

LIRA COMMITTEE REPORT – 2019 AGM

The objectives of the Leisure Isle Residents' Association are to:

- Nurture and protect the environmental heritage of the Island and implement programs to achieve this.
- Liaise with the Municipality, SANParks and others to ensure an appropriate supply of services to the Island, and to ensure the enforcement of laws.
- Implement and maintain a security system for the protection and safety of residents, visitors and property.

2019 has been a challenging and exciting year for the LIRA Committee, and the following report on the year's activities provides a brief overview of how these objectives have been addressed.

FINANCES

Audited annual financial statements for 2019 have been posted on the LIRA website, and will be presented at the AGM. Highlights are:

- Total 2019 income of R1 515 121 against a budget of R1 409 090
- Total 2019 expenditure of R1 522 199 against a budget of R1 380 289
- Net 2019 loss of R7 078 against a budgeted income of R28 801

Breakdown of expenditure for 2019 is as follows:

- Security: R1 131 425
- Public area maintenance: R202 244
- General administration: R75 696
- Depreciation, electricity and interest: R60 843
- Steenbok Reserve contribution: R50 000

The Balance Sheet at 31 October 2019 reflects the following assets:

- Net fixed assets: R114 715
- Current assets: R802 854
- Total assets: R917 569

Capital and liabilities are:

- Accumulated surplus: R264 210
- Guard hut contributions: R59 951
- Camera replacement reserve: R96 491
- Current liabilities: R496 917
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- Total reserves and liabilities: R917 569

MEMBERSHIP

The Committee monitors membership numbers closely, not only because membership fees are LIRA's primary source of income, but also because membership numbers are a key indicator of the level of support for our activities and a measure of our effectiveness.

The Committee has worked hard to recruit new members and retain existing members, through personal and face-to-face interaction wherever possible. The comprehensive and regularly updated database maintained by Peter Dieterich is a vital tool in the management of all membership activities.

There are a total of 432 private properties on the Island, and there are currently 328 paying members of LIRA.

Reasons for non-membership include: 28 properties in transfer/sale, 13 properties with tenants, 24 cannot afford or stopped paying, 17 won't join or resigned, and 12 are for reasons unknown.

Membership therefore stands at 76% of all properties, or more accurately 81% of occupied properties. If tenanted properties, second properties and financially strained residents are excluded, this total rises to 90%.

This extremely high level of membership is proof of LIRA's credibility and standing, and greatly abets our dealings with the Municipality and other organisations.

MEMBERSHIP LEVIES

For 2020, monthly levies have been increased from R410 to R430, an increase of 4.9%. Annually paid levies have increased from R4 600 to R4 830, an increase of 5%.

Based on 2019 expenditure, the following is a breakdown of how the levies have been spent:

74% of levies is spent on security, 13% on maintenance of and improvements to Leisure Island infrastructure, 10% on general administration, depreciation, electricity and interest, and 3% on our Steenbok Reserve contribution.

LIRA members have also made significant contributions to the Island over and above the levies they have paid. The Committee has been able to draw on a wide range of Island expertise to assist with various projects and initiatives. Members have volunteered their time, labour and money, enabling us to achieve a great deal in the way of maintenance and improvements.

COMMUNICATION

The importance of communication to members was highlighted at the 2018 AGM, and this has been a focus for the Committee throughout 2019. Numerous (17) LIRA newsletters, notices and feedback reports have been sent to members and other interested parties throughout 2019, updating them on Island activities and notifying them of forthcoming events.

These newsletters are emailed to more than 550 addressees that include important role players, such as senior Municipal officials, and the address list is ever expanding. Mailchimp is used to ensure accurate delivery and monitor readership statistics which currently stands at approximately 65%, outstanding viewership for email communications.

Committee activities have featured prominently in newsletters in 2019. For instance, on the fibre optic roll-out the newsletters performed a valuable role in informing homeowners of the potential impact of the infrastructure on their properties and requested them to submit their concerns for the committee to address. On the road name sign project homeowners were asked to give their preferences on the location and wording of the signs, and were informed of the auction of the old signs.

Newsflashes were also used to alert members to an application for an off-sales liquor licence on the Island, and to communicate links to relevant Municipality communications.

The ongoing seawall saga and the Committee's engagements with the Municipality with respect to Festive Season preparations have also featured in the Newsletters.

The Leisure Island WhatsApp group has also been used by the Committee to communicate topical information, such as notifications of meetings and loadshedding schedules. Members are encouraged to contact Sheena Mare should they wish to join the group.

ISLAND SECURITY

Leisure Island has once again experienced a generally crime-free year. The only major reported incident was a burglary in April, where two homes were broken into and articles stolen. Alerted by a homeowner, Allsound apprehended the culprits in the Steenbok Nature Reserve and handed them over to the SAPS. The stolen goods were recovered.

This incident served to shake us from complacency and was a reminder to take precautions to prevent crime, particularly over the holiday period. **Members are urged to report all incidents to Allsound's 24-hour Control Room, on 044 382 5589.** Allsound will direct your incident to the relevant security agency, as well as keep a record of the call.

LIRA employs Allsound to provide the Island with security services similar to those found in gated estates. Seven guards provide a 24-hour service in three shifts, monitoring access to the Island and manning CCTV cameras at the entrance, at Green Hole, and at the Boat Club. They also respond to call outs, and do visible bicycle and van patrols. A special feature of Allsound's service is that our guards are dedicated to the Island, are familiar with the territory and residents, and are proud of their record of ensuring our safety.

Allsound management has a strong working relationship with the Municipal Law Enforcement and Traffic departments and with SAPS. They attend local security cluster meetings, and are co-ordinating all law enforcement and security matters for the Festive Season on behalf of the Committee.

WARD 9 COMMITTEE REPRESENTATION

Leisure Island falls within Ward 9, which covers the south-eastern portion of Knysna, and LIRA represents Leisure Islanders on the Ward Committee. We have been fortunate to have had Mark Willemse as our Ward Councillor, and also as Executive Mayor. He has been a strong ally of Leisure Island, and has been invaluable in the assistance he has given in LIRA's many interactions with the Municipality. The current uncertainty around his position is a setback to us, and we hope this will be satisfactorily resolved.

Regular Ward Committee meetings have been held throughout the year, at which Leisure Island reports have been tabled and discussed. We have used this forum to publicise the many positive contributions that we make to Knysna and Leisure Island, and to raise our concerns (and voice our demands) for reciprocal support from the Municipality. This year our focus has been primarily on the delivery of services, law enforcement and the seawall.

Ward 9 has also held public feedback meetings which have given our members the opportunity to hear first-hand the many issues facing the Municipality, as well as to engage with their elected Councillor.

In July the Municipality also held a well-organised public participation session in Cearn Hall, to present their updated Integrated Development Plan (IDP), Spatial Development Framework (SDF), and Budget, and to request input on these documents. On behalf of our members, LIRA made two formal submissions to the Municipal Manager in response to this request.

- Our Budget Submission requested that the Municipality make adequate provision in their budget to enable effective law enforcement on Leisure Island. This was prompted by the unacceptable explanation given by the Municipality for their inability to enforce the by-laws prohibiting alcohol usage in public places and the associated anti-social behaviour - ie that they did not have sufficient resources to police the Island, particularly over the Festive Season.
- Our Spatial Development Framework Submission requested that the Municipality put into place a formal structure to allow for the joint management of the Island's beachfront by both LIRA and the Municipality. This was prompted by the description in the SDF of the Leisure Island beachfront as a

prime tourist and recreation destination, despite the reality that our beachfront infrastructure is in a poor condition due to neglect by the Municipality.

Our Ward 9 representation has also given LIRA a forum for sharing matters of common concern with the Knysna Ratepayers Association, and with other residents' and homeowners' associations.

ENGAGEMENTS WITH KNYSNA MUNICIPALITY

At the 2018 AGM it was agreed that LIRA should have greater involvement with the Municipality, with a view to improving working relationships and promoting better service delivery to the Island. We have pursued this in 2019 and have engaged with municipal officials at all levels and developed strong relationships with a number of departments.

The levels of service that the Island has received in 2019 have, in many areas, been excellent.

The new team at Parks and Recreation has implemented a much improved program of mowing, trimming etc. Refuse collection has been reliable and efficient, as has litter collection and bin-emptying. The septic tank emptying service continues to respond promptly, and homeowners are once again getting three services per year as part of their rates. The Fire Department, with Allsound's help, extinguished a house fire at Land's End in April.

The relationship with the Technical Services department has, however, been less fruitful with no resurfacing of the Island roads this year and with delays in getting potholes fixed. This department has also not responded to our many requests for a meeting to discuss the seawall and has shown no intention of utilizing the money budgeted for making repairs to it.

Islanders are increasingly using the Knysna Municipality App to report faults such as broken street lights, potholes and water leaks, and response times have been good. The Municipality often contacts LIRA for assistance on building plan and town planning applications, and on various Municipal initiatives like their prepaid water and electricity meter installation projects.

FESTIVE SEASON PREPARATIONS

The main focus of our interaction with the Municipality has been on preparations for the Festive Season on the Island's beaches. This year an early start was made to our joint planning, and a number of co-ordination meetings, working sessions and site inspections have been held.

Meetings have been held with the Community Services and Law Enforcement Departments to ensure municipal by-laws are enforced, particularly during holiday periods. The by-laws prohibit the consumption of alcohol in public spaces, and LIRA has requested that this be enforced on all the Island's parks and beaches. Unacceptable behaviour resulting from excessive liquor consumption remains the major issue for Law Enforcement. Traffic violations, including drunken driving, speeding, and obstructive and illegal parking have also been raised as major concerns.

We have had assurances that the Law Enforcement officials deployed to the Island will be better trained, and that patrols by Law Enforcement vehicles will be increased.

We have requested roadblocks on George Rex Drive to discourage drunk driving and have, in consultation with residents, submitted a request for additional speed humps and traffic signs to calm the traffic on certain Island roads.

The Cleaning and Solid Waste department has undertaken to provide additional cleaning staff and increased litter and refuse collection and removal services. Temporary toilets of the same flushing type will once again be provided by the Municipality over the school holiday period to cope with the seasonal

crowds. There has been consultation with affected homeowners to ensure that these toilets will be placed in acceptable locations.

Our interactions and collaborations with the Municipality in the run up to the Festive Season have been very positive. A recent posting by the Municipal Manager on the Knysna Municipality website, which has been shared on our latest newsletter, gives a strong commitment to the enforcement of the by-laws and to a zero-tolerance approach towards traffic offenders over the Festive Season. We look forward to another safe and enjoyable season for residents and visitors on the Island's beaches and open spaces.

We again encourage all Islanders to use the Allsound call centre number to report any incidents or raise any concerns, and to ensure prompt and effective responses from the relevant authorities.

BEACHFRONT IMPROVEMENTS

Our very popular beachfront, which has for some time been looking neglected and untidy, has received a number of improvements this year. These have been initiated and sponsored by LIRA, with the support of the Municipality and SANParks, and with inputs received from adjacent homeowners. In effect LIRA has assumed a greater responsibility for managing and developing the Island's beaches and open spaces.

Post-and-rail fencing has been installed alongside Bayswater Drive to prevent cars from parking on the beach, dunes and picnic areas. At the request of residents this has not been extended to Thornely Park this year but may be in future.

New Municipal regulatory signs are being erected along the beachfront, with clear icons and wording (in three languages) to encourage beach users to abide by the by-laws. Older signage has been removed or rationalised to avoid visual clutter. This has been done after consultation with the Municipality to ensure that their requirements are met. The signs now bear the LIRA logo, as well as a 'Keep it Green' slogan, and are an important requirement in terms of the enforcement of the by-laws.

The Green Hole public toilet block has been comprehensively upgraded, with funding from private donors and inputs from a number of our members. This long-overdue revamp is significant in that the toilet block provides the only ablution facility to the many visitors and tourists who come to the Island's beaches throughout the year. The work included a repaired and repainted roof, doors and walls, the repair of leaks and sub-standard plumbing, and the provision of new taps and soakaways, with new signage and exterior paving.

The Municipality's proposal for a more extensive upgrade of the Green Hole picnic area was circulated to adjacent homeowners, and their comments forwarded to the Municipality. This project, which includes increasing the parking area, with improved picnic and ablution facilities, will now be developed by the Municipality's consultants with a view to getting the necessary environmental authorisations before any work can proceed. We have been assured that LIRA will be invited to participate in this planning that will only take place next year.

PARKS AND GARDENS

LIRA has expanded the scope of work of our garden services team who maintain and beautify the entrance gardens. Our LIRA gardener is kept busy with his weekly clean-ups of problem areas and with the ongoing upkeep of the Cearn Hall gardens, often helped by Island volunteers.

Two gum trees in Links drive were trimmed by adjacent homeowners, and the Municipality has agreed to address the remaining eight trees in Kings Park and Hillview Park in the coming year. Once done, this will mean that all the gum trees will have been attended to.

FIBRE OPTIC ROLL OUT

LIRA held a Special General Meeting in March to agree a way forward for the installation of fibre on the Island. At that time there was some confusion as to what the installation process entailed. Openserve was experiencing resistance from some homeowners, and the large number of unoccupied properties was making it difficult for them to gain access to do their installations.

The LIRA Committee undertook to 'mediate' between residents and Openserve, leading to five months of activity to ensure residents' concerns were addressed but without delaying Openserve's roll-out. Our database proved invaluable in contacting the many Islanders living in distant places.

Openserve co-operated by revising their layouts to ensure the least disturbance to properties and to minimise unsightly poles and aerial cables, redesigning what was originally planned to be an overhead fibre network to a largely underground one. The care with which the work was done by Nokia's contractor, and the respect they showed for our homes and gardens was extraordinary.

The role played by homeowners was gratifying as resistance changed to co-operation. Literally hundreds of site visits, phone calls, emails, sketches and meetings between neighbours were required to complete the network. Nothing went missing, no lasting damage was reported, and LIRA did not receive a single serious complaint from any member.

Nearly 5km of underground cable was laid in trenches on the Island; 40 junction boxes and manholes were constructed; 9,5km of new aerial cable was suspended from poles; only 18 new poles were required - reduced from the more than 50 that were originally planned; and soon all unsightly and obsolete copper cables will be removed.

With the fibre network complete, Islanders have been able to sign up with the various Internet Service Providers to bring fibre connections to their homes.

CEARN HALL

The LI Country Club manages and maintains Cearn Hall in terms of their agreement with the Municipality, with assistance from LIRA where required.

A meeting was held with library management early in the year, to discuss areas of overlap with the library, which shares the premises. Arising from this meeting the Municipality introduced separate metering to ensure that the Country Club was not burdened with the library's electricity costs.

The long-awaited wheelchair ramp was completed just in time to make the hall more accessible to those who cast their votes in this year's elections. The ramp was funded and built as a private donation by LIRA members.

The 'Friends of the Library' volunteers hold their well-attended tea and cake sessions in the hall once a month, and have raised funds to provide new shelving for the library, and have supplied a new fridge and urn for the kitchen by private donation.

We have recently been approached by the library management to assist them with an exciting proposal to make improvements to the library. Planning is at an early stage, but the intention is to expand and modernise the library and equip the hall as a stand-alone facility, with a shared entrance foyer and improved toilets. If implemented, this project may result in a more attractive and better serviced Cearn Hall that can be used for a wider range of Island activities.

NEW ROAD NAME SIGNS

The renewal of the Island's road name signs was completed this year, thanks to the efforts of the Fun-Raising Committee who sponsored the project and who, with LIRA's assistance, spent a great deal of time consulting residents, interacting with Municipal authorities and supervising the contractor.

The results have been well-received - the new signs are uniform and attractive, and many old and ugly signs have been removed or rationalised. Navigating the Island's complex road system is now much easier for visitors.

The project proved to be more costly than originally anticipated as many of the existing poles needed replacement and additional signs were requested by residents. These costs were covered by sales of the Island Passport, and by funds raised by a silent auction of the old street signs that was arranged by Sotheby's. This raised enough money to cover the shortfall, as well as to fund further neatening up of signs at the entrance to the Island.

With the help of Steenbok Nature Reserve, and with the consent of SANParks, LIRA also repositioned ugly and intrusive SANParks signs in Kingfisher Creek and on the beachfront.

INTERIM SEAWALL REPAIRS

The seawalls surrounding Leisure Island were built, together with the causeway, in the 1930s. These walls protected what was a low-lying sandy island enabling it to be developed as a residential suburb. These 80-year-old structures have seen many repairs over the years, the most significant being the rebuilding of portions of the southern seawall by the Municipality about ten years ago.

It was during this rebuilding that a dispute arose between the Municipality and SANParks which led to all repair work being halted. Concerned at the ongoing deterioration of the seawall, LIRA took the matter to the Cape High Court in 2018, seeking a ruling as to who was responsible for the seawalls, and an interdict to direct the responsible party to make the necessary repairs.

Judgement in this case was delivered on 20 December 2018, coincidentally the day of the LIRA AGM. Disappointingly, Judge Papier was unable to make a ruling and dismissed the case. LIRA sought legal opinion as to whether to appeal the judgement but decided not to pursue this option. Instead we met with the Executive Mayor in January and undertook to collaborate with both the Municipality and SANParks in developing a solution to the seawall issue.

LIRA agreed to gain the necessary environmental authorisation to allow interim repairs to be made to the seawall. The Mayor confirmed that once this authorisation was in place, the Municipality would use the R1m it had budgeted for Leisure Island seawall repairs to be used to make the repairs.

LIRA, with the support of the LI Boat Club and Steenbok Nature Reserve, and after a long process involving public participation, obtained authorisation from the Department of Environmental Affairs and from SANParks to undertake interim repairs to the seawall for a period of five years. We then asked the Municipality to start the repairs as per our agreement but unfortunately received no response. LIRA therefore decided to proceed with two pilot projects, at our cost, in order to demonstrate that relatively quick and inexpensive repairs were possible and to improve the appearance of the popular Bollard beach.

These two pilot projects – the repairs to the timber post seawall, and the repairs to the stone seawall to save the old milkwood tree – have now been completed. We continue to engage with the Municipality and to urge them to undertake the repairs needed to sustain the seawall.

LONGER-TERM REBUILDING OF THE SEAWALLS

The repairs mentioned previously are an interim measure to prevent the collapse of the older portions of the walls. In the longer term these older portions of the seawall will require rebuilding. This will be a costly exercise and will require a full environmental authorisation that will include further public participation, expert studies and comparison of alternative solutions before any rebuilding work can be done.

The recent high spring tides that inundated portions of Steenbok Nature Reserve, and Links and Woodbourne Drives, and the continued erosion of Bollard Beach that will soon reach Bayswater Drive, are reminders that the Island's sea defences need to be strengthened. Any rise in sea levels resulting from global warming will only increase this need.

LIRA has been actively discussing this with both SANParks and the Municipality, but due perhaps to the legal dispute over the ownership of the seawall, there appears to be little desire by either party to address this issue. Getting started on the environmental processes required to address our longer-term seawall issues will therefore be an important challenge for LIRA in the new year.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

LIRA is represented on the SANParks Parks Forum, and has developed good working relationships with environmental officials from both SANParks and the Municipality. The focus this year has been mainly on environmental matters at Steenbok Nature Reserve and on our beachfront, where we have received support and advice on a number of initiatives, including alien vegetation removal, seawall authorisations, and beach and dune erosion.

The popularity of Leisure Island as both a residential area as well as a premier destination for visitors, beachgoers and tourists, has resulted in increasing pressure being put on the Island's natural resources. Steenbok Nature Reserve has played a major role in protecting and nurturing the natural environment on the northern side of the Island, but other areas of concern are the bushy areas to the south east of Green Hole; the expanse of sparsely vegetated dunes alongside Bollard Bay; and the Kingfisher Creek salt marshes and Land's End coastal forest.

These areas are being negatively impacted by neglect, insensitive human intervention and by the spread of invasive and alien vegetation. An opportunity therefore exists for LIRA to play a pro-active role in protecting the Islands' natural heritage, by preserving areas of indigenous vegetation and managing and limiting human impacts.

LEISURE ISLE FESTIVAL

This Leisure Isle Festival was once again extremely successful and raised R300 000 for charitable causes. Those who benefitted were Ithemba (Hands & Hearts), KAWS, e Pap, Hospice, Vermont and Loeriehof Old Age Homes, Die Werkswinkel, the Knysna Basin Project and Steenbok Nature Reserve.

The Festival was hosted and supported by LIRA, and extremely well organised and run by an independent Festival Committee, with Sotheby's as the major sponsor. Extensive positive feedback has been received from stallholders and attendees.

STEENBOK NATURE RESERVE

The popular Steenbok Nature Reserve has had another successful year. The Reserve consists of two Municipality-owned erven on the north shores of the Island. It is jointly managed in terms of an Agreement between the Municipality and LIRA by the Steenbok MANCOM.

This very successful public-private partnership has the objective of ensuring that the natural heritage of the Reserve is nurtured and protected for the benefit of current and future generations of residents and visitors.

Highlights of 2019 include:

- The completion of the alien and invasive plant eradication program, with just ongoing maintenance now required to prevent the regrowth of alien species.
- Improved levels of garden and park maintenance from Ivy Garden Services.
- The upgrading of the Reserve's infrastructure, including pathways, fencing, signage, irrigation system, noticeboards etc.
- Continuous improvements and updates to the Steenbok website.
- Regular Facebook posting and informative newsletters to promote and publicise the Reserve.
- An increase in the number of educational visits by school groups in support of the objective of promoting inclusivity.
- The hosting of many outings by special interest groups and sporting and recreational users.
- The colourful fund-raising stall at the Leisure Island Festival, with the theme of 'Kids in the Park'.
- An ever-growing volunteer program.

Development plans for 2020 include a new landscaped area to integrate the east and west portions of the Reserve across Harbour Road and via Rogers Way, with new planting, signage and walkways.

Further progress has been made with SANParks in achieving protected status for Steenbok - a process now awaiting promulgation. This is essential to avoid any risk of future development in the area, and to safeguard Steenbok's future as a conservation area beyond 2021, when the current Agreement with the Municipality expires.

THE LIRA COMMITTEE

The LIRA Committee is elected at the AGM and comprises Island homeowners who are paid-up LIRA members. All are volunteers who freely give their time, energy and expertise in representing our members.

The 2019 LIRA Committee was again chaired by Keith Hollis, with David Stromberg as deputy chairperson, and with Clive Bennett, Mary-Anne Beviss-Challinor, James Botha, Paul Kotze, Arjen Meter, Ingrid Meter, Brenda Neall and Declan Nurse continuing as members. The Committee was strengthened with three new members elected at the 2018 AGM: Kerry Evans, George Mackeurtan and Myles Ruck.

2020 will see some changes to the LIRA Committee. Arjen resigned from the Committee in October, and Craig Carter has recently been co-opted onto the Committee. James and Clive have indicated that they will not be available for re-election. A new Committee will be elected at the AGM.

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