

# LRA's LOUGHTON LIFE Newsletter Members' Edition January 2024

*Loughton Residents Association is independent  
and focuses on looking after Loughton.*

*We have Cllrs on the County & District Councils and  
hold 21 out of the 22 Loughton Town Council seats.*

## Eyesore on Alderton Hill

There has been a long-running series of attempts to build an enormous complex of elderly persons' flats, with care facilities and communal areas, at the foot of Alderton Hill, next to Poets Place. The site extends up Alderton Hill, well into the area currently occupied by large, single-family homes; it faces Brook Road. The proposal would be between 3 and 6 storeys high!



The latest planning application was turned down by the District Council 12 months ago; 310 local households had objected. The applicants then appealed, and 234 local households objected (a remarkably high number for an appeal).

A five-day Planning Inquiry was held from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> December in Epping. For LRA, Michael Benbow, who had put considerable effort into encouraging residents to object, and David Linnell attended on all five days, and spoke strongly against the development. Michael also successfully organised residents from each of the areas surrounding the site to attend and to say how the development would adversely affect them. This was the second time that there has been an appeal on a rejected application for the site. Unfortunately, the planning system is stacked against residents, making it increasingly hard to get proposals rejected. We now await the Inspector's decision, which won't emerge until well into 2024.

## Please renew now

Your copy of *Loughton Life* should come with a letter either confirming that you've already paid for 2024 or asking you to renew your membership. Membership remains at £5 a year but additional donations are always welcome. You can help us greatly by renewing now.

LRA is run by volunteers, and we keep our costs to the minimum. We depend upon volunteers and membership to produce these newsletters and run our campaigns.



## Central Line Improvement Programme

We understand from news reports that the first refurbished trains from Transport for London's (TfL) Central Line Improvement Programme started to enter service from late November.

It will reportedly take until 2029 for all 85 trains on the line to be overhauled, and TfL have said that the refurbishment should extend the life of the trains by 15-20 years.

Modifications will provide wheelchair space, which is much needed, but will also reduce seating capacity in affected carriages. Visual displays will also be provided and new AC traction motors. It will be interesting to see if the armrests, which were all broken off in the first month of the stock's life, are replaced, and if we see an end to the gaffer tape added for waterproofing.

Extending the life of the present 1992 stock may be a false economy and can be seen as a stop-gap measure. They are already 30 years old and likely to be obsolete in a decade's time. With a less restricted government investment policy in TfL, they would be due for replacement now, not in 15 years' time!

TfL has a programme to replace Piccadilly Line trains from 2025. That programme was originally planned to also replace Central Line trains (eventually) which would have improved capacity in the 2030s, however given the drop in passenger numbers during the Covid pandemic and the subsequent tight financial position TfL finds itself in, we may be waiting a long time to see new trains arriving at our tube stations.

Once testing of the first train to be overhauled has concluded, production will ramp up, with the programme returning one train to service per month once the work on it has been completed. Five trains will be taken out of service at a time to maximise production, with increasing numbers entering into passenger service over the next four years.

The impact on the service (especially during rush hour) when five trains are taken out of service remains to be seen, and recent (and regular) reports of severe delays due to lack of trains isn't a good sign. TfL has been reported as saying they "have experienced an abnormally high number of defective traction motors that has required us to take several trains out of service and implement an amended timetable".

**Our thanks to all the residents who support LRA**

## Pyrles Lane Pavement Danger

Local residents have reported that the pavement outside the shopping parade has deteriorated with cracks and uneven surfaces appearing. Some residents have already suffered falls as a result and sustained injuries.

This has been reported to Essex Highways. LRA Cllr Chris Pond has chased this up to try to get some action. He cannot *make* them act but he has asked for urgent maintenance.

In the meantime, take care in the area and let any elderly relatives living nearby know of the danger.

## High Road darkness

Members will recall we have reported before that over half the streetlights in the busiest part of the High Road are "dead". This is apparently because the design of the luminaires (the entire light fixture including the lamps) is obsolete (they were installed in 2003) and cannot easily be replaced by LEDs.

Essex Highways planned to tackle this in the first half of 2023, however that obviously did not happen. The High Road now has large stretches of road lit only by lighting in shops.

LRA Cllr Chris Pond reports that the issue was raised at the County Council full council meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December. The Council's Portfolio Holder has said that the next LED upgrade phase will be completed this financial year. Given past experience, believe it if you like.



## Warm places over winter

Warm places are opening up again across the district, with some venues offering refreshments, activities such as board games and free WiFi.

Venues locally are (opening days and times vary):

- Debden Library
- Epping Forest Campus, New City College
- Loughton Library
- Oakwood Hill Community Centre
- St Mary's Church.

## On the buses

**Bus route 804:** Local County Cllrs have been told school bus route 804 will likely be withdrawn after this school year. The route is now very little used, but the County Council will talk to Transport for London to see if one of their services could be slightly altered or diverted to compensate.

**Bus routes 20 and 167:** Minor timetable changes will be put into effect on 9<sup>th</sup> March. The same routes, hours and general pattern of service will continue.

## Salt bins removed

In late 2023 the County Council removed seven salt grit bins from around Loughton, without notifying the Town Council first. The County Council then said the bins were removed due to them being faulty. The Town Council has challenged this and is trying to get them reinstated.

The salt bins removed were purchased and installed between 2003 and 2009, and were positioned in the hillier parts of Loughton to assist the residents in cold snaps, where roads are not gritted by Essex Highways.

The Town Council does run a salt bag volunteer scheme, where individual residents can volunteer to collect a bag of salt and distribute it on their respective road. The Council, however, relies on a very limited supply of salt from the County Council and does not have the resources to administer salt for the whole of Loughton.

Unless you are already an existing volunteer, it is unlikely that the Town Council will be able to assist in the short term. If you wish to be prepared, you can buy your own salt bags locally.

## More police events planned

Epping Forest Community Policing Team (CPT) kicked off the year with the first of their 2024 multi-agency public engagement events. The team were at St Mary's Church in Loughton with colleagues from Essex County Fire and Rescue, the Safer Essex Roads Partnership, Essex Watch, and the District Council's community safety team.

This year the team are planning quarterly engagement events in Loughton and at New City College in Debden.

## Contacting LRA

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**LRA councillors are Independent and non-political**

## Planning & licensing

The LRA Plans Group (LRAPG) looks at all planning and licensing applications in the town and takes action where appropriate. It consults residents and supports, or objects to, individual applications as appropriate. It works entirely separately from LRA's Cllrs on Council planning committees. Read more about Planning and Licensing, the role of the LRAPG, how to get more information using the application and reference numbers provided, and how you can comment at <https://tinyurl.com/LRAPPlanning>

Where there are residents in flats above licensed premises, for example on the High Road, The Broadway or nearby, the LRAPG objects to late-night licensing applications.

### Changes in Planning Policy

The Government changed its national planning guidance last month with respect to house building and development. The new guidance clarifies that a significant increase in the average density of residential development in an existing urban area may be inappropriate if it will result in developments which are "wholly out of character with the existing area."

Whilst this advice has arrived too late to stop the large development by Fairview Homes at Lucton's Field, it gives hope that any further high-density development can be resisted by the council. Whilst the planning inquiry regarding the development at 13-15A Alderton Hill has closed, the planning inspector will have to consider this new guidance before issuing his decision.

### Aura Grill and Bar, 179-181 High Road

This application proposed varying planning conditions to allow three cars and three motorcycles to park at the rear of the building (exiting onto Station Road), and to extend opening hours to 10am to 12:30am Mondays to Saturdays and 12pm to midnight on Sundays.

This was the Cafe Rouge restaurant which is now occupied by Aura Grill and Bar and recently the subject of planning enforcement action for unauthorised works to the rear.

LRAPG has objected to the application and considers the opening hours should be restricted to 11pm at the latest to protect residential amenity; there are residential flats in the properties to the south of building. With limited parking, patrons using the premises are likely to park in quiet residential streets just off the High Road.

Leaving at 12.30am to access and rev up vehicles when they are cold in the winter/slam car doors etc on quiet residential streets is unacceptable.

*Reference EPF/1241/23. The formal consultation period ended 12 December.*

## Clays Lane closure

When Thames Water closed the road on 15<sup>th</sup> January, they instituted a full closure along the whole lane, including the first hundred yards from the A121 to the entrance to Stanmore Road and the Goldings Manor Estate, meaning that a full circuit of the diversion was necessary. This was crass, and involved 150 households in huge, wasted mileage. LRA Cllr Chris Pond contacted Essex Highways who sent an inspector. A more sensible closure has now been instigated.

This closure along the rest of the narrow lane will be annoying to many until 25 February, but at least it has been minimised.

## The financial state of Qualis

The District Council has reported that Qualis continued to make positive returns in three of its four companies, albeit below target levels. Qualis Living continued to struggle to achieve its targets, and this would be addressed in the next Qualis Business Plan when the target would be revised to reflect economic conditions. Qualis had also made £2 million of interest payments to the Council for its lending and this directly supported the Council's provision of services. Overall, Qualis reported a quarter 2 loss of £350,718, which was almost £200,000 greater than forecast.

*LRA Comment: We have always been doubtful about the advisability of the District Council setting up Qualis to take over various Council services for residents and to borrow money to fund developments, partly because this has removed the services concerned from direct scrutiny by LRA Cllrs and partly because of the financial risks involved. (The Council can argue that some of Qualis's problems have been caused by changes in economic conditions and in Government policies. However, experience shows that changes in these factors are to be expected, even if the details are unforeseeable, and that plans need to be sufficiently robust to withstand them.)*

## Affordable homes and Qualis

The District Council proposed reducing affordable housing at two Qualis Commercial housing sites in Epping, given they were deemed financially unviable in their current form, with cost increases attributed to the "current economic conditions, with rising inflation (affecting the cost of materials and labour) and rising interest rates". In other words, the developments as planned and approved would mean a financial loss to Qualis, and by logical extension to the District Council.

To avoid or lessen financial losses, the homes now need to be sold at presumably higher market prices rather than provide homes that are affordable.

The request to reduce affordable housing was subsequently considered and approved at the District Council full Council meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> December.

LRA Cllr Chris Pond has commented that the original planning applications were seen through the District Development Management Committee at the time as vital for Epping and axiomatic to its future swimming facility, just as the multi-storey car park was to be good for the Epping environment, and it was pushed through accordingly.

## St Margaret's hospital, Epping

It is planned that there will be extended opening times and additional equipment at the St Margaret's Hospital to support a new Community Diagnostic Centre CDC from summer next year with:

- Two additional computerised tomography (CT) scanners
- Extended hours for X-rays
- New ultrasound equipment
- New cardiology equipment
- New respiratory equipment
- Relocated MRI scanner
- More phlebotomists to be recruited, increasing the number of blood tests that can be carried out.

## Additional funding for road maintenance

The County Council has announced that the County is to receive £121 million of funding for road repairs and resurfacing between now and 2034, which has been reallocated from the HS2 rail scheme.

This is welcomed locally, however does need to be put into context.

That additional funding over 10 years is on average £12.1 million per year which would be on top of the current year's allocation of £34.6 million. Essex Highways has, however, said it needed £77.7m each year and has stated that county roads are in managed decline. The additional funding will help but not fill the gap. It is not known if any of it will be spent on Loughton's roads.

## Potential spending cuts

The District Council is currently completing its budget for 2024/25. In order to balance the budget, they need to identify £3.5 million in savings "making this one of the most challenging of all budgets in recent years".

The District Council is now considering recommendations to achieve this. Of note are:

- Removal of the out-of-hours noise complaint service.
- 25% cut to funding for Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF).
- 25% cut to funding for Epping Forest Citizens Advice.
- Removal of the District Council's dedicated policing team.

LRA Cllr Chris Pond says that losing the dedicated policing team is especially concerning, and that the overall budget situation is a result of the central government continuing to underfund local government. The Treasury throttles councils by restricting Council Tax increases to 3%, by not adjusting Council Tax bands, and by not giving sufficient grants. Dire cuts are the inevitable result.

The budget is due to be finalised in February.

## Please keep the roads clear for the gritters

A few C-class roads like Pyrles Lane, Forest Road, and Englands Lane, which are not bus routes but are narrow and overparked, are still on the salting routes (most were removed in the mid-90s). LRA Cllr Chris Pond has received complaints they have not been salted in the past. A lengthy correspondence with Highways has followed, particularly on Englands Lane.

The County Council say that because of the narrowness of the street, and the amount of parking (sometimes inconsiderate), gritter vehicles would be in danger of getting stuck if they attempted to access the street.

Please try to park where the width won't be obstructed, as the drivers of the gritters will simply not enter the road.

## Luctons Path Streetlights

A resident contacted LRA Cllr Caroline Pond to report that two of the streetlights on Luctons Path were not working. Caroline raised this with the County Council who advised there would be a delay fixing them, as they were due to be upgraded to LED lighting. The lights have now been replaced.

## LRA Christmas Quiz 2024

Thank you to all of you who sent in your entry for the Christmas quiz. The winner is Tom Cowhig, who wins a book token. If you'd like to see the answers, you can find them on our website.

## Christmas window competition winners

The Town Council has thanked all the Loughton businesses that decorated their windows and joined in the town's festive celebrations in last year's Christmas Window Competition. The winners were:

- Local Independent category: Elliott James, 165 High Road
- Multiple/Chain Store category: Madison Fox, 94 High Road
- Charity Shops category: Haven House Children's Hospice, 188 High Road
- Eateries: The Aviary Bar & Brasserie, 3 Centric Parade, 200 High Road

The charities chosen by the category winners will each receive a £75 donation from the Town Council, and this year they are Cancer Research UK, Haven House Children's Hospice (two donations) and 3Food4U.

## Bright lights on The Broadway

Volunteers from the Broadway Town Centre Partnership and students from New City College staged a children's Christmas event on the Broadway for the second year running on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> November.



The students designed and built a pop-up Santa's grotto in the former District Council office and Father Christmas saw just under three hundred children.

T. Cribb and Sons helped to sponsor a free fairground ride and Sainsbury's donated lots of free fruit. Charlotte, the children's worker from Loughton Methodist Church, ran a drop-in activity in St. John's on the Broadway. Children from Distinct Performing Arts and the Thomas Willingale School choir entertained crowds on stage. Lighting effects were provided by Terry Tew Sound and Light. The Bookshop on the High Road supported the event by donating lots of books and Qualis Property Solutions arranged for several Christmas trees to decorate the central reservation.

All the volunteers on the day made this such a successful community event.

## If you are reading this

You have an interest in our town, and already support LRA.

***How about taking that one step further by becoming an LRA Councillor?***

Elections for both Town and District Councils take place in May, so we are looking for some LRA members to join our team of Cllrs. Our Cllrs come from a wide cross-section of occupations and ages, with many new Cllrs learning and working alongside those with many years' experience.

If you might be interested, or just want an informal chat to know what is involved, please call Michael Benbow on 020 8508 4457 or Chris Pond on 020 8508 2361, or email us at [contact@loughtonresidents.co.uk](mailto:contact@loughtonresidents.co.uk)