

**MINUTES OF SOPWELL RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION AGM
HELD AT ST JULIANS CHURCH ON WEDNESDAY 24 MAY
2022**

THOSE PRESENT: Janet Audley-Charles (Chairman), Karen Lilly (Secretary) via zoom, Brad Andrew (Treasurer) Gail Jackson, Jo Cooney, Steve Peters (via zoom), Mark James, Kate Swindells, Elaine Rainsford, Michelle Mackenzie, Raihaanah Ahmed, Sandy Norman, Fran Burrows, Mat Daniels (Manager Cycle Hub), Ed Jankowski, Teresa Frame, Chrissie Blanch, Muki Gorar (local Councillor), Emma Matanle (local Councillor), Sandy Walkington (District Councillor) Jesus Pastor, Rachele Mauro, Sarah Hall, Adelle Stapleton, Iain Grant, Liz James, Liz Boulter

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Janet welcomed everyone to the 17th AGM.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Jack Hill, Rick Taylor, Jenny Taylor, Peter Wares, Chantal Burns, Sarwar Shamser (local councillor), Shelley Hayles

3. MINUTES OF AGM HELD ON 24TH NOVEMBER 2020 VIA ZOOM

The minutes were approved as a true record. Proposed by Sandy Norman and Seconded by Michelle Mackenzie.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Report from November 2020 to May 2022

I am aware that the agenda is long, but this shows that SRA is active! It would be a worry if we had nothing to talk about.

We have to remember that the committee all volunteer, and each of us has very busy lives and different skill sets.

18 months has flown by since the last AGM.

Fewer things have happened **but** lots of work has gone on in the background.

Three newsletters have been sent out to around 3,000 residents. The most recent just this last week. A special thanks to Gail for the hours of work she put into design and editing. I am very grateful to the team of volunteers who enabled the delivery to take place.

It is interesting to see the very first newsletter of the SRA. Some things have changed, but sadly other things are still being worked on.

Despite the pandemic, with the impact of restrictions, Grow Sopwell has flourished.

And as everyone will hear from Michelle shortly the outcome of all the work that the C.A.S.H campaign group have been doing in the background is fantastic. With meetings, investigation, research and yet more meetings than you can imagine. The outcome was to make sure the Community Centre met and meets the needs of the community. Consultations had taken place to find out what the community wanted, and with a high degree of determination led the C.A.S.H campaign group to fight that these needs were met.

The C.A.S.H group worked phenomenally hard to raise funds including the bricks which now adorn one of the walls of the Community Centre. It goes to show how the community can come together to make things better for all!

Grow Sopwell has grown and flourished with regular events and working parties.

The committee members attend other meetings as well including the CNC.

The City Neighbourhoods Committee (CNC) makes decisions on important policy and financial issues involving eight wards in St Albans that do not have a parish council.

It has responsibility for a wide range of facilities that also includes small parks, allotments, war memorials and public toilets

The CNC is composed of Councillors, including at least one from each ward, and representatives of Residents Associations, including Sopwell Residents Association.

This year the CNC talked about the council consultation on governance in the district, how eight parish councils, one town council and an unparished area within St Albans are governed.

One issue was whether there is a need to alter the number and councillors or create a new parish or town council. The Residents Associations voted to ask the council to explore the idea of having a new parish made up of all the eight unparished wards – all those basically making up the city centre – including Sopwell. We are now waiting on the officers' report which will tell us more about this option.

Another committee is the St Albans Central combined Residents. This is a committee representing Residents Associations on the CNC. It is completely independent from the council.

We will return to the usual pattern of 12 months for the AGM. The only thought was that perhaps as next year is the 20th anniversary of SRA starting, we could perhaps push the AGM to the beginning of June and hire the Community Centre and celebrate 20 years of history and activity. All groups/clubs will be invited to display their information.

For groups to flourish and for things to be done we do rely on volunteers and there are things that we could move forward on, for example we need volunteers to reboot the toy library and a volunteer to pick up the pickers and organise the litter picks. The pickers are used from time to time by local Brownie groups and wood craft folk and they reside at my house at present.

I would like to thank the committee for their hard work. The group has expanded with new members. Michelle will talk about in a moment.

As Brad will highlight and the few statements of accounts that are around the room, the bank account has been very quiet. Our only income is the £100 from the council (which poor Karen is having to fight for) and the book sales of Sandy Norman's Sopwell Memories, copies on the table.

In the past there no charge for the printing of the newsletters but that has ceased and the average cost of printing the newsletters is nearing £400 each time, The coffers need to be added to and a small amount of money will come through on the SRA lottery through the St Albans community lottery, but Gail will talk shortly a little about why we are looking at charitable status. Money sitting in an account does nothing and active association needs to have money coming and going.

Since the inception of SRA 19 years ago, life has moved on massively. Yes, we have over 850 on Facebook and numerous WhatsApp group were set up during the pandemic. We are always looking for ways to improve communication, whether we need to look at offering/advertising the email more etc.

The difficulty is ensuring residents know about what is going on. A resident I spoke to didn't know where the Marlborough Pavilion was let alone the Community Centre. Yet communication has been through their door for the 10 years they have lived there.

6. COMMUNITY POLICE REPORT

We have recently done a couple of operations on the Alban Way. The first one was speaking with residents about how safe they feel within the St Albans District. This was primarily but not exclusively aimed at women and girls for the Police action for the Violence against Women and Girls programme. As well as the Alban Way we also spoke to over 100 residents on the day collecting feedback. The majority of feedback was positive with near enough all residents saying they felt safe within the district. However, most also stated they wouldn't go out in the evening when dark on their own. Most residents requested more patrols and would like more lighting and CCTV throughout St Albans. The lighting and CCTV feedback will be passed onto the council.

The other operation on the Alban Way was part of our OP Sceptre which is a special operation around knife crime. We are pleased to report that there were no knives or weapons found along the Alban Way. While knife crime is low in St Albans, we are aware of the concern and issues this causes to the public. We also attend secondary schools regularly giving talks around the dangers of knife crime and the punishment involved.

We are also pleased to see the new ramps up and running and have attended regularly to check on it when we have been able to.

We are pleased to report that there have been no issues raised to us and everyone we have seen have been in good spirits and enjoying themselves.

We are looking forward to the new Community Centre opening and would love to attend and host some of our beat surgeries and events at the venue.

Once again, a reminder for those who haven't signed up to our OWL system. It is a really useful tool for us to get crime prevention messages out there along with informing residents of what has been happening in the area or where and when our event and beat surgeries will be, We will be sending an OWL message out shortly informing residents of our upcoming events and beat surgeries. It is a free service and you only need to provide name, address and e-mail address. If anyone is interested in signing up, they can do this at www.OWL.co.uk

7. TREASURER'S REPORT

See attached report from Brad. A question was asked whether the accounts had been audited. Due to the low amount in the account it wasn't necessary and would cost too much. But a second pair of eyes could be used just to check. Need to ask around to see who could do this for us.

The accounts were adopted and were proposed by Mark James and seconded by Elaine Rainsford.

8. COMMITTEE STEPPING DOWN

Jack Hill was stepping down after being on the committee for 15 years. In his absence Janet thanked him. Brad Andrew is stepping down as Treasurer but staying on the committee as a general member.

9. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The following people are putting themselves forward for re-election

Chair Janet Charles

Secretary Karen Lilly

Rick Taylor, Brad Andrew, Gail Jackson, Mark James, Steve Peters, Elaine Rainsford, Adelle Stapleton, Jo Cooney, Sandy Norman ex-officio

Proposed by Iain Grant and Seconded by Sandy Norman

The following people are putting themselves forward for election as Treasurer and Vice Treasurer

Katharine Swindells – Treasurer

Teresa Frame - Vice Treasurer

Proposed by Iain Grant and Seconded by Sandy Norman.

Katharine Swindells and Teresa Frame were duly elected as Treasurer and Vice Treasurer on to the Committee and it was agreed that they would be added to the banking mandate.

10. GUEST SPEAKER – MAT DANIELS – MANAGER CYCLE HUB AT COTTONMILL COMMUNITY CENTRE

Mat Daniel introduced himself as the new manager for the Cycle Hub at the Cottonmill Community Centre. As mentioned previously there will be a soft opening in June.

He said the cycle track had opened and was very popular. There will be different events at the club. They will be involved in Larks in the Parks. There will be social cycling, including off road. Training will also be given for the track cycling. There

will be sessions for disabled cyclists. A question was asked about training for people with disabilities. Mat said one hour's training would be given beforehand and then they would be able to go on the track. Emma Matanle said she would contact the local schools so that they can arrange sessions. Mat said there would be things for sale like handlebar grips. There will be a facility to service bikes. No facility to repair electric bikes at present.

11. SUB GROUP REPORTS

Cottonmill Community and Cycling Centre – Michelle Mackenzie

We are really pleased to say Cottonmill and Sopwell finally has Community Centre!

The new Cottonmill Community and Cycling Centre is due to 'soft open' on Monday 30th May. The Centre will be managed by the Council leisure contractor but, at the moment, that contract is currently out to tender.

The tender process is due to be completed towards the end of this year so, in the interim, SLM (who currently manage Westminster Lodge under the Everyone Active name) will manage our new centre.

This does mean that, for a while, it's likely the centre may only be open when there is a hall booking and only some basic café facilities, like hot and cold drinks and snacks will be available. We have made SLM aware just how busy the cycling facilities have been every weekend since they opened, and we are hoping that they will have the centre and café open sometime during weekends and during school holidays. SLM do seem to be willing to react to demand.

Currently the actual ‘Grand Opening’ for the centre, is planned for November. So, after Larks, that will be the next event we will be planning for.

Sustainability & Resilience Sub-Group report – Kate Swindells

New sub-group of Sopwell Residents Association – growing environmental sustainability and community reliance.

We aim to support local people to manage the uncertainties we are all facing because of global warming, ecological breakdown, and related disruptions around food, energy, and the general cost of living.

We plan to:

build community resilience and adaptation to an uncertain future.

Educational/awareness work to increase awareness of climate and ecological issues and practical responses.

Upskilling re food growing; repair; insulation; working together
Support activities that help build community cohesion, networks and support

Support mental health and well-being for individuals of all ages
Reduce isolation for minority groups, the vulnerable and elderly

Grow environmental sustainability in Sopwell

Help and encourage people to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in everyday lives through food, energy and consumer projects.

Help to increase the uptake and use of renewable energy in Sopwell – to reduce energy costs and build local resilience to energy supply disruptions.

Encourage residents to reduce waste – in food and consumer items.

Encourage repair of consumer items: electrical; clothing; furniture to reduce wastage, save money, and reduce carbon emissions.

Engage the community to protect and restore the national environment in Sopwell – to include in people's gardens, and in public spaces.

Currently firming up our activities that we plan to put on at monthly sessions at the new centre. Including.

Learning sustainable cooking

Repair Cafes

Sustainable Fashion

Information and awareness raising

Lots of plans for future projects and working with local partners

Currently looking for funding and more volunteers to put on our monthly sessions. We have £500 already from The Peoples Postcode Lottery.

Social Events – Elaine Rainsford

The last Larks in the Parks was in 2019. Subsequent years were cancelled due to Covid. That event in 2019 brought nearly 1,000 people to the Marlborough Pavilion and much needed funds to local projects.

This year Larks is back on Sunday 10th July 12-5pm. At your new Cottonmill Community and Cycling Centre.

We have an array of family entertainment including school choirs, Sopwell Singers Choir, The Ver Players Ukele Band, Rohan, local legend Sinead Quinn, The Purple all-stars and The Rock School.

Fairground rides, an inflatable assault course (it's a knockout style), face-painting, henna, Bubbleologist, activities from the cycle hub on the tracks, a fire engine, the wonderful donkey rides and the amazing raffle are all back.

Food from Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Pakistan, Lebanese, Mungos Kitchen, ice cream van, Waffles & crepes and the awesome St Julian's afternoon tea tent.

All this as well as a great selection of stalls selling treats and gifts from local small producers.

Free entry

Volunteers

Later in the year we are planning on more events at the new community centre but are waiting to see what will be available first and what the community want.

Young People – Shelley Hayles

Art competition with collective art gallery

Pickle ball trial classes at Westminster Lodge a success to hope to do them in school holidays

Well-being courses including 6-week circuit classes at Westminster Lodge all coming up for summer holidays.

Also in talks re Thursday night youth club for teens.

Duke of Edinburgh Awards begin in September.

All will be advertised locally in due course.

SCT – Raihaanah Ahmed

Raihaanah said the Trust was started in 2013 by her husband. She gave an update on all the work they do. Brad Andrew asked if they collect clothes. Raihaanah said they collect them at certain times of the year.

12. INCORPORATION OF C.A.S.H INTO SRA

C.A.S.H's purpose, as an organisation, was to campaign for a new Community Centre for Cottonmill and Sopwell and, our new centre has been built, we've achieved our purpose. But, having come this far, we don't want to just walk away!

We have been invited to take part in the new Forum to continue to contribute support for the community centre and cycling facilities. Our role in the Forum will be to represent the Cottonmill and Sopwell community.

After discussions with the SRA committee, we decided that it would make sense for C.A.S.H to be incorporated into SRA. A couple of months ago, Kate, Elaine and myself were voted on to the SRA committee (Janet, Jo and Gail were already committee members) and C.A.S.H are now a sub-committee of SRA

13. CHARITABLE STATUS

Gail spoke about SRA becoming a charity. She said over £5,000 would be needed to become a charity. Hopefully this can be achieved in time for the next AGM.

14. .UPDATE FROM NEWLY ELECTED COUNCILLORS

Emma Matanle gave an update

Building work will hopefully begin on the King Offa site soon. It is modular building so should be finished by next April. Emma said more bins were needed at the Community Centre as there was a lot of rubbish building up. Emma said she was having once a month meetings with the stakeholders to iron out any issues. A suggestion was to plant 7 trees for 7 decades for the Platinum Jubilee. There was a discussion and a suggestion was that fruit trees would be more productive. There were more reports of mopeds and scooters riding along the Alban Way.

Unable to identify them on CCTV as they were wearing balaclavas.

Muki Gorar introduced herself as the newly elected councillor for Sopwell.

15. AOB

Nothing

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Janet suggested 10th June 2023 to celebrate SRA's 20th anniversary.

The meeting was formally closed and Janet said everyone was welcome to stay for refreshments and Jack's rock cakes.

I certify that this is a true record of the minutes of the Sopwell Residents Association AGM held on 24th May 2022

Janet Audley-Charles
Chairman

Karen Lilly
Secretary