



**Highfield Residents Association**

**AGM Minutes 14 November 2023 Highfield Church Hall 07.00pm**

**1. Introduction and welcome** Professor Roger Brown, Chair HRA

Professor Roger Brown welcomed members and guests to the 47<sup>th</sup> HRA AGM. He introduced Councillor Kaur, the Leader of Southampton City Council.

Councillor Kaur began her address by saying that it was a pleasure to be invited to such an engaged and active Residents' Association Annual General meeting. She then spoke about the Council's proposals for a Bus gate in Portswood Broadway, and thanked HRA members for their contributions to the second Phase Consultations. Due to the high volume of responses these was taking time to evaluate but it was hoped to reach a decision by Christmas. Councillor Kaur then went on to outline the Council's five priorities for the city:

- jobs and skills
- greening the city
- affordability - paying the living wage
- improving the physical environment
- the coordination of city developments: enhancing the maritime city, a destination city and a sustainable city

More details of the address can be found in Annex i.

Councillor Kaur then responded to members' questions. These included:

- Where had the finance come from for the various road schemes
- Were there any plans for a ULEZ in the city
- Would there be a School Streets project in Portswood?
- Why was the council not doing more about breaches of electric scooter hire regulations with Voi?
- How would residents know if there was an increase or decrease in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions across the city
- Portswood Rec play equipment had been removed as unsafe. Might the Council help fund the replacement?
- Electric (hire) scooters were a potential danger. There was to be an increase in charging docks in poor, unsuitable, locations in Portswood e.g. the junction of Brookvale Road and Highfield Lane. Would the Council look into this?
- Had the Council considered having bespoke dog running areas in parks and open spaces?
- A cyclist highlighted how many roads were in a dangerous condition for cyclists

- The very bad state of some Highfield pavements was raised e.g. Shaftesbury Avenue and Welbeck Road. This was especially dangerous for wheelchair users.
- Were there any plans to capitalise on the enthusiasm for cultural events following the City of Culture bid (especially since the Nuffield Theatre had closed).

Professor Brown then thanked Councillor Kaur for her interesting address.

## **2. Apologies for absence** to the Secretary received in advance

Diane and Roger Ferry, Jutter Manser, Ruth Allen, Mr and Mrs Smith, Ros Wellington, Councillor Fielker, Monica Parrish, Simon Hill.

## **3. Minutes of the previous AGM** held on 8 November 2022 – circulated after that meeting, now available on the HRA Website - taken as read.

## **4. Annual Report** - Professor Roger Brown

Welcome, especially Councillor Kaur.

Last year I spoke about the role that HRA tries to play as a sort of 'glue' for the local community, particularly by providing information about local happenings but also by being a channel for the expression of local views and opinions.

As it happens, the work we have done on the Council's proposals for the Portswood Corridor, aka Portswood Broadway or Portswood High Street, is a good example. At the Council's request, HRA organised (and paid for) two open public consultation meetings on the proposals as well as collecting and forwarding members' views to the Council and sending in our own – detailed and well-considered – Committee response. Since the matter is now being further considered by the Council I will not say more here about the proposals, except to say that there were some aspects of the consultation material that left something to be desired in terms of openness and balance, as I think the Council has accepted-

Planning has continued to be a major focus of our attention. Almost a year ago, we submitted, through the North Southampton Community Forum, comments on the first major consultative document on the new Local Plan that will determine planning policy in the City for the next few years. The main thrust of our comments was to try to avoid perpetuating the overdevelopment that has significantly disfigured large parts of our city. We also expressed concern about the continuing expansion of student numbers and the consequential pressure on the city's housing stock.

Turning to individual applications, our Hon Sec, Barbara Claridge, has done excellent work on a number of applications during the year, but planning rules on permitted development – being extended by the Government – have made objections harder. This is especially true of more landlords converting loft spaces and being granted larger HMO licences. In particular this has resulted in increased student density in areas that are already saturated even before the university expansion. Finally on planning, we

supported the Council with an objection to proposed residential extensions on the back of a retail unit on Portswood Broadway in May and are currently awaiting the appeal decision.

The other major local preoccupation has been crime. The Highfield Crime Information Sharing WhatsApp Group – ably managed by Nadine Johnson – continues to collect and transmit information about local crimes. Details of reported incidents are on our website. We have had a number of useful liaison meetings with the local police and are hopeful that once again they will be able to attend our meetings on a regular basis.

Finally, we have been pleased by the progress made by Dawn Ballantyne and her team of Rangers on the Common and other local green spaces. An article by Dawn appears in our current Newsletter. HRA's area coverage was unaffected by the Ward boundary changes in May (we have always had a few members in Swaythling). We have however been delighted to be able to welcome the attendance of the Swaythling Ward Councillors, alongside the Portswood Councillors, at our Committee meetings and are very pleased to see them here this evening.

Our membership numbers have remained steady at around 350 households. A few have chosen not to renew but we have had 45 new members since the start of the year. I would encourage all members to join/renew using Bank Transfer whenever possible: details are in the Newsletter and the website.

I should like to finish by thanking three sets of people for their contribution to our work.

First, the HRA Committee and especially Barbara Claridge, Martin Benning, Nadine Johnson, the Digital Comms Co-ordinator, Nicolla Martin, who as membership Secretary, also coordinates the volunteering delivery work of our Street Reps, for whose help I should like to express mine and the Committee's great appreciation and Ken Burtenshaw, who designed a new HRA logo and the banner and also puts the Newsletter together for printing.

Second, our friends and partners: the Ward Councillors from Portswood and Swaythling, University representatives and members of sister associations.

Third, those local businesses who support us. In particular, Pearsons (who sponsor our Newsletter) as well as the many local firms, listed on our website, which offer discounts on production of our membership card, the combined value of which is worth many times the value of our £10 annual subscription. Particular thanks are due here to Nadine Johnson for her tireless work in ferreting out and liaising with our business partners.

To conclude. I am sure you will agree that HRA is an active, effective, efficient and well supported community organisation. But to continue to be so it will go on needing your support and subscriptions. Many thanks for coming this evening and for listening to me.

RB

## 5. Financial Report

### a. Presentation of the Accounts 2022

The Examined Accounts for 2022 had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

The Treasurer, Martin Benning, reminded the meeting that these accounts were for the calendar year 2022. His full report is in Annex ii.

### b. Approval of Accounts for 2022

Professor Brown sought approval of the 2022 Accounts. This was agreed by the meeting. c.

### Committee recommendation regarding Membership Fees

The Treasurer proposed that the HRA household membership fee would remain at £10 for the following year from January 2024. This was approved.

### d. Ratification of the Accounts Examiner

The Chair proposed that Malcolm White be ratified as the Examiner of Accounts for the following year 2024. This was approved.

## 6. Ratification and Election of committee members

a. The Hon. Secretary explained that members usually served for a three-year period and, if willing to continue, their position on the committee was ratified at the AGM. She was pleased to confirm that Professor Brown was willing to continue as Chair of HRA and thanked him for his leadership during the previous three years. The meeting approved this appointment and also that of Jerry Gillen and Stephen Connolly.

b. Christine Rawnsley had been co-opted onto the committee during the past year and the meeting approved her appointment as a full committee member.

c. **An exceptional agenda item** was taken. HRA member, Bill Newnam announced that he was active in securing a graffiti-free Highfield. He knew of two garages in Heatherdeane Road that had been graffitied and asked if anyone knew who owned them so that he could ask permission before cleaning off the graffiti otherwise it could be viewed as a criminal act. Prof. Brown thanked Bill and said the request would be posted on HRA Social Media.

## Close of the Annual General Meeting

The AGM closed at 8.20pm

Following the meeting a Members' Reception was held between 8.20pm – 9.00pm

**Annex i. COUNCILLOR SATVIR KAUR HRA AGM 14<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2023**

Councillor Kaur began by speaking about the Council's proposals for a bus gate in Portswood Broadway. The second round of consultation had been completed and the Council was now processing the 'thousands' of responses. She acknowledged the HRA response, on which she offered her personal reflections. The outcome of the consultation was not predetermined. No decisions had been made. The Council would be working with the community to get the best outcome for the local area. Everyone wanted to see improvements. They were certainly looking at the option of a phased implementation. Local business was also in favour of a gradual approach.

There were five more general priorities for the city, most of them focused on making Southampton a place to be proud of. Jobs and skills training were vital as the world of work was changing. Younger people were being lured away from the city centre. Cost of living issues were not confined to the poorest. They would be developing the Warm Welcome scheme in libraries and Community Spaces where it was possible to get a hot meal.

Food distribution was a major issue. Should we be relying on food banks? A safer city was another priority, as was improving the performance of some private landlords, the subject of a Council Scrutiny inquiry. There was increased homelessness as a result of insecure tenancies. Community Wardens would work alongside the police on issues like vagrancy. The Council was spending capital funds on infrastructure to combat anti-social behaviour.

The Council attached a high priority to greening the city. There would be improvements in the handling of food waste with a new plant to facilitate recycling. There were more Green Flag parks including Portswood Rec.

Another priority was affordability. The Council paid a real living wage to its staff (the minimum wage linked to inflation) as did a growing number of local employers such as the two universities, the hospital and ABP. Working with partners, the Council was trying to increase the number of affordable homes. Cheaper and better buses was another aim. A third of children in the city lived below the poverty line. At the other 'end', the Council was working with the universities and major employers to make the city an attractive place for graduates to want to remain.

Councillor Kaur was conscious of the need to continue to improve the physical environment, including especially roads and pavements. They were working hard on fly-tipping and litter. There was a longstanding need to improve access to the waterfront. The Council was exploring a river bus service in conjunction with Ocean Infinity, a local business, and Red Funnel. The issue currently was how it would be funded. The Council was also working hard to bring derelict buildings back into use.

Finally, Councillor Kaur recognised and endorsed the need for developments in the city to be better coordinated, with less done piecemeal and more strategy. To this end, the Council had set up a Renaissance Board with the major institutions and employers. This had identified three main priorities: enhancing the maritime city (ABP, the NOC, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency); a destination city (4 million people pass through the city every year, the follow-up to the City of Culture bid); and a sustainable city (not only the Green Agenda but also transport, housing and energy). In all of these areas the Council would continue to work closely with local communities and residents' groups.

**Annex ii Treasurer's Report 2022**

The standout points for the 2022 financial year:

- The net income for 2022 was £1831 compared to 2021 when it was £1602
- Total income for 2022 was £4393 compared to £3310 for 2021. This increase was due to increase income from subscriptions and donations (the subs were increased from £5.00 to £10.00) and a significant increase in income from advertising in the Newsletters. The increase in advertising was due to more newsletters being produced in 2022 compared to 2021 (affected by Covid in 2021).
- Total expenditure for 2022 was £2562 compared to £1709 for 2021. This increase was mainly due to two factors - an increase in meeting costs as the committee meetings moved from Zoom to face to face meetings here in the Church centre and a big increase in printing costs due to the Newsletter being printed after Covid.
- 60% of subscription income was from payment by cheque or cash with the rest coming from online payments.
- Our total amount in both the current account and savings account is just over £19,000. Keeping the subscription rate at £10 per household will continue for the near future as we continue to aim for a £20,000 fighting fund.

Martin Benning, Treasurer