



HIGHFIELD RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

**Minutes of the committee meeting held on Monday 8th August 2011
At the Highfield House Hotel.**

Present Jerry Gillen- Chair, Roret Blue, Steve Connolly, Bryan Wakely, Keith Reed, Peggy Augier

Apologies Caroline Knight, Nicolla Martin, Headley Rossell, Nadine Johnson, Josie Brown, Jenny Arnold, Julia Brooking, Sue Hartley, Allison Shelly, Martin Moore EBRA.

Attending Jo Sage, Frankie Fry – SU Officer, Jacky and Chris Foster (Highfield Road), Simon Hill (Common Sense), Sam Ling (SU President), Cllr Matthew Claisse, Graham Linecar (Common Sense), Peter Knight (SFRA), Cllr Vincenzo Capozolli, Derek Willis (Grosvenor Rd), Cllr. Adrian Vinson, Cllr. Jeremy Moulton (Dep Leader of Council)

Minutes of the July meeting

- Acceptance of minutes - proposed by Roret Blue and seconded by Peggy Augier.

Matters arising

- Bin collection - Jeremy noted that industrial action is on-going; however, the outcomes of recent meetings with the Unions suggested there is light at the end of the tunnel.
 - In meantime there is a contractor service of up to 10 vehicles, which are keeping the service running at 50%.
 - Jacky Foster commented that vans being disallowed near the site was not helping residents who are attempting to clear their own rubbish.

Correspondence

- Jacky Barnes of PRG, sent a card thanking the HRA, as follows
“Dear Jerry, yesterday a beautiful bouquet of flowers arrived from ‘all my friends in HRA’ – I was very touched by such a gesture, and am writing to ask if you could convey my thanks to everyone. You really need your friends at times like these, and HRA has turned up trumps. With best wishes, Jacky”.
- HRA have received news that their community chest application has been unsuccessful.
- Alan Whitehead has written to HRA indicating he is not in favour of the daylight saving campaign (discussed further later in the meeting).
- Jerry has been in contact with DCLG re. short-comings in planning legislation in relation to HMOs. He has received a response from Caroline Noakes MP, and following a meeting with her this week feels that there is the opportunity for dialogue.
- Notice of appeal re: 1 Blenheim Gardens – HRA has written a letter of objection.

SU and University Liaison – Frankie Fry

13 Grosvenor Road

- Frankie has spoken to the SU Advice Centre and visited the students at Number 13 Grosvenor Road to check they are ok.
- The SU Advice Centre reports it has advised the student residents they are within their legal rights to occupy the house and they made the decision to stay.
- Jerry stated this does not reassure HRA, who have interpreted this as the Advice Centre seeking to break the injunction by advising the student residents to ignore its purpose, which has in turn undermined Council attempts to deal with a rogue landlord
- Sam reiterated that the SU Advice Centre provides independent advice, and does not seek to tell students what to do. Instead they seek to provide students with the information they require to make an informed choice. He also stated that the student residents in question had not legally broken the injunction.

Shush! Campaign

- Frankie outlined this year's Shush! Campaign activities which were initially in Halls bars and are now coming back to campus. The purpose of Shush! is to reduce noise during Freshers' Week. Activities this year have involved a Shush! Poster Competition at Swaythling Primary School and the purchase of a giant ear which has been used in conjunction with a placard to spread the message about being quiet on way home.

Bins

- It had been brought to the attention of the SU that students were being charged for excess household waste. In response to the recent refuse crisis in Southampton, the SU hired a tipper truck to collect student rubbish and take to the refuse centre – a blog has been written recording these activities.
- Cllr Vinson commended the SU efforts to deal with refuse issues.

SU 5-year Strategic Plan

- Sam outlined the SUs planned work to develop a 5-year strategic plan with input from local RAs, with a focus on how community interaction can be improved.
- Jerry stated it would help if the SU was more supportive of the HMO campaign – opposing actions taken by the previous Vice Pres (Emily Rees) of the SU. It was felt that these had driven a wedge between the SU and local RAs in the city.
- Frankie stated she would respond to this once she had familiarised herself with these debates, and the information handed over by her predecessors.
- Jerry offered to meet with Frankie to discuss this further once she had absorbed this information.

Quality of student housing

- Sam identified this as an area of common ground between local RAs and SU, who were simultaneously concerned with driving up the quality of student accommodation in the city.
- It was identified that students looking for accommodation too early often allowed rogue landlords to take advantage. Frankie outlined efforts to warn Freshers of this (Freshers' information packs).

- Additional licensing for HMOs was raised as a possible remedy, although it was agreed by all that this is an expensive and bureaucratic tool and in any case not favoured by SCC.
- Sam encouraged the residents present to redirect students they are aware of who are living in sub-standard accommodation to the SU who can advise.
- Jerry also stated HRA could help students in this situation, and suggested HRA and SU could work together on this. Sam was in agreement.
- Derek noted that a sign of the quality of student accommodation was if planning consent was in place – it would be helpful to encourage this as a criterion of quality.

Common Sense – Simon Hill

Simon identified an area of Southampton Common – area wanted to make more open v- 2 hectares of 147 hectares in total.

It was reported a lot had been achieved in 2 years by Common Sense:

- Large trees along big carriage drive had been removed following a grant from the council to allow species to regenerate. Many more people were reported to be using this as a through way.
- An area near the underpass had been cleared – trees had been removed so it is less intimidating.
- Holly had been cleared in area 2A, and replaced by heather.

Plans for further work were outlined:

- Area 4B was suspected to contain badger sets, however an ecological survey found none, and Common Sense would now like to see this area returned to park grassland.
- Simon outlined an issue with reforming banks to prevent vehicles intruding on the common.
- Looking to contract a tractor to do this work as part of a working party – this is achievable.
- A picture from 1965 was shown of the area opposite Highfield campus – clear parkland – it is hoped the undergrowth in this area will be cleared so it will resemble its historic state - predominantly mature trees and longer grass.
- At the moment grass cutting is slipping back, and a regime needs to be set up to keep areas clear when they have been cleared by volunteers.
- Primarily, it was stated the heath areas should be preserved – Simon cited Richmond Park to describe the desired feel of open park land with trees and long grass.
- Jerry stated HRA has approved the scheme and expenditure has been allocated.
- Cllrs present stated they were in favour of the scheme and would assist with moving it forward.
- It was suggested that Simon could set out key points in an email to the Cllrs present, who would endorse the plans.
- Jerry thanked all for their support

Membership - Nicolla

Nicolla was not present to report on membership, however, Jerry noted that membership in the previous month had totalled approx 650 members (households), and was unlikely to have changed significantly.

Finances – Headley

Headley was not present at the meeting, but Jerry reported finances were healthy.

Planning and Licensing – Keith and Jerry

- Keith circulated the monthly report summary prior to the meeting.
- Jerry remarked it is disappointing that planning officers still appear to be working at odds with HRA – they appear to represent developers more than local communities.
- Cllr Vinson emphasised that the role of a planning officer is to make decisions according to Planning Law.
- Jerry noted the application (on p.4 of the monthly summary) for the erection of a two-storey HMO to the rear of 162-180 Broadlands Road – although this proposed development is outside of the HRA area, HRA feels strongly that to allow this development to proceed would represent poor interpretation of Planning law, and has leant it's support to resident members of the East Bassett RA.
- Cllr. Claisse raised the question of the criteria against which HRA will oppose an application outside of the Highfield area, as in this case.
- It was noted this development would take place on the edge of the Highfield area, and there was the potential for this to have a 'knock-on' effect in the vicinity.
- Jerry outline Appeals determined – the development of a Care Home in Bassett has been refused – HRA supported Ridgemount RA and introduced Sarah Clover of No 5 Chambers who represented them at the Appeal Hearing.
- Following consultation with No. 5 Chambers, HRA is advised that work being carried out at 8 Grosvenor Road does unfortunately fall within permitted development rights.
- Cllr Vinson noted it was important to monitor how many residents move into 13, Grosvenor Road.
- Derek stated it was not clear how many students had moved in – which was the basis of the injunction.
- Jerry has investigated new strategies for opposing this type of application:
 - Planning Policy Strategy 3 (PPS3) emphasises the goal of sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities.
 - PPS3 is to be replaced by a National Planning Policy framework, which also states clear objective to achieve sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities.
 - Opposition to future applications must stress how the development will contradict these objectives.
 - Cllr Vinson stated it is crucial to define balanced and inclusive communities more clearly – currently these terms are too subjective. (e.g. in the Local Plan - LDF)
- This was reiterated by the Deputy Leader of the Council who remarked that PPS3 wording can be interpreted as one wishes, which highlights the critical need for clearly defined policy alongside the Article 4 Directive (A4D).
- Jerry summarised a Briefing Paper about A4Ds, which emphasised the need for clearly defined local policies and a realistic threshold was paramount, i.e. no more than 10%.
- How the threshold is measured (i.e. in what area/direction) remains a key issue. Other councils have defined a percentage per street and not sandwiching a family home between 2 HMOs.

- Alarm was raised at the suggested threshold of 20% of households, which was thought too high and is recognised as the “tipping point” figure at which a community becomes unsustainable.
- The nationally accepted threshold is 10%
- The potential use of ‘Stop orders’ was discussed – these must piggy back on another order (i.e. they would have to be issued after an Enforcement notice). Councils are loathe to issue these as they carry a compensation risk.
- It was indicated that a way forward may be to suggest to DCLG that temporary stop orders be allowed for 30 days without compensation. These would allow time to assess the situation, and for normal planning process to happen – otherwise all action is retrospective.
- Heavier fines for landlords were also suggested – which would be issued through the Magistrates court– the deterrent must be a sensible proportion of the gain to the landlord to be effective however.
- Simon Hill outlined a case of what he believed was unlawful development in Highfield Road which had been granted PP by the council. He felt there could be grounds for Judicial Review. There is only a 3 month window in which to do this – therefore it would have to happen before 3rd September 2011. (Post meeting note – advice from No 5 is there are no grounds and action is therefore withdrawn)
- It was noted the mechanism for notifying residents to Planning Panels was not working effectively – it was questioned why the council is not using email for this purpose.
 - Cllr. Claisse agreed to raise the issue of poor communication with residents, with Planning Officers.

Website - Stephen

- A small amount of progress has been made – overall there were negative responses to the look and feel of the new website.
- Steve is to continue working on this.

Daylight saving and “Lighter Later” campaign - Jerry

- Jerry outlined the National Lighter Later Campaign – there is a Private Members Bill going through Parliament at the moment and campaign organisers are keen for RAs to lend their support.
- It was agreed Jerry should pledge support on behalf of HRA.

Any other business

- Brian raised the winter social event – the local church was to contact HRA – there has been no word.
- Jerry suggested we should write to them to find out if they plan to go ahead. Brian agreed to contact again in 2 month’s time, but predicted no response. (Post meeting note – Ghandi have agreed we can hold event at the restaurant, Bryan to follow up)
- The Highfield pub was also suggested as an alternative venue.

The meeting closed at 21.19.

The next meeting will be on Monday 12th September 2011