



CHERRY

TREES

RESIDENTS'

ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Tuesday 19th November 2024 at 7pm

St Mary Abbots Church Hall

Committee Members Present: Charles Penney - Chairman (CP)

Frances Manthos - Membership (FM), Bruce Fair -Treasurer (BF), Myrto Rochat (MR) - Secretary, Mimi Carney - Environment (MC), Thomas Blomberg – Planning (TB), Christian Klotz (CK), Manish Goel (MG), Rashmi Chopra (RC)

Apologies from Committee Members: Caroline Cuffe (CC) - Secretary, Romanos Brihi (RB), Peter Hoffmann-Fischer (PHF), Monique Bahadur – Social (MB), Alessandro Tonchia (AT)

Also in attendance : Joe Powell, MP, Mayor Preety Hudd, Cllr. Catherine Faulks, Cllr. Lloyd North, Alex Turner, (Operations Director for Opportunity Kensington)

Sponsors: John D Wood & Co. (Matthew Harrop and James Stuart-Mogg present)

1. Apologies and Opening Remarks

The Chairman (CP) welcomed all members and opened the meeting at 7.05pm. There were 63 CTRAA members in attendance (including the 9 Committee members listed above).

CP thanked John D Wood (JDW) for sponsoring the CTRAA AGM for over ten years as well as St Mary Abbots for making the hall available to us once more. CP thanked members (including the Committee) for attending the meeting and MR for taking the Minutes. Apologies had been received from Committee members as listed above. CP also welcomed our new local MP, Joe Powell, and Billy Beckett (his Community Relations Adviser). No police officer was able to make the meeting, this being an off-duty day for them.

CP acknowledged the sad passing this year of late members Charles Shaw (one of the original founding members of the Association), Rolf Christophersen (aged 102 ½), Peter English (4 Berkeley Gardens) and Basil Tsavolos, whose former shop, Olympic Electronics in Kensington Church Street, is much missed. CP congratulated member Bettie Griffiths, who turned 100 last April.

2. Minutes of the Last AGM held on 20/11/2023

Draft Minutes of the 2023 AGM held on 20th November 2023 were circulated to members by e-mail with a hard copy provided to members attending the AGM. The Minutes were approved by the meeting.

3. Opportunity Kensington (including Token discount scheme) - Alex Turner (AT)

AT spoke to the meeting as Operations Director for Opportunity Kensington (OK) - the brand name for a Business Improvement District introduced in 2022 to deliver a programme of services and initiatives that support and improve the area around High Street Kensington. It is part of a UK-wide initiative for town centres. One initiative is to allow local businesses to provide additional services on behalf of the Council in areas where it needs extra help. The scheme is set to run for a 5 year cycle (ending in 2027), after which a fresh bid based on a ballot will be voted on during 2026. OK currently comprises 400 business members and its district boundaries are clearly laid out on its website. The first initiative in 2022 was the introduction of a token card, like the neighbourhood loyalty discount card initiated by CTRAA. This token card is available through the website and gives access to over 60 offers from local businesses. It is currently a physical card but it can be scanned with a QR code and added to a digital wallet on phones.

OK also launched a security initiative to help shops deal with shoplifting: for the past year, two wardens have been patrolling the High Street 6 days a week, actively apprehending shoplifters. This operation has been very successful and has resulted in the recovery of over £60,000 worth of stolen goods. OK has also invested in new decorative Christmas lights and has entered a partnership with a local charity promoting the donation of books. Kensington Church Street has been another focus for improvements, with plans to try to reduce noise levels, plant 8 new trees and instal a rain garden. The vision for High Street Kensington is to reduce traffic, increase pavements' size and make it a better shopping experience overall, with pedestrianisation becoming the leading focus. This vision, together with the business plan, is set out on the OK website and a summary appears in the flyers brought by AT for handing out to the members.

OK has also set up a Community Events Fund and has reserved £15,000 every year to fund events designed to help draw people into the area. Any such event could benefit from up to £2,000 worth of funding from OK, provided it satisfies both the geographic criteria (i.e. the nearest tube station must be High Street Kensington) and that it is billed to attract footfall into the area. OK has an Instagram account and currently has 10,000 followers. CP thanked AT.

4. Sponsorships during the year

CP thanked all of this year's kind sponsors : **John D Wood** for today's AGM, **Knight Frank** for the Summer Party in June, **Maskells** for a very successful and well attended Christmas Drinks Party at the Kensington Wine Rooms on 8th December 2023, **Strutt & Parker** for the Autumn Party in September and **Riverstone Living** for hosting a Spring Party.

Huntsworth Wine (Tuggy Meyer) kindly continues to provide wine for all events at a discounted rate. Welcome to the new **Blue Stoops** pub on KCS, who invited all members to attend their opening.

5. Accounts for Year Ended 31/10/24

Bruce Fair (BF) presented the Accounts for 2024. Total income at £5,577 was marginally below the prior year income of £5,738, with income from subscriptions being materially lower at £1,700 compared to £2,600. The reason for the drop in subscriptions was that many members switched in 2023 from an annual payment to 3-year discounted deal which resulted in a lot less money being collected in 2024 than 2023. Luckily, CTRAA received more sponsorship from our sponsors, particularly in relation to our Summer Party; this was reflected in the figures showing sponsorship up by £750 in 2024 which balanced the reduced income from subscriptions. BF explained that he took advantage of higher interest rates and shuffled money between accounts to maximise the amount in the 95-day deposit account.

General expenditure went up by £349 to £497 in 2024. This was because the association now pays the costs of running the website. During the year responsibility for running the website transferred from Thomas Blomberg to Christian Klotz. It was noted that Thomas Blomberg had set the website up several years ago and very kindly had run it all those years at no cost to the Association. BF thanked Thomas for his incredible work. It was noted that £423 was spent on one-off software licence fees and going forwards the website will cost circa £120 per annum to run.

The cost of parties increased from £5,300 in 2023 to £6,500 in 2024. This was largely due to inflation and the fact that once again 3 parties were held in the year, with sponsors covering most but not all of the costs. The result was that we ended up with a deficit of £1,438 in 2024.

The bank balance peaked at £8,984 at end 2023; the deficit of £1,438 in 2024 reduced the bank balance to £7,546 at end 2024. BF noted that, even taking into account the increased number of members from 245 in 2023 to 270 in 2024, there would not be enough to stop the bank balance falling further in subsequent years. BF therefore proposed increasing the membership fee to £15 per year, noting that the membership fee had been held at £10 per year since 2017, with many members on a 3-year plan paying as little as £8 per year. Via a link on the website members are now able to quickly and easily pay their membership fees and new members are able to register to join the association without the need to complete the paper membership form.

CP thanked BF for doing a tremendous job as Treasurer and stated that putting up the membership rates had not been an easy decision, but one that the Committee had thought about long and hard.

Answering a question from the meeting about considering axing one of the parties, BF explained that the Committee had considered it, with the Christmas Party being the most likely contender as it had only recently been introduced, but this would be a hard decision as it had proved popular and well attended, attracting a different younger crowd of residents. BF noted that sponsors were being asked where possible to increase their sponsorship.

Cllr. Faulks suggested applying to RBKC for a City Living Local Life grant to fund our events. CP thanked BF for his diligent work. The increase to £15 p.a. was passed with immediate effect with no discounted deals. The Accounts were approved.

6. Membership: Status & Membership Duties

This was covered above.

7. Composition and Election of CTRAA Committee 2024

A draft List of Portfolios for 2024 was circulated by e-mail prior to the meeting and provided in hard copy at the meeting. This included the following changes: after many years, Caroline Cuffe and Thomas Blomberg have stepped down, as has Monique Bahadur. RB took over the social/events coordination portfolio and MR the Secretary role. More on this under AOB.

The proposed Committee portfolios for 2024 were approved at the end of the meeting - please see under AOB.

8. Introduction to our new MP, Joe Powell (JP)

JP thanked CP for the invitation. Four and a half months into the job, JP records having had a good meeting with our 3 local councillors and being ready to work with them on local issues. An immediately pressing one involves galvanising support against Silvertime's application to open a 3-storey 24-hour slot machine casino next to Earl's Court Tube station. JP is also very concerned about the current sharp rise in robberies, theft and burglaries in Central London targeting watches and phones, but also including high value shoplifting. JP is aware of the current low levels of trust in the Met and of the effects this is having on our local police force - our local borough commander is struggling with recruitment and retention. Even if the government is minded removing the current £200 minimum threshold for shoplifting prosecutions, there are not sufficient resources to tackle these crimes unless police numbers increase.

JP updated the meeting on the recent arbitrary closures of Kensington Palace Gardens by the Crown Estate: he has met with their representatives who have assured him this will not happen again. Another local issue JP wants to tackle is the antisocial behaviour and parking relating to E bikes. The current set up is messy, with bike companies operating with a Wild West attitude and the councils do not have enough power to enforce parking rules. This needs to change.

Housing is the biggest case work for JP and covers many types of categories. The high number of mansion blocks and flats in the constituency means leaseholds are a big issue in the area, as well as rogue management agencies. JP wants to encourage the government to enact as quickly as possible the leasehold reforms passed in 2024. Short term lets/Airbnb's are also an issue, with RBKC having the highest levels per capita in London and with little governance in existence. A proper registration scheme needs to be brought in, to help identify if someone is contravening their lease etc. JP has joined the Housing Select Committee to scrutinise policy on a national level.

JP opposes the proposed closure of the Post Office on High Street Kensington and has initiated a petition to that effect.

Questions from the meeting:

1. *Are you in favour of returning TFL's cycle lane on HSK ?* Yes, but not the Holland Park Avenue one.
2. *Do you have powers to you have to increase social housing in the borough?* There is a lot of work to do. Currently 3,000 people are waiting for lower end/social housing in the borough - with similar figures in Bayswater/Lancaster Gate and there is no new supply of homes. There are 2 big development sites at Earl's Court and Kensal Canalside in Ladbroke Grove, with a initial offering of only 12% for social housing, which will need improving but is heavily dependent on funding promises from central government. Intermediate and key worker housing is also needed whilst the Temporary Accommodation Bill puts further restrictions on housing budgets across London boroughs. The private rental sector is also in dire need of reform and scrutiny, oftenqualifying as the worst quality housing in the constituency. CP thanked JP.

9. Report from the Councillors

Cllr. Catherine Faulks (CF) spoke to the meeting:

- Confirms the Council's budget is seriously stressed (£4M over-budget) due to the cost of temporary accommodation as spelled out by JP and that housing is the biggest and most pressing issue for the borough.
- Regarding the Post Office proposed closure, over 2,000 people have signed the petition opposing it but it needs more like 10,000 or even 20,000 signatures to have an impact. CF will share with CP the links to all the petitions currently live to distribute.
- Regarding TFL's proposals for the new cycle lane on Holland Park Avenue and Shepherd's Bush roundabout, a meeting took place between RBKC councillors from all 4 wards and TFL, when they held them to account about their plans. These are likely to go ahead regardless of objections, but TFL have tentatively agreed to take on board some of the suggestions put forward on behalf of residents with regard to traffic congestion etc..
- Regarding E-bikes, there was a recent public and well attended meeting at the Town Hall with representatives from both Lime and Forest bikes - the latter company, being newer, is logistically less well-established and has promised to remedy the situation of bikes being dumped anywhere by employing cycling wardens to enforce geofence-based parking. To curb anti-social behaviour by E-bike users, the legislation needs to change to give the Council more powers to deal with it and this is being lobbied for at Ministerial level.
- Regarding the issue of rubbish from shops and businesses on High Street Kensington which is often overflowing and creates a problem with seagulls, ravens etc. as they are lidless. There are containers behind the shops but they are unattractive and would not be suitable for the pavement on the High Street. The other issue is that different shops use different rubbish collection services, with varying pick-up times, thus creating havoc. So, the Council has come up with the idea of offering discounted rates to shops prepared to limit their choice of collection services to a single or only two collection services companies - the Council's own one and First Mile. The plan is to introduce this on High Street Kensington in January/February 2025.
- Updates to the meeting on the various initiatives taken by the Council to improve the High Street, including a green wall going up on the Council building, introducing planters on the pavements of the High Street (as a contribution to the Business Improvement District), re-arranging planters on Jubilee Square, restoring the Victorian Temperance Fountain on High Street Kensington so that it can now be used for fresh drinking water and funding more planting on Peel Street outside Campden Houses.

CP thanked the Councillors for their input.

10. Environment/Traffic and Parking, including rubbish, trees, dogs mess, lampposts, pavements

Nothing of note needed to be addressed; all is kept under control thanks to Mimi Gilligan. (MG)

11. Police Report

In the absence of the Police (who were unable to attend the AGM), BF reported:

- Shoplifting continued to be a significant concern.

- Burglary and robbery were priorities for the Police within Campden Ward. BF and EM attended quarterly Police liaison meetings.
- Good news: 2 speed indications devices were approved to be put up on Kensington Church Street, which would hopefully slow down the traffic on this busy road. BF thanked the Council for supporting the initiative. BF is continuing with his efforts with the full support of the CTRAA Committee to improve respect of the two “no entries” at the top of Vicarage Gate and top of Palace Gardens Terrace.

CP thanked BF for his report.

12. Planning Issues

TB reported on the redeveloped Newcombe House project - now a reality as it is now actually being built, with an estimated finish date of Spring 2027. A welcome development will be the addition of a fairly large GP surgery on the corner (where the Fish Shop used to be), housed on several floors, with residential flats on top. Another development concerns the concrete building at the bottom end of Kensington Church Street, which previously housed Pizza Hut. This past summer, the owners of the block obtained permission to tear it down and build something brand new a year from now. The good news is that it will look good.

13. Website

CP thanked TB for the many many years of work looking after the Association’s website, from both a technical and an editorial point of view. This has now been transferred to Christian Klotz (CK) , with Frances Manthos (FM) helping out on the editorial side.

14. Communications

CP floated the idea of creating a new CTRAA WhatsApp group, more precisely a one-way WhatsApp channel, which would help disseminate CTRAA-related information in a quick and efficient way, and invited those interested members to send their mobile numbers to be added to the group.

15. 2025 Garden Parties and other events

The aim for 2025 is to have a similar number of parties, namely 2 garden parties and hopefully another Christmas party, subject to being able to benefit from similar sponsorship as in 2024.

16. AOB/Concluding remarks

CP reported on several changes in the Committee this year.

Caroline Cuffe, a Committee member on/off for about 30 years and who has been our secretary between stints of living here and in the US, has now moved permanently across the pond, so we wish her good luck and thank her for all the work she has done over the years.

A particular call out to Monique Bahadur, who steps down this year, after many years of fantastic work as social secretary. We had many a good party thanks to Monique and will miss her very much. Thank you for everything you have done for Cherry Trees over the years.

Another big shout out goes to Thomas Blomberg, stepping down from the Committee after 30 years. Thomas ran both the website which he created as well as the earlier Newsletter and has done a sterling job of Planning also for a great many years. He will also be missed but is thankfully not moving from the area, so we will hopefully still be able to rely on his enormous fonts of knowledge.

CP presented each of TB and MB with a bottle of champagne as a thank you present on behalf of the CTRAA.

The meeting then approved the changes to the composition of the Committee for 2025 as circulated in draft.

The Committee, in turn, thanked CP for his endless hard work and for leading the Association in such an expert way.

The meeting concluded at 8.20pm.