

Minutes of Highfield Residents Association
Annual General Meeting
Held on 24th April 2014
Highfield House Hotel 7.30pm

Present	Roger Brown,	Chair
	Jerry Gillen	Vice Chair
	Jill Baston,	Secretary
	Chris Klewe	Minutes Secretary
	Headley Rossell,	Treasurer

Attending	Local Councillors, Committee members, Panel Speakers and 75 HRA members.
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Panel Speakers

Sergeant Stewart Chandler,	Hampshire Constabulary
Professor Judith Petts.	ProVice Chancellor, University of Southampton
Councillor Jacqui Rayment	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport
Councillor Derek Burke	Chair of Scrutiny Panel
Mitch Sanders	Council Official for Regulation

1. Welcome

Roger Brown welcomed all HRA members, the panel members and other visitors.

Apologies were received from Pam Ashurst, Jenny Turner, Simon Hill and Julia Brooking.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM were taken as read and approved.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Chair's report.

Roger Brown thanked the committee and members for all the work that they had carried out during the year. He particularly thanked Peggy Augier and Julia Brooking, who are retiring from the committee, for their work over the years. He was sad to announce the recent deaths of Peter Knight and David Ely.

The main matters dealt with over the last year were connected with planning and HMO licensing, the function and working of the Scutiny Panel, the work of the North Southampton Community Forum and the setting up of the Building Bridges Project. Work on renovating and clearing the Little Common Area was now virtually completed and the public space was in good order.

The Association now had an all time high membership of 560 households in the area, confirming that we were truly representative of the local community. Most of our membership data was now held on the internet with information going out to members by email. We also have a good Facebook page.

The chair confirmed that there were no plans to increase members subscription rate, but that there might need to be a special call if an unforeseen need arose.

Roger made a presentation to Caroline Knight who had been committee secretary for some considerable time.

5. Treasurers Report
Headley Rossell presented the accounts which had also been printed on the back of the agenda. Although we had made a slight loss over the past year, the financial situation was essentially healthy.
6. Election and Ratification of Committee Members
The memberships of Jerry Gillen, Steve Connelly Headley Rossell Chris Klewe and Oliver Dicker were ratified.
7. Question and answer session with panel members.

The chair introduced the 5 panel members who each gave a brief outline of the work they do in this area or the positions they hold.

Q1 What was the Council's policy on HMO's
Councillor Derek Burke replied that the Scrutiny panel were considering this matter and had taken representations from many interested parties. Their report would be published in mid May and the Council Cabinet would then consider the matter.

Councillor Adrian Vinson summarized his experience in this area and questioned, whatever the final policy was, did the Council have sufficient powers to enforce it. He also confirmed that there appeared to be a total lack of hard data on the number and likely demand for HMO's.

Councillor Matthew Claisse agreed with Adrian and suspected that the report would probably not support a single % value of HMO dwelling city wide but that it would vary from ward to ward. The HMO licensing scheme was not yet fully operational.

Mitch Sanders said that to the best of his knowledge there were around 7,000 HMO's throughout the City, of which 4,500 were in 4 wards. The Council would welcome any further data that a local survey might come up with. An HRA member asked why HMO licences were issued before planning permission for an HMO had been granted. Mitch Sanders confirmed this was a technicality that came about because a licence had to be granted to any suitable house, ie with the appropriate number of facilities, fire doors and other requirements, but that planning permission was subject to a different set of rules and policies.

A further question from the floor asked about the legal requirements for licensing. Mitch Sanders confirmed that all HMO's registered after 23rd March 2012 had to be licensed. Details of HMO's would be available online as soon

as possible.

Q2 Professor Petts was asked how the University sees its role in the City.

The University is the second largest employer in the City with over 1000 staff. It has excellent facilities, is in the top 100 ranking of world universities and of course it supports the excellent local bus service.

The University feels a strong obligation to be part of the local community and encourages staff and students to do voluntary work and engage with the local residents and environmental groups.

Professor Petts spoke about the need for more halls of residence and that about 2000 further units were about to come into use this year. She hope that there would eventually be a total of about 9000 units, not enough for all students to be housed.

She also raised the difficulty for planning purposes of how Universities would develop in the future. At present about 50% of Southampton's students live within 50 miles but still see the need to live and work on campus rather than commute. How for example would the growth of the internet and distance learning effect higher education?

Q3 Sergeant Stewart Chandler was asked about the levels of crime in the area.

He replied that overall there was a downward trend to the crime figures. Burglaries have reduced and quite often students themselves were the victims. The national crime survey indicated that crimes were down by 15%, but Police records showed only a 2% decrease. Sexual offences reported had increased slightly, but this might be due to improved reporting of offences.

Q4 What was the Council doing about landlords letting signs which were proliferating.

Councillor Jacqui Rayment said that there was no easy answer. Boards should be removed within 2 weeks of the signing of the letting tenancy agreement, but the letting agents left them as free, though to residents, unsightly advertising boards. She questioned whether there was any need for the boards at all since most letting were initiated on the internet. Mitch Sanders added that a further difficulty was the shortage of money and therefore staff to go and check on sign removal.

Q5 Professor Petts was asked about the proposed improvements to the cycleway between the University and Westwood Road.

She said that improvements were definitely required since the pedestrian and cycle traffic were too much for the present arrangement. Comments from the audience complained that since there were steps down to the University Site, with no ramp proposed, it was not really fit for purpose.

Q6 The Police were asked about Neighbourhood Watch schemes

Sergeant Chandler confirmed that these were a valuable contribution to crime prevention and the police would encourage people to set up more schemes.

Q7 What are the Council doing about the shocking state of our roads and Pavements.

Councillor Jacqui Rayment replied that the the Council had agreed to double the resources going to these repairs and to give residential roads priority. Balfour Beatty had the contract to repair our roads and pavements when they became potholed, but there was an interesting problem about the nationwide definition of what constituted a pothole.

Q8 Professor Petts was asked if the University would consider providing funds for the Building Bridges Project so that it could continue into further years.

She replied that the Project seemed to be fulfilling its aims and that the University would certainly consider the matter.

Roger Brown thanked the panel for coming to the AGM and for their interesting replies. The meeting closed at 8.50pm.