



Newsletter

Autumn / Winter 2008

GROOMSPORT VILLAGE ASSOCIATION NEWS

Autumn/Winter 2008 Working Together to Protect the Future of Our Village

Over the past few years it has become increasingly difficult to maintain both the musical element and the historical element of the Eagle Wing event, with Market research telling us that both elements are important.

Because of this the Eagle Wing event was divided into two distinct events for 2008. This allowed for an evening of music and fireworks in July and an authentic historical day on Saturday the 6th of September which was just one day shy of the actual sailing date of the original Eagle Wing .

The July evening proved to be balmy and very scenic with a wonderful sunset over Cockle Row cottages and Groomspport bay. Musical entertainment finished with a set from the Illegals band that played cover versions of the Eagles' songs and many other popular classics. The firework display ended a super evening for residents and visitors. An attendance count revealed that 4,000 people enjoyed the evening in Groomspport.

Unfortunately, the weather almost beat us in September with storm force winds, rain and low temperatures. The outcome of this was to relocate some of the activities and we thank the traders and the local churches that helped so willingly with this. For the 200 hardy souls who turned and braved the elements a rich and diverse range of historical information and entertainment was available.



Hugo Duncan entertains the crowd

We intend to offer a broader range of entertainment in Cockle Row cottages next summer to minimise the impact of the weather. If you would like to be involved in the next Eagle Wing through entertainment or crafts please contact Wendy Smith on 91278033.

..... Secretary's Report

Presented at the Annual General Meeting, Thursday 13th November 2008

1. Meetings

Following the Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 11th October 2007/2008, 14 meetings took place during the year: 12 Committee meetings, 1 Inter-Agency meeting and 1 Open Public Meeting. In addition there have been meetings of the Planning and Newsletter sub-committees.

2. North Down Green Belt

In November 2007 the Committee learned that a need for up to 400 new homes in and around Bangor could necessitate development on Green Belt Land. Following a presentation by Councillor Austen Lennon, the Committee sent a letter to the Council stating its view that land designated as Green Belt should continue to be protected.

3. Christmas Tree Lights Ceremony 2007

The Committee received excellent feedback on this event which was supported by North Down Borough Council and enjoyed by a large number of families from the village. The Mayor formally switched on the lights and there followed a torch procession with entertainment, a visit from Santa and refreshments. The Village Association wishes especially to thank Stephen Archibald and his team, the Presbyterian Church for use of the Walter Nelson halls and parishioners who assisted with the refreshments, as well as the many adults and children who provided entertainment.

4. Inter-Agency Meetings

An Inter-Agency meeting took place in April. Issues of concern reported by residents to the Committee were raised and discussed. This meeting was chaired by Lynette Mahaffy, North Down Community Network and attended by committee members together with representatives from North Down Borough Council, Police Service for Northern Ireland, DRD Roads Service and Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Altogether, sixteen items were raised under the following headings: Speeding; Roads/Footpaths; Parking; Planning; Coastal Path; Anti-social Behaviour; Bonfire; Dog Fouling

The Committee is pleased to report successful outcomes with regard to some of the issues raised; others are ongoing and will be raised again by the new committee at the next Inter-Agency meeting to be held early in 2009.

5. Post Office closure

The Committee was active in opposing the proposed closure of the village Post Office. Unfortunately, despite strong opposition from Councillors and residents, the decision by Royal Mail to close this branch was upheld. The Committee welcomes the proposal for an Outreach Service in the village and members met with the Head of External Relations, Royal Mail Group, to discuss the Proposal and record residents' concerns.

6. Planning

The most significant work undertaken this year resulted from two planning applications. The Committee has stated that the Village Association recognises a climate of change with regard to development in established communities. However, it seeks to ensure that any development is appropriate and in keeping with the character of the immediate locale and the village.

7. Communications

- 7.1 The Village Association website is operational and will be extended and improved.
- 7.2 The Village Association post boxes in the Spar and Post Office continue to provide a useful channel of communication between residents and committee.
- 7.3 Two Newsletters and one Information Sheet were produced and distributed during the year. A third Newsletter is currently being prepared.
- 7.4 The Committee is exploring the possibility of a public notice board for the Village Association.

8. Groomsport Village Association Constitution

Following advice from North Down Community Network, the Committee is proposing amendments to the Constitution to simplify and to make it more relevant to the current work of the Association. The new Constitution, incorporating these amendments, will be presented at the Annual General Meeting.

9. Thanks

The Groomsport Village Association Committee wishes to thank the following people and organisations for their invaluable support during the year.

- Lynette Mahaffy and the North Down Community Network
- Lady Hermon MP, Councillors, MLA's, and Agency representatives who attended the Inter-Agency meeting and supported the committee throughout the year
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Cllr Alan Chambers
- Rev Dr Roger Purce
- Stephen Archibald, North Down Borough Council
- Leighton Arndale, North Down Borough Council
- Sean Leonard
- Pearl Brown
- Select Vestry, Church of Ireland, for use of the Maxwell Halls
- Residents who deliver Association newsletters

Ann Sanderson
Hon Secretary



Groomsport Does it Again!

For the second year running Groomsport played host to more than 200 international triathletes. Once again our village was praised for its picturesque setting, as well as for the gruelling course it offered to the competitors who took part in this year's Half Iremen.

KEEPING US POSTED!



With the support of local councillors and Lady Sylvia Hermon M.P. the overwhelming number of letters from residents of the village and beyond has resulted in the village Post Office facility being retained. However, the revised provision will go forward without our current Postmaster, Sean Leonard. Groomsport will miss the patience, kindness and dedication of Sean and his wife Joan and a huge debt of gratitude is owed to them. The village wishes them a long and very happy retirement.



The Future of Groomsport Post Office

The following letter from Barbara Roulston, Head of External Relations Royal Mail Group sets out the changes that are underway. It is important for us all to embrace these changes and support the new partner service. If not, we run the risk of losing our Post Office facility altogether.

The Post Office remains committed to Groomsport

In May 2007 the Government announced a range of measures to modernise and reshape the network of Post Office branches across the UK in order to put it on a more stable footing for the future.

They asked Post Office Ltd to implement the changes – a difficult task which we have not undertaken lightly and which we have attempted to do as sensitively as possible - but which meant closing or changing the type of service in a number of communities across Northern Ireland. We understand the inconvenience and concern that this can mean for our customers, but with falling customer numbers and falling incomes for both the company and the subpostmasters running our post office branches, carrying on as before was simply not an option.

Continued...

I want to assure you that Post Office Limited takes very seriously the way it provides its services to all its customers in Northern Ireland and our consultation was about listening to our customers and amending our decisions where we thought we had got it wrong.

That's why we changed our minds about our plans for Groomsport and decided that we needed to retain access to postal services within the village itself. I know many of you will be disappointed that the current post office branch cannot remain, but we are fully committed to making our new partner service at the Spar meet your needs. A partner service helps Post Office Ltd be more viable because it is a more cost effective way of providing post office services. It's more economical for us because the subpostmaster of a larger and more commercially viable post office branch has the responsibility of managing the provision of our products and services to nearby communities – like an extension of their own branch.

It does mean change – a new environment in which to undertake your post office business and new staff to build a relationship with - and I know change is neither easy nor popular, but we have listened to the comments raised through our recent consultation and also the views expressed when I met with representatives of Groomsport Village Association in September and we will be working hard to make the partner service successful for us and for you.

There will be a dedicated Post Office counter within the store, set apart from the other retail counters, which will be solely for the transaction of post office products and services. We expect the very highest standards of customer service from all our people and full training will be given to new staff, who will be looking forward to welcoming you to the new facility. In addition there is the benefit of longer opening hours.

It's going to be different, but the concept has been very well tested and trialled in villages across the UK similar to Groomsport and with the support of the local community, it works very well.

Your new Post Office partner service will be opening in the New Year and I very much hope you will give it your full support.

Barbara Roulston
Head of External Relations
Royal Mail Group

The Neighbourhood Watch scheme is an extremely effective way for small communities to feel safe and keep safe. At least ten schemes would need to be running in order to cover the whole of Groomsport.

It is up to the residents in each area (a street/a large cul-de-sac etc.) to meet and decide whether or not to participate in the scheme.

It is interesting to note that some household insurance companies are willing to offer a reduction in premiums to those households participating in Neighbourhood Watch.

The Neighbourhood Watch Scheme By Sharon Skelly, NW Administrator

There is more to Neighbourhood Watch than protecting homes and property against burglary. By working together, neighbours can help to reduce all sorts of crimes, for example, anti-social behaviour and young people causing a nuisance. They can also take action to improve the environment by getting something done about vandalism, graffiti, poor street lighting and a lack of local facilities.

Neighbourhood Watch helps to reassure people by reducing fear of crime and making communities safer places to live and work. Some of the benefits include promoting better communication between the police and the community, encouraging people to watch out for possible problems and providing signage to show that members of the community are looking out for each other.

Setting Up a Neighbourhood Scheme

Consult Sharon Skelly on 02890 901201 or e-mail Sharon.skelly2@psni.pnn.police.uk

Sharon will send you out a pack containing the information and application forms to get started. Each area considering NW must have at least 50% support from the local residents. The application procedure is very straightforward and Sharon will be on hand to help. She is also available to come along to speak to any groups of residents who are considering the scheme.

Most callers to your home will be genuine; however there are some who may not be. These callers are 'Bogus Callers' or 'Distraction Burglars' who may want to trick their way into your home to steal from you. If you are in any doubt, simply check your caller out with QUICK CHECK on Freephone **0800 013 22 90.**

Easy steps with QUICK CHECK

- Before you answer the door, make sure your back door is locked.
- If you have a door chain remember to use it before you open the door.
- Ask the caller for their identification and check it carefully.
- Ask them to wait outside and close the door- genuine callers will not mind.
- Ring FREEPHONE **0800 013 22 90**. Your call will be answered personally and promptly by a trained operator. They will check with the company on your behalf, that the person at your door is genuine. If they are not or they think there is something suspicious, they will contact the police immediately.
- Do not let anyone into your home until you are satisfied as to who they are.

QUICK CHECK is a FREE telephone service, which is available 24 hours a day all year round to residents throughout Northern Ireland. In an emergency dial 999.

Inter-Agency Meetings

Following the questionnaire completed by residents at the beginning of this year, the issues and concerns raised were brought to an Inter-Agency Meeting held in April.

Committee members and representatives of the following key agencies were present: Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Police Service for Northern Ireland, DRD Roads Service, North Down Community Network, North Down Borough Council.

These meetings provide a valuable opportunity for matters to be discussed with all Agencies involved in an issue. The next Inter-Agency Meeting will take place early in 2009 and all residents are invited to notify the Association of the issues they wish to be raised by the Committee. Please post your suggestions in the Village Association post boxes which are sited in The Spar and Post Office or alternatively on the website: www.groomsport.org

The following energy saving measures are also designed to save CASH!

- ◆ Top up your loft insulation to 270mm (10.5 ins.)
- ◆ Get cavity wall insulation and save 15% off heating costs
- ◆ Switch off appliances – don't leave them on stand-by
- ◆ Fit energy saving light bulbs
- ◆ Only boil as much water as you need
- ◆ Check your boiler efficiency and upgrade if necessary
- ◆ Buy Energy Saving Recommended appliances
- ◆ Wash laundry at 30° C
- ◆ Draught proof windows and doors
- ◆ Turn down thermostats by 1°

For free, impartial advice contact your local Energy Saving Trust advice centre on 0800 512 012

Keeping in touch with the committee via the Web

We are witnessing the demise of our Post Office, once the hub of communications in the village. We refer to letters coming through our letterbox as "snail mail" in contrast to our electronic mail, which silently whizzes onto our computer monitors at the touch of a button. Nowadays, we expect that communications will be instantaneous. Our personal mobile phones are constantly at the ready. We seem to live in the age of "constant chat". The Village Association committee is loath to be left behind, isolated by silence after this electronic communications revolution. We have embraced the power of the Web, so that you are kept in touch with developments in the village. We can be found at www.groomsport.info



Fourth of July Celebrations in



A Very Important Date for your Diary
Friday 5th December 7 p.m.
Groomsport's Great
Christmas Tree Lights Switch
On!