

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CLEVELAND SQUARE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION**

Held at the Caesar Hotel, 26-33 Queen's Gardens London W2 3BE on 5 March 2020

Committee: Nick Sutherland-Dodd (Chair), Suzanne Etherton, Tomas Campbell, Maureen O'Connor, Rachel Magrill, Lorraine Connolly.

Apologies: Leslie and Barbara Simon; Ann Symonds; Felix and Hilary Macdonogh ; Jeremy Rosenblatt; Nita Dunkley; Florian Wendelstadt; Jerome Schoumann; Sadie Coles; Sara Shahrn Muhanrach

### **1. Welcome – Nick Sutherland-Dodd**

The Chair welcomed the members attending and noted that an attendance sheet was being passed round for all to sign. Some notices of apologies had been received, which would be noted in the minutes rather than read out.

### **2. Police presentation**

The Chair noted that on the agenda, it had been hoped that police representative would be able to attend and give a presentation about crime and safety in the neighbourhood, but unfortunately there has been a shift change and the Police will not be able to be with us today.

### **3. Chair's report – Nick Sutherland-Dodd**

- a. Keys: an electronic key system has now been introduced and the swap over from the old keys completed. Access to the gardens can now be closely controlled to admit entitled residents only. The introduction of the new key system has also made it possible to compile a database of residents (held in compliance with GDPR), which in turn has very much facilitated CSRA communications, as all residents who so wish can now receive material by email. This project was labour intensive and our thanks go to Suzanne and Maureen who oversaw it all.
- b. Website: Cleveland Square and Gardens now has a new website, the work of DD Etherton to whom thanks are due. All residents can now access information online, minimising paper maildrops. There is a contact form on the website by which residents can get in touch with the Committee direct, and all application forms for events, access, etc. are now also on the website and can be filled in directly online.
- c. Tree management: work in the gardens this last year has focused on a great deal of tree management, which will be discussed later in the meeting, within the garden report.
- d. Garden rates: further to the approval of the increased rate at the last AGM, garden rates collection this last year was a resounding success, with rates collected in full in record time. Thanks are due to Maureen for her hard work here.
- e. Accounts: in the time since the last AGM, much work has been done on the accounts, which are now brought to a professional level. Again, many thanks are due to Maureen.
- f. Play equipment: as a recap on the situation, at the last AGM the then ongoing installation project was to be subject to a professional inspection as there were concerns with the work. The inspector produced a report and it was presented to the contractor. It appeared that he agreed to put right the problems notified, but instead the very next day he took his tools and left the site. While attempts were made by the Committee to have the contractor reimburse the payments made, these were not fruitful and the Committee then made the further decision that although there would be a financial hit to Square finances, CSRA should not throw good money after bad in the expense of pursuing the contractor in legal proceedings. The Committee made the difficult decision to dismantle the problematic work that had been installed, with the aim of taking time to review the situation. There is now a new scheme underway, planning for equipment that will last

for twenty years, is safe, and that the whole community can support with confidence. Angus Hudson, who has much experience with capital projects, has very kindly agreed to lead this and our thanks are due to him.

- g. **Fireworks:** although Katie Banks and James Meek are not present, we would all like to give them much thanks for their fantastic organisation of the fireworks in 2018. However as residents will know, there were no fireworks in 2019 as, despite a call for help going out in spring 2019, it was not possible to find a credible solution for handling the organisation and so it could not be done. The fireworks are of great financial benefit to the community but organising the fireworks is a lot of work, and not something that is a 'Committee' responsibility – it needs CSRA members to get involved if they would want it to happen.
- h. **Kids' party:** this is a highlight of the year and as usual it was a wonderful day. Our thanks go to Jodi Bartle, Lorraine Connolly Rebecca Reed and Sajia.
- i. **Shakespeare in the Squares:** this is another great event, so much so that the people who run it keep Cleveland Square for the last night in the run, as they love the garden so much. Last year it was Midsummer Night's Dream; this year it will be The Tempest, on Friday 10 July. Book early as it always sells out! Thank you to Caroline Cowie for organising the event
- j. **SEBRA party:** as another event, we had the SEBRA party held in the Square, with the great and good of Westminster attending, which is always a great showcase for the community. Residents are recommended to support SEBRA as the organization does a lot of good for the area.
- k. **Gardeners:** to end on a slightly down note, we are aware that there have been some instances of abusiveness to the gardening team, which is not acceptable. We would ask rather that if any resident has any issue with the gardeners that they contact the Committee – the form on the website can be used for this.

To sum up, it has been quite a quiet year in the gardens, partly because of the new electronic keys system, which has cut down on the numbers of people coming into the gardens despite not being entitled to do so. The garden is due to the tireless efforts, skill and inspiration of Suzanne and her team. We are lucky to have such a special place.

#### **4. Minutes of last AGM**

These were circulated at the meeting.

#### **Approved – nem con**

#### **5. Accounts**

Full accounts to date in professional format were circulated at the meeting.

A question was raised from the floor as to the accounts package not including a budget. The Chair confirmed that no budget was included, as that further to the forthcoming business of the AGM it was expected that the development of a budget would be a project to be taken forward by the Committee after the meeting.

#### **Approved – nem con**

#### **6. Garden Report**

Suzanne Etherton gave a beautifully illustrated presentation of the development and growth of the gardens during her tenure as Garden Manager. The presentation is attached.

The meeting gave Suzanne a round of applause for her dedicated and visionary work.

#### **7. Nominations to the Committee**

The Chair noted that further to the process set out in the CSRA Constitution and as set out on the agenda, the Committee had received nominations for seven people to be elected to the Committee at the AGM: Don Jordan, Angus Hudson, AnneMarie Landau, Joanna Moss, Mark Fray, Rebecca Illing and Sarah Davison, and the Chair welcomed this great showing of enthusiasm. The Chair stated that rather than require the nominees to go through any individual election process, the Committee would propose to co-opt the whole group immediately. After confirming that such a proposal was compliant with the CSRA Constitution, the nominees were all thereupon co-opted, with their joining of the Committee subject only to the formality of re-election at the next item on the agenda.

A question was asked from the floor about the qualifications the prospective Committee members had for the various roles. Some speakers felt that living as residents and caring for the Square and a desire to contribute were the real necessities – which the nominees (some of whom had previous service on the Committee) had demonstrated by having themselves put forward. Specialist expertise can be outsourced if necessary. There was also discussion as to whether the specific roles that each nominee would take up needed to be agreed at the meeting, but it was confirmed that allocation of roles is a matter for the Committee membership to decide among themselves.

## **8. Re-election to the Committee**

Further to the above co-opting of the nominees, it was confirmed that of the existing Committee ie Nick Sutherland-Dodd (Chair), Suzanne Etherton (Garden Manager), Tomas Campbell, Maureen O'Connor (Treasurer), Rachel Magrill (Secretary) only Lorraine Connolly would wish to continue and stand for re-election. Re-election of Lorraine and the co-opted nominees was put to the meeting.

A comment from the floor thanked Suzanne for the amazing job she had done as garden manager and that the beautiful garden should be maintained

**Approved – nem con**

## **9. Fireworks**

The need for CSRA members to take action if they would like the fireworks event to continue was noted again. A comment from the floor noted that this did not have to follow previous events and so did not have to be the large event it has been in the past.

*The meeting then turned to certain items which residents had requested to be added to the agenda.*

## **10. Crime and safety around the Square and Gardens**

Lorraine Connolly noted that there are a number of local liaison organisations which would be helpful in targeting crime and fostering safety, where positions are currently vacant: Neighbourhood Watch and the Bayswater area Safer Neighbourhood Panel. Volunteers to lead liaisons with these organisations would be extremely welcome and any interested member should contact Lorraine after the meeting.

It was commented from the floor that there were a number of serious incidents

## **11. Sustainable community gardening - discussion of what we can do to make the garden more sustainable, inclusive and user-friendly**

Those proposing this agenda item were invited to explain what they had in mind for these issues. . Angus Hudson said that children should be encouraged to use the garden in a freer way The playing of ball games being given as an example. Feedback from parents was that children should play more and feel included. One resident was concerned that this meant children running into flowerbeds and playing football, and if they wished to run more wildly there was a park nearby. A view was also expressed that children in all means play in the garden should be under parental control with consideration for residents who like to use the garden in a different way appreciating it as a quiet and social place with beautiful horticulture. It was noted that the way children used the garden had been an issue for as long as the oldest resident could remember.

The Chair concluded that there were as always two views in the room-, the garden as a quiet beautiful place and for those with children who wanted a less precious garden and more freedom for the children to play – it's about balance. It's a shared space and consideration should be exercised at all times. It is an ongoing discussion for residents to have. As has been going on for the last 60 years.

On "sustainability" one resident thought there should be compost in the gardens.. Suzanne explained that composting was a central part of gardening in the Square but that the Committee had stopped advertising the existing compost owing to rats taking over as people put their food debris into the compost. There was also discussion on the gardeners' welcome use of shredded paper.

It was considered that these were issues for the new Committee to take forward.

## **12. CSRA Garden Committee - discussion of ideas for the committee's structure and rethinking how the garden is managed**

In light of the handover to the newly reconstituted Committee, it was agreed that this topic was now one for the new Committee to take forward among themselves.

## **13. AOB**

- a. Newsletters: there was a request from the floor for more frequent newsletters to be produced for residents. It was noted however that with the advent of email communications the admin work of the Committee had hugely increased, with over 2000 emails received at the Committee email address. Volunteers to assist with administration and paperwork – including newsletters – would be greatly appreciated.
- b. Keys: a question from the floor asked as to the rules around disabling the electronic keys. The main reasons for disablement are when residents leave and forget to handover keys. When another occupant takes over, the previous occupant's key is switched off. Other reasons include if rates are not paid or for a limited time, where there is persistent bad behavior.
- c. Crime and safety: further to the earlier item on the agenda, a number of residents shared their concerns with recent experience of crime and danger in and around the Square.
- d. Bins/ rats: a resident raised an issue with difficulties of having complaints taken on board by Westminster Council, and it was recommended that residents make contact with SEBRA, which has very close contacts with the Council and a good way of making sure their voices are heard. It was noted in this regards that membership of SEBRA was good value at only £15 a year.
- e. Traffic in the Square/ speed limits: several residents raised concerns as to ongoing problems with drivers in the Square, and it was again recommended that SEBRA was a particularly helpful route for pursuing these issues with the Council.
- f. Next AGM: a member queried whether the meeting was now required to set a date for the next following AGM. It was confirmed that no such fixing of a date was required as business of the meeting, and that the next AGM would be held at a time and place to be determined by the Committee.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed.