

# Let's all enjoy life more

**Dr Michael D'Souza**  
Chair of One Norbiton

Have you ever thought how much better life could if we *all* lived in a friendlier and more attractive community? It was with this in mind, that our team of volunteers started working on our new experiment in "localism". It is called "One Norbiton" and already it is growing fast. Hopefully, with more involvement from you, we will soon create our own urban village.

## **Why is "One Norbiton" needed?**

Some of you will remember that in 1975, when I first came to work in Norbiton as a doctor, things were bad. There was a lot of illness and addiction. Many people here felt dumped, stressed and powerless. Well today, although a lot has improved, the Home Truth is that change has been far too slow. Many people here still feel lonely and victimised and that some parts of Norbiton are by no means ideal places to bring up small children. What's more the average lifespan of people living here is still a full five years shorter than in the rest of Kingston.

## **How are we building One Norbiton?**

To do this properly, we must all work together and fortunately our NHS, RBK, local councilors, and the National Government etc have all signed up to give our residents, businesses and schools their advice and support.

Our first task has been to discover what are the worst problems in Norbiton. The plan being to deal with as many of these ourselves, using the power of personal involvement and our shared goodwill. If this is not enough, then we will assist our public servants to be more efficient in using our taxes and rates to put things right. Our underlying hope is that if we all become more self-supporting we can not only reduce the cost of services but also enjoy a greater feeling of personal strength and worth.

## **How can One Norbiton claim to represent the whole of Norbiton?**

Well we do not yet. But we have already held two open public meetings after sending personal invitations to all 10,000 citizens living at the 6000 business and residential addresses in Norbiton. At these two meetings we got unanimous local endorsement to proceed. So we have now formed a charitable company called "One Norbiton", which is guaranteed and controlled by us all. Its simple objective is

*"To improve the democratic involvement, health and quality of life of those who live, work and study in Norbiton ward and the surrounding area"*

## **Which local residents have got involved so far?**

Our Secretary, Jill Preston, who is also the Chair of our local Cambridge Road Estates Community Group (CREst), has done most of the hard work in setting us up and has generously allowed us to share her tiny CREst office. Our Vice-Chair, Harry Hall, is now leading a group to refurbish the derelict Surrey Sports Centre. We also have an established central committee that meets every month and operates through sub-groups each of which is tackling different problems.

Ed Naylor, a former Kingston Mayor, leads our group dealing with unemployed young people and financial stress. Former Councillor, Sheila Griffin runs another liaising with the Police. Our group dealing with Housing and Environmental problems has involved Tim Bell of Cambridge Road Estates Residents Association CRERA and the Reverend Peter Holmes who started up the Joel project for the homeless : while local resident, Peter Jeens' runs the group that deals with our youth problems.

Civil Servant, Davinder Lail, has been running our Community Engagement Group. This has been asking a random sample of all Norbiton citizens to act as our Consultant Panel (just like an ongoing Gallup poll). Already nearly 40 residents are advising us in this way and we will continue to add to this number every year. With this Panel we can continually measure how the quality of life in Norbiton is changing and find out not only what people want improved, but also what skills and talents they are prepared to share with their neighbours. To further assist with this, we are building an "e-community" and John Hall of [Kutlets](#), has set up an excellent website etc where you can contact us and find more about what we are up to.

## **What are our Challenges?**

We all already know how much "Stress" can both cause and worsen many of our most serious problems. The best way of tackling this is to create a more caring community which does important things like reducing debt, supporting mothers looking after pre-school children, visiting our isolated elderly and providing better shelter for our homeless.

One of our most tricky tasks will be to reduce the way people with substance abuse and personality difficulties cause stress both for themselves and their neighbours. To do this we need everyone's ideas on how to help to make Norbiton a less stressful place for them and for others with problems and disabilities.

## **Perhaps we need a more "Participatory" Democracy**

To do all this we need more *personal* participation: even if this is only by accepting the responsibility of voting. This will create a very different sort of local "participatory" democracy, in which we will all be able to represent our own personal views about the shape of our community, instead of just giving

away our power to politicians to speak for us. Helping solve our own problems ourselves will also reduce feelings of inadequacy and the assumption that everything that is wrong is up to our overburdened and expensive state “system” to put right.

### **What is happening next?**

The first thing we are going to do is to make proper plans to tackle our youth unemployment. We might make a start in the New Year by forming a Norbiton Task force for volunteers and other to combine in sorting out practical problems quickly. Next we want to make Norbiton a more attractive place to live in. Already we have begun getting our pavements cleaner of dog mess! We’ve recently begun an experiment to see if both owner-occupied and council tenants in Norbiton can enjoy working together in the same teams to produce more attractive neighbourhoods. We have arbitrarily divided the ward into six Rainbow coloured sectors and are challenging these teams to compete for a prize for creating the most attractive gardens, window boxes and public spaces in their sector. These teams have been mapped out and listed on our website. Look this up and see which team your home is in. In future years we hope to get more competitions going for such things as Sports, Healthy Eating, Neighbourliness and the Arts.

### **What can you do to help now?**

At the Olympics this year we all witnessed the power of Volunteering. So why don’t you volunteer this Christmas and help make Norbiton a home rather than just somewhere you happen to live. You are welcome to contact us and join in any of our sub-groups or attend our monthly Committee meetings.

Share your creative ideas. Tell us about your special talents. You may find creating an urban village will not only put Norbiton on the map but be a really life-enhancing thing for you to do. Remember One Norbiton needs *everybody* with whatever you’ve got to offer, be it muscle-power, brains, skills or just your smile.

***So Text Jill now on 07905227448 or email her at [admin@onenorbiton.org.uk](mailto:admin@onenorbiton.org.uk)***

Our temporary postal address is **One Norbiton, 61 Graveley, Norbiton KT1 3HY.**

We also have a Facebook page – [click here to visit](#). And Twitter [@OneNorbiton](#)

***To find out more visit our website [www.onenorbiton.org.uk](http://www.onenorbiton.org.uk)***