

How Frances



The Malcolm
Richards
Column

enlightened self-interest has benefited the whole community

Frances Carter, secretary of the Kew Residents' Association, is a serious smoker - "My doctor is very good about it but obviously would rather I gave up" - but she is also a serious thinker.

She cares about the lovely patch where she lives - in a gracious Victorian house off the Mortlake Road. She is concerned about threats to the environment and she is passionately dedicated in her own tiny way to making life fairer. She confesses to being a bit shy and not happy in row that involves a lot of public speaking, but is content in back stage administration, research and creating think tanks. "I like time to reflect."

She spent 10 years with the Kew Society and produced the twice-yearly magazine, a task she threw herself into with enthusiasm and which enabled her "to meet a lot of interesting people".

Dominating her life at the moment is the battle to prevent the expansion of Kew Retail Park, which is

within a few hundred yards of her home and where Starbucks is bidding to change the character of the area with a new coffee shop.

Frances was divorced nine years ago and has dedicated the last couple of decades to fighting to preserve one of London's best loved and loveliest villages.

A journalist and photographer, she has thrown herself with gusto in local life since she first moved into Lichfold Road in 1971. The Kew Society, the Richmond upon Thames Arts Council and Richmond Wives Circle have all benefited from her know-how and experience.

She studied English at Edinburgh University where she met and fell in love with a fellow student, eventually marrying him and moving to Pinthco.

The couple had no children and so Frances has sublimated her energies in fighting local causes.

She has been an avid reader of the Richmond and

Twickenham Times for four decades now and first got involved in the local scene after reading of people's concerns in the letters page and news stories. "I am a newspaper addict."

She has great faith in our democratic system and in all her campaigning and lobbying has bent over backwards to work with its elected representatives and persuade them to rethink some of their preconceptions.

For the last seven years she has served the Kew Residents' Association, which is a lobby group complementing the work of the Kew Society and which has been prodded back into life by the Starbucks planning application.

"Corporate greed is one of the evils of our age", she points out. "Big organisations implant their tentacles into local communities without any attempt to find out what makes a community tick or how local people feel."

And she thinks the retail park is a case in point. "Here is a totally isolated and unnecessary shopping area built against residents' wishes on the edge of the South Circular which is already beset with traffic problems, but attracting more car-bound customers creates terrible chaos and pollution."

She is also putting pressure on Transport for London to introduce more speed restriction notices on the stretch of the ring road through Richmond.

"When I moved here from Pinthco I first started to get involved in trying to influence opinion."

Moving from central London and its anonymity she could "see life in a manageable perspective" and appreciated that an individual could make a difference.

Bertrand Russell used to talk about how enlightened self-interest could change the world for the better.

Frances Neal provides a shining example.