



**Minutes of a special meeting of the RA Council held on 7 February 2012  
at Fellowship House at 8.00pm  
called to discuss the Final Report of the Council's Strategy Working Party\*  
and to decide on future action to be taken**

**\*See page 4**

**Present on 7 February:** Janet Elliott, in the Chair, Simon Abbott, Tony Brand, Jeremy Clynes, Tony Ghilchik, Eva Jacobs, David Lewis, David Littaur, Max Petersen, Judith Samson, Jonathan Seres, Gary Shaw, Richard Wakefield and Richard Wiseman

**Apologies:** Peter Beesley, Douglas Blausten, Terry Brooks, Alan Brudney, Charles Gale Colin Gregory, Stephanie Hurst, Rosalind Josephs, Will Sowerbutts, Geoffrey Spyer, and Ian Tutton

**Points of agreement and recommendations arising from discussion of the Strategy Working Paper Final Report:**

In connection with all the following there was strong support that any widening of the role for the RA should principally be project led and that the principal way to extend involvement in RA activities among residents was to engage them in specified projects.

1. Membership

1.1 Increase overall membership and level of active participation

Agreed there is a need to take action both to increase membership, and the level of active participation by members in the work of the RA; also wherever practicable to involve a wider age group.

Action & timing

Initially by Membership Secretary to begin to strengthen Membership Team; and urgent need to identify person/s willing to advise and devote time to this work; recruit replacement Chair of Membership when role has been redefined.

1.2 Investigate possible redefinition of membership criteria

Set up small group to investigate possibility and implications of a change from household to individual membership and/or allowing all adult (including young adults) members of a household to become individual members and/or to vote at AGM and Special General Meetings.

Noted that proposal, if carried forward, would require a change in the RA Constitution; implications must be fully worked-through and costed.

### Action and Timing

Complex – requires commitment of a small group with legal input and dedication. No action until individuals identified.

## 2. Finances & Staffing

2.1 Agreed that increased availability of financial information in the year just ended is a significant improvement. Agreed there is a need for review of the proportion of income to be allocated to specific types of activities. Recognised that RA must have sufficient flexibility in its expenditure pattern to cover reasonable additions to annual expenditure on activities which arise out of changes agreed after the start of the financial year and agreement on the budget;

2.2 Agreed that use of self-employed part-time paid specialists to undertake particular duties is accepted. This includes the roles of Secretary to the Council and bookkeeper which are a necessity in present conditions to enable the association to function, as for many years volunteers have not been found to undertake this work.

2.3 Not accepted that **all** events can or should aim to be self-financing. (For example, entry to community events in public spaces are considered to have continuing value but cannot by their nature be fully recharged to attendees.)

Action and timing - by Hon Treasurer with advice from EC and Events Committee

## 3 Relationships with the Trust

3.1 The need for the RA to both co-operate with the HGS Trust and to challenge it if and when occasion arises remains fully recognised;

3.2 Full recognition also needed of present level of interaction between the RA and Trust and the role which RA Committees and their members presently fulfil in achieving a good RA-Trust working relationship.

Recognition of value of RA representation on various Trust Committees and the extent to which this has increased in the recent past as has the degree and frequency of informal consultation. The Trust Officers have addressed an RA Open meeting in recent months and remain available for discussion on matters of common interest and concern.

3.3 The benefits of planned meetings (on a regular basis) between RA Council members and Trust Officers and both elected and appointed Trustees was not wholly accepted, as members present felt that meetings were most effective when there was a currently justified specific purpose. However, this issue could be taken up again with the Trust.

### Action and timing.

Ongoing - spearheaded by EC and Committee Chairs with interests which need close working relationships with Trust.

## 4 Relationship with LBB

4.1 Agreed that the possibility of a more formal/ regular consultation basis between Councillors and Officers of LLB be further explored. However, the meeting was uncertain whether more regular meetings on general topics were a practicable or a more effective form of communication.

4.2 Suggest that 4.1 be first discussed with Suburb Ward Councillors.

Noted that LBB also co-ordinates on borough wide policies through FORAB (Federation of Residents Associations in Barnet) of which HGS RA is a member.

4.3 Noted that to date it has not proved practicable to engage the interest of the East Finchley Councillors who are the elected representatives of the part of HGS which is a part of the East Finchley electoral ward.

4.5 Noted that help from both Councillors and Officials has been frequent and helpful in respect of the 'Save our Market Place Library' campaign, and that LBB specifically chose to negotiate with the RA.

#### Action

Chairman and Vice to initiate a further discussion with Suburb Ward Councillors in the near future and seek an understanding as to how relationships might be improved.

## 5 Focus Groups

5.1 These were proposed in the paper and were supported in principle by members present especially for short term issues or issues on which an input from local experts who are not necessarily currently involved in RA affairs, could be crucial. They might also be used should the RA wish to take up some aspect of education or health policy. However, broadening RA involvement in those issues on a general ongoing basis was not supported.

5.2 The idea of the RA maintaining a list of local experts was accepted in principle but the practicalities of collection and maintenance of such a list and data protection issues would need to be explored before a final decision on the keeping of such a list was agreed.

5.3 Focus Groups could also be used by RA Standing Committees to pursue specific aspects of their ongoing work.

Action This initiative to be implemented as projects are identified.

## 6. Appointment of a Development Officer-Executive

Subject to affordability, the meeting could see the potential value of such appointment/s. However, the range of possible activities/responsibilities proposed for the position holder as listed in the paper was not considered well made, and the issue of the co-ordination of his/her work given the width of the brief was questioned. Further work was needed before any recruitment could be agreed.

## 7. Publicise our achievements

7.1 There was general support for the already extended range of promotion of the RA and its activities which had gone on over the past year, which owed much to the work of the

membership team and publications committee, and had also been suggested by earlier reports of the Strategy Working Group.

7.2 There was support for the idea that continued effort should be put into promoting the RA , what it stands for and what it does. This it was felt should cover all appropriate areas of the work of the RA and not just those specifically mentioned in the Strategy Report.

### 7.3 Implementation

It was agreed, subsequent to the meeting, that the RA seek to identify a PR specialist who would donate his/her services to the advising the RA on further improvements . (PR specialist already identified as at 20.2.12)

## 8. Implementation Committee

The meeting was unable to support the idea of a single implementation committee with responsibilities across the full range of issues raised, but supported the idea of appointing a person or persons to facilitate implementation where action was supported.and any resulting costs were justified.

### Other Business – Financial decision requiring urgent action.

As notified on the agenda for the meeting, the Council was asked to make a decision on whether to continue to support the Proms at St Jude's in 2012 by becoming a silver sponsor including being the sponsor of the lunch time concerts at a total cost of £2,750. If the RA was to meet the deadline for inclusion of our sponsorship in time for this to be recorded in the advance publicity, the decision needed to be taken at this meeting. The Council voted 10 votes for and with one abstention to become a Silver Sponsor of the Proms for 2012.

The meeting close at 10.10pm

**\*Note: The RA Council decided on 6 March 2012 that the Working Party Report be appended to the minutes of 7 February when they are posted on the RA website.**

**Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association  
Strategy Working Group  
Final Report**

This is the Working Group's third and final report to the RA Council. The earlier reports were presented in November 2010 and March 2011.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The RA need to adopt a Strategic Plan which will

Re-Confirm its mission statement and objectives

Stem Membership decline

Set out its core areas of operation and concern

Set out its policies on major issues

Set out the nature of its relationships with local organisations (incl. the LBB)

Set out a committee structure to help address and monitor these core areas of interest and a reporting procedure

Ensure that its structure offers opportunities to call upon a wealth of talent found amongst residents or provide such opportunities outside the structure.

- Ensure that the work it does and the targets it sets reach out to the people whom it aims to serve and represent
- Redesign its Executive and Council structure and meetings content to make these meetings more attractive to people
- Continue to do well what it is already doing.

**OUR MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

Our views have been set out in our Interim Reports but we highlight the following:

**Membership**

Membership is static and ageing – not representing the cross section of the community adequately. It is not fair or practicable to have left this in the hands of the chairman and urgent steps must be taken to recruit additional members on a significant scale.

We consider that this is a key issue because if we cannot proactively work to engage and attract younger members we cannot bring about major positive changes for the RA. To recruit new members we need to create an environment that is attractive for them to want to contribute and therefore we need to change and extend the menu of activities and skills we are seeking from the community.

We recommend that the Residents Association allow adults in households to have a vote. It is a consideration we consider to be important.

**Finances**

Considerable improvements have been made in recent months to the RA's record keeping and controls. This now provides an opportunity to consider how RA funds should be spent, both in terms of policy and in relation to individual projects. This should be done before the next AGM if possible.

We need to allocate and use our funds to improve what we do and offer to the community. A spending policy should be adopted consistent with the aims of the RA, and other than trivial amounts, all expenditure should fall clearly within the policy.

Where we put on activities for the community we should seriously seek to ensure that we can make these as self financing as possible so that we can concentrate our funds on our main priority.

## **Development Officer**

We repeat our previous recommendation that serious consideration must be given to the appointment of a paid part-time Development Officer. If the activities of the RA grow in the direction recommended, the administrative burden placed on the RA Chairman, and the Chairmen of committees will become difficult to carry efficiently and could prove a disincentive to those who might otherwise be prepared to take on these roles. We do not believe that the RA can be expected to achieve a deliverable and 'driven' programme without a paid position, in today's climate.

The roles of the paid part time Development Officer (DO) would include:

assisting the implementation of the activities of the key committees and recruitment of new active members for the various activities of the RA;  
acting as the Community Liaison Officer with Schools, Adult Education, Cultural and Religious bodies and local businesses to help implement the various programmes of Committees; and  
coordinate and ensure active representation on Local and National organisations in a forward looking way, to enhance the contribution of the RA.

There would be an element of payment to support secretarial services. The ability of the RA to finance this position is crucial. This expenditure should be part of the overall review of financing recommended elsewhere in this paper.

An Implementation Committee should be established to:

- Recruit a DO; and
- in the interim carry forward the recommendations of this report.

## **Wider Representative Role**

As indicated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> interim report, the RA could provide a valuable conduit for the views of residents on matters beyond those which are strictly local. Education and Health Services are obvious matters. In addition the RA could be the best route for residents to respond to the increasing use of consultation by local authorities and others.

## **Relationship with HGS Trust**

As previously mentioned, residents often find it difficult to distinguish between the Trust and the RA. We need to develop a systematic relationship with the Trust to:

1. Challenge the Trust (and to be seen to challenge the Trust) about individual matters, and in relation to the Trust's own long term plans in cases where the RA does not feel that the best interests of residents are being served. This might include for example elements of conservation and planning issues and the Trust's own role.
2. Co-operate with and assist the Trust on matters where there is no conflict of interest.

## **Relationship with London Borough of Barnet**

Any improvement that has taken place since the Working Group started its work has been slight. Relationships with Councilors and officials are ad hoc, and it is not clear that the RA is looked on as a serious representative of HGS residents, or that residents themselves or the Suburb are regarded as an important component of the borough.

The RA should be added as an automatic consultee on matters within the Ward.

These changes will require the cooperation of Councillors and Officials. This cooperation should be sought through direct discussions.

### **Education and Young People**

We fail to engage with local schools (also in Hampstead and other areas of London where Suburb school children attend) and educational /religious organisations working with them to provide resource materials (including lecturing) and formulate course work and course opportunities on the History, Historical Connections (eminent people); architecture and town planning history and environmental issues about the Suburb and its important place in the London Story. The RA should develop resources to enable it to do these things.

### **Focus Groups – bringing in local skills and expertise**

By building an effective database and with the help of a Development Officer we can aim to build and task Focus Groups to look at

- Environmental issues affecting Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas – engaging with other organisations with expertise including the Prince’s Regeneration Trust, the Department of Energy and Climate Change, built environment groups such as the RICS and RIBA, University of Cambridge Centre for Climate Mitigation Research etc... where there is a huge debate in which we neither participate nor benefit from their research in an applied manner.
- Alternative energy uses in the Suburb.
- Policy documents on Planning and Design matters (in addition to the outstanding Design Guide that exists).
- Policy documents on issues such as retailing centres affecting the Suburb; adequacy and type of provision of medical services for residents in the changing NHS world.

### **Publicising Successes**

The RA achieves a great deal with limited resources. Too few residents are aware of work which includes:

- The work of the Trees and Open Spaces Committee, including tree preservation;
- The Garden Suburb Gallery; and
- The library group

The profile of the RA could be raised considerably by giving more publicity to its involvement in these and similar matters.

### **PROGRESS TO DATE ON OUR FIRST INTERIM REPORT**

In our March Report we recommended the following priorities:

1. Membership Committee: we believe that additional members should be co-opted to the Committee who are prepared to spearhead a membership drive. Their function will be entirely different from the continuing renewals function, but by being on the committee they will have access to the database and the opportunity to add inserts to the delivery/mail shots.
2. Focus groups – these should be established ad hoc to consider short term issues
3. Communications (per the interim report) – the first step to updating the list of email addresses is, we understand, in hand to coincide with the February/March renewal delivery.

4. Structure – the Executive Committee and Council should function as intended under the Constitution.
5. Meetings with the Trust and LBB to be instituted on a regular basis.
6. Committees – encourage ad-hoc membership for particular issues, or generally to interest a wider net in HGS & add to RA's abilities.

It must be emphasised yet again that these matters themselves do not constitute a strategy but are an essential condition for any strategy adopted. It is therefore disappointing that so little has been achieved so far. Following the above numbering, progress can be summarised as follows:

- 1 No progress
- 2 No progress
- 3 The email list is in the process of updating both as to the accuracy and completeness of the list and new software has been purchased. 1,400 of 2,000 members are now on the list although 100 need updating. However, a recent exchange shows that even the criteria for inclusion on the hgslist (which is separate, but has important links) are not well understood.
- 4 Moving to two-monthly Council meetings, and shifting back to the Executive those functions intended by the constitution to be handled by it, has been implemented. It is too early to say if this is a success, but the breathing space given by giving up half the Council meetings has already been used to hold two open meetings of RA members.
- 5 This has not been done, although there is a general acceptance of the need to distinguish the RA from the Trust in the minds of Residents. The recommendation is still however work in hand.
- 6 There has been limited co-option on to some committees, in particular Consam; however the majority of other committees seem to have made no progress in this regard; it cannot be emphasised too strongly that without the rejuvenation intended to be brought about by the recommendation there is little chance of refreshing the RA so keenly needs. Failure in this regard will make implementation of the 6 year retirement rule near impossible.

With the exception of the first item we have not attempted to prioritise the issues as they represent a coherent whole.

## **CONCLUSION**

The preparedness of Council and the Executive to adopt the suggestions already made and to regard it as their responsibility to take them forward (rather than leave them to the Working Group to implement) is extremely disappointing and has left this Working Group with the sense that there is no real commitment to embrace change. The issues are well enough set out above and in the earlier reports and the limited success of the RA in implementing them is regrettably self-evident.

December 2011 - End