



## Provisional Minutes of Highfield Residents Association 40<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

Held on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2016  
Highfield House Hotel 7.30pm

Present	Roger Brown,	Chair
	Jerry Gillen	Vice Chair
	Jill Baston,	Secretary
	Chris Klewe	Minutes Secretary
	Mark Batchelor	Treasurer
Attending	Ward Councillors, Committee members, Guests from other local Associations and 70 HRA members.	

1. Welcome  
Roger Brown welcomed all HRA members, Ward Councillors, Representatives of the University, the Police and other guests.  
  
Apologies were received from Bryan Wakely, Simon Hill, Alan Whitehead, Simon Rowbury, Councillor Matthew Claisse, Gene Wawman and Mr & Mrs C Price.
2. Minutes of the previous AGM  
  
These were taken as read and approved.
3. Matters Outstanding  
There were no matters outstanding.
4. Chair's report.  
Roger Brown presented his report which is printed in full below. There were no questions raised from the floor.

5. Treasurer's Report.  
Copies of the Accounts were circulated, discussed and formally approved. The difference between restricted and unrestricted funds was queried and the Treasurer explained that restricted funds were reserved for specific projects (such as building bridges or certain planning appeals) and could not be used for general expenditure.  
A proposal to increase annual membership fees to £5 was formally proposed, seconded and approved by members.

6 Election and Ratification of Committee Members

Mark Batchelor and Steven Johnston were confirmed as committee members. Oliver Dicker has agreed to continue as the Accounts Examiner.

7. Question and answer session

Members and Visitors were invited to raise any matters that concerned them.

? Many members raised concerns about the number and licensing of HMOs

A The Council officer responsible for HMO licensing, Karen Hunter, reported that it was going well.

? An update on the problem of rat infestation was requested.

A Steven Johnston reported that the Council were doing their best to reduce the rat population by poisoning and other works. He also indicated how much food was being put out weekly by the man concerned. To get any further with banning orders, specific visual evidence was required and this was proving difficult to obtain.

? The use of the Sainsbury's site for student accommodation rather than housing was queried..

A Adrian Vinson replied that it was disappointing but not illegal..

8. Local Council candidates standing for the Portswood Ward were invited to give a 5 minute presentation of what their parties would do for the local area. The candidates concerned were:-

Kieran Brown	Green Party
John Savage	Labour Party
Linda Norris	Conservative Party
Adrian Ford	Liberal Democrat Party.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm and was followed by an informal social

gathering.

## **HRA 40<sup>th</sup> AGM 14<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2016**

### **CHAIR'S REPORT**

I am pleased to present my Chair's report on the work of the Committee over the past year.

Once again we have benefitted from a stable membership. We were however delighted to co-opt Steven Johnston and Mark Batchelor, who has taken over from Headley Rossell as our new Treasurer. I shall shortly be asking the meeting to confirm these appointments. I should like to make a presentation on behalf of the Committee to mark Headley's many years of excellent service to HRA. As always, I thank all the officers and members of the Committee for their contribution to our work. I should like to say a special 'thank you' to our volunteer street representatives who do a great job as our 'eyes and ears' on the ground: we are most grateful for their help.

As well as Headley's retiring from the Committee, Adrian Vinson is stepping down as our Planning Coordinator. We are very grateful to Adrian for his assiduous work in this capacity and delighted that he is remaining on the Committee to assist us on planning and licensing issues from time to time. We do however need a new planning coordinator. This essentially involves scanning the Council's website to ensure we are aware of developments that may affect our area and checking that an appropriate response is made. I would like to ask if there is anyone here who would be able to do this for us. It is not especially onerous and requires no special knowledge or expertise in planning issues. I know that Adrian will be happy to provide whatever training is needed, and the Planning Sub Group will continue to write the necessary letters, etc. This year has been one of both successes and failures in the planning area.

On the plus side, we were delighted when an Inspector upheld the Council's rejection of the application to turn 13 Grosvenor Road from a family home into a multi-occupant dwelling. This was the third Appeal made on this property in the last five years, which suggests a serious imbalance in the planning system. This was a particular success because it would not have happened without the persistence of HRA and local residents, with legal advice and support from King's Chambers, and in the teeth of opposition from the then head of planning and the Council's legal officer. The more recent case of 38 Grosvenor, where a cognate application was also rejected, suggests that our victory on 13 Grosvenor may now be having a more positive effect on the Council's consideration of such matters, although the landlord has now appealed against the Council's decision on 38 Grosvenor. We are pleased that the HMO licensing scheme is rolling forward and producing convictions where appropriate. Karen Hunter, who is in charge of the scheme is here this evening and will be glad to take any questions members may have. Finally, on the plus side, we have noted a number of helpful appeal judgements in other parts of Southampton where unhelpful developments have been successfully resisted.

Somewhere between the plus and the minus side, we have commented in some detail on both the consultation on the revised Local Plan and the revised HMO SPD (details can be found on the website). We welcome the proposal in the revised SPD for a 10 per cent threshold city-wide, as well as the addressing of 'sandwiching'. But we are disappointed that there are still no proposals to deal with over-intensification of HMOs at ward level, especially where there is an exceptionally high transient population (for example, due to the presence of student halls of residence; I shall be saying a bit more about the student issue in a minute).

On the definitely minus side, we were very disappointed at the Planning Panel's decision to grant permission for Orchard Homes to erect more student accommodation at 224 Portswood Road at a time when the greatest need is for affordable homes for the City's people (as was indeed promised by the initial developers and accepted by the Council). As I said in my Chair's blog at the time, both the decision itself and the way it was arrived at left a good deal to be desired, not least the evident ignorance or unawareness of the Panel members of our local circumstances. We shall continue to press the Council to change the process so that there is a better chance of local knowledge being brought to bear on these critical decisions. What indeed is the point of having such panels if local knowledge is not used in this way?

The given justification for the Orchard Homes Development was the demand for more purpose-built accommodation for students at the University of Southampton. This was also the motivation for the subsequently abandoned proposal to convert this hotel into a large student residence, and for the proposals to reuse the B & Q site further towards Swaythling. These developments pose us with a dilemma (and I am well aware that I speak as a former VC).

On the one hand, the two universities are together one of the City's greatest assets, and we have no wish to harm them. In principle, purpose-built accommodation is positive if it frees up HMOs for family use. But the University of Southampton has expanded enormously in recent years and its students now represent a significant proportion, possibly as much as 40 per cent, of the local population. This means that there is a very clear risk of the area and its infrastructure being seriously unbalanced. HRA therefore sought a meeting with the new Vice Chancellor and the Council Leader to discuss these matters in the light of the University's continuing expansion. We have since had a constructive meeting with the new Chief Operating Officer at the University, Ian Dunn, and I look forward to further such meetings in due course.

Turning to other matters, as Simon Hill's report in the Newsletter shows, good progress continues to be made in clearing the Little Common and returning it to its historic condition and role. It was in accordance with this policy that HRA objected to the plans to enlarge Lovers Walk as a means of managing conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians along what is sometimes a very busy path. This was partly on the basis that we were not convinced that this was the best solution to the problem, and partly on the basis that we thought that too much weight was being given to the interests of cyclists at the possible expense of other users, especially pedestrians. The outcome is not yet known.

One thing which this issue has thrown up is the potential desirability of having a broadly-based representative forum which can act as a 'sounding board' for initiatives

and developments on the Common. With the agreement of the HRA Committee, we have begun discussions with other Residents' Associations and other interested parties with a view to establishing such a body. It appears that there is a good deal of support for this and an inaugural meeting is pencilled in for 7<sup>th</sup> June, at which Jerry Gillen, Simon Hill and I will represent HRA.

I am also delighted to report on the success of our new website, for which HRA owes Nadine Johnson and Ross Gordon a considerable debt of gratitude. We have so far exceeded 20,000 page views and 10,000 'hits', and many people tell us that they check it on a daily basis (see Nadine Johnson's article in the Newsletter). We are also expanding the range of companies that will offer us discounts. The website is proving an excellent vehicle for information but we also plan to continue with the printed Newsletter on an annual basis. We are very grateful to Caroline Knight for her excellent editorship of this popular and well regarded publication, which we shall publish as long as resources permit. I am incidentally sorry about the apparent non-delivery of copies in one or two places, which we are investigating.

We continue to work with the Southampton University Students Union on activities to bring students and residents together. Unfortunately the Curry and Quiz night in November was poorly attended on our side. We are however confident that our next social event – a tapas and paella evening at the Highfield House Hotel on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> of July – will be a success. Tickets can be bought here this evening. We also work closely with our three Ward Councillors – Matthew Claisse, Linda Norris and Paul O'Neill – all of whom attend our meetings when they can and give us very useful input, encouragement and advice, which we very much appreciate. We also appreciate the input of the local police although this has recently been somewhat sporadic, but we are very pleased to see Hayley Morrison here this evening and I am sure she will be very happy to answer any questions members may have.

In my report last year, I warned that our current subscription of £3 might not be sufficient to meet our needs, though we do receive donations that exceed this in total. It is many years since we raised the subscription and the Treasurer will be proposing an increase to £5 at this AGM. I hope that this will be acceptable to members.

Finally, I should mention that this report will almost be my last as HRA Chair. I have indicated that it is my intention to step down in April 2017. I am sure that the Committee will be able to find a suitable successor, but if any member would like to be considered for the role, the Secretary, Jill Baston ([highfieldrasec@gmail.com](mailto:highfieldrasec@gmail.com)), will be pleased to hear from you.

I am sure you will agree that this report gives a good indication of the range of matters with which the Association has been dealing over the past year. I am now very happy to answer any questions.

Roger Brown