

The Spring Grove Residents' Association

In 1973 the Spring Grove area was declared a General Improvement Area by Kingston Council. The Residents' Association was formed to examine, discuss and suggest improvements to proposals made by the council. *The object of the Association was to safeguard residents, their property and their environment from unacceptable proposals submitted by the council, and also to negotiate with the Council to improve the area.*¹

In 1975 the constitution states the aims of the association to be

1. the preservation and improvement of amenities
2. the representation of all members in matters affecting their welfare, and the association was declared to be non-party in politics.

Membership is open to all residents of the specified area and representatives of businesses situated in the area could be associate members. Street representatives for each street, nominated by residents of that street, form the committee.

When the association was formed the area was generally run down. The roads and pavements were in poor condition and several buildings were suffering from neglect. By constant consultation with the council, police and polytechnic/university much has been done to improve the area. The main achievements are listed below.

In 1973 a suggestion was made to the council to move the Circus and fair from Athelstan Recreation ground to elsewhere in the borough, to move the GLC refuse point and to install new street lighting in the area. The next year saw proposals for road closures in order to reduce traffic and improvements to council housing in the area, but in 1976 houses in Belleview Rd were still lying derelict and proving to be a hazardous play area for children. In the next two years little improvement had been made due to lack of council finance, but improvement grants had been offered to owners of property in need of repair.

Socially, however, SGRA were active in caring for the community. A regular newsletter, Springboard, was being produced and drama productions, Bingo sessions, fairs, festivals and parties for OAP's were arranged. There was a knitting group, which knitted blankets for the elderly and a mother and toddler group. A waste paper collection was organised, the Hogsmill River had been cleared and there was even a garden implement loan scheme being arranged.

In 1978, the future of the 100 year old St John's church was being discussed. Some residents wanted it retained as a focal point and community centre and others preferred to demolish it to make way for a park and area of outdoor recreation for the children. Kingston Polytechnic used it as an Arts and Drama studio. Another scheme was proposed in 1990 to sell the vicarage, replace it with three houses and use the profit to divide the church in two, one half being retained as a church and the other being converted into a two-storey community centre. Residents were keen to keep the grass area and railings, rather than a proposed wall, to preserve the open-ness of the area. The church is now a Grade II listed building and remains as a single unit, which, although not partitioned is used also for community groups. The vicarage was deemed a building of special townscape merit and the new houses were built in part of the vicarage garden fronting Bloomfield Road.

By 1984 many successful projects had been achieved. These included improved street lighting, the Hugh Herland Sheltered Housing Unit, the refurbishing of many

¹ SGRA letter to residents ref (JAB/17.6.84)

Council properties and many attempts to clean up the Hogsmill River prior to a Hogsmill walk being developed between Mill Street and Springfield Road Bridge.

SGRA welcomed the proposal to designate the Spring Grove area as a conservation area in 1985 and the Spring Grove pub to be designated a 'building of special townscape merit'. In the 1980's residents expressed their concern about increased student parking and the conversion of large houses into student flats. A trend which could not be curtailed. In 1987 they were successful in preserving the 71 bus route through Villiers Road and in 1990 SGRA urged the council to replace Road signs, especially in Denmark Road, where there had been confusion over the numbering of houses due to a new development at one end.

In 1994 the main concern was the proposed development of the VP Wines site in Villiers Rd and in 1995 the ongoing complaints of student noise and disturbance, smell from the sewage works and parking problems were once again voiced. Other problems which the residents helped to sort out were rubbish discarded by students and abandoned cars and shopping trolleys.

The move of the local doctor's surgery from Fairfield south to Kingston Hospital was opposed in 1999. In 2000 storms had caused flooding of the basements of some houses requiring residents to be temporarily rehoused. After years of complaints a new sewerage treatment system had at last been installed at the sewage works, lessening the unpleasant smell.

SGRA advised the council on their views of the proposed Residents parking scheme (controlled parking zone) and traffic calming on those roads with greater through traffic including road humps, tree planting at corners and a mini roundabout at the Villiers Road junction. Shop owners were concerned about loss of trade caused by parking charges and a 20 minute waiting time outside the row of shops was put forward. Also special consideration was requested for carers' cars.

The use of the church hall was approved for a nursery and for the Spring Grove Fringe Drama group. The hall was already used for jumble sales, meetings, pantomimes, barn dances, Morris dancing, Orpheus choir rehearsals and badminton. The Association raised funds to provide a new kitchen and chairs for the hall, which had already been refurbished by members.

A website was designed and set up in 2000 and in 2001 planning objections were made to prevent the demolition of 28 Springfield Rd and a block of flats being built in its place. As this was in a conservation area the objections were upheld and the house preserved. Concerns were also expressed about the 4 sets of traffic lights in close proximity outside Surbiton High school.

Throughout its existence the residents enjoyed celebrating special events including a street party for VE day anniversary celebrations in 1995, centenary celebrations of the Spring Grove pub, and a party for the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002.

Much has been achieved by the care, diligence and perseverance of the members of Spring Grove Residents' Association. They have fought hard to win battles, some of which have taken many years. They have been able to conserve the character of the area of Victorian and Edwardian buildings, improve the amenities and develop a spirit of community.

***Researched and written by Glenis Ward, 'Kingston at Leisure' Team Member using material deposited in the Borough Archives as part of the project 'Kingston at Leisure: The Hidden Records of the Boroughs Clubs and Societies'.
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