

Chair's Annual Report 2019-20

The COVID-19 crisis has had a huge impact on all of us but out of this terrible event one positive has been the amazing upswell in volunteering and community focus. Neighbours have helped neighbours and street groups, schools and churches have supported those in need. In particular I mention the Norwood and Brixton Foodbank which since April has fed over 10,500 people and the Mutual Aid Groups (“MAG”) that sprang up overnight signing up a thousand strong army of willing helpers across Norwood.

We added a new Coronavirus section to our website (www.norwoodforum.org) providing accurate support and advice signposting and increased the output of our e-newsletter to keep people up-to-date on local developments. We have worked with the MAGs providing some financial support, introduced the groups to our contacts in the Council, and also facilitated a connection with the Lambeth Age UK befriending service. We are now supporting Lambeth TechAid – a computer recycling and distribution group supporting those in the community without access to technology – by providing segregated banking services, local connections and promotion.

As a group, in the absence of face-to-face collaboration, we have changed our own working practices and have held committee and public meetings on-line. Our two public Community Conversations firstly explored what post-lockdown challenges Norwood will face and our second had a transport focus as well as covering other important issues of green sustainability.

In support of the NHS a huge number of rainbows have appeared across our neighbourhood. We have an ongoing community album #rainbownorwood where you can see some of those we have spotted - and there is still time to add your own.

This year our major cultural project was the Window Wanderland festival with the theme ‘Wild Norwood’. Events and activities included workshops during West Norwood Feast, a formal opening by local bird enthusiast Lev Parikian of our community window display at West Norwood Library & Picturehouse, the Norwood Flock of birds installed in shop windows along Norwood Road and Knights Hill, and a competition. Throughout Norwood 60 windows were decorated and special thanks to all the residents who participated, to Station to Station for their support with publicity and enabling local creative Jessie Huckin to work with Kim from Norwood Forum to install the community window and Norwood Flock displays, and to West Norwood Picturehouse for providing the competition prize. This project marked the end of our Year of Culture during which we sought to shine a light on the wealth of creativity across our three wards.

Also in the area of culture we worked with the Friends of West Norwood Station, the Portico Gallery and artist Felix Price to part fund the painting of the Cotswold Street mural, and are pleased at how well received this has been by the local community.

Our tagline is “Connecting the Community” and earlier in the year we were able to give grants to various community groups in Norwood to promote a variety of good causes. This included £400 each to three notable local organisations, which really highlighted the breadth

of activity in our community: The Norwood Pensioners Group went on two fantastic coach trips, Rathbone Young People's Services took a group of young people to the Go Ape experience in Battersea Park and Southside Rehabilitation Association ("SRA"), our local mental health charity, used their grant to purchase new computer equipment for training purposes.

A major focus of our "Connecting the Community" has been the Community Safety Partnership and the main objective for 2019-20 was to introduce the local communities to each other by rebuilding contact files and supporting activities which cross social, cultural and organisational boundaries, including those planned by the Police, NHS and Council. There were three physical meetings before the COVID 19 Lockdown. Each led to practical co-operation between players who had not previously met, as well as agreement to support programmes already being planned by others.

Sadly, plans to work with the London Grid for Learning to make their on-line materials (including for child protection and Internet safety) available, at no charge, via homework clubs and youth groups bore different fruit when lockdown forced local schools on-line in short order. We helped publicise what was available, including low cost equipment, provided purchases/donations were routed via registered education establishments, schools or the council. When COVID-19 struck the plans made at the February meeting to publicise calls for volunteers for mentoring, homework clubs and youth groups and for events and information on the new local structures and services for health and welfare, were put on hold.

We have also been active in green campaigns. In September 2019 we held a Clean Air public meeting where we discussed the Air Quality Science Experiment which demonstrated potential illegal levels of Nitrous Oxide along main roads within Norwood including Knights Hill, Norwood Road, the Tulse Hill Gyratory and Thurlow Park Road. The meeting speakers included Florence Eshalomi AM, our local councillors and local organisations. There was a strong consensus in the room on the importance of clean air to our health and our wellbeing, with every speaker identifying specific issues and data, as well as projects that are both underway or could be the basis for campaigning.

This also fed into the work that Norwood Forum has conducted with the Norwood Planning Assembly and the production of the Norwood Green Local Plan which is expected in draft later this month. The Plan puts forward our shared high-level aspirations for the wider Norwood area, which have been derived from close and continuing engagement with residents and businesses. It forms the foundation for the continuing work of the main community organisations. It is envisaged that the final plan will be put to a public referendum in May 2021. You can find more on the [Norwood Planning Assembly website](#).

Further on green issues, Norwood Forum has been working with Lambeth Council on the replanting of empty tree pits. We have supported the Council in identifying streets where trees once grew but were subsequently felled and not replaced. Before the COVID-19 crisis we identified specific streets that needed prioritisation and were intending to leaflet neighbouring houses on tree maintenance.

Somewhat under the radar is our work with Norwood Action Group to review all local planning applications, commenting in support or objecting as we decide together or individually. We objected to the application to convert the upper floors of the White Hart pub to flats, and hope this old pub will now still be able to open successfully post COVID-19. In early 2020 we supported NAG's amazing campaign against the proposed new Southwark Metals metal recycling plant at Windsor Grove. The expanded plant would have a huge adverse impact on our neighbourhood, not least through a huge increase in large lorry

journeys. Over 1100 written objections were made to this scheme, and at the time of writing we still await a date for its consideration by Lambeth.

On the now completed Thames Water mains replacement works along Norwood Road - which pre-COVID-19 was the most important issue for the Norwood Road - we were able to work with the contractors and Station to Station to influence to some degree and publicise road closure etc information at each of the various phases. The disruption caused to our high street and the surrounding area by this much extended project has been very damaging and frustrating. Replacement of our trunk water mains is of course important infrastructure work, but the engineering challenges encountered prevented the whole intended length of water mains being replaced, and does nothing to reduce the numerous water leaks in our local roads and pavements.

Before the General Election there were three lively Question Time hustings across the Dulwich and West Norwood Constituency where all the MP candidates were invited to answer questions from the public on their policies. The Forum helped publicise all of these with a special General Election e-newsletter and partnered with Herne Hill Forum and other local groups to bring questions from across our three wards.

In April, with the support of the station manager, the Forum installed a new Community Bookcase in Tulse Hill Station. This compliments the one on Auckland Hill. Both always have space for you to add your book donations, as well as books for you to borrow. There is now a fledgling Friends of Tulse Hill Station group, again supported by the station manager.

During lockdown the Forum was pleased to support the first public event from the new social enterprise Network Norwood which is run by Kim from the Forum and Teresa O'Donoghue, the new West Norwood Feast Coordinator. #StayHomeSundaySupper ran in the evening of both the May and June #StayHomeFeast, with partnerships that included (as well as the Forum), Station to Station, local shops, pubs and cafes. Our community was encouraged to cook and eat the same simple recipe (provide by two local residents), at the same time, and share their pictures and videos online. This helped to remind ourselves that our strong sense of community spirit was still intact. Over 100 households took part, and the project was repeated in August as part of Virtual Lambeth Country Show.

We are pleased that the West Norwood Library & Picturehouse has been able to reopen to provide their much needed services to our local community. We regret though that the Building Management Group has not met at all this year, and so cannot perform its role as a helpful interface with the local community. We hope to see the Council making urgent progress with implementing the National Heritage Lottery Fund West Norwood Cemetery improvements in tandem with the Friends and the wider local community. Just under £7m is due to be invested in the Cemetery to conserve heritage monuments, provide new pedestrian entrances, undertake infrastructure repairs, provide a visitor centre and fund a volunteer and activities programme.

Also in the field of promoting our local heritage, we had worked with the Norwood Society to arrange a number of local history talks but these fell by the wayside with COVID-19. More positive news is the installation along Norwood Road of a series of Blue Plaques illustrating some of our rich local history. Phase one will be installed in the coming weeks and we will be developing this project further in the coming year.

The above illustrates just some of our contributions and partnership working with many local groups. We are grateful for all their work to improve our local area, and look forward to this continuing in the year ahead. We hope you will all continue to use our website: www.norwoodforum.org as a resource of local news and especially live events as we all look

forward to our thriving local cultural scene returning post-COVID-19. We publish a fortnightly e-newsletter which is also posted across our social media platforms, and an (almost) daily post on social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) highlighting a news or event from our website. We are also regularly at West Norwood Feast.

Looking forward and despite the difficult times ahead we will continue to work on promoting cultural and heritage projects, planning, green issues and as it says on the tin, "Connecting the Community".

Can I thank all those on the Committee and our administrator, Tim, who have worked so enthusiastically to ensure that as a group we can make a difference.

Sunil de Sayrah
Chair
August 2020