

Sopwell Residents Association
Minutes of AGM held 8th May 2018
At Mandeville School, St Albans

Those signed in attendance sheet: R Douglas, M Douglas, A Lunn, J Taylor, R Taylor (Chair), Jo Cooney (Secretary), J Charles, J Welch, J Smith, L Hobbs, M Fewnsolme, S Norman, J Hill, H Morris, S Peters, K Lilly, F Burrows, M Mackenzie, B Mackenzie, B Bateman, L Bateman, I Grant, Dist Cllr J Smith, A Johnstone, M James (Treasurer), Gail Jackson

1. The Chairman (Rick Taylor) welcomed everyone to the AGM and especially said how the committee appreciated the work done on Sopwell's behalf by all our Councillors.
2. Apologies were noted from Dist Cllr Shakir Rahman (who was attending an induction for new Councillors), Dist Cllr Eileen Harris (who was on holiday), County Cllr Sandy Walkington (who was attending another meeting), Ann and Peter Wares, and Willem Hoffland.
3. The minutes of the AGM held on 9th May 2017 were approved as a true record of that meeting.
4. There were no matters arising from the Minutes.
5. **Treasurers Report:**
Mark James circulated the Statement of SRA Accounts for the year to 31st March 2018. The Accounts showed a Closing Balance at Bank of £2,958.42. Mark said we should have received a grant from St Albans District Council of £100 for lodging our AGM minutes with them which has not yet been forthcoming. Jo Cooney said that she would contact the Council to follow this up. Jennifer Taylor proposed that the Accounts for 2018 be adopted and this was seconded by Steve Peters.
Rick thanked Mark for presenting such a clear and concise report of the year's expenditure.
6. Annual Report prepared and presented by Jo Cooney, Secretary, as follows:

Walks

Maggy Douglas started off the new term by leading 13 Sopwell residents (and a few from Park Street) on a walk around the fields and footpaths of Sopwell on 14th May 2017. The circular route started at Mandeville School, went through Hedges Farm and back via Goreham Drive and Abbots Avenue.

She also then finished the year with a "Sopwell Secrets" walk as part of the Sustainable St Albans week, leading a group of 27 from the Nunnery Green Space, taking in local sights such as Sir Richard Lee's ruins, the willow tunnel, the mighty cedar tree and the pre-fabs. The weather held and it was a wonderful way to spend the afternoon.

Willow tunnel

Maggy and Barry have done a super job on maintaining the willow tunnel at the back of the Nunnery Green Space keeping it looking spruce. Maggy's walk went through the tunnel on the last Sunday in April.

Sopwell Project

Sandy Norman has continued to do a marvellous job of chronicling the local history, which can be found on the site www.sopwellmemories.org.uk. The latest post is on Betty Entwhistle house, from its opening in the 1970s to its demolition last year.

The SRA held a Charity Market stall in the city centre on Saturday 3rd June 2017. There were displays of local history, and the committee gave away over 100 of ex-officio committee member Sandy's wonderful and informative book *Sopwell: a history and collection of memories*. Copies of the book can be purchased from Waterstones or via the website.

The SRA also supports the proposed St Albans Market Project, aiming to record the oral history of the city centre market.

Communications

Web communications

Sopwell Residents Association's Facebook page has been going strong for over a year now, thanks to Janet Charles. The page now has over 300 members and has been a useful way to publicise events. Thank you also to Peter Segers who manages the SRA's web page www.sopwell.org.uk.

Newsletter

Two newsletters are produced each year, keeping residents abreast of local events and sent out to all 3,000 residents of Sopwell. Thanks to Barry Bateman (editor), Maggy Douglas (distribution co-ordinator) and the team of local volunteers who deliver the newsletters, who all did a great job as usual. If you are interested in writing an article for the next newsletter or hiring advertising space, then please contact Barry Bateman. Anyone able to help deliver the newsletters, please contact the SRA Secretary on info@sopwell.org.uk.

Consultations and meetings

There's been much proposed change in the last year, and the SRA committee (both individually and collectively) have contributed to, amongst others, consultations including The Local Plan 2018; St Albans District Council Parking Workshop; the Sopwell Nunnery Greenspace Action Plan; and the River Ver Improvement Project. In addition:

- We have held six committee meetings during the year.
- Rick Taylor attended meetings of the Combined Group of Residents Associations.
- Rick Taylor attended meetings of the City and Neighbourhoods Committee of St Albans City and District Council.
- Rick Taylor and Janet Charles attended Ward Co-ordinators meetings of St Albans and District Neighbourhood Ward Co-ordinators.
- Willem Hofland has attended meetings of the Bus Users Forum.
- Willem Hofland has attended meetings of the Housing Consultative Forum.

Other local organisations

Sopwell Litter Pickers: We thank Holly Morris for taking over the annual litter pick and expanding it into a fantastically run monthly event, advertised on the group's Facebook page. The local area looks much cleaner as a result.

Cottonmill and Sopwell Hub (C.A.S.H.): We acknowledge the hard work of Janet Charles and Michelle Mackenzie in raising the local need for a community hub and fully support them in their efforts.

Committee Structure and Changes

Stepping down

Thanks to all the work and effort put in by the committee over the past year. The following are standing down:

- Rick Taylor is standing down as Chairperson.
- Mark James is standing down as Treasurer.
- Jennifer Taylor is standing down as Minutes Secretary and from the Committee.
- Maggy Douglas is standing down as newsletter distributor and walk leader and from the Committee.

Standing for Committee

The following people are putting themselves forward for election / re-election:

Barry Bateman, Janet Charles, Jo Cooney, Jack Hill, Willem Hofland, Gail Jackson, Mark James, Karen Lilly, Steve Peters, Rick Taylor.

The following are prepared to be elected as officers:

Chairperson: Janet Charles

Vice Chairperson: Barry Bateman

Treasurer: Jo Cooney

Secretary: Karen Lilly

Sandy Norman, Peter Wares and Peter Segers are filling ex-officio support roles to the committee.

Any Sopwell resident is entitled to stand at the AGM for any office mentioned above. Please let us know if you are interested in joining the committee and/or standing for a role.

Jo Cooney May 2018

Rick thanked Jo for presenting such a full and interesting report of the year's activities.

7. Janet Charles was the meeting's keynote speaker and gave a presentation and report on the Cottonmill and Sopwell Hub (CASH), which was prepared by her jointly with Michelle Mackenzie, as follows:

"Over the years Cottonmill and Sopwell has lost it's community focus. Unlike most other St. Albans estates, we have no community centre, no social club and now we no longer have a community pub.

But our community is still growing. The Betty Entwistle site will introduce 40 new apartments and the Abbey View development (the old Ford Credit building) a further 78, one and two bedroom apartments. An undisclosed amount of temporary accommodation units are being proposed for the King Offa site and plans are underway to build two new apartment blocks, consisting of 18 units, on the site of the Sopwell Youth Club and to demolish garages in Holyrood Crescent and build two, two bedroom houses.

The Council have been aware for many years that Cottonmill and Sopwell desperately needs a community hub. Back in 2011 the 'new' Strategic Local Plan promised that a new hub would be provided but, seven years on, nothing has happened.

In February a group of residents got together and began talking about this issue. And shortly afterwards the Cottonmill And Sopwell Hub campaign began.

The campaign is being coordinated by a core group of residents known as the CASH Team and over the past couple of months we've been very busy!

We've been actively pursuing an initial meeting with Richard Shwe and Julian Daly at the council to discuss the possibility of a hub. Mr. Shwe has responsibility for community buildings in Sopwell and Cllr. Daly is a former leader of the council. We're hopeful that a date for that meeting will be set shortly.

We also want our campaign to be discussed at a meeting of the full council members and to do this we must present a petition. We currently have an ePetition running on the council's website and have been out and about collecting signatures on paper too. We needed 500 signatures and we currently estimate that we have approx. 750.

We've set up a Facebook group which currently has over 200 members and we're on Twitter as well.

We've been doing lots of research. We've talked with other church and club buildings in our community. We've also investigated other community centres – how they're managed, how they're funded, what services they provide, what is successful and what issues they face. We recently visited Fleetville Community Centre and chatted with staff and we're looking to a visit to another local community centre very soon. We've also been asking residents what they would like to use a community hub for and we currently have a list of about 50 suggestions.

We've also been talking with established local groups and businesses who've expressed an interest in using a new community space. So far that includes the Sopwell Communities Trust, St. Albans District Foodbanks, Sopwell & Verulam Children's Centre, local Home Schooling groups, Play Street Café and some local fitness groups. We're also liaising with the St. Albans Weighlifting Club, who have been running a club in the Sopwell Youth Club building for the past 33 years.

We also have the full support of our local Labour and Lib Dems and of the Sopwell Residents Association.

And we've spent a lot of time out and about in the community, talking to residents and raising awareness of our campaign. We've been distributing posters and leaflets, we've held two open meetings, we spent a whole day in Sainsburys chatting to people and collecting signatures and we've spent a freezing cold morning on the Alban Way surveying passers-by.

Unfortunately, all campaigns incur costs, things like printing, advertising, hiring rooms for meetings etc, so we've had to start some small scale fundraising. We now have a fundraising page on Facebook. One of our team members held a St. George's Day afternoon tea and the lovely people who came along donated nearly £90. And on Sunday 17th June the Hare & Hounds will be holding their annual 'Father's Day Garden Party' and Elaine, the landlady has kindly offered to raise funds for the CASH campaign.

What we'll be doing next...

We'd love to hear from anyone who'd like to help with the campaign! We would especially love to hear from anyone that has any experience in areas such as legal, businesses, grant applications or anyone who is interested in doing investigative work.

We also need to formalise a committee. We will be looking for nominations for Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Vice Secretary, Treasurer and Vice Treasurer. Our next meeting, the date of which is to be arranged, will be to vote people in to these roles."

Following Janet and Michelle's report there was general discussion from the floor about the hub and in particular the possibility of obtaining a Lottery Grant.

Rick thanked Janet and Michelle for their presentation and wished them every success with CASH.

8. Rick welcomed PCSO Che Ponton and PC Ben Kirby to the meeting. The meeting was advised that Sopwell would be having a new PCSO – Donna Peters. PCSO Ponton and PC Kirby discussed with the meeting various issues relating to St Albans and Sopwell in particular and reiterated the fact that the general public had to be the eyes and ears of the local police as the force was now spread so thinly around the district. They told the meeting about the St Albans Community Safety Partnership.
9. Election of SRA Management Committee: As was advised in Jo Cooney's report some changes were to be made to the officers of the committee as follows: Rick was standing down as Chairman, Mark James as Treasurer and Jo Cooney as secretary, although they were all prepared to stay on the committee. Maggie Douglas and Jennifer Taylor were standing down from the committee.

Rick said that it had been a pleasure to be chairman of the SRA and work with the committee. Jennifer therefore nominated Janet Charles to take over the chairmanship which nomination was seconded by Barry Bateman.

Mark James nominated Jo to take over the role of treasurer which she agreed to and her nomination was seconded by Rick.
Karen Lilly was nominated by Jo to take on the role of secretary, which was seconded by Jennifer.

The membership of the management committee was now: Janet Charles (Chairman), Jo Cooney (Treasurer), Karen Lilley (Secretary), Rick Taylor, Steve Peters, Jack Hill, Mark James, Barry Bateman (Newsletter), Gail Jackson, Willem Hofland.

The formation of the new committee was formally proposed by Maggy Douglas and seconded by Roderick Douglas.

10. Announcements: Janet announced the National Big Lunch will take place on Sunday 3rd June.

The meeting was formally closed by Janet who had taken over the chair with thanks to everyone for attending.

Open forum and discussion took place over refreshments – with Jack Hill's rock buns taking pride of place as usual.