CRASH Combined Residents’ Association of South Hampstead

DRAFT Minutes of Annual General Meeting held via Zoom on 12 October 2021 at 7:30 pm

Committee members present:

Eric Bergsagel (Chairman)

Alan Mason (Lead, Planning Group)

Mark Spurlock (Lead, Communications Group)

Lucy Findlay

Susan Hadida (Treasurer)

Diarmuid O’Hegarty

Frances Radford

Kumiko Matsuoka (Lead, Streets Group, Secretary)

1. Lucy Findlay, chairing the meeting, welcomed all to the AGM.

2. The first speaker was Eric Bergsagel on The Proposed Demolition and Over-development of the O2 Centre: CRASH Concerns and Actions.

Eric started off by saying how this was the single most damaging development for South Hampstead and the surrounding areas. Landsec’s proposal to cram many 10-16 storey buildings in the site to accommodate 1850 homes with only narrow strips of green in-between and only a linear “park” - which was basically a narrow path with few trees – was very bad news and pressure should be put on them to make changes to their plans. They were trying to give a positive and idealistic image of the proposal by showing unrealistic computer-generated pictures and using obscure language to mislead lay people from asking the right questions.

Eric thought that the existing O2 Centre could be imaginatively modified without being demolished, which was what major architectural organisations and UK architects were now encouraging developers to do for environmental and climate emergency reasons. However, Landsec seemed keen to put more high rise buildings on the site instead.

Eric showed an alternative idea of lower-rise buildings along the two ends of the site parallel to the railway tracks, terraced, or even cantilevering over the tracks similar in style to the nearby Rowley Way (Alexander and Ainsworth Estate) with a large park in the middle which would give far better quality of life to the people who would live there and the communities around.

CRASH had already started discussions with other major local community associations who were also very unhappy with Landsec’s proposal. The key was to find a unified voice to respond the company.

In the Q&A/discussion afterwards, Eric said that as the planning application would be submitted by Landsec at the end of November 2021, no changes to plan could be expected before then and that Camden Council would not take a public stand on the proposal until after the submission. Nayra Bello O’Shanahan, our Camden Councillor, said that the Council had now agreed to delay the revision of the site allocation plan until more comments were heard from the public/nearby residents and local residents’ associations. Both she and Leo Cassarani (another Councillor) stressed that in order to influence the Council strongly and effectively, the community associations had to form a unified front with clear priorities laid out.

3. The second speaker was Amit Madahar, a new member to CRASH, a fluid mechanics expert and a member of the newly formed South Hampstead Flood Action Group. He spoke about the recent flood in South Hampstead: Flood—Steps That We Can Take to Prepare and Protect Ourselves.

Amit’s flat in Goldhurst Terrace was flooded badly in July along with many other properties in the neighbourhood. He conducted an online survey with the help of others in the Action Group to understand who were affected locally. The map produced from the responses was almost identical to the map published by the Council’s flood report in 2013 which covered the floods back in 1975 and 2002. Despite the report making recommendations and actions, no noticeable changes have been made to this day to make this area more protected. It was clear that not only Camden but also Thames Water had to be involved to improve the drainage capacity. Irene Fuchs, another member from the Action Group then spoke to outline what the Group had done so far towards finding a solution: a Zoom meeting with the MP, Tulip Siddiq; made a deputation to the Council asking for more action; Ms Siddiq and Camden had now written to the CEO of Thames Water requesting a meeting to discuss this matter, Flood Forum (a charity body) was contacted for help and so on. Insurance cover for flood was also mentioned as it was causing a serious headache, with potential loss of cover if flooding became more frequent and also to question the government support scheme (Flood Re) which did not cover all kinds of buildings. Clearly a lot of issues yet to be sorted out by the group.

Leo Cassarani said that the Council had now decided to spend around 20-30K on SuDS (Sustainable Drainage System) for this area (as part of Swiss Cottage Green Project) – which meant managing drainage in and around properties such as tree planting and encouraging soil percolation, reducing paving front gardens of properties etc which would help the situation. However, he still emphasised that Thames Water still held the key to preventing future flooding by sorting out the drainage.

4. Lucy thanked the speakers and introduced the formal CRASH AGM.

Apologies for absence were received from Margaret Aitchison, Helen Mortimer and Igor Alexander.

5. The Minutes of the 2020 (32nd) AGM were approved.

6. Chairman’s Report and Appreciation

Eric spoke briefly about the stalled development of 100 Avenue Road as Essential Living had applied to amend the planning permission to remove their obligation for affordable housing and to use cheaper cladding for financial/viability reasons. Camden had already rejected the former, but the changes have gone to the Planning Inspectorate and an inquiry will take place between 9 to 12 November.

Frances Radford who was involved in setting up the forerunner of CRASH 33 years ago in 1988 and has been a key committee member since, has decided to step down from this role. Eric thanked her on behalf of all CRASH members for the sterling work she has done over the years and Susan Hadida presented her with a card and a gardening gift token.

7. Treasurer’s Report

Susan reported that there was a surplus of funds this year as more donations were received.

She asked for members who had not yet paid this year’s subscription to do so via online banking or paying by cheque to her. (Details on the new CRASH website).

8. Election of Officers

The same officers (except Frances Radford) were re-elected.

9. Any Other Business: Trees

Peter Symonds said that over 75 trees in the neighbourhood had been lost in the past 13 months, 119 applications for reducing/pollarding, 48 applications to fell trees were made and only 3 were rejected by Camden. Eric Peel, a CRASH member, was seeking amendment to the Section 211 of Town and Planning Act (of 1990) with a set of proposals to stop any unnecessary destruction or damage to trees.

Susan Hadida was currently fighting to save the 4 plane trees in her back garden from being felled.

Lucy thanked all and the meeting was closed at 9:30 pm.