

SEBRA

SOUTH EAST BAYSWATER
RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

43rd Annual General Meeting – 18 November 2013

Minutes

The 2013 Annual General Meeting was held in the Porchester Hall. Some 150 members of SEBRA attended; there were also more than 50 guests. John Zamit, Chairman of SEBRA, opened the meeting at 7.10 pm.

He said that numerous apologies for absence, too many to read out, had been received. They included apologies from Councillors Steve Summers, Cabinet Member for the Community; Heather Acton (who hoped to be able to arrive later) and Jean-Paul Floru (both from Hyde Park Ward); Rosemary MacQueen, Strategic Director Built Environment at Westminster City Council; Chief Superintendent Paul Rickett and Chief Inspector Tracy Stephenson, both of the Metropolitan Police; Leon Daniels, Managing Director Surface Transport at TfL; Elizabeth Virgo (Chairman) and Andrew Garwood-Watson, both of the Paddington Waterways and Little Venice Society; and from Committee Members Jeannie Dixon, who was unwell and Angus Hudson, who was away.

The Chairman went on to say that today's meeting was to be in a new format, with just one formal speech and then questions from the floor, mainly but not necessarily to the platform party. Later on there would be an informal reception with drinks and canapés sponsored by Veolia Environmental Services.

1 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone, especially Councillor Philippa Roe, Leader of Westminster City Council. He expressed thanks to GLL, operators of the Porchester Hall, for once again providing the hall for the meeting, and especially to David White, the Porchester Centre's General Manager, and to Hall Manager, Ben McEntergat, and his staff.

The Chairman pointed out three displays at the rear of the hall:

These included one by Crossrail, with a model of a proposed new bus depot off Great Western Road, on the north side of the railway outside Paddington;

Another, mounted by the Bayswater BID, showed the latest Council proposals for the 'public realm' improvements to Queensway;

He also referred to a display of old photographs of Westbourne Grove and of the Royal Parks by Eddie Adams, an old friend of SEBRA, who was selling copies of his two paperback books containing many of these views at a special reduced price.

The Chairman then introduced the platform party. From his left they were Mark Field, MP for the Cities of London & Westminster, who would need to leave the meeting early; Councillor Robert Davis, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment; SEBRA's President, John Walton; Philippa Roe; Lynda Lennon CBE, Chief Executive of the Royal Parks Agency; and Keith Sibley, Crossrail Area Director West, standing in for Andrew Wolstenholme, (Crossrail Chief Executive).

2 Introduction of the Guests

The Chairman said he hoped that Karen Buck, MP for Westminster North, would arrive later on, as would Mike More, Chief Executive of Westminster City Council, who was soon to retire. Paul Dimoldenberg, Leader of the Labour Opposition Group on the Council, was present.

Some of the other guests present were:

- i) Councillors Ed Argar, Cabinet Member for City Management, and his deputy Frixos Tombolis; Local Ward Councillors: Susie Burbridge, Antonia Cox, Michael Brahams, Brian Connell and Suhail Rahujah;
- ii) Sgt Ken Taylor, representing the local Police. Many officers and staff from Westminster City Council were also present, as were representatives of Service Providers/Contractors to the Council;
- iii) The Council's new Tri-Borough Director of Libraries and Archives, Mike Clarke, was present, and Elizabeth Williams led members of the Paddington Libraries team;
- iv) Representatives of neighbouring Societies: Bayswater Residents' Association (BRA); The Hyde Park Estate Association (HPEA); Westbourne Neighbourhood Association (WNA) and representatives from business, including Bayswater BID (now trading as 'Bayswater Village') and Paddington BID/Waterside Partnership;
- v) A number of representatives of Crossrail;
- vi) A representative of Meyer Bergman Ltd, the new owners of Whiteleys, was also present by invitation.

3 Election of the Committee

The Chairman introduced the election by saying that the original list of those standing for re-election had included former Chairman Desmond Robinson, but that he had sadly died only a few weeks before. He said that this was a terrible loss for SEBRA, and reminded the audience of one of Desmond's favourite remarks when he had been in the Chair, that speeches should be like a lady's skirt - neither too short, nor too long.

The Chairman also thanked Joanna Buxton MBE, who was retiring from the Committee, for her many years of service to SEBRA.

Turning to the formal election of Committee members, the Chairman confirmed that nominations for the Committee had been set out in the Notice of the Meeting and repeated on the Agenda, of which a copy has been placed on every chair, and that no other proposals had been received.

Tony Shaw (Craven Hill) proposed the re-election of all those named (below), and Ian Lieber (Craven Terrace) seconded. On a show of hands, all nominees were elected nem con.

Committee elected

David Brewin, 14 Westbourne Grove Terrace;
Jeannie Dixon, 141 Gloucester Terrace;
Angus Hudson, 21 Cleveland Square;
Penny Linnett, 32 Westbourne Park Road;
Tom Meinhard, 34 Lancaster Gate;
Michael Nicholson, 17 Craven Hill Mews;
Barbara Suckle, 20 Cleveland Square;
John Zamit, 2 Claremont Court, Queensway.

4 Adoption of the Accounts

The Chairman introduced the accounts to 31 March 2013 (at Annex A to these minutes), which had been provided to all attending. He said that the year's activities had produced a healthy surplus of £2,794.30 thanks to our generous sponsors. He thanked them by name, as: The Cleveland Arms; Conways, Knight Frank; Murphy Group; Veolia; WestminsterTranServ; West One, Whiteleys.

Adoption of the accounts were proposed by Mary Moore Mason (Hereford Road) and seconded by Joanna Anderson (Sunderland Terrace).

On a show of hands, the accounts were adopted nem con.

5 Invited speaker

The Chairman then invited Councillor Philippa Roe, Leader of Westminster City Council, to give her address, entitled: *The Financial Challenges facing the Council for years 2014 to 2016*.

Councillor Roe said that she was flattered to be the only person to be invited to make a formal speech, and indeed to speak for the second year running. She would review what had been achieved in the Borough, which she summed up as being the preservation of services while making 75 per cent cuts in 'back office' costs. At present she and colleagues were very busy working through the 'Medium Term Plan' very thoroughly, with considerable success. She acknowledged that this had led to cost-saving measures which might well have been taken sooner. These were being achieved by improving services in many ways, including the use of modern technology and The Tri-Borough approach, working with Hammersmith & Fulham, and Kensington & Chelsea. People had benefitted – Westminster's Council Tax was now the lowest in the country, and had been static for six years. She said that Council Tax in Westminster was £644 less than in Camden, and £681 less than in Brent.

She described this as being outstanding value for money, and reminded the audience that Westminster was maintaining twice weekly rubbish collections, unlike many other Councils. She enumerated a number of other savings, while saying that a lot of work remained to be done.

Councillor Roe said that Westminster's Primary Schools were top in the country for reading and writing; she concluded that the Borough was feeling the benefit of targeted cuts in specific services rather than 'salami slicing', (ie shaving small amounts off every budget). Finally, she said, there was a 'fantastic standard of living in Westminster'.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Roe, saying drily that one might think that an election was coming! She had given the impression that there were no problems in the offing; his information was that the cuts to come would be tough – even now, he said, that one can't get carriageways repaired, day-to-day services were being reduced all round, and that he was especially very worried that the Planning Department was under threat. It was already 'so stretched that it wasn't true', with 13,000 planning applications a year - and yet the Department was being asked to make yet further cuts. In summary, the Chairman said that the Council Leader's speech had not been the one he had requested her to give: the financial difficulties facing the council for 2014/2016, but that it had been what he had expected – after next May's elections we would hear a lot more about the need for austerity.

6 Question Time

The Chairman explained the new format, under which the bulk of the meeting would consist of questions from the floor, aided by roving microphones. He earnestly requested speakers to give their names clearly, and warned everyone who would be replying to beware of the yellow plastic duck which he had awarded to London Assembly Member Kit Malthouse two years before for 'ducking a question' – the Chairman acknowledged that doing so might have been an error of judgment, as we had not seen Mr Malthouse since, either at the Summer Party or at the AGM.

At this point Mark Field MP stood up, apologising that he had to leave the meeting early due to 'business in The House'. He took up a microphone and proceeded to make a short speech. Mr Field started by saying that the last round of boundary changes had taken much of the SEBRA area out of his constituency, and placed it in Westminster North, the new seat held since May 2010 for Labour by his parliamentary colleague Karen Buck MP. 'Putting politics aside' he went on to pay tribute to her, and to say that they were both united in the effort to see that the national law was changed to

deal with the increasing problem of basement developments under private homes.

Bayswater had indeed changed markedly in the eleven years he had been an MP. It had ‘changed for the better’ he felt, saying that this, plus what was to come in to Queensway, would produce benefits for all to reap in years to come.

The Chairman then re-introduced the Question and Answer session, mentioning that any questions for the police would be taken by Sgt Ken Taylor, leader of the Hyde Park Safer Neighbourhood Team.

At this point Karen Buck MP arrived, and was invited to join the platform party, just in time to answer any questions directed to her.

7 Questions

Q Karen Scarborough (Connaught Square) asked what had happened to SEBRA’s application to the Council, made in April 2013, for its area to be given Neighbourhood Area status, a preliminary step to any application to become a Neighbourhood Forum.

A Councillor Davis replied that he was the Cabinet Member responsible for this matter. He said that the Council had been overwhelmed by applications but that it was going carefully through the process. All areas applied for would be determined ‘by this time next year’. ‘It was’, he said, ‘taking/ a little longer to get it all right’.

The Chairman commented SEBRA had indeed hoped to receive more by now than just a bald acknowledgement of its application, and added that there was concern that delays in the process would lead to others ‘jumping in’.

Q Victor Margiotta (Fulton Mews) asked ‘what was happening about Queensway?’

The Chairman said that this question also fell to be answered by Councillor Davis, but that it was a good one - and that, so far as he was aware, no one really knew the answer.

A Councillor Davis said that the Council had been working on ideas for improving Queensway for some time now, as evidenced by the display boards at the end of the hall. Without concerted action Queensway would die, he said. The architects now engaged on planning the ‘streetscape’ scheme had produced superb designs elsewhere; he said that a lot of money had already been spent on developing the proposals to their current form.

Now there had also been the recent co-incidental change of ownership of much of the property in Queensway, which could make a great contribution to the success of a unified scheme. Attempts to achieve improvements to Oxford Street had fallen foul of multiple ownerships of the properties there. With just three owners to deal with in Queensway, things might well proceed more smoothly. The new owners had spent a substantial amount of money in buying these properties, and they would want a good return on their investment. All this boded well for improvements there.

He concluded by saying that everyone would know ‘where we were going’ by this time next year. He anticipated a positive future, which would be clearer in a few more months.

The Chairman said that he shared this enthusiasm. He had some reservations about the scheme which had been developed so far – for example, he pointed out that plans for very substantial widening of the pavements would render the carriageway so narrow that there would not be enough room for larger vehicles to pass a bus pausing at a stop. This was most unwise, and easily dealt with by widening the pavement slightly less.

He also said no one had consulted SEBRA for six months but that there had been a meeting very

recently with Councillor Davis and other interested parties, held at the insistence of Councillor Susie Burbridge. At SEBRA's request a number (but not all) of the changes it had proposed had been incorporated in the plans on display at the rear of the hall. These plans were to be put on display for comments at Whiteleys the following week

He urged the new owners of major parts of Queensway to be forward-looking, but said that they needed time to settle in and take stock – he exhorted them to become part of the community. A good start would be to improve their shops and shop fronts/signage.

Q Sir David Roche (Lancaster Mews) asked for more details of the Queensway proposals. He was particularly concerned about the impact on the street scene of stalls on the pavement.

A Councillor Davis said that the current plans were the Council's, and were now being 'consulted on'. He welcomed all contributions to this process.

The questioner replied that these schemes did not always work out. Thirty years previously he had been Chairman of Planning for the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham. An unsuccessful attempt had been made to improve the North End Road, but difficulties in persuading the market stallholders to accept change meant that it was never achieved.

Councillor Davis then shared some of his aspirations for Queensway – perhaps, he said, it could become a recognised marketplace for various things, say on different days of the week. On one day, for example, it might become an antiques fair, not unlike Portobello Road; on another it might be a food market; on another it might contain book stalls. There were several attractive possibilities.

In the end it would be necessary to make a judgement – certainly the hope was to 'bring in good retail' which would enhance the area.

Q Ian Jones (Lancaster Gate) asked what was being done about the problem of short-term lets of residential property for holiday occupation (which is illegal in Westminster). He had seen advertising literature from a company offering local residents a management service for such lettings.

The Chairman said that there was a specialist team to deal with this practice in the Planning Enforcement Department, whose leader, Roald Piper, was among the guests that evening.

A Councillor Davis said that it was good to highlight this problem. Dealing with it was not easy, because much evidence had to be gathered in the form of affidavits, photographs etc. Neighbours often did not want to become involved.

Q Turlogh O'Brien (Leinster Mews) asked about the commercial use of the Royal Parks

A Amid applause, Lynda Lennon said that the Royal Parks now needed to find some 60 per cent of funding from other sources, due to Government cutbacks. One third of this was coming from public events, two-thirds from concessions to various operators – eg from those running boating on the Serpentine, or restaurants in the Parks. She urged people to support these businesses; her Agency received a share of the profits they make!

Returning to the Parks' events strategy, she said that 5,000 requests for events in the Parks were received each year. There were some 30 major events annually – to achieve a balance in managing this process was not easy; she was grateful for the contribution to getting it right made by several residents' associations and similar bodies.

Q Sebastian O'Meara (Westbourne Park Road) asked about problems faced by objectors to planning applications when a proposal was withdrawn and later re-submitted with slight

variations but in essentially the same form. Was it efficient and fair, he asked, that this could happen and that previous objections would then be ignored? Busy people might not realise that re-advertised proposals were not exactly the same schemes as those to which they had already lodged objections.

The Chairman commented that this was indeed a problem. It was not helpful that objections were not linked; this difficulty was made greater by a lack of continuity in the planning department staff members dealing with these linked applications.

A John Walker, Operational Director Development Planning for Westminster City Council, came forward to say that objections could not be transferred between different phases of an application; it was very important for people to object again, and there was no way round this.

Q Jack Gordon (Burwood Place) asked about a story in the Autumn 2013 issue of SEBRA NEWS, saying that the magazine was SEBRA's own version of *Private Eye*. The article, with the title '*A Most Bizarre Decision*', was about **the Council's re-allocation of payments by developers into its Affordable Housing Fund**, for which such payments were intended

This question received general applause from the audience.

A Councillor Davis said that it had been more appropriate to use some of the funds payable as a 'planning obligation' towards 'public realm' improvements in Queensway itself, rather than their going into a general Affordable Housing Fund which might well be used for affordable housing, but 'miles away in Queens Park'.

Karen Buck MP commented that such transfers had by no means been restricted to just one or two schemes; the income being devoted to affordable housing was nowhere near the amount needed.

Her point was met with significant applause.

Q Maggie Rose (Caroline Place) said that there had recently been two muggings and a burglary in Caroline Place, and asked what was being done about it.

A Councillor Davis said that these events were being treated seriously, and asked the questioner to 'accept that the Council was very interested'.

Sgt Ken Taylor added that this a new feature of life in the area, in which he had known nothing like this in his 15 years in the local police. Fortunately it had been a rare case, as crime levels generally were down; he went on to say that residents ought to be 'very careful', and that the perpetrators were 'after lots of money'.

Karen Buck MP paid tribute to Sgt Taylor and the work, which he does locally. She said that 'a pool of regional officers' was needed, but that this resource was 'no longer available'. Police with local knowledge were always being taken off to other duties, she said; there was 'real pressure on police resources'.

Philippa Roe also commented, saying that the Council was determined to 'make it work'. Westminster was the only Borough in the country 'seeing an increase in Police' – who had assured her that 'manpower itself was not the problem.' The Council was watching the situation very closely.

Councillor Antonia Cox (Hyde Park Ward) also spoke, saying that things in our area should now be better, because the 'Custody Suite' at Paddington Green Police Station had reopened. People who

had been arrested did not now have to be taken down to Belgravia. This must help to reduce time pressures on the police.

Q Helena Cordell (Kensington Gardens Square) asked what was being done to keep toilets and washrooms in the Public Library clean; she said that this was a problem.

A The Chairman said this was a matter which the incoming new Tri-Borough Director of Libraries, Mike Clarke - who was in the hall - could look into.

Mike Clarke then spoke briefly, thanking SEBRA for having invited him to attend and saying that he would talk to the questioner at the end of the meeting.

Q Alex Verbeek (Craven Terrace) said he was a jogger, and asked why Kensington Gardens were not open at night, whereas Hyde Park is.

A Lynda Lennon said that it was important to consider what features of each area might be at risk during night-time opening; the Albert Memorial was an example. However, she would look at what might be done. She said that it was interesting that the crime statistics did not suggest that extending opening hours would have any adverse affect.

Q Ian Hessenberg (Westbourne Park Villas) asked for more news about Basement Developments, which had been covered in the Autumn issue of SEBRA NEWS.

A Councillor Davis said that a joint exercise which Westminster Council had just carried out with Karen Buck MP had shown that existing Planning Law could be 'much tougher'; the newly introduced Planning Guidance, together with the new Construction Management Plan, would maximise the effectiveness of the current law.

'Kensington & Chelsea had rushed ahead without research', he said, and that Borough's attempt to introduce new controls had not worked well. The new Westminster policy, developed more cautiously, and very well supported by 'excellent work' by Alan Baxter Associates, Structural Engineers, was 'very good'. Overall, Westminster City Council's 'policing' was 'much better'.

Karen Buck MP added that the current problems followed fairly recent Government changes to what was now allowed under 'Permitted Development'. No one had foreseen the basement problem, which had developed very quickly. The problem was that developers were so well funded that they can 'afford to test the law'. She was continuing her joint efforts with Mark Field MP; together they were visiting Ministers and pressing for a change in the law. She said she would be introducing a Private Member's Bill.

These comments brought applause from the audience.

Q A member asked how the Crossrail scheme would affect existing transport links.

A Keith Sibley, amid laughter, said that he was happy to reply to this first question directed to him, although he would have been equally happy not to be have been asked any questions at all! He said that Crossrail's trains would add something like 10 per cent to overall capacity; the Central Line especially would be 'relieved'. There would be much greater usage of interchange stations like Paddington, but it had been designed to cope with such increases.

Q Valerie Braden (Westbourne Gardens) asked about the antiquated law on leaseholds, which gave flat dwellers significant problems.

A **Karen Buck MP** said that she absolutely agreed that something should be done about the ‘aged law’ on leasehold, which had ‘last been looked at in 2001’.

Q **Councillor Susie Burbridge** asked two questions about access to Paddington Station. First, ‘why were the stairs missing’ for access from Eastbourne Terrace, and Secondly: why was it not possible for private cars to drop off passengers at the new taxi deck on the eastern side of the station?

A **Keith Sibley** confirmed that access from either end of Eastbourne Terrace would not be possible until Crossrail was completed in 2018; there would then be pedestrian entrances at each end of the Terrace.

He also agreed that private vehicle access to the station was difficult at present. ‘Registered’ private cars (but not minicabs) could use the taxi deck now; once the scheme was complete in 2018 access for private vehicles would be better.

Q **Ian Lieber (Craven Terrace)** asked about cycling in the Park, saying there was a need for substantially higher fines to prevent reckless cycling, which is very dangerous. He had recently seen a cyclist continuing for quite a considerable distance before finally accepting that he must stop when pursued by police.

A **Lynda Lennon** said that fines had recently been increased by £10, but that it was difficult to maintain a balance – she said that cyclists’ groups were always asking for better facilities; for example for dedicated cycle lanes, while pedestrians did not want any of this. She asked the questioner to let her know of any specific problems, and she would investigate them.

Q **Mark White (Queen’s Gardens)** asked about the Craven Road sewer clearance works (reported in several recent issues of *SEBRA NEWS*).

A **The Chairman** said that the problems there seemed never-ending, and that Thames Water had kept finding more deposits of fat, oil and grease during its long drawn-out clearance exercise. He himself had encountered great problems in getting any information from Thames Water – he had spent well over two hours on a phone call to the company about this, being passed from pillar to post, but without finding anyone who even knew that the work was in progress. *SEBRA* member Tony Shaw had been a great help in looking into this problem; he and the Chairman would continue to pursue it. ‘Watch this space’ said the Chairman – and wound up the Q&A session.

7 Presentation to Mike More

The Chairman then asked if Mr More was present; he was detected near the back of the hall, having arrived during the proceedings. Mr More, who after more than five years in post is soon to retire as Chief Executive of the City Council, was asked to join the platform party. The Chairman then presented a series of gifts to him, starting with a farewell card signed by the ‘great and the good’ from *SEBRA*, plus a number of presents which – it had been ascertained – Mr More would be permitted to accept.

These gifts all related to Mr More’s favourite football team, Arsenal, and included a pair of gloves ‘for use in his retirement garden’, a clock, and a number of other items, among a mug, a red teddy bear mascot, a football and a pen set. Finally, the Chairman produced a tape recorder and played a snatch of a raucous song performed by a number of Arsenal supporters.

8 Raffle draw and social gathering

It was now 8.40 pm. The draw for raffle prizes then took place.

The prizes, generously donated by the organisations concerned, were:

La Suite West Hotel: A room for one night plus dinner and breakfast, for two;

Island Grill Restaurant (at the Lancaster London Hotel): Dinner for four plus a bottle of wine;

Marianne Restaurant, Chepstow Road: Dinner for two including a bottle of house wine;

The Caesar Hotel: A voucher for £100 against accommodation or restaurant bills;

Bayswater BID/Village: A Christmas hamper;

Knight Frank, estate agents: Use of their London taxi for a day (within the M25).

The formal meeting closed, and those present moved to the back of the hall, where free beer, wines and soft drinks were available. SEBRA volunteers helped the caterer's staff in circulating a selection of hot and cold canapés, and the post-AGM gathering went on until around 10.15 pm.

Note

A copy of SEBRA's Accounts to 31 March 2013, as provided to all those attending the AGM, is available on request from the Chairman of SEBRA.