



Digswell Residents Association
www.digswellra.org.uk

Annual Report 2023

Reports on Roads, Parks, Housing, Road Safety,
Membership and Finance



November 2023

Welcome to this Newsletter from the Digswell Residents Association. This group was formed in 2007 to resist the increasing random parking that had come to plague the village as the charges in the station car park rose. It has since tried to provide a voice to the local authorities about the way issues on Planning, Environment, Parking, Traffic and Leisure facilities should be dealt with.

Here is some information about the various issues that the DRA have been involved with recently.

The committee is made up of volunteers who give their time free to the benefit of the community. Some have been on the committee for many years and would welcome offers to take over the responsibilities.

To mention one, Mike Freestone, who has tirelessly been our Transport/Parking co-ordinator and has left the committee. The role he has played connecting with the County and Borough Councils on highway issues has been invaluable.

Do come along to the annual meeting where the committee will report on some of the issues that have been covered during the year. We will welcome offers to join this happy band in the Digswell community.

www.digswellra.org.uk

Annual Meeting 8pm Tuesday 14th November

Digswell Village Hall
30 Harmer Green Lane
Digswell, AL6 0AT

Come and have your say about local matters:

Digswell Playing Fields

Road Safety

Housing in Digswell

Mimram River

Environment

Digswell Archive

Local Councillors will be on hand to talk to.

New Village Sign for Digswell

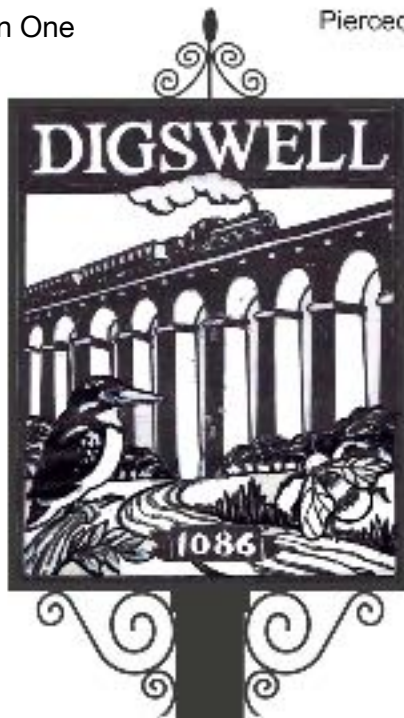
The DRA Committee has been working to obtain a new, professionally designed 'Village Sign' for Digswell and now has two options to present to the Annual meeting. We will take residents' views and preferences into consideration at the meeting. Option 1 is a laser cut 'pierced sheet steel' sign with enamel painted highlights.

Option 2 is a painted 'cast aluminium' sign. The sign would be carried on a robust oak post. Design life is 25-30 years with minimal maintenance. The proposed site is on grassland at the corner of Harmer Green Lane and Hertford Road opposite the children's playground. We are working with our sponsors Siemens Mobility Ltd and the local councils to create this new sign for Digswell. Please attend the meeting if you have views on the proposal. Paul Johnson.'

'Due to space constraints, this newsletter contains summaries of the reports, full versions of which can be found on the DRA website www.digswellra.org.uk'.

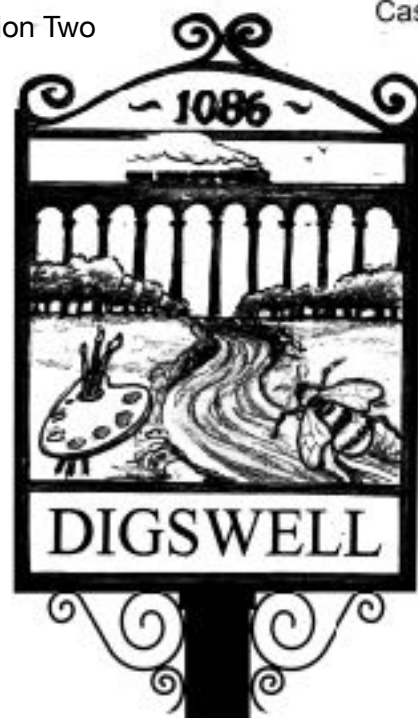
Option One

Pierced Metal



Option Two

Casting



Full descriptions and installation diagrams are on our web site www.digswellra.org.uk

Planning and Development

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (2016-2036)

Welwyn Hatfield Council recently received the Planning Inspector's final report on the Local Plan and the Plan was formally adopted at the Council meeting on 12 October. The Inspector insisted on a number of Main Modifications which were the subject of consultation during the year. One of these is a requirement for an almost immediate review of the Plan to be submitted for examination within 3 years. This will need to identify further sites to be developed from 2033. While in the current plan there are no allocated development sites in Digswell, the Inspector's final report comments on the comparatively low level of development proposed in some villages, particularly in the parish of Welwyn. He recommends a prompt review to establish where some of the development required beyond 2033 is to be located. "This provides the opportunity to analyse further the opportunities for development, particularly in the parish of Welwyn, but also at Cuffley and Welham Green". Thus clearly it will not be long before a debate about allocated sites, particularly in our area, will be back on the agenda.

The WHBC Plan adoption statement is viewable [HERE](#)

The full Local Plan with the Planning Inspector's modifications is viewable here <http://www.welhat.gov.uk/local-plan>

Welwyn Neighbourhood Plan

Welwyn Parish Council is currently finalising a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish and DRA members have been involved in its evolution. It will need, however, to take into account the final version of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan.

Planning applications

During the year the DRA has objected to several contentious planning applications in Station Road, Harmer Green Lane and New Road. Details of these will be found on the DRA web site.

Paul Turner.

Digswell Playing Fields, Pond and Children's Play Area.

Situation Report

Last winter was fairly quiet. The WHBC cut back the nettle bank and the trees that were planted last year came into leaf in the spring, along with a large number of daffodils that had been planted by the Digswell Horticultural Society.



We watered the new trees during an early dry spell but then the summer has provided us with plenty of rain, meaning only one further watering visit has been required this year.

We have continued to weed around the base of the new trees and check the tree ties. We propose to carry out a final weeding visit later this year and give the trees a good mulch with the chippings that were provided by Better, when they cleared a large tree that fell by the river.

Although the Council have continued to cut the grass on the playing field and maintain the Children's Playground, they have not strimmed the nettle bank again this year. They did arrange to quickly fill in a large hole that appeared in the nature walk footpath when requested. However, they have not been able to prevent ongoing damage to the field by moles and rabbits. They have recently just filled some of the rabbit holes.

We have requested that Better make some improvements to the rather unsightly concrete paving area by the pond that has become cracked and damaged, and they have been seeking grants to hopefully improve this area. They have also been asked to re-locate the goal posts to a different position.



The Children's Play Area continues to be well used on school days and particularly during the school holidays. The PTA from St John's School has been asked to help to monitor this area and provide ideas to improve the facilities for the children. The land behind the Play Area still has an area of Himalayan Balsam and this will need to be tackled next season.



Affinity Water has been re-surveying the River Mimram and the pond and associated tributaries this year and we believe that they are preparing a new plan of works to improve this area next year. The main focus of their work will be the creation of new weirs, to improve the fish movement up stream and this work will be within the Digswell Water Mill site.

Siemens, who have been working on the signalling system for the railway tracks, have offered to provide a work party to assist with environmental work for the Nature Reserve / Playing Fields. This help could also include the clearing of the nettle bank.

There has been no visit by the Wednesday Group who has previously carried out environmental maintenance around the pond and Nature Reserve area, but the DRA are still looking for community volunteers to help with these sessions in future.

The DRA Accounts hold a sum of £1,930 for the benefit of this site and your views would be appreciated on how we can best spend this money, for the benefit of the community.

We hope that parents, children, and adults from the Community would wish to make some comment, both good and otherwise, about this local leisure facility and we request your help in identifying where things could improve.

Forge Orchard, Digswell. (also known as Digswell Community Orchard)

This site is located at the edge of the village on the Hertford Road, opposite the school and adjacent to the Arts Centre. It is owned by the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and has been locked up since it was first planted with fruit trees in 2015 and no public access has been arranged since.

Discussions have taken place during the past year or so, to establish whether it was possible to use the site for educational purposes and community use.

This year the Committee have been seeking advice from the Welwyn Parish Council to see if they would be interested in taking over a Lease for the site. However, the Parish Council were not keen to proceed with this arrangement.

There have also been discussions about whether the site could be secured to allow educational support for youngsters with additional educational needs. With a secure site one of the considerations was to reduce the possibility of vandalism to the fruit trees and the site.

However, it has finally been agreed to arrange for the site to be opened up with no locked gates. The fencing along part of the site would also be open, as this would allow free open access into the site. There has been interest from Forest School, to carry out after-school workshops and the Digswell Art Centre to use the site for art sessions. The site would also be open to residents and other Community groups.

The WHBC would continue to be responsible for the maintenance of the Orchard site and Community Volunteers could be organised to assist, as required.

These discussions have been very slow during the past two years but finally a proposal was made to the Borough Council, who has agreed to proceed to open up this Community Orchard site early in the New Year.

Four apple trees donated by Tewin Orchard have now been planted. In the photo: Alan Sparshott, Emma Griffin, (WHBC Tree Officer) Councillors Terry Mitchinson and Roger Trigg.

If anyone has an interest in helping to retain this site for local use and to help keep the Community Orchard alive, please contact. one of the Committee. admin@digswellra.org.uk.

Keith Lucas, Alan Sparshott, Liz Johnson



Membership, Committee and Finance

Membership:

Currently we have a list (from 2019) of 146 households of which 40 have not renewed their membership, However 56 new households have joined since Nov 2021 bringing the total to 162. Renewal and joining fees are £10 per household. Residents are encouraged to renew their membership or join if they have not done so in the past.

Please pay online using the bank sort code 09 06 66 and account number 43600078, (Digswell Residents Association) Please notify the treasurer when you have done this so we can keep the records up to date. treasurer@digswellra.org.uk

Finance: The DRA holds a balance at present of £4730 of which £1930 is reserved for works in connection with the playing fields, £231 for Drive Safe and £86 for the Digswell Archive project, leaving £2482 in the general account.

Committee: The 2022-2023 Committee members are: Peter Holt, Dick Stabler, Liz Johnson, Paul Johnson, Roger Adey, Eric Diment, Keith Lucas, David Cox, Paul Turner, Mark McLaughlin, Alan Sparshott.