local Heritage Character Statement. The DRARA area was part of a planned expansion of Oxford and the various styles and details reflect the phased development, much of which was late Victorian or early Edwardian, but not all. There are examples of later developments throughout the area though none as striking or different as the latest development at 8 Hill Top Road – even though Hill Top Road already reflects a wide range of styles and developments. Nick Welch went to see the house.*

The concrete and zinc construction of 8 Hill Top Road is a marked contrast to the brick and tiles of the neighbouring houses. The development was a source of curiosity as it progressed from the clearance of the site, the erection of a garden shed at the end of the garden and the lifting into

place the massive pre-formed concrete walls. As the house grew, so did interest in it.

When I went to meet the owners and see the house from the inside it was a grey and damp evening but even so the light and the sense of

space was stunning. The back wall is glass and even in the murk of our summer it was clear that the outlook would be amazing. The house has won an award from RIBA, and on the architect's web site there is a description of the house, which includes the following extract.

“The design is all about expressing the base beauty of concrete: the very antithesis of bling. All the main elements of the building – the walls, floors, ceilings, stairs, roof – are polished panels of precast concrete, made off-site, delivered and assembled like a vast house of cards.

The house is organised so these raw panels are left completely unfettered by fittings, services and clutter. The highly disciplined plan has long enfilades down each side so the concrete flank walls run right through from front to back, washed by daylight from full-height windows displaying the distant view.”

The mirror-smooth concrete is perfect and referring to its “base beauty” may sound a little esoteric, but it conveys the simplicity and scale of the structure. What this does not, and maybe could not, convey is the strong sense that this is a home; it's not just a design piece but a house with warmth and comfort as well as being

aesthetically very pleasing. The soft reflection of the light from the concrete walls gives a comfortable ambience. At the back of the house the floor to ceiling glass wall gives the massive sense of space but within it there are comfortable living and working spaces – the kitchen and eating area on the ground floor and a lovely sitting area on a mezzanine floor above with a glass waist-high wall which makes it feel enclosed and safe but also part of the overall space that has been created.

All the practical things of daily life are in the central core; well designed and where they are needed. The garden is formal, with ponds and a range of drought-resistant plants. The idea of ‘borrowed landscape’ makes complete sense with the extensive views over to Cumnor from the back.

The inspiration for the design and build comes in part from the owners' interest in the work of Tadao Ando, who came to architecture through the unusual route of truck driving and boxing, and whose work is characterised by extensive use of concrete, aiming for beauty through simplicity, but also designing complex spatial arrangements. This is all evident in the house, and it works. It is also a striking example of how neighbourhoods evolve and develop over time.

## Local Businesses

*Our series on local businesses continues with the work of Oxford Garden Partners. Nick Welch met with them. Their web site is [www.oxfordgardenpartners.com](http://www.oxfordgardenpartners.com)*

Oxford Garden Partners is a local business run by Kate Jury and Emi Itoh. I met with them to talk about their business on a day that promised some sun and warmth; we complained about the impact of the appalling summer weather on our own gardens and hoped for something better in for the autumn. They started Oxford Garden Partners in July 2010, working from their own homes and using Dropbox as their virtual office space.

I first saw Kate and Emi in action on Divinity Road with their surveying equipment, establishing and checking the levels for a small front garden project. They were being very thorough and paying a lot of attention to the details of what

they were wanting to achieve for their client, and this sense of professionalism was reinforced when I looked at some of their designs and the projects that they had worked on. Their work is about aesthetics and structure, the two cannot be separated, and they spoke about the plants they choose and the materials for the gardens with equal enthusiasm and expertise. They want to create places that are unfussy, timeless and simple. The distinction between garden design and landscape design became very vague and we agreed that it was as much to do with scale as anything else.

Kate and Emi came to garden design from very different routes that combined when they met at

the Oxford College of Garden Design. Reflecting on their time there they both had that glazed look of people who have been through something tough but very rewarding. Emi came to Oxford from Japan via France and the US and had been a violinist and Kate decided on a career change from the world of publishing. Kate's interest in gardening led to an increasing interest in design. Emi was always interested in architecture and has carried this interest into her gardening.

On their web site [there's a link to Kate's blog](#). I had an enjoyable time reading about gardens and plants and came to a piece on the Real Alcazar in Seville, which I think is as wonderful as Kate

describes it. In her blog Kate writes "What strikes me about these gardens – those within the palace and in its immediate vicinity – is their essential modernity: every time I design a small urban courtyard garden, or the slightly larger suburban 'back garden', this is what I am aiming for – a seamless integration from house to outdoors, so that the eye continues its journey: an extension of textures and colour, gradually substituting the man-made for the natural...and a sense of privacy, belonging, and enclosure that city-dwellers need as a retreat from the bustle around them" The scale of the Real Alcazar is far grander than anything that would be offered in Oxford but Kate's description is an eloquent summary of what she and Emi strive to achieve.

## **The Gold Letterbox – Paralympic Gold comes to the DRARA area**

The gold letterbox where Divinity Road meets Hill Top Road is an inspiration, and it's there because Lily van den Broecke was the cox of the British LTAMix4+ crew that won a gold medal at the Paralympics. Lily is now at Durham University reading Politics, Philosophy and Economics but has lived on Hill Top Road for much of her life. Talking to her about the Paralympics and her rowing made clear what a determined, clear sighted and capable person she is, but it also revealed what being brought up in the area meant to her. She is proud of her medal, and the celebration of it by the gold letterbox means a great deal to her.

LTAMix4+ stands for Legs, Trunk and Arms mixed coxed four. This means that at any one time, there are four athletes in the boat and one cox. The description of the boat tends to emphasise the disability rather than the fact that there are four top athletes who also have to deal with some pretty daunting obstacles to be the best in their sport – and they are the best. This crew has been together for two years and in addition to the Paralympic gold medal, won gold at the World Championships in 2011, and gold in the World Cup in Munich in 2012. Lily describes the experience of coxing the crew and being involved with the Paralympic team as being very humbling and an education.

Before she became the cox for the LTAMix4+ boat Lily was a successful cox for the British Junior Rowing Team. She started rowing nine years ago at Headington School. After sculling for four years she took up coxing because she realised that she was not going to be the right size or stature to be a top rower. She weighs in at 50kg, the minimum allowed for coxes. Her own success in rowing means that she knows only too well what rowers go through in their training and racing. The technical knowledge, inter-personal and emotional skills necessary to be such a successful cox and team member can be seen in her YouTube video. She talks with a calm authority and with insight that is very impressive.

The selection is intensely competitive, and nothing is taken for granted. Despite the previous successes the crew had to compete to be selected through the trials. And for Lily this continues; although she is taking a year out to concentrate on her studies she is aiming to cox at the 2016 Olympics.

*Nick Welch*