

HRA Chair's Report AGM 11 November 2025



This has probably been HRA's busiest year ever. We have managed to somehow keep the show on the road and for that we owe a big debt to the HRA Committee and our officers and especially our Hon Sec, Barbara Claridge, and our Communications Officer, Nadine Johnson. As well as managing the Association's affairs with superb efficiency, Barbara does an excellent job in assessing and commenting on individual planning applications as well as handling planning queries. Nadine ensures that our communications are timely, economical and informative. Nadine also manages the HRA Crime Information Sharing WhatsApp Group, of which more shortly. Where we would be without these two superb colleagues I really do not care to think. Nicolla Martin as Membership Secretary and Martin Benning as Treasurer also contribute vital roles within the Association. I would also like to thank Ken Burtenshaw for his design work on our excellent printed Newsletter which is a really informative and professional document. I particularly commend Barbara and Nadine for keeping members informed of events over the summer holiday period.

I would also like to take this early opportunity to acknowledge the great help and support we receive from the three Ward Councillors for Portswood – Councillor Katherine Barbour, Councillor Marie Finn and Councillor John Savage. I would also like to thank the multi-talented John for providing us with our sound system this evening. Following the last Ward boundary changes, we also now welcome the three Councillors from Swaythling: Councillor Matt Bunday, Councillor Lorna Fielker and Councillor Thomas Gravatt. Finally, in this brief introduction, I should also like to welcome representatives of the University of Southampton - Gagandeep Bedi, the new Associate Director for Corporate Engagement – and of our sister associations.

The year since the last AGM in November last year has been dominated by various things affecting Portswood and especially Portswood Broadway, of which the now abandoned Bus Gate and the application to replace Portswood Shopping Centre with still more student

accommodation blocks are only the most significant. I shall say more about that and about the Avenue Campus proposals in a moment. Let me start with the central focus of the area, Portswood Broadway.

There is very little to add to what has already been said about the Portswood Project, of which the late and unlamented Bus Gate trial was a central feature. At an early stage – sensing the degree of Council commitment to the project but also the amount of local scepticism – HRA argued that the Council should conduct a trial of the scheme in the first instance and should involve representatives of the local community in the detailed working out. I am glad to be able to report that both points were accepted and I ended up chairing the Project Steering Group in an independent capacity.

At this point in time – as the Americans say – we are still completely in the dark – six months after the pausing of the Bus Gate – as to the Council's future plans for the Broadway as part of possible improvements to the Eastleigh/Southampton Corridor. I leave others to comment on whether this is an appropriate way to communicate with, and rebuild trust with, local communities, business and the many voluntary and community organisations in the area.

I mentioned earlier the Crime Information Sharing WhatsApp Group. This enables us to monitor local crime trends as well as provide valuable information to the authorities. It is clear that over the past year there has been an increase in various forms of anti-social behaviour in the Broadway and the immediately surrounding area. We have had several meetings with the Council and the police about it. We have supported, and indeed commended, the efforts of the local police and the Council's Community Safety team to get on top of the problem. But I am afraid that – even with greater community involvement in the form of reporting and awareness – neither has the resources to do so. This will also apply to the proposed introduction of a new Public Spaces Protection Order which is currently being prepared within the Council. We hope that when it is introduced the new Order will be vigorously enforced by the police and the Council's Community Safety Team.

This question of resources is also pertinent to what has become for me something of a King Charles's Head, namely the deterioration of the area's centrepiece, Portswood Broadway, as a District Centre.

In October last year I wrote to the then Council Leader drawing attention to the loss of valued independent shops and their replacement by food takeaways, the increase in anti-social behaviour and the deterioration in the fabric of the Broadway. I proposed that a joint Council/community group should try to develop a strategy for the Broadway, possibly along the lines of the Portswood Project Steering Group. The letter was prompted by the decision of the Council's planning panel in August last year to allow a takeaway food outlet to occupy the premises of Portswood Hardware. At the panel, the case officer, recommending approval of the application, was reported as saying that there was currently no specific policy on concentration of food establishments in a locality, adding that it would be a 'very subjective' judgement to say that there were too many in Portswood.

The response I got was that my idea was interesting but the Council was not in a position to contribute any resources to it. I therefore withdrew the suggestion on the basis that I could not see (a) any value in proceeding without the Council as the relevant local authority, or (b) why local people should volunteer their time and effort when the Council was not prepared to do so. At the time of this meeting, we still await the Council's plans for restoring the health of our various District Centres, of which Portswood is one of the most significant, but once again the timescale is currently unclear.

Finally, we now have the proposals for additional purpose-built student residential accommodation on the Broadway and on the University of Southampton's Avenue Campus. HRA objected to the first and has just objected to the second. In both cases we have been reflecting the overwhelming views of our members. I will not go into detail here, but what is perhaps of most concern is that the Council appears to have no policy for ensuring that the consequences of the University's further expansion are fully debated and considered before the necessary decisions are taken on individual developments.

You may think that this is a very curious argument for a former Vice Chancellor to be making. But as a resident of Southampton for more than 30 years, I am very conscious of the impact of the late 80s/early 90s higher education expansion on the supply of family homes and the unplanned expansion of HMOs (if you doubt this, just walk down Portswood Road and look into the roads on the right south of Waitrose). Let me be clear. It is not the further expansion that I object to – although bearing in mind my other life as a writer on higher education policy, I do wonder where the additional students will be coming from, given the imminent home demographic downturn, the increasingly competitive international market and the way in which big suppliers like China and India are seeking to become more self-sufficient – but the fact that the Council just appears to be complacent or laissez-faire about the whole thing. If this is incorrect, I hope someone will tell me.

Incidentally, I do understand the argument that building on the campus and/or in purpose-built blocks, relieves pressure on family housing. I have always doubted this but in any case, as HRA's strong and detailed objections to both these developments demonstrate, there can be serious detriments to the local area and community wherever the blocks are built.

Finally, we continue to belong to the National Organisation of Residents Associations and get good value from our subscription.

And finally, finally, you will have gathered that next year HRA will celebrate 50 years of action. It is not too soon to be thinking of how we do so and the HRA Committee will be discussing this at their next meeting on 9th December. Please send your ideas to the Hon Sec. There will be a small prize for the most interesting suggestion...

Thank you for listening to me.

Prof. Roger Brown, Chair, HRA

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