

The Friars' Community Group

Occasional Newsletter number 12, Winter 2010

The Department of Sunshine and Rainbows

What is the Friars' Community Group?

The purpose of the Friars' Community Group is to represent the interests of people living and working in the Friars to preserve its architectural and historical integrity as far as is reasonable, and to act as a point of contact for negotiation with developers, builders, and local and central government departments. This newsletter is produced for and on behalf of the Friars' Community Group and supported by the Norfolk Community Foundation. Enquiries about distribution and content, or if you would like to get in touch with us or become involved, please contact us through the website www.friars.org.uk

With winter unmistakably upon us it's time to reflect on what has been happening. Some would say not much has changed since the summer newsletter – others would say everything has changed! The landscape around The Friars is in the flux of enormous change and those keeping an eye on the website will be familiar with the regular NCC updates on work in progress. As yet, we don't know exactly what 'the cuts' will bring (or otherwise) for the Friars, but rest assured an eye will be kept on what is happening and everything will be done by us to protect the interests of everyone in the Friars. We have had sight of other newsletters in the town and we are proud to say that we think we are the only truly independent newsletter there is. Others that are founded by the council have editorial content that is heavily weighted in favour of the council. This means that they cannot criticise or hold the council to scrutiny, whereas we can. We give credit where credit is due but we won't be told what to print or not print.

Membership The Annual General Meeting took place as usual and many have renewed their membership and as usual we have gained a few new members this year. To all those who have renewed, though you will already have a thank you receipt, we again thank you. Many have promised to drop the annual £5/person through our door (cheques or cash) but we realise that the dangerous weather is a deterrent and hope that when it clears up people will remember the group. Whilst we recognise there are some who are unhappy that the gap created with us taking a step back hasn't been filled entirely I have to say that just because we haven't been able to feed back to people what we have been doing doesn't mean that people of the Friars have gone unrepresented and their voice unheard. We still attend meetings to wave the flag and jump on people when they intend to add to or take away things that affect our common life. The current economic crisis the country faces has meant that there is significantly less investment around that would mean changes within the Friars. The point though of the FCG is that we have a voice and we STICK TOGETHER so that there is an infrastructure available when we need to stand up against a threat together.

Planning Application in Southgate St: This site is now up for sale with an approved Planning Application for a much smaller development than was proposed. The combined efforts of individuals and the Friars' Community Group conspired to get the best deal possible here. Congratulations and thanks to all concerned.

Building Site All Saints' St/Bridge St corner: Some movement here has been happening, but whether as a result of enforcement action prompted by a complaint the FCG made earlier, or because they are poised to leap into construction remains to be seen. We are making enquiries so watch this space.

Building Site next to the Porterhouse: Here we have another site that started with overambitious dreams of residency but has had to be reduced to something more proportionate. The result will be better than derelict land but it will be a rather cramped space in which to live and it would seem that it might get more cramped before it is finished!

Hillington Square Redesign: Freebridge remain keen to meet with the Friars' Community Group but there is no point in holding a public meeting in such inclement weather when few are likely to attend. The Charter we believe is still planned to be launched a few weeks after Christmas, and we have put in a significant amount of time to contribute to this. It will be interesting to see the result. Whilst we haven't the resources to include Hillington Square in our distribution, because they are our neighbours there is a healthy dialogue between Freebridge and the Friars' Community Group. Freebridge want to include the Friars' Community Group in their negotiations and it is in our interests to participate. It is, after all, why we exist. This is why we hope you will take the opportunity to have your own say when the opportunity arises as so many of you have done in the past.

More on Ice: Anyone unable to get their shopping done during this grim weather, or needing help to make doctors or hospital appointments, are invited to contact us for assistance. If we can help we will, if we can't we will try to find help, if we can't help then at least you will know we will try and do all we can.

Southgates Roundabout. It might be worth remembering that the purpose of the roundabout redesign was to increase the capacity of the junction to speed up the traffic flow in and out of town in eager anticipation of the extra traffic generated by the construction of a relocated college and housing on the NORA site. As we all know, this hasn't happened and isn't likely to in the foreseeable future, which allows the roundabout to be tested by existing drivers. Predictably there have been a modest amount of collisions while people are getting used to the new design, and daily quiet unassuming drivers who wouldn't say boo to a goose find themselves cutting up burly lorry drivers with the skill and abandon of an experienced white van man. But in addition to the hazards drivers face there is concern about the inadequacy of the pedestrian crossings, particularly across Wisbech Road and London Road. Much of the cycle/pedestrian traffic that formerly used Harding's Way has been diverted via the South Gates over very poor footpaths. The foot/cycle path past the Southgates Bar is too narrow for shared use and rejoins the road too close to the roundabout. Local cycling groups are pressing for it to be replaced by an on-road advisory cycle lane continuing (Dutch style) through the centre of the South Gates. Unfortunately, no amount of re-engineering will solve the safety and congestion problems here without a major reduction in traffic speeds and volume.

Harding's Way Bus Route. Work continues, as do the concerns about the safety and viability of the scheme. There is still no clarity as to how priority will be determined between buses and cyclists on the narrow section at the end of Whitefriars Road. Norfolk County Council have now agreed to put in a narrow footway on the eastern side of the route between the sluice and Whitefriars Road to maintain access to the school, which is better than originally planned but still inadequate. The destruction of the small woodland at the Wisbech Road end has had devastating consequences for wildlife, with several species of bird no longer seen in the area and, it is believed, the loss of at least two species of butterfly.

The Incinerator. As everyone is probably aware by now, Norfolk County Council is planning to build a *highly* controversial rubbish incinerator at Saddlebow. There are major concerns across all sections of society as to the safety of the emissions from the plant, as well as its financial viability. Private Finance Initiative (PFIs) have a poor record as to value for money, and the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital has been widely recognised as an example of how to rip off the public. Promises of jobs and heating by the council are quite dubious, and increased traffic will add to the poor air quality the incinerator will generate. As well as being likely to lead to widespread disease especially among vulnerable groups from the unborn to the elderly, there are questions to be answered by the council regarding its democratic credentials. The voice of the region is clear; Not here, not now not ever. But this isn't a knee jerk NIMBY response; opponents to the incinerator recognise there needs to be a new solution but this isn't it. Anaerobic waste digestion hasn't been considered and neither has a scheme to improve recycling. The debate continues but meanwhile further information can be found at the Farmers Campaign (www.farmerscampaign.org) and King's Lynn

Without Incinerators (www.klwin.co.uk). We await news about what form the proposed referendum will take. If, like most of us in The Friars and further afield, you don't want the incinerator, please take the opportunity to acquaint yourself with the facts, sign a petition, write to NCC, vote against the incinerator in the referendum and continue efforts to reduce waste, recycle, and where possible compost as much as you can.

Post Office Plans. The owners of South Lynn Post Office (that's the one on London Road, not Wisbech Road) have applied for planning permission to move the post office facilities from the present site to White's Newsagent just along the road, and convert the current building into a fast-food outlet. Whatever the outcome of the planning application, we would like to see a commitment to providing a post office in the area for the long term. If you wish to comment, the planning application number is 10/01844/CU and you have until the end of December. One particular area of concern is that there are only two parking spaces outside the shop and whichever way people drive in there will have to be some reversing on a main road at some point.

A Big Conversation. Norfolk County Council says they will have a budget shortfall of £150m next year as a result of changes to the way they are funded. Staffing levels at Martineau Lane have been slashed drastically as a result. There is a covenant on the site preventing it from being sold for housing though this is being looked at I gather. They are holding a 'Big Conversation' to ask us what not to spend money on. The Friars' Community Group have already been to one consultation and participated in the debate. It would seem that many proposed cuts are aimed at services that currently support the disabled, families and children. Some would say this is *not* Good News. Details are available online at: www.norfolk.gov.uk/council_and_democracy. The implications are huge, particularly for the more vulnerable members of the community, so it is important to get involved.

Twenty's Plenty. A campaign for a town-wide 20mph speed limit for the whole town will be launched in the New Year. Residents of King St have been beefing about this for some considerable time; King St is known as the legal heart of the town and few realise it also has a large residential population. Drivers see it as an opportunity to test the manufacturers claim of 0-60 in the same way they see London Rd for the same purpose. Many other towns and cities in the UK are making 20mph the default speed for urban areas. The benefits are an increase in safety (particularly for children), a decrease in pollution and 'smoothing' of traffic flow. For more information on the national campaign see www.20splentyforus.org.uk.

Crimewatch: One of the ramifications of the cuts could see a reduction in 'community' policing. As previously reported, the Friars benefits from very low levels of crime, and even anti-social behaviour here is nothing compared to the problems faced by residents in many other parts of town. Clearly we have much to be grateful for. However, residents are already starting to see the effects of cuts in policing resources. Complaints made about the noise from our local lap-dancing pub elicited promises of a prompt response but little action. Environmental Health officers stop their late shift well in advance of when noise becomes a problem raising the question about is this really a good use of a qualified Environmental Health officer. Obviously discussions are under way to keep the impact to a minimum, but the future shape of local policing is unclear, as is what effect the cuts will have on local borough council services. If you, however, have concerns about how the cuts are affecting you and need support to back up your complaint please get in touch. For now, the police are warning households that walk-in burglaries are a real threat. They have a lively initiative to deter shoplifting so petty criminals are looking for easy ways to thief and the homeowner seems to be a gullible target. Scraping icy windows with the engine running being a case in point.

Yet MORE on Ice: Recent hysteria about fears of litigation following householders choosing to clear the pavement of snow and ice outside their property have been laid to rest. Readers are reminded that the government have clarified the matter by saying that litigants need to prove malicious intent to press a case against householders, but people clearing the pavement with the genuine intention to make walking safer need fear no tap on the shoulder.

That old itch again: Nothing seems to unite residents of the Friars more than the issue of parking. If the Germans unite under the banner of Kucher Kircher und Kinder, the French join together with a Gallic shrug and a national strike, Weetabix sticks together on the side of a bowl and the Friars unite on the issue of cars. Usually it is either because they are parked on the pavement (illegal), they are parked so other traffic can't pass (stupid and inconsiderate) or they ignore traffic regulations (stupid inconsiderate and illegal). Not all by any means but many problems occur during school dropping off/picking up times (some parents begin to queue just after 2pm!). The school is doing all it can though more support from the Traffic Wardens wouldn't come amiss. Plans for the Borough Council to take over responsibility from the County Council continue (an arduous process of transfer involving legal application street by street) and will result in a RIGID application of the law by the Borough wardens in pursuit of greater revenue. Many will be caught out and wise virgins will acquaint themselves of finer points of parking law well in advance. Remember you read it here first!

Penultimately: Most will not know that as from the AGM there has been a change in the committee of the Friars' Community Group. We must say a well-earned thank you to Martin who has resigned from being our Chairman and welcome Mike Nobbs into the post. Mike is a long term resident of the Friars and many will know him for his Rasputin like beard and Rizla. Others will know him by his experience as an expert in matters of buildings construction and planning law. We couldn't have wished for a better replacement for Martin who did all we asked of him. Both Jane and Jeremy have had to stand down from their posts because of Janes' cancer, but remain closely involved in what is going on in a coordinating role, Margaret Worledge is doing a wonderful job as treasurer, Dave Cooper remains in able charge of our website and Jenny Perryman has taken on the role of Minutes Scribe.

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

The Queen has one, Channel Four has one so why shouldn't the Newsletter?

Underpinning everything The Friars' Community Group tries to do, is the single principle that ordinary common people needn't take on the chin what others do, and try to do, to us here in the Friars. It is our belief that if we stand up to authority by using the proper routes and tools available we can hold authority and business to account. We have proved this to be so in many of the things we have achieved. Even in areas where we haven't won 100% we have nevertheless held them up to scrutiny and account.

In these straitened times and belt tightening it is understandable if people hover over spending £5 to keep the community work together. We have been transparent in saying that some of what we would normally do has been hindered by Janes' illness and all that implies, but it doesn't mean representation has stopped altogether, and we stubbornly maintain that £5 is a very small sum to ask for what we can achieve together.

Christmas for many is a time for family, eating, drinking, presents and getting away from work. For others it is a time for eating, drinking, presents and longing to get back to work. Some see it as a time for eating, drinking, and getting away from the family. For a few it is a time for abstinence because you are on double overtime. For a few it will be a period of untold misery. A few will find it a time of unexpected disaster for no fault of their own. Maybe even a few will use it for religious reasons. Whatever Christmas you have, we hope it will be everything you want it to be. Whatever New Year you have we wish it a good one, cosy in the benign sentiment that is appropriate for New Year celebrations.

If in 2011 you need someone to help you stand up for what you see as your rights in an infringement with the council or whoever then remember the Friar's Community Group. You don't have to be a member to ask for help, but we appreciate a little recognition. This Newsletter was a collaboration between Rob Archer and Jeremy Dearling. Complaints should be directed at Hotpoint. Compliments should be attached to a bottle of Single Malt. Happy Christmas. Happy New Year.

This newsletter is produced for and on behalf of the Friars' Community Group and supported by the Norfolk Community Foundation. Enquiries about distribution and content to Jeremy or Jane Dearling, 13 Gladstone Rd. King's Lynn, PE30 5AL, 760513, or via the web site www.friars.org.uk. Enquiries to the Chairman, Mike Nobbs, at 770779.

