

HYDE PARK ESTATE ASSOCIATION

CHAIRMAN'S CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2018

Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe that a whole year has gone past and that we now approach the end of what for our Committee has been a busy year. I am happy to say that your Committee has been very active on a number of fronts, and while we would have liked to have achieved more than we have in this year, we are moving in the right direction and we feel that the Committee is certainly succeeding in its effort to identify and deal with some of the issues that confront us on the Hyde Park Estate.

I will try in this newsletter to give some flavour of the kinds of things we have been dealing with and some of the concerns that we still have to address.

We have held two very good special meetings in the course of the year, along with our popular monthly pub sessions, open to all members, namely, our Annual General Meeting and our Christmas party on 4 December.

The Annual General Meeting, held at the Royal Lancaster Hotel once again, was the best we have ever had in terms of attendance and we were very pleased and privileged to have had very interesting presentations by John Davies and Paul Flexney-Briscoe of the Sellar Property Group about the stunning new development at Paddington Square, which will transform completely and excitingly the entrance to Paddington Station.

Kay Buxton of the Marble Arch and Paddington BIDs, outlined some of the many and varied activities of the BIDs, including a description of the activities of their Community Support Teams.

Councillor Ian Adams, our new Ward Councillor, having finished his term as Lord Mayor of Westminster, entertained us with a number of entries in his diary during his mayoralty – he has had a fascinating term as Lord Mayor and delighted us with the most interesting stories and anecdotes.

The problems on the Estate remain, as I mentioned in my Chairman's Report – crime and prostitution have not diminished, and indeed there have been increases in the amount of prostitution, drug dealing as well as robbery and aggressive attacks by individuals on bicycles and scooters.

In addition to this, a number of businesses in the Estate have been broken into and burgled and it appears as if the police are quite challenged in attempting to deal with these incidents.

We are grateful, as always, for the very generous help afforded us by General Manager, Sally Beck of the Royal Lancaster Hotel – it is a superb venue and we much appreciated being able to meet residents and friends after the meeting over a glass of wine. These annual meetings are crucially important as they give us a chance also to hear from members of our community and to address the concerns that they raise.

We also had occasion to meet with residents at a stall set up in Connaught St during the 150th Anniversary celebration of the Church Commissioners. The Commissioners put on a very good show, having actors in period dress and entertainment set up on a stage in Connaught St. We received a fair amount of feedback and recruited some new members and were grateful for the arancini kindly supplied by Stuzzico, one of our business members.

We are very grateful to the Church Commissioners for numerous improvements which they have made on the Hyde Park Estate, and continue to do so, whether it be the new fountains and gardens at the Water Gardens, the replacing of period balconies on Connaught Street, or the newly-completed railings in Hyde Park Square. Please have a walk around Hyde Park Square one evening to see the lights on the six Christmas trees in the Square and just how elegantly the railings have returned the Square to its former glory.

The Church Commissioners do come in for some in for some pretty hard stick from some of our businesses and residents, but we are sincerely grateful to Mark McKeown and his colleagues for their continued commitment to improving the look, feel and general ambience of the Hyde Park Estate.

Clearly, some businesses have had their rentals pushed up too sharply and we will always attempt to assist businesses that are having difficulty with some of these increments. This is not the time to load businesses with additional costs, as the economy has really stalled, possibly in anticipation of the Brexit outcome. So, our message to the commercial property division of the Church Commissioners is still 'Please do not be the cause of our losing very useful amenities and businesses that contribute to the general feeling of Connaught Village and its appeal'.

We also had a very enjoyable Christmas Party, organised by our irrepressible Sandra Brendlor, at the Royal Standard Cocktail bar and Restaurant on the corner of Sale and Star streets. We had a room to ourselves, which enabled quite an intimate meeting for the fifty members of our community who attended, including Councillor Antonia Cox, John Walton of PRACT and John Zamit of SEBRA. A good time was had by all. It was a great opportunity just to meet and have informal conversations, enjoy each other's company, and see in the festive season.

Our activities have focused primarily this year on our sub-committees, and I will give you a flavour of each of those:

1. TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

Our Chairman of this committee, Sally Martin, has been exceptionally busy in the course of this year. Assisted very ably by Drs Sergio Chiquetto, Nic Xenios and Mr. John Baker and less ably by myself, Sally has been focusing on the incredibly challenging problem of the increase in traffic through the Hyde Park Estate caused by the installation of the cycle lanes and the consequent narrowing of key arterial roads such as the Bayswater Road and Westbourne Terrace and Street.

The resulting chaos at the Lancaster Gate gyratory has certainly made things worse in terms of traffic density and pollution, the invasive noise of horns being sounded in anger and frustration around the clock and a general feeling that our neighbourhood has been invaded and is being ruined by all manner of vehicles using it as a rat run.

This committee has invested in two surveys using Tracsis, a reputable traffic data and advisory company that assists in the measurement of traffic flows. We have ascertained that the Hyde Park Estate is fundamentally being used for the through traffic that can no longer easily traverse the Bayswater Road and other choked arterial routes. TFL will no doubt argue that the traffic has improved and that they have data which will actually confirm this.

However, we are certain that this is not the case and all of us who live on the Hyde Park Estate are totally aware that traffic has increased fundamentally.

We placed fourteen vehicle number recognition cameras at the key entrances and exits from the Hyde Park Estate over a period of twelve hours on a Tuesday last January. The purpose of this survey was to capture all vehicles entering and exiting from the Estate. We have ascertained that upwards of 86% of vehicles that came into the Hyde Park Estate over the twelve-hour period exited within 5 minutes.

This confirms objectively that most vehicles that come into the Hyde Park Estate are not legitimate delivery vehicles, residents or necessarily even taxis serving the Estate, but are vehicles simply using the roads of our Estate, possibly with the assistance of Waze or other such satnav systems, as a convenient way of avoiding the traffic density caused by the halving of lanes on key arterial routes for the sake of installing cycle lanes that are objectively not being used.

We are furious with TfL as they have done no apparent significant study prior to all these changes that would have addressed potential consequences. They are also not wanting to hear the feedback that we have tried to give them, that is, that people will still continue using cars and need to, and that the bicycle lanes on Bayswater Road and certainly on Westbourne Street are hardly ever used.

Not only that, but the changes on Westbourne Street now actually channel traffic through the Estate because, as we all know, there has been the reduction of one lane turning either left or right into Bayswater Road. This is actually scandalous, but we nevertheless find ourselves at this point speaking to people who simply will not listen. This does not mean that we will desist from making these representations - we will take them to the highest level. Not only are Uber taxis and ordinary taxis using the Estate as a through route, but there are increasing numbers of heavy and light vehicles as well as coaches, which are not actually permitted to drive through the Estate.

In order to address all of this, we have been ably assisted by John Walton of PRACT whose knowledge and understanding of traffic issues is unparalleled. John has been hugely helpful in a number of these discussions by virtue of his comprehensive knowledge and the very thorough and well-researched documents that he produces.

We are working now with our Ward Councillors to address the problems of rat-running from the Lancaster Gate gyratory through the Estate, not just via Brooke Street but right into Hyde Park Square and Connaught Street, as well as from traffic turning off Bayswater Road into Hyde Park Street and going all the way through Hyde Park Crescent into Sussex Gardens.

We would like to thank our Ward Councillors for making representation, after we had raised these issues with them, and finding CIL money to achieve some degree of traffic mitigation. We will shortly be seeing three new Zebra crossings, one on the west side of Hyde Park Square in Strathearn Place, and one on the north-east side of Hyde Park Square in Hyde Park Street as well as one further north in Hyde Park Crescent.

There is also an intention to reduce the speed limit across the Hyde Park Estate to 20 miles per hour, something which is being done in other Wards and will probably end up being done throughout London (more about this later). Our Councillors have also had some double yellow lines painted to discourage vehicles from parking in places that cause difficulties for pedestrians and cyclists. Other traffic calming measures will include the introduction of various shoulders and raised sections and circles that will try and slow down some of the traffic speeding recklessly through the Estate.

Much of this work is highly technical and we would like to thank Sally, Nick, Sergio and John for their assistance and for putting in many voluntary hours to analyse the data and understand the position that TfL has taken. We have also hired traffic expert Mr Keith Firth to do some consulting for us in terms of what our next steps will be, but rest assured that we will carry on attempting to

address this problem until such time as we are able to either shut off some of the streets that allow access to this very vexing and invasive traffic, or find other means to reduce it.

As we all know, the Oxford Street plan envisaged by the Mayor of London was stopped by the Westminster City Council after a very significant representation by most of the local Ward resident associations and amenity societies.

A consultation has just finished on Westminster City Council's own plans for the Oxford Street district. We have joined other resident associations and amenity societies in making our views known and raising such concerns as we have through the process of consultation.

Additional concerns were around a second consultation, to do with changes to buses and bus routes. Much concern has been expressed by various members and residents in particular about the number 94 bus about which there has been a great deal of discussion.

We have also highlighted the concerns about the proposals to relocate the Victoria Coach Station to a site near Royal Oak. Although this is not within our area directly, there will be knock on impacts on the Estate. This is a plan that was attacked 30 years ago by both SEBRA and the HPEA and it was the reason PRACT was originally set up. There will be a public meeting on the 22nd January further to discuss this but clearly this is one of the concerns that many of our members have and we are watching the developments very closely.

We have undertaken to do further traffic counts at Lancaster Gate and review the results with both SEBRA and PRACT and our Councillors before finally making a representation to TfL which will be data-based and will present the arguments very forcibly, our having spent a year understanding the problem and obtaining accurate data.

2. PLANNING AND LICENSING

The new head of our Planning subcommittee, Matthew Lindsay, has quietly worked away at ensuring that planning applications are looked at and in particular, representation is made when there are planning issues that cause concern to residents or, on the other hand, where there are requests for assistance with applications that would add value to the Estate and contribute to the social good.

Matthew took over the portfolio this year and we are delighted that he has done so and that this most important portfolio is in safe hands. Once again, we welcome requests for assistance from all residents who are having problems with planning, either where a neighbour is intending to do something which you feel is disruptive or detrimental to your property, or where you are attempting to improve something and would like the endorsement of the Hyde Park Estate Association. Please do not hesitate to contact us or to contact Matthew Lindsay in particular.

We have also mentioned a number of key consultations which have an impact on planning. It is strange that many of these consultations seem to take place just before Christmas, when people are winding down their activities and taking a break out of London or spending time with their families. It is not optimal and sometimes one wonders why there are so many consultations being squeezed in at such short notice before the end of the year.

One of the consultations has to do with the Westminster City Council City Plan which closes on the 21st December, which includes a number of proposals that require careful consideration including a restriction on the size of any new-build residential property to 150 square metres, as well as liberalising the ability to add an additional storey to an existing property.

Whilst we are fully in support of providing more affordable housing, we are concerned about both of these proposals because restricting new builds to 150 square metres seems to be a draconian way of doing this. Surely this should be done through the planning process itself, upon

applications being received and not as a centrist blanket rule which prevents the variation in residential property sizes that should characterise a great city. We are quite surprised by this and certainly would object to it.

There is in our view a problem with adding additional storeys to existing properties, as this could invite all sorts of ill-considered schemes and encourages the type of building that changes the character of our Estate. One of our major roles is to preserve the heritage and character of the Hyde Park Estate and this loosening of planning constraints certainly threatens to change that.

We were also concerned about the proposed changes to the Westminster City Council Planning Department which might lead to the removal of the Chief Planning Officer and we have raised our concerns about this directly with the leader of the Council. Again, this was an example of poor consultation and an inability for us to put our point of view across in a timely and constructive manner.

There is another consultation, closing on the 23rd December, about Edgware Road. We are supportive of most of the measures intended to make the Edgware Road safer for pedestrians, namely, the introduction of green man crossings with countdown timers and boxed sections for cyclists.

However, your Committee is deeply concerned about the risk of traffic diverting through the Estate to avoid tailbacks arising from the traffic being slowed down by the pedestrian crossings - given the fact that the other side of Edgware Road is subject to congestion charges, increasing traffic might enter the Hyde Park Estate to escape the predictable tailbacks.

While we support it in principle, we are also unsure about the effect of the mooted 20 mph restriction on the Edgware Road, as some research would suggest that slow traffic increases levels of pollution. Once again, this scheme cannot be implemented without full consideration of the potential consequences. This is a lesson we have learned to our great disadvantage with the introduction of cycle lanes and this Committee does not intend for that to happen again.

It is clear from above that the Hyde Park Estate Association is extremely active in attempting to ensure that our beloved Estate is being protected in ways that it needs to be from the heavy-handed actions of certain bureaucrats and agencies who are more interested in their grand plans than what it means to live in this wonderful part of London.

It has been suggested that we should explore with the Mayor's office the potential of extending the congestion zone into the Estate again, which might deal with many of the traffic challenges. We will certainly raise these questions in the new year in our ongoing attempt to deal with the traffic problems.

3. WARD PANEL AND POLICING

Earlier this year we were able to reinstate the Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panel meetings with the Police. These meetings have gone very well and our relationship with our police team has been an extremely good one, with a great degree of consultation and cooperation. We have built excellent relationships with our two PCs, Lorna Sutton and Claire Napper and with our new Police Sergeant, Ludmilla O'Brien. Sadly, Sgt Lud has now moved on and we would like to express our sincere thanks for the work she has done in the short time she was with us, as she and her team really understood some of the difficulties we confront on the Estate and attempted, inter alia, to address the outrageous situation of prostitutes blatantly using Southwick Mews and being very aggressive on Sussex Gardens.

We have experienced all too often our good police resources being shifted to other areas and we know this is necessary for them, but it is quite distressing for ourselves. We know by now that as we build a relationship with a good, new team, that team will be moved on one way or another.

The police have illustrated their understanding of the degree of crime on the Hyde Park Estate, which is of significant concern. Following a recent security meeting, the Paddington and Marble Arch BIDs have undertaken to extend their Community Service patrols on Friday and Saturday nights in the lead-up to Christmas. These patrols are paid for by the various businesses and are provided by private security firms who work in close co-operation with the police.

Noting Council Leader Nicky Aiken's attempts to obtain additional voluntary Council Tax contributions, we did ask our Councillors to ascertain whether these contributions could be ring-fenced in order to provide the Hyde Park Estate with additional policing or security. We would certainly then be in full support and would try to get most of our members to make the contributions. Westminster City Council certainly have it within their remit to do this, but they have chosen not to do so at the moment. It is still our considered priority request of them!

We do not think that the additional funding that the Police will get from the Government will make any difference to the services they provide us, so we will carry on making representation that, given that we only have two police constables on the Hyde Park Estate (formerly there were six), the only way that we will bring down the increasing crime levels will be to have additional security or policing presence on our streets.

The police are doing everything they can with their very limited resources and we know that they are totally committed and totally engaged but they simply do not have enough manpower and the only route open to us is to employ security patrols. It is very difficult for us, as an amenity society, to do this, because it is not within our remit, but we want to try to find a mechanism to enable contributions by members of the Hyde Park Estate, as has been done elsewhere, which will afford us all the additional security.

If everyone on the Hyde Park Estate was prepared to contribute, the amount per annum would be under £100 per household. This is certainly not unaffordable by most of the residents on the Estate. So, watch this space, because we will push on with these representations, given our concern that crime is one of the biggest issues confronting us! We would also like to hear your opinions on the idea of a voluntary contribution for the purpose of hiring private security teams.

At our last Ward Panel Meeting on 4th December, the police indicated that they were engaged in certain activities that we hope will have a more significant impact, both with some of the gang activities that seem to have been more prevalent on the Hyde Park Estate and with the recent increases in knife crime and violent assaults.

In order to address this, the Met have been conducting daily weapons sweeps and have also brought in their Capitals Territorial Support Group to deal with some of the problems plaguing the Ward. We welcome this additional assistance and the police making use of some of their specialist teams, both to do with violence and to do with prostitution and drug dealing.

It is noted that the Joe Strummer Subway has been shut and the area will be planted up to improve its appearance.

A word from the Police worth noting: as we head towards Christmas, please be aware of ATM snatch-and-distraction thefts which have increased at the Barclays and HSBC branches on Edgware Road! The police advise us rather to use the ATM machines inside wherever possible and to be mindful of how much money we are withdrawing, as well as being mindful of anyone loitering nearby. The police would welcome suspect descriptions and the registrations of associated vehicles. Also, be careful of how you dispose of Christmas gift packaging so as not to make expensive new acquisitions too obvious.

In Sussex Gardens, Southwick Mews and other surrounding streets, the police are continuing to implement Section 35 Dispersal Zones and would welcome residents and businesses getting in

touch, as any information on prostitution and drug dealing would enable these additional powers to be employed.

We thank the police for all of their activities and their efforts to address the issues. They will next year carry on with the surgeries they hold at Waitrose and also the meetings that we began this year at Abasto in the evening, for any concerned residents to come and speak directly with our police team. More about this at the beginning of the year, and please watch for new Abasto dates.

4. COMMUNICATIONS AND FINANCE

Committee member Sarah Clifford has been very active in updating our website and obtaining photographic content. We welcome any content from members and we will ensure that the new website is topical, interesting and relevant. Members are successfully subscribing to receiving our emails. As we get much material from local stakeholders, the more email addresses we have, the better – it does not cost much to be a member of the Association and the benefit would increase as a function of making members aware of what we are busy doing.

One aspect of this is to capture any 'hot topics' from the community. Our contacts with members by email are one very important way of achieving this. We will explore new and more effective ways of communication with our members, while not flooding you with unnecessary information.

Our thanks go to Sarah Clifford for all she has done to bring us into this new century in terms of our communications capability. We would also like to thank our very dynamic new Treasurer, Maria Parpou, who has, working with Sarah, updated our payment methodologies so that we are able now to pay online and also able to take credit card payment at the door of our various functions when so required. Maria has thankfully taken full charge of this important portfolio.

As I mentioned at the Annual General Meeting, we were extremely sad at the passing of our long-serving Treasurer, Bill Quinn. Bill served this Association for over fifteen years and we will always miss him. A thorough gentleman, he was also an honorary Vice President of the Association and his were shoes that were not easy to step into by any means, but Maria has taken control of the function and our finances are in good order, as is the recording thereof.

5. MEMBERSHIP

Thanks to Mark McKeown of the Church Commissioners, our membership increased significantly in this last year with the introduction of block memberships for blocks within the Hyde Park Estate. This is a significant change in the way in which we have worked before, because it enables us to put posters of our activities in the foyers of the various block buildings and to communicate more effectively with a broader group of members.

The block membership does not mean that individuals living in those blocks can't receive individual communications; this is still possible, and all block residents need to do is contact us with their email details and they will receive those communications with pleasure.

Sandra Brendlor, who has always organised such incredible functions for us, will be stepping up to join Dr Saeed Barzin in focusing on the remaining blocks in the Hyde Park Estate and increasing the block membership and subscriptions. We wish her well in this initiative, as the more members we have, the more understanding we have of what's going on in the Estate, the more we can do to raise concerns and to act in a meaningfully representative fashion.

6. SHORT LETTING AND ENVIRONMENT

Another new committee member, Andrew Beverley, has very kindly taken over two portfolios of the committee. The first one is the portfolio of short letting. Andy has been very active in helping set up the Bathurst Action Group, which has actively been discouraging short letting and has a lot of information regarding how to combat this increasing problem, with its concomitant issues of fly-tipping, loud noise and anti-social behaviour.

A cross-departmental group has been set up by Westminster City Council to address the problems of short letting, a problem described by Nicky Aiken, Leader of the Council as 'night letting'. We are very pleased that this is being done but would like to ensure that we maintain our own vigilance on this issue. Please talk to Andy Beverley if you have these concerns and feel that we can be of some assistance.

Andy has also taken over the Environment portfolio, because it seeks to address issues in the physical environment of the Estate such as broken paving stones, unsightly broken fences, garbage being left where it should not be left, the possibility of improving light fittings and so on, throughout the Estate. We are invited to submit our list of items to the Council every year and Andy will be our point man on this particular topic as well. So thank you, Andy, for stepping up and for assuming responsibility on behalf of your fellow residents.

7. EVENTS AND PUB EVENINGS

Susan Quinn continues to arrange our extremely successful pub evenings, with a range of different speakers and topics, always attracting significant interest from members. We thank Susan once again for her ongoing commitment and passion and for ensuring that these evenings are never disappointing and are highly worthwhile in terms of providing an opportunity not only to hear from our various excellent guest speakers, but also to engage with them on their topics and to stay behind afterwards and have a chat or some food in a way that reinforces the spirit of our community.

So, it has been a very busy year for our committees and I would like to thank most sincerely all of our committee members for their contributions, for their interest in serving the community and for their providing our committee with such a splendid spirit of partnership and enthusiasm. In particular, our Vice Chairman, Sally Martin, our Treasurer, Maria Parpou, our Secretary, Bernadette McKernan, and our Webmaster Sarah Clifford, have been real stalwarts and have assisted enormously in the amount of organisation that is required to keep our various activities going. My heartfelt thanks to them and to all the other members of the committee.

So, it is clear from the above that your Hyde Park Estate Association is extremely active in attempting to ensure that our beloved Estate being protected in ways that it needs to be from the heavy-handed actions of certain bureaucrats and agencies that are more interested in grand plans than in what it means to live in this part of London.

The more we stand together as a community, the more we are able to protect the tranquillity and good feeling of our environment. I am deeply grateful for the assistance of all who serve on our Committee and we invite all residents and businesses to come forward and participate in our activities so as to ensure that firstly, we represent the community more effectively and secondly, that we are sure that the voice we make heard is a representative voice in itself.

There is no greater experience than feeling the sense of the neighbourliness and community that comes from meeting and interacting with our fellow residents and we are committed to ensuring that we are not just a neighbourhood but indeed a community.

It remains for me to wish you all a very MERRY CHRISTMAS and a happy and peace-filled 2019. May you and your families be well over the festive season and we hope to see you in the new year as we continue with the various initiatives to which we are committed.

Dr Allen Zimble
Chairman
Hyde Park Estate Association