

Save Our Village Action Plan

PROGRESS

July 2021 Update

This discussion paper is intended to help us assess what has been achieved and where we want to go next on the SOVAP front. It will always be in “draft” form as we implement or amend our original objectives.

The following is for your discussion and YOUR comments are needed to help the document stay current and effective. This draft is being presented to Charlton Society members for comment and any changes you trigger will be incorporated in a subsequent draft.

• **RECAP**

The Charlton Society’s motto is, of course, “Conserve and Improve”. The Save Our Village Action Plan (SOVAP) sets out ways in which action is required to achieve both those aims –50 years after the first such action led to the creation of the Society itself. Today, though, we are faced with unprecedented challenges (the national “high street crisis”, changing demographics, ever-increasing traffic, poor public and private maintenance etc., all symbolised by Historic England’s 2017 decision to place the village on its At-Risk Register.

The Plan – which preceded Historic England’s decision – has been discussed and amended over the past 3 years and is now in its 3rd issue and serves as the Society’s conservation and improvement ‘bible’ for the Village.

A crucial element in the Charlton Society succeeding in the successes we have achieved is through the support of Royal Borough of Greenwich officers, our ward Councillors Gary Dillon, Gary Parker and Linda Perks and the collaboration with local traders and various other community organisations.

• **SOVAP IMPLEMENTATION REPORT**

2.1 The October 2019 committee meeting agreed that some of us should take a lead on selected elements of the SOVAP: i.e.: a delegated approach to implementation. This would spread the load of implementing the many and varied actions contained within the SOVAP. **It was therefore agreed that** Angela Burr take on the village **planters**; Geoff Cooper, **paving**; Rick Newman, the **Church forecourt waste bins**; Roden Richardson, **traffic management and signage**; and Ruth Dodson, **the fountain and the Village car parks**. There are initial signs that this strategy is starting to work. It’s worth remembering that while each individual facilitator is in one sense on her or his own, each is also part of a collaborative team responsible for results and to the Committee and members.

2.2 The impetus for delegation was our determination to demonstrate with visible evidence to the public and ourselves that the Action Plan was moving forward. **This would make for both a pragmatic way forward and a morale booster for all concerned.**

The delegation is also designed to spread the workload amongst committee members and also enable interested Society members to take an active part.

2.3 Two other strategies played or have begun to play into the action:

- Successive cuts to the RBG Parks department mean that large-scale projects may require grants from outside bodies but that smaller improvements can be undertaken within the normal maintenance

programme by the Parks department. However the Covid – 19 pandemic stepped in and has made many of these discussions either completely unachievable, delayed or requiring a new look.

- Improvements in the Village can be more or less ambitious. In an ideal situation and in the quest for “the most beautiful urban village in the world” the more ambitious, the better. However, a key objective is also to get results as soon as possible. While we work up the more ambitious projects – let’s call it ‘Phase 2’, it has been proposed that we also identify elements that can be implemented quickly and reasonably cheaply (and/or ‘cost-free’ by being able to fall back on the resources of RBG and volunteers) - let’s call these ‘Phase 1’. An example of a Phase 1 project would be to undertake improvements to the tree planters (paint the metal surrounds, weed, and plant up) in front of Earle House, the Florist Tudor Rose, The Baguette café and The Village Green Grocer.

Phase 2 would be a complete revamp of the whole of the area - provisionally identified as Earle Place, consulting the residents on how best to use it in the longer term, producing designs and fundraising as necessary to implement the whole. This strategy would demonstrate to the Council, local residents and the general public that the SOVAP was ambitious and here to stay, a role that might encourage more people to become involved. Very occasionally it might be possible to achieve a Phase 2 project at our first throw in other parts of the Village but in general it seems that many of the improvements we might want to see will face the same prioritisation imperative.

Implementation principle: Phase 1 - undertake projects quickly and inexpensively – often within RBG existing budgets but think them through in terms of Phase 2 long-term objectives and costs.

- **PROGRESS TO DATE**

3.1 **PLANTERS**

Angela Burr instigated a meeting with Tony Bigwood and John Porritt, RBG Park dept. officers responsible for Charlton Village amongst others. Angela, Carol and Roden with Tony and John undertook a walk-about of the village in 2020. Short term improvements were identified for the tree planters outside Earle House, the brick planters in the High Street including a different planting scheme allowing for plants that could provide a barrier between the road and the pavement, and maintenance and tidying in Torrance Close. Unfortunately all these jobs have been on hold due to the pandemic about with July 19th looming we can start again.

Planting up the tree planters would build on the improvements undertaken by The Village Grocer and some volunteers. Subsequent discussions with the Parks officers resulted in some weeding being undertaken but the final objective is to remove the gravel surface to allow for a full planting scheme to create a visual centre piece for an area that during the pandemic has emerged as a vibrant outdoor meeting place.

During the village walkabout with RBG we were reminded that the Assembly Rooms car park has a brick planter arranged around a lime tree in one corner. This is an example of overlap between council departments: highways are responsible for the layout of the car park and for keeping the car park and service roads clean while parks are responsible for occasional weeding resulting in this planter being neglected.

This project has now just this month, been resurrected due to the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions but faces a slow implementation due to the Parks department having to catch up with many months of delays and not being able to work.

3.2 STREET TREES: The Village was the unexpected beneficiary of two new Plane trees outside shops 1 and 7, initiated by RBG Highways as a barrier instead of bollards. This suggests that the Charlton Society needs to be more active in promoting the conservation area for Charlton Village.

Our suggestion to move the tree planted immediately in front of The Baguette cafe was refused by the Parks department tree officer; but it might be worth keeping this in mind.

3.3 CHARLTON VILLAGE CAR PARKS

Improvements to the car parks were also discussed as was opening an historic gateway in the Charlton Park wall to allow access between the car parks and park. This would also alleviate some of the parking problems related to Charlton House. What has emerged is that projects can be complicated by a particular project in question involving various council departments. This is a Phase 2 project and no real discussion has taken place here as it involves major realignment of parking arrangements; discussions with Charlton House regarding opening up a gateway and would probably require planning permission due to the Conservation Area restrictions.

It was also pointed out that any major rearrangement of the car parks MIGHT result in the free parking being replaced with a charge or a free parking system for a restricted time limit. Would this be acceptable? This is a discussion to be had.

We need some other CS members to take on this project as Ruth has been otherwise occupied with improving the CS website and keeping it up to date; and Geoff moved to Sussex in 2021.

3.4 ST LUKES CHURCH:

In July 2021 St Luke's church received news that it had been successful in an application to Greenwich Neighbourhood Growth Fund for a grant to facilitate improvements to the Church and churchyard including new litter bins and noticeboards, removal of trip hazards, additional benches and representation of the sundial. St Luke's main door is in the process of being represented and is already much improved. The gardening team at St Luke's have greatly improved the flora of both the churchyard and the Memorial Garden

3.5 TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT & SIGNAGE:

3.5.1 Traffic and signage suddenly became live when, out of the blue in February 2020, Cllrs Linda Perks and Gary Dillon told us that RBG Highways was working up a traffic plan for the Village including making it a 20mph zone. Roden, Carol and Linda met RBG Highways representatives by zoom, rather late in the day to discuss the 20mph traffic restrictions along Charlton Road between Cemetery Lane and Blackheath Standard. These improvements included alterations to the pathway crossing the junction to left and right of the main road installing at level crossing indicating a pedestrian priority. Some other improvements were put to one side due to insufficient funds and we have as yet not managed to reduce the number of signs along the route. Initially the scheme does seem to have calmed the traffic, however more recently the road reduction measures for Woolwich Road seem to have increased large vehicles moving up to Charlton Road to escape the traffic delays.

During discussion CS suggested that a bus lay-by be established at the Charlton House bus stop to reduce the traffic jams caused by buses stopping in the road, aggravated by the 486 and other traffic wishing to turn right down Charlton Church Lane. The RBG officers agreed to research whether this would be possible only to discover later that

Transport for London decided to rescind the use of lay-bay as buses were finding it difficult to re-enter the traffic flow!!!! It is ironic also to note that traffic congestion on Charlton Church Lane is probably as bad now as it was in 1969 that caused the Society to be formed.

The 20mph stretch between Blackheath Standard and Cemetery Lane does appear to have calmed some of the speed excesses, but given the 20 mph limit is supposed to be supported by the table platforms at road junctions. In practice there is little discernable change.

3.5.2 Alerted by a Charlton Society member that a ground level planted strip near Charlton Station was being vandalised by cars illegally parking while the driver shopped in Sainsbury's we contacted Central Charlton Residents Association to alert them of this fact. They were already on the case: CCRA have worked successfully to improve the road layout near Charlton Station. This resulted in a wider pavement to restrict illegal parking for shoppers and post office users; the installation of a ground level planting bed which was immediately destroyed by shoppers parking on top of it as no protection barriers were included to allow the plants to survive. However the latest news is that they have persuaded Highways to install a number of trees along the edge of the pavement using a species that will not affect passing traffic – particularly the 486.

3.5.3 TRAFFIC LEVELS:

The SOVAP did suggest that the Society undertake some monitoring of the level of traffic passing through the Village, the level of pollution and the traffic jams caused by vans delivering goods to the shops.

Casual monitoring suggests that due to the changes of the road layout and 20mph restrictions along Woolwich Road there are a greater number of vehicles and large lorries passing through the village. We need to monitor properly and set up a pollution monitoring system.

Wherever we can we have been promoting the use of the service roads for shops receiving deliveries, including speaking to the traders themselves. We raised this issue in relation to The White Swan where the owner is proposing to facilitate refuse collection for both the pub and the new Torrance Road dwelling via The High Street rather than Torrance Close.

The prospect of further gridlock in Charlton as a consequence of knock-on from LTN schemes in SE10 has loomed but may be eased after interventions led by Cllr Sara Merrill.

- THE WHITE SWAN PUBLIC HOUSE:

The Charlton Society application for a new ACV on the White Swan prepared by Carol with enormous support from members and Charlton residents was accepted in March 2020. In November 2020 planning permission was granted for a single storey 3 bedroom dwelling to the rear of the pub. This included the installation of a fence further north of the large Willow tree contrary to that indicated in the planning application, then second and third fences creating a walk way to the first floor, where it appears that work has been undertaken to turn the function rooms into dwellings. We have not managed to gain access to see exactly what the situation is.

Further correspondence has been had with RBG to see whether the planning application is valid given the owner lied as to the effects of the new dwelling on the White Swan and garden but at present this would only be reviewed if further planning applications were proposed.

In the meantime the White Swan has remained empty since March 2019, it looks forlorn and unloved and is a sad reminder of the important role it played in the life of the Village. We remain vigilant. The ground floor pub and cellar are available for lease but at a price that is unaffordable and with a much-reduced garden, essential in our current times and a major feature within the ACV listing and as a community resource.

We are currently researching applying for the building to be listed.

3.7 EARLE PLACE: The development of a Village Square has been most noticeable in front of Earle House due mainly to the efforts of The Baguette Café and The Village Greengrocer. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic both traders have kept going providing a ray of sunshine in the village; in fact thanks should be given to all the traders who have kept providing their services for residents and visitors alike. The café has provided an outdoor service throughout the seasons and in early 2021 this was enhanced due to the Council's Street Eats programme providing further seating and facilitating a street café provided by The Baguette.

As mentioned before The Village Grocer planted up one of the tree planters giving a pleasant aspect to the area, at Christmas they provided a Christmas tree for the Church's project and we provided Christmas lights for the Earle Place tree.

Inadvertently one of the main improvements included in the SOVAP programme has been given a kick-start. We just need to take it further.

It would be helpful to know more about any plans the Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust have to open up access to Charlton House from Earle Place as well as the setting of the Summer House.

3.8 GREENWICH WARD BOUNDARY CHANGES: *Changes are afoot and the most recent proposed Ward Boundary changes if accepted will create two 2 member Charlton wards - Charlton Village & Riverside and Charlton Hornfair.* This will remove small parts of existing Charlton to other wards but the Charlton Society has argued strongly that the Charlton Village & Riverside ward should retain the whole of the Charlton Riverside SDP are including land west of Anchor & Hope lane up to Angerstein Lane.

Parliamentary constituency boundaries are also under review, which might be time to suggest the small area to the north of the A2 (i.e. Hornfair, around Charlton Manor Primary) that is presently in Eltham should come within Greenwich and Woolwich, as with the rest of Charlton

3.9 THE CHARLTON SOCIETY: Throughout the pandemic the Society has tried to maintain as normal a presence as possible. Committee meetings have continued using Zoom. Although the 2020 talks programme was cancelled it was re-established from January 2021 by presenting the talks also by Zoom.

The Fifty Years celebration took the form of the Charlton Village Street Exhibition, presenting a series of 24 photographs displayed in the shop windows. Lasting for the month of November it was well received and people felt it should have been extended. Perhaps next time but it is a format that we could use again.

4. KEEPING THE BALL ROLLING

4.1 PLANTERS

4.1.1 Earle Place: Metal planter walls: Retain and Paint? Remove resin gravel and plant out

- Brick planters in The Village: Plants to protection pedestrians from the traffic. Soil change.
- Metal planter and brick planters adjacent to the Assembly Rooms: Change/modify? Specify? Planting plan?
- Draft proposals to be shown to adjacent shopkeepers for comment (but final decision jointly between CS and RBG). Consultation with CS members?

4.2 PLANTING AND TREES

4.2.1 Specify design principles and plant selections.

4.2.2 Specify tree location and types for the village as a whole. Is this necessary?

4.3 TRAFFIC AND SIGNAGE

4.3.1 Design and define wording and site for village welcome signs. We should continue to press for a Village style signage as promoted by Historic England, despite reluctance from the Council.

4.4 EARLE PLACE: Redesign the whole village square working with residents, traders, RBG. Work with Charlton House in relation to installing a gate way into the park behind the Summer House.

4.5 CHARLTON VILLAGE TRADERS: Develop new projects/events to extend relationship between them and the Society: Village in Bloom.

	Christmas Lights – event to turn them on
Welcome new shops:	International Stores
	Dry Cleaners in part
	Bowes Shoe Shop
	Green Fronted shop

4.6 CHARLTON TOGETHER AND CHARLTON RIVERSIDE.

Charlton Together has been active since March 2018, possibly far longer than was ever envisaged at the time, however its enduring merit reflects the protracted developments to kick start the redevelopment of Charlton Riverside consistent as far as practical with the Masterplan produced for the Royal Borough of Greenwich in 2017.

Need to resurrect the Charlton Neighbourhood Forum. Involvement with the inception of Charlton Neighbourhood Forum, which has involved community consultation, appears to be on hold at present – the Charlton Society should continue to be involved.

We need to monitor demographic changes in SE7.

Charlton Society Committee, July 2021