

CRASH

Minutes of CRASH (Combined Residents' Associations of South Hampstead) AGM via Zoom held on 30 November 2020 at 7pm

Committee present:

Eric Bergsagel (Vice Chair)
Susan Hadida (Treasurer)
Lucy Findlay (Chair of the meeting)
Diarmuid O'Hegarty
Frances Radford
Alan Mason
Mark Spurlock
Kumiko Matsuoka
(position to be confirmed at the AGM)

Swiss Cottage Ward Councillors:

Nayra Bello O'Shanahan
Leo Cassarani
Simon Pearson

Guest Speaker:

Yael Stobezki of The Green Triangle

1. Welcome and Appreciation

Lucy Findlay, chairing the meeting, welcomed everyone to the meeting. She briefly gave an introduction to those who were new to CRASH the history and the aims of the association. She also mentioned that thanks to the Comms Group, CRASH now had a new moniker: Communities and Residents Active in South Hampstead.

Peter Symonds who has been the Chairman of CRASH for 10 years stood down earlier in the year. A long-term friend and fellow actor Barry Humphries (aka Dame Edna) who has lived in this area for 32 years spoke with good humour on behalf of CRASH to thank Peter for all the tireless work he had done over the years and for being a kind and effective advocate for the area. Peter thanked Barry and Lizzie (his partner) for their friendship.

2. Discussion and Q&A

2.1 Yael Stobezki, a member of The Green Triangle (GT), a group which has been looking after the area of green triangle hidden behind the three roads: Fairhazel Gdns, Greencroft Gdns and Goldhurst Terrace (entered from either Goldhurst Terrace or Fairhazel Gdns) spoke about the group's work.

The space was owned by the Maryon Wilson Estate but for a long time it was neglected and being used as a general dumping ground. In 1997, with permission volunteers started to clear the area, planted many plants and trees, and since then have been looking after the GT making the space attractive for neighbours and for communal events such as summer parties and bonfire nights to take place.

When a storm came two years ago which resulted in a very large tree coming down, the agents acting on behalf of the owners did nothing, leaving the group to sort out the mess and repair the damaged fence.

It was therefore a surprise to find early September this year, that the agents had come to the space, padlocked the doors and barriers placed preventing anyone from entering the Triangle (apparently for Covid safety!).

It transpired that the owners had decided to sell the land but the group received little information. So a meeting was arranged but this was cancelled at the last minute. It was clear that they wanted to sell the area either as a whole or in small "parcels" as a garden extension for some houses around it. The group made some enquiries about the price, but the agents never got back to them.

The group has since managed to acquire the status of ACV (Asset of Community Value) from Camden for the GT and both the Council and Tulip Siddiq (Labour MP for the area) have been very supportive of this move. This has meant that if, at any point, the owners wished to sell the land, the group would have to be notified of it and would have the right to purchase the land, be given 6 months to sort out the funding. Any potential buyer, if found by the owners, would have to be told of the situation. The GT was a site of importance for nature conservation, and as such, if anyone wanted to change the use of it, a planning permission would be required.

The Group was still worried, however, that their endeavour was only slowing down the plans that potential developers might have, rather than stopping it. Yael took the opportunity to ask the attendees if anyone had any experience in setting up a charity, trust or any other legal entities, and to raise funds to contact: greentrianglenw6@gmail.com

Lucy thanked Yael for her talk, and Eric Bergsagel said that he knew someone who might be able to help, and would contact her by email. Councillor Nayra Bello O'Shanahan said she too had some contacts.

2.2. Lucy welcomed the three Ward Councillors and CRASH committee members active in Planning, Trees and Communications for Q&A.

2.2.1. To start off, a member asked for the update on the low traffic zone in the area. Simon Pearson answered that Camden was held up by the Government's latest change of policy and the Council was consulting their legal team about what that meant. At the beginning of lockdown (in the spring), the Government issued permission to local councils to introduce cycle lanes etc under "the emergency traffic orders" (which would automatically expire in 18 months during which time public consultations were supposed to take place – and if approved, the changes would become permanent); but two weeks ago they changed this and now there must be prior consultation [before anything was implemented].

Eric asked Simon as to what a low traffic zone/low traffic neighbourhood (LTN) might look like, and he responded by saying that typically this involved posts and/or cameras to either stop or discourage rat-running and to slow down traffic moving through the area so that only residents or visitors to the area would use the roads. Buses (C11) [passing through Canfield and Broadhurst] might be an issue and TfL would have to be involved in this case.

However, Leo Cassarani said that the C11 route would not change as it was an excellent service. The matter was more complicated but their main aim was to reduce rat-runs. This had already been mentioned to the Council officers but as yet no concrete proposals were produced.

Susan Zur-Spiro highlighted the fact that as she had a disabled son, and she herself was suffering from long-Covid, car use was essential and important to have a parking space. There were not many disabled parking around and sometimes people without a badge would park in the space. Also relatives coming to visit should not be inconvenienced. Simon who was on the Disability Oversight Panel and had fortnightly meetings with Camden Disability Action said access was their No.1 topic, so they would make sure that every address was reachable, although it might take longer to get the destination [if posts or one-way system was introduced to stop through traffic]. Disability parking spaces would remain intact.

Lucy asked about the single lane on Finchley Road and what the future plans were on the short section between Finchley Road Tube and O₂ Centre. Talks were still ongoing with TfL, Simon replied, as it was their scheme. Leo added that although TfL were aware of the (congestion) issues, they had not made clear to Camden what they wanted to do.

Nayra commented that regarding concrete proposals for the LTN, as consultants would be modelling the traffic [for Camden], if there were to be any impact on Finchley Road they would hear about that and the findings could be used for the discussion with the TfL.

Next question was about additional bicycle storage in the area. Nayra said that the plan was to have 5 additional hangars by the end of the year, and hopefully 6 more in the new year. Leo regretted that the waiting list for storage was 5500 long in Camden as a whole, about 700 in South Hampstead. Many hotspots (from the map of people needing them) were not served especially in the uphill section of the area. Funding was in place, but the hold up was mainly due to the company that was managing the scheme for the Council. Also, before any car parking space was removed to put a hangar, a public consultation would need to take place first and this could take 1-2 months.

2.2.2. Moving onto Planning/Building Development, Lucy asked about any updates/progress on large buildings at various sites such as the O₂ Centre proposals and 100 Avenue Road. Nayra responded by saying that 100 Avenue Road had stopped because the developers had some viability issues: the plan was no longer as attractive as it was first thought. They had arranged to speak with Council officers at the end of November, and so the councillors should hear about the meeting from the officers after that. Nayra's hunch was that contrary to the Council's hope that the proposed changes were minor, it would be more substantial, so she would let the community and Save Swiss Cottage group know of any news.

Leo said that the developers were now trying to back out of the promises they had made because they realised they could not make a profit, so they were going to dilute the commitment they had made. The development was only granted on appeal because of the affordable housing and community space they had promised to provide. If these were removed from their revised planning, permission should not be granted by the Council. The prediction that Essential Living (EL) would demolish the existing building leaving a hole was proved correct. The company should not be trusted.

However, Nayra said Camden had already received some money from EL. A question was raised as to whether part of this money could be used to plant more trees in the neighbourhood as more and more trees were being cut down. She said when two Walk and Talk sessions took place in the ward, participants were keen to plant more trees. Funding was already allocated for this purpose especially for Gardens area but thought we should wait until the LTN measures had been drafted as they might have some impact on suitable locations to plant trees. She would keep us informed.

Regarding the O₂ Centre, Leo said that councillors were consulted a while ago: to close Homebase, get rid of the car park and build 100s of flats on the car park space. He had spoken with the councillors for West Hampstead but what with Covid they were not expecting to hear any more until the end of next year. The O₂ owner, LandSec, were selling a lot of their assets at the moment and Covid had changed their situation. As with EL, they were stalling due to the changing property market in London. But there was to be a consultation on the future of the O₂ Centre so we should take part in that and make our thoughts known.

Next, Susan Zur-Spiro asked about the Casterbridge project (a plan to build a community centre and health centre behind Casterbridge and Snowman House on Abbey Road facing some of the gardens on Goldhurst Terrace) and what was happening as she and her neighbours (three properties affected by party wall) were never consulted, and were not even aware of such a plan until September. The issues were: removal of trees and security concerns as the proposed plan was very close to their properties. Planning permission was given on 12 November. Simon responded by saying the Planning Officer had told him that the normal procedure was followed. Susan rejected this as being untrue, so Nayra suggested that Susan and her neighbours wrote down their concerns and discussed with the Planning Officer. Leo said that if the planning application process was not followed there was an escalation process (such as an ombudsman).

Another question was asked about a plan to demolish the existing building (with shops on the ground level) opposite Casterbridge and to build a 12-storey building. Leo said that that was funded by GLA grant which would expire soon – he would make enquiries as to what was happening (although the building came under Kilburn ward).

2.2.3. Lucy received from the participants more frequent street cleaning requests (especially fast roads/bus routes). Nayra said that funding was cut by a lot for cleaning but hotspots (where shops and restaurants were) along Broadhurst Gdns near West End Lane, Canfield Gdns and Goldhurst Terrace close to Finchley Road would be added to Veolia's night collections. Simon encouraged us all to use Clean Camden App on one's smartphone to report unsightly rubbish on the street to report to be collected by Veolia (and they were usually very quick to act).

3. Formal AGM

Apologies for absence

None received.

4. Approval of minutes of 2019 AGM

Approved.

5. Treasurer's Report

Referring to the Accounts for 2019, Susan Hadida said that income was down from the previous two years although still managed a surplus. There were three meetings last year, two of which to discuss the future of CRASH. As a result, she believed that we now had a strong committee. This year, despite the pandemic, Planning Group worked tirelessly to help members. Re: subscription, some still had not paid for this year and there would be a shortfall for 2020 if not received. She expressed a big thank you for members who had given donations to CRASH and added that any donations of any amount would be a great help.

6. Vice-Chairman's Report

As a preface to his report on CRASH activities, Eric said what he wanted to make clear here was what CRASH did and why it was important for us to renew our membership – to share information with others, and tonight's Q&A with the councillors clearly illustrated how important it was for us to be involved, to maintain our neighbourhood in the way we hoped to keep.

Covid dominated our lives this year but CRASH had been active, most visibly with Planning, Trees, Rubbish and Streets groups.

Planning: One of the main aims was to monitor inconsiderate abuse of planning applications in the area including excavating basements or even excavating a front garden for underground parking lift (this was at 111 Canfield Gdns - Eric said no decision had been made yet).

Trees: In the three weeks of July alone there were applications to cut down 14 mature trees. It was clear from this that we all had to be extremely vigilant and oppose where necessary to maintain the “gardens” environment.

Streets: The Nicer Neighbourhood team had organised a community cleaning of the land owned but neglected by Network Rail (Finchley Road end of Broadhurst Gdns) on 19 October 2019. This turned out to be a fantastic and fun community event and was hugely appreciated by many for clearing out so much rubbish and leaving the area much cleaner [the area was inaccessible with metal fencing, so rakes and sticks had to be used to drag most of the rubbish towards the pavement, and other brave souls managed to jump over to remove the rest – heaps of rubbish were collected]. Rubbish picking on some streets were also organised by Streets Group.

Other matters that took place were: consultations on the proposed changes to the Ward boundaries, and on changes in traffic patterns since Covid started; following up on the disappearing dog poo bins in the area etc that affected our daily activities.

Eric said CRASH was delighted to be able to facilitate this evening’s Q&A with the Ward Councillors - to be able to meet the reps, and to hear how much they put into the community and their responsibilities. Having lived in the area for 33 years he also recognised and felt fortunate about many of past Councillors’ contributions.

There was now an online neighbourhood newsletter website for the area: <https://swissandsouth.co.uk> – CRASH would try and send a follow-up email to let people know even those who could not attend this AGM.

The best news of the year was the developers withdrawing from the 100 Avenue Road for now but still a concern as to what would happen next. He felt if it could be re-designed as a low-rise building it would have a better relationship with the community. CRASH would continue to comment.

Eric thanked Peter personally for his 10 years’ service and in conclusion he encouraged members to spread the word about CRASH.

7. Amendment to the Constitution

Unanimously agreed.

Election of Officers:

Unanimously agreed.

Lucy thanked Yvonne Klemperer for acting as Secretary until last year. If any participant was interested to join the Committee and be active to approach them. Eric said due to Covid, for the time being communication would be mainly by email, occasionally via Zoom meetings.

8. Any Other Business

Peter thanked all for the kind words he was given this evening. He thought that CRASH was now stronger with a better committee, so it would be an improved association from now. At some stage, he hoped to join the committee again.

Eric thanked Lucy for being a perfect host for the evening.