

Community Centre

Following last year's review and changes to the Objects of the Association, this year the Executive Committee has turned its attention to the Management of the Community Centre. The hiring conditions have been updated to reflect current good practice and regular hirers issued with annual contracts. The Community Centre has also been redecorated and new light fittings have been installed in the main hall. The Centre continues to attract a range of uses from children's playgroup and parties to dance and keep fit classes, in fact something for most people.

Community events

Returning to my theme of this Park Ranger - community. There have been a number of events organised by Verity Christian Fellowship that have aimed to get people together. There's been a car wash, Easter show, picnic, summer fete, craft fair in association with the WI, barn dance and carol concert all drawing in a number of residents and I'd like to thank the church for trying to re-ignite community spirit. I do urge you to support

community events over the next year and beyond, either by attending or helping out. I realise that not all events will meet everyone's taste, but I'm sure there will be at least one that you'll enjoy.

Supporting local business

Although we are close to the town centre, please do remember that we have a number of small businesses at Snowdon Parade that we can support. Local businesses such as these can be really important to many people from children making their first unsupervised venture out to the less mobile that rely on being able to access nearby facilities.

Where next?

Where next is really down to you. Who lives on Vinters Park and Woodlands? You do. It's your neighbourhood and you have the chance to contribute to its success. If you'd like to get involved, please contact the Honorary Secretary (Keith Rogers, 24 Lombardy Drive, 755858) for a nomination form or have a chat with the Chairman (Gerry Kirrage, 678498) to find out more.



PARK RANGER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
VINTERS PARK RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2004

All residents of Vinters Park and Woodlands Estates are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Vinters Park Residents' Association, to be held in the Community Centre on Wednesday 21st April, starting at 8.15pm. Refreshments will be served from 8pm.

AGENDA FOR AGM

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 2003 AGM
3. Matters arising from Minutes
4. Matters arising from the Chairman's Report
5. Presentation of Accounts
6. Election of Officers and Executive Committee members
7. Appointment of Independent Examiner or Hon. Auditor
8. A short presentation by the Mayor of Maidstone, Cllr Morel D'Souza.
9. Question Time: An opportunity to discuss matters of local interest with guests at the meeting including representatives of the Police and local schools
10. Any other business.

Chairman's Report

Who lives on Vinters Park and Woodlands?

Historically, Park Ranger has been used to summarise what's been happening on Vinters Park and Woodlands over the last 12 months, plus invite you all to the Residents' Association AGM, which this year will be held on April 21st at the Community Centre. This edition will be no different in some ways, but may be a touch more challenging in others.

I've purposely used the title "Who lives..." as I'd like you to think about exactly that, what sort of people are part of this

community? The estates have and maybe a dysfunctional community matured over the last 30 years community.

and I feel have always been seen as a desirable area of Maidstone to live in due to the proximity of the town centre, easy access to rail and motorway links, schools within walking distance, the open spaces around the estate and access to the Valley Park nature reserve. This area has a lot of good things going for it, but is it missing one vital ingredient - community?

Having lived on Vinters for some 16 years I feel able to suggest that I've witnessed an erosion of community, that our 'castles' are now exactly that, fortresses of isolation, a place of refuge from the 24/7 society that we have either embraced or been forced into. The pace of life, people that are in work working longer hours, households where there need to be two income earning adults just to survive, the need to get the latest, the fastest, the biggest, the best, a society where consumerism, consumption and materialism are the current religion. What has buying into this life style offered us at the end of the day: stress, exhaustion, broken relationships, kids on the streets making their own entertainment

So, that's the downside, surely there's an upside? I've already noted some of the positives of living here, so maybe we can all work on the missing link, people. Just for a moment ask yourself "Who lives on Vinters Park and Woodlands?" Do you actually know not just your neighbour, but also your neighbourhood? If we can start to reclaim community then there's a great future for people living here. If we ignore people then I'm certain that we'll see ongoing physical degradation of the area, which in turn makes the estates less desirable to live in.

You can make a difference, and either joining or assisting the Residents' Association can be a good first step. So here is the invitation, or challenge. Come and make a difference in your neighbourhood.

What's happened over the last year?

It's been a busy year for the area and the Residents' Association. Here's a quick summary of what's been happening.

Policing and crime

Despite what you may think, the neighbourhood suffers no more or less than similar areas of Maidstone. There are certainly parts of the area that are subjected to more incidents, Snowdon Parade shops being a magnet for what could be termed ongoing anti-social behaviour, or is it a case of bored teenagers as there's nothing for young people to do on the estate out of school hours or at weekends? Anyway, we have vandalism, the occasional burglary or car break in with no particular pattern. In no way am I belittling these issues, having been subjected to an attempted burglary I know the feeling of unease such experiences can generate. What I do want to make clear is that we do not live in the middle of a perpetual crime-wave.

Condition of the estate

The last year has seen a footpath scheme completed, easing pedestrian access along main roads, some footpaths have been repaired, roads have been redressed, a zebra crossing has been added, closed circuit TV has been installed and a new housing development has been opposed. This is by no means an exhaus-

tive list, and the Residents' Association continues to act on your behalf, liaising with the local Authority, seeking to secure the best possible outcome for the area.

However, as implied in my opening section, other areas of the estate are starting to look shabby. Walls and fences are falling into disrepair that may be encouraging vandals to finish off the job. Some of these are privately owned, some are in common areas. The common areas in particular create difficulties with no identifiable owners and no funds to deal with the dilapidation the fallen walls remain fallen.

One possible way of addressing such issues would be to explore the creation of an urban parish. Establishing a parish would mean that additional funds would be raised through Council Taxes to spend on improvements, however there is also the additional administrative burden to consider. Although the Executive Committee is not currently pursuing the formation of an urban parish, residents who are interested in such an entity can always speak with their current Borough Councillors for more information.