

## Spring 2021 Newsletter



### Green shoots!

As the days get longer and there is the hope of new growth in our gardens and open spaces, we start thinking about being able to meet outdoors with family and friends in the coming months. AHRA members also have much to look forward to due to work that has continued over the last year.

Firstly, you will notice our new logo. Local artist, Kate Davis, has very kindly designed a new logo for us. Kate also designed the archway at the Lenten Street Bridge entrance to Flood Meadows. I am sure you will agree that her creativity has helped lift that once-neglected corner of Flood Meadows.

Secondly, we have new members to welcome to our Association. Paul and his wife have recently moved into Cromwell Gardens. We have also been approached by Katy, who lives on Market Street and has asked to join us. In the past, AHRA has assisted residents on the High Street with issues they have had with noise & anti-social behaviour, so we are delighted Katy got in touch. We are looking forward to meeting in person when restrictions allow!

Which leads nicely onto our announcement that once we can, AHRA will be organising a social gathering for members in the summer once we're able to meet again in person. We are unable to confirm any further information at this stage, for obvious reasons, so watch this space for more details...

In the meantime, don't forget that if want to raise anything, do send an email to [ameryhillresidents@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ameryhillresidents@hotmail.co.uk). In recent months, we've had queries about trees, street lighting, footpaths, litter, and potential flood risks.

### Online Meetings continue...

As well as the regular Hopfield Place / Redrow Liaison Meetings, where we are still awaiting answers to our long-outstanding questions about future ownership and management of the Lower Field, landscaping of the Lower Field, and potential future flood risk, we have continued to represent AHRA at other community group and council meetings. Over the last few months, we have attended Alton & District Residents' Association, Alton Community Coordination Group, and Alton Town Council's River Wey Steering Group (inc. Flood Meadows & Kings Pond) meetings. We are also hopeful that we will soon be engaging with CALA, the developers of the Brewery site in relation to the Wey Walk route linking King's Pond with the High Street.

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## **Wrangling with SSEN**

Some of you will have been affected by the power cut in January where a number of streets in our patch lost power for about 4 hours one evening. On behalf of the residents, I complained to SSEN CEO to highlight the unsatisfactory level of customer service which myself and other residents received at the time of the power outage. We had found out that we had been put on an emergency generator as a result of engineering works carried out elsewhere in the area, and that this generator had run out of fuel – which caused the power loss!

The inadequate responses from SSEN's Customer Services team were bureaucratic and unapologetic, did not recognise the considerable inconvenience caused by the breakdown and did not give an adequate explanation of what went wrong. Furthermore, there had been no apology for the loss of service and no indication of what measures the company is taking to prevent a reoccurrence elsewhere.

My complaint to the CEO was acted upon immediately, and we had a flurry of emails over the course of the next few days. It was very clear that our complaint had been taken seriously and lessons were learnt. We found out that there was a series of events which caused the loss in service for several hours and as a result of our complaint, SSEN have investigated and will improve their procedures to prevent this happening in the future. This includes looking at ways to create notifications for customers when they are put on generation.

In addition to the response to our complaint, as a goodwill gesture, AHRA have been given £200. We will be putting this towards the social gathering for members once we can arrange it.

## **Electricity Supply Important Information**

You may not be aware that there has been a change in the company structure of SSE. SSE Retail and SSEN both used to be part of the parent company SSE, but in January 2020, SSE Retail was sold off to Ovo Energy. SSEN only deal with electricity from the roads into the meter. SSE Retail is responsible for customers' electricity supplies in their property and their bills. So, anything from the meter into the house is owned by SSE Retail. We only discovered this as a result of the incident in January, so wanted to make you aware of the change, and also circulate some useful information:

Firstly, here are some helpful numbers:

**If you have a power cut and there is no light on your meter, call - 105 (SSEN)**

**If you need to discuss your electric bills, SSE Retail are your supplier – 0345 070 7373**

Secondly, any residents over the age of 60, have a chronic illness, deaf or blind or have a disability would benefit from SSEN's Priority Service Register and it has been recommended that they register. If this applies to you, and you're not already registered, do call the number below!

**If you want to register yourself for the Priority Service Register (PSR) – 0800 294 3259**

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## **Flood Meadows & River Wey**

The river level is high again this year and at the time of writing (mid-April) remains so despite there having been little rain recently. We think the levels may be affected by the dense accumulation of plant growth in the river – look upstream from Cut Pound – and we're asking EHDC to cut back and remove this proliferation. This high level has also worsened the erosion of the footpath in a number of places. These will require repair. We had an inspection of these damaged areas in mid-March and the Town Council has asked a firm of specialist contractors to quote for reconstructing the damaged parts of the footpath. But before any work can be carried out the Environment Agency have to be approached for permission to work on the riverbank - the granting of such a licence can take up to three months so it is unlikely any remedial work will be carried out before the summer.

The same contractors (who installed the observation platform) will soon be replacing the existing wooden bridge across the 'pond'. This bridge connects the riverside footpath with the tarmac one running down to Lenten Street. The replacement bridge, in the same style as the existing, will be made of recycled wood and plastic (like the observation platform).

Another project planned for later in the year is the provision of berms and gravel recharge upstream from the Lenten Street bridge. These measures will be designed to vary the flow of the river and improve the river bed to provide a more varied habitat for species in the river. This work will also need to be licensed by the Environment Agency and so is unlikely to begin before the summer. The spreading of the gravel on the riverbed will probably be done by volunteers - budgets, as always, are limited.

Finally, the new grassed area by the Lenten Street bridge has taken well and has been supplemented on the banks by the planting of native riverside flora. Within minutes of the barriers being removed over the Easter weekend, children were splashing about in the river! There will need to be some reinforcement work at the base of the new bank to counter erosion which the flow of the river is beginning to cause - again, probably a summer job.



## **Gothic Cottages**

This pair of attractive mid-Victorian houses stands next to Amery Hill School and opposite the Quaker Meeting Room. Five years ago we noticed that the left hand one was empty and showing signs of neglect. Since then we have been working with EHDC officials and local councillors to get essential repairs carried out. The house remains empty and the dilapidations clearly visible in the building's fabric remain. Recently EHDC officials have told us they are no longer pursuing the owner for action and they consider the matter closed. This is disappointing to us. There is an article in the Spring edition of the Alton Society Newsletter describing our fruitless quest to encourage positive action. Who knows when something will be done. On your next walk have a look for yourself.

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## Lenten Street Trees

Engelmann & Buckham Ltd. own office buildings in Lenten Street. These buildings and their associated car parks run down behind Fielders Court and reach the south bank of the river opposite Tanhouse Lane. The company has applied to EHDC for permission to fell three mature trees (two sycamores and a cedar) and reduce one other (sycamore). This application is based on a professional survey of the trees in question which has detected serious weaknesses and which concludes that removal of three of them must take place. Replacements are planned - sizeable, 10-12cms diameter. This may be inevitable but it will remove a substantial canopy of mature trees behind Fielders Court and Tanhouse Lane. Planning permission has not yet been granted but, assuming it will be, felling will take place soon.

## Flood Action Plan

As reported in the last newsletter, following the flash floods last summer which affected many parts of our town, flooding has gained a lot of focus by our local Town, District and County councillors. It is hoped that a local Steering Group will be set up, and we have been assured that AHRA will be involved from the outset. In the meantime, we are engaged with EHDC and HCC in relation to specific, tactical activities, such as the maintenance required to the river upstream of Cut Pound as referred to elsewhere in this newsletter and potential solutions to the run-off that pours down Brick Kiln Lane when there is torrential rainfall.

## Useful Contact Information

If you would like to receive more regular updates, please send an email to [ameryhillresidents@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ameryhillresidents@hotmail.co.uk) to be added to our mailing list.

Alton Town Council: 01420 83986; [info@alton.gov.uk](mailto:info@alton.gov.uk); [www.alton.gov.uk](http://www.alton.gov.uk)

East Hampshire District Council 01730 266551, [www.easthants.gov.uk](http://www.easthants.gov.uk)

Hampshire County Council 0300 555 1375; [info@hants.gov.uk](mailto:info@hants.gov.uk); [www.hants.gov.uk](http://www.hants.gov.uk)

The Alton Society: [www.altonsociety.org.uk](http://www.altonsociety.org.uk)

Alton & District Residents' Association: [www.adra.community](http://www.adra.community)

### Various Facebook Groups:

Love Alton Alton Matters

Alton News Alton Coronavirus Support Group

Alton Covid-19 Mutual Aid

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