

## **HRA CHAIR'S REPORT 2024**

Good evening. Welcome to our 48<sup>th</sup> AGM.

Last year I spoke about the role that HRA plays as a vehicle for channelling and crystallising the concerns of the local community on local issues. The past year has thrown up further examples of this role and provided further evidence of the need for HRA to have the continuing level of support shown by our 300+ household membership numbers.

Undoubtedly the most significant thing to affect our area over the past year has been the City Council's decision in January to proceed with the Portswood Broadway Scheme - the introduction of a 'bus gate' in the Broadway between Westridge Road and St Denys Spur Road and associated mitigation measures in Highfield and Portswood. As has already been mentioned I am involved with this project as chair of the group – the Portswood Steering Group - giving advice to the Council about the implementation of the project. So I had better be careful about what I say today and to speak chiefly as Chair of HRA.

In that capacity, I have stated previously that whilst there is some member support for the scheme, the majority are sceptical that the envisaged benefits in terms of traffic movements, the environment and the district centre will outweigh the potential loss of amenity and local business. Nevertheless HRA was determined to engage constructively with the Council and were indeed gratified when, having noted our concerns, the Council decided to introduce the measures on a trial basis in the first instance.

The Council's plans for the trial are now on the Council's website. Households in the roads mostly affected should have received a letter from the Council's agents, Balfour Beatty, bringing them up to date with the proposals and introducing the public consultation on the legal instruments – Traffic Regulation Orders or TROs – that will be needed for the proposals to be given effect. The trial will begin at the end of January and will last for six months. The PSG will be monitoring and evaluating the trial against Key Performance Indicators devised by the Council with input from the Group. The Group will then make recommendations to the Council about whether the Scheme should proceed and if so, on what terms. HRA will of course also be monitoring the position, responding to the Council and keeping members informed in the usual way. In the more immediate term, HRA will be making a formal response to the Orders. In particular, having previously, in 2021, pressed for a 20mph zone, we shall be supporting this aspect of the proposals and indeed suggesting that the new zone should cover the whole of Highfield not only the area covered by the ATZ.

Last year, too, I reported that crime had risen up our agenda as compared to previous years. This has unfortunately continued to be the case. Our Crime Information Sharing WhatsApp Group continues to collect information about possible crimes and works closely with the police and the City Council. We also have regular meetings with both sets of authorities. But I have to say, with regret, that their responses tend to depend on the availability and prioritisation of resources.

A particular problem over the last year has been the apparent rise of various forms of anti-social behaviour particularly in and around the Broadway. Together with the Broadway Scheme and the projected redevelopment of the Portswood Shopping Centre (the old Iceland building), this has very much thrown a spotlight on the Broadway. With the support of our Ward Councillors, I wrote to the Council Leader, Councillor Fielker, last month drawing her attention to the diminishing health of the Broadway and seeking a Council-led initiative to try to improve it. In the meantime the Council should delay formal consideration of the proposed new development. HRA urges all members witnessing anti-social behaviour to report it to the authorities - the Council's Community Safety Group and the Police using the channels advertised on our website.

On another transport issue. HRA has continued to press for the reinstatement of the U1 bus service. Before the redevelopment of the Central Station this was a vital and valued direct service for Highfield residents as well as the wider travel network (ferry, bus, train and airport). It was a key plank in the Council's strategy of improving connectivity across the City. So far there has been a failure to engage with us, the view apparently being taken that the replacement services are a good substitute, which they are not. In spite of the support from six Ward Councillors, our arguments have so far failed. However, we shall have another go at the Enhanced Bus Partnership meeting this time next week.

Finally, I should like to give the Association's thanks to a number of individuals and groups that are cardinal to our success.

First and foremost, I should like to thank the HRA Committee and especially our hard-working officers – Barbara Claridge (our Hon Sec), Nadine Johnson (Communications and Crime information co-ordination), Martin Benning (Hon Treasurer), Nicolla Martin (Membership). I'd also like to thank Ken Burtenshaw for his work on our excellent Newsletter and Malcolm White for his continuing work as our Accounts Examiner.

Next, our three Portswood Ward Councillors: Katherine Barbour, Marie Finn and John Savage. They all work tirelessly for our area, attend our meetings and are excellent counsellors and advisers.

Then, our partners from the University of Southampton, from local business, from the police and from our sister associations. Special thanks to Pearsons for their support of our Newsletter and to the wide range of local businesses that now offer discounts to members, discounts worth many times the value of your sub! Particular thanks here to Nadine Johnson for all her hard and successful work on this front.

So HRA has had another good year. But we shall only be able to continue if we can go on counting on your engagement and support. Support us by renewing your membership on time, by volunteering as a Street Rep or speaking to us about joining the Committee. so that we can carry on with all the good work on your behalf.

Thanks for coming and thanks for listening to me. I am now happy to answer any questions on what I have said.

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