



MINUTES OF 41st AGM

HIGHFIELD RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Thursday 20th April 2017

Highfield House Hotel

1. Professor Roger Brown (Chair) welcomed the members and guests.

Apologies were received from Alan Whitehead MP, John Bradshaw, Adrian Vinson, Andy Kendall, Ian Dunn, Pamela Ashurst, Mark Batchelor, Chris Klewe.
2. Minutes of 2016 AGM, previously circulated and taken as read.
No comments.
3. Professor Brown presented the Chair's Report. (Attached and on the website).
4. In the absence of the Treasurer, his report was presented by Headley Rossell.
There were no questions.
5. Four committee members were re-elected: Jerry Gillen, Steve Connolly, John Bradshaw and Chris Klewe.
6. Peter Johnson, Professor of Oncology, University of Southampton, Chief Clinician, Cancer Research UK, spoke of recent progress in cancer research based at Southampton.
 - Treatment is beginning to move on from chemotherapy to using the body's own immune system to tackle cancer cells. This is proving successful in many cases and avoids the toxicity often associated with chemotherapy.
 - A new building at Southampton General Hospital, the Centre for Cancer Immunology at Southampton, is due to open this year. Funding so far has come solely from philanthropic gifts and community support.
 - Cancer care in Southampton reaches a standard above the average in the UK.

Professor Johnson then answered questions from the audience.

More information can be found at www.southampton.ac.uk/youreit

Jon Walsh from the University, who looks after community complaints, took questions about student noise, together with Mitch Sanders from the Council. Jon advised that excessive noise should be logged, and the household checked to ensure that it is a student house. After two letters (or emails) of complaint the students will be called in. This often resolves the matter. Mitch said that Environmental Health runs an out of hours service, and nuisance can be reported online at any time. Mitch also emphasised the importance of keeping a log.

7. AOB

Josie Brown, on behalf of Dr Pamela Ashurst, encouraged those present to consider membership of the University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust, and distributed information leaflets. www.uhs.nhs.uk/members

Roger Brown, who is retiring as Chair, was presented with a gift from the Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.30 and was followed by a social evening with drinks.

Chair's Report

I am once again pleased to present my Chair's report on the work of the Association over the past year.

Let me start by thanking the HRA Committee for their hard work and support during the year. Also a big 'thank you' to our Examiner, Olliver Dicker, and to our excellent Street Reps. I should next like to express our appreciation for the advice and help we have received from our Ward Councillors during the year: Matthew Claisse, Linda Norris, Paul O'Neill and John Savage. We also greatly value the help and advice of our local police officers although we also understand the very clear resource constraints that they, and indeed other key public services, operate under (something I shall be saying a little more about later). Finally, we also appreciate the better liaison with the University this year, as well as with the Students Union, whose efforts to encourage students to be good local citizens we have greatly appreciated. We are very pleased to welcome senior representatives of the Council, the police and the university here this evening.

This time last year I indicated that if reappointed I would step down as HRA Chair this year, and this remains my intention. So as well as giving an account of the Association's work during the year I should also like to say a few words at the end about HRA and its future. This means that my Chair's report will be slightly longer than usual. It will also differ a bit from that printed in the Newsletter. It will of course be appended to the minutes of this meeting.

There has been no single, dominating issue this year, but a very wide range of matters, mostly concerning the local environment, have occupied us. Since there is plenty of information on the website, I will give only the main points.

As always, we have spent a good deal of time on planning issues. Earlier in the year we were delighted at the dismissal of the landlord's appeal at 38 Grosvenor Road, and especially at the Inspector's remarks about preserving the character of the area and the Supplementary Planning Document – the SPD – constraining the development of new HMOs. We were also pleased at a similar outcome at 14 Westwood Road. But we have been disappointed with the difficulties we have experienced in liaising with the Council's planning team, and actually horrified at some of the officers' recommendations on individual applications, and in some cases the Planning Panel's subsequent decisions. This explains the Committee's decision to challenge the Council's approval of the application at 12 Russell Place through an application for judicial review. This was not a decision taken lightly, but we simply could not accept the Council's wholesale disregard for its own policies – including the protection of Conservation Areas – that this decision represented. We are very grateful for the support that we have received from members on this issue, particularly from Portswood Residents Gardens. I am also sorry to have to report that in spite of considerable efforts on our part, the Council's Solicitor, Richard Ivory, declined to share with us the Council's legal advice on 1 Salisbury Road, or to explain his reasons. I regard both the lack of transparency and the lack of courtesy as highly regrettable, especially as they cannot be put down to lack of resources. We were however pleased with many of the changes to the SPD (Supplementary Planning Document), although our longstanding demand for a 10% limit on HMOs ward by ward remains unsatisfied.

In addition to the usual run of planning applications, two specific environmental issues have taken up quite a lot of our time.

The first is the Common. HRA continues to support the work of Simon Hill and Common Sense in trying to restore the appearance of the Little Common back closer to what it was before parts of it became so overgrown. We have expressed our concerns about various aspects of the management and maintenance of the Common, where there still appears to be a reluctance in some parts of the Council to accept the plan agreed by them some years ago to gradually restore the Little Common closer to its original and more open appearance. These concerns embrace ones relating to the three improvement projects submitted last year by our Ward Councillors under the Council's Minor Projects programme, including the clearance of the old carriage drive to return it to grassland. I am sure that everyone here will agree that this makes the whole area much more attractive without in any way detracting from the wildlife. More generally, I attach great importance to maintaining the current character of the Common, hence in part our objection to the University's application to modernise the Steps from the Highfield Campus on to the Common.

It was partly for this reason that in partnership with SCAPPs, HRA took the lead in establishing the Southampton Common Forum, which will provide a focal point for attempts to enhance the Common, and whose Chair, Adam Wheeler, is with us this evening. HRA is a member of the new Forum, but I also urge all those here with an interest in the Common to join as well. One of the Forum's first projects will be to consider with the City Council future options for the Hawthorns Education Centre and Café. We shall be holding two workshops on this at the Centre on the 2nd and 4th of May, details will be on the new website www.southamptoncommonforum.org. I shall continue to represent HRA on the Forum's new Management Committee.

Second, there are growing concerns about the local environment more generally, especially in and around Portswood Broadway.

As those of you who follow our affairs on the website will know, we have been much concerned this year about the flagrantly anti-social activities of a local resident who feeds rats and other vermin in industrial quantities in our area and beyond. He has been served with a Community Protection Order but this has so far had only a limited effect on his activities. I should like to commend Steven Johnston of the HRA Committee and Stephen Hayes-Arter of the City Council for their tireless efforts here. However this is only one of a number of concerns that have been raised with the Council and the police, others being vagrants outside Coffee#1, instances of begging, parking and cycling on pavements and, most recently, the opening of an Arthur Daley-like second hand car business outside the former Blockbusters video store.

Mention of the website leads me once again to commend Nadine Johnson and Ross Gordon for all their hard work on our behalf. Nadine has also to be thanked and congratulated for promoting advertising on the website and also for obtaining discounts from a number of local traders for HRA members, discounts that very quickly offset the cost of your subscription. This in turn takes us to finance. I warned last year that our finances were coming under pressure and we subsequently increased the subscription to £5, once again more than surpassed by voluntary donations. If we are to be effective as an association, we have to be able to draw on the best possible professional, including legal, advice, and the costs of such advice are increasing all the time. There is no immediate crisis but we shall have to keep

things under close review, and certainly make special calls for particular activities (as with 12 Russell Place). It is partly for financial reasons that this year's printed Newsletter, so ably edited by Caroline Knight for so many years, may be the last.

I said at the start of this report that I would say a few words about HRA and its future. These are based on my having been Chair for the last four-and-a-half years, and Chair of OTRA for seven years before that. The Association is now the largest and strongest residents' association in the City. In so far as any such voluntary body can exert influence over the decisions of such bodies as the City Council, the University and major commercial entities, HRA does so. This reflects many years of tireless endeavour by successive officers of the Association, especially Jerry Gillen the Vice Chair. However we remain heavily dependent on the commitment and efforts of a very small number of people. Moreover, most of them are beyond retirement age and have many other commitments as well.

Unless and until we are able to get some new blood into the Association, I do not believe that we can continue to be as effective as we have been in representing your interests and those of the local community more widely. This would obviously be a great pity, not only for Highfield and Portswood but for the City as a whole, but I see it as being almost inevitable on present information. Ladies and gentlemen, it is up to you! More generally, I do worry about what appears to be a virtual collapse of local governance as the resources available for local services continue to diminish. To comment on the reasons and the larger picture would go beyond the agenda for this meeting, but it is a considerable worry as we go forward.

Finally, there is the difficult question of how the Association can or should balance the views of the great majority with those of a minority. Clearly, we should make every effort to obtain a consensus on major issues, but it isn't clear how we should proceed in cases where a small minority takes a different view and canvasses it more widely to the potential detriment of the majority. In other words, how – and how far – should we aim to balance the position of a small group against the interests of the area as a whole?

Let me conclude by saying how much I have enjoyed the support of the Committee, the other officers, and the members of the Association over the past few years, how grateful I am to them, and how proud I am of what we have achieved in that time. Thank you, and thank you for listening to me this evening.

I am now very happy to answer any questions, although I may pass them on to others better able to handle them.

Roger Brown