

**Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association
Strategy Working Group
Final Report**

This is the Working Group's third and final report to the RA Council. The earlier reports were presented in November 2010 and March 2011.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RA need to adopt a Strategic Plan which will

Re-Confirm its mission statement and objectives

Stem Membership decline

Set out its core areas of operation and concern

Set out its policies on major issues

Set out the nature of its relationships with local organisations (incl. the LBB)

Set out a committee structure to help address and monitor these core areas of interest and a reporting procedure

Ensure that its structure offers opportunities to call upon a wealth of talent found amongst residents or provide such opportunities outside the structure.

- Ensure that the work it does and the targets it sets reach out to the people whom it aims to serve and represent
- Redesign its Executive and Council structure and meetings content to make these meetings more attractive to people
- Continue to do well what it is already doing.

OUR MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Our views have been set out in our Interim Reports but we highlight the following:

Membership

Membership is static and ageing – not representing the cross section of the community adequately. It is not fair or practicable to have left this in the hands of the chairman and urgent steps must be taken to recruit additional members on a significant scale.

We consider that this is a key issue because if we cannot proactively work to engage and attract younger members we cannot bring about major positive changes for the RA. To recruit new members we need to create an environment that is attractive for them to want to contribute and therefore we need to change and extend the menu of activities and skills we are seeking from the community.

We recommend that the Residents Association allow adults in households to have a vote. It is a consideration we consider to be important.

Finances

Considerable improvements have been made in recent months to the RA's record keeping and controls. This now provides an opportunity to consider how RA funds should be spent, both in terms of policy and in relation to individual projects. This should be done before the next AGM if possible.

We need to allocate and use our funds to improve what we do and offer to the community. A spending policy should be adopted consistent with the aims of the RA, and other than trivial amounts, all expenditure should fall clearly within the policy.

Where we put on activities for the community we should seriously seek to ensure that we can make these as self financing as possible so that we can concentrate our funds on our main priority.

Development Officer

We repeat our previous recommendation that serious consideration must be given to the appointment of a paid part-time Development Officer. If the activities of the RA grow in the direction recommended, the administrative burden placed on the RA Chairman, and the Chairmen of committees will become difficult to carry efficiently and could prove a disincentive to those who might otherwise be prepared to take on these roles. We do not believe that the RA can be expected to achieve a deliverable and 'driven' programme without a paid position, in today's climate.

The roles of the paid part time Development Officer (DO) would include:

assisting the implementation of the activities of the key committees and recruitment of new active members for the various activities of the RA;
acting as the Community Liaison Officer with Schools, Adult Education, Cultural and Religious bodies and local businesses to help implement the various programmes of Committees; and
coordinate and ensure active representation on Local and National organisations in a forward looking way, to enhance the contribution of the RA.

There would be an element of payment to support secretarial services. The ability of the RA to finance this position is crucial. This expenditure should be part of the overall review of financing recommended elsewhere in this paper.

An Implementation Committee should be established to:

- Recruit a DO; and
- in the interim carry forward the recommendations of this report.

Wider Representative Role

As indicated in the 2nd interim report, the RA could provide a valuable conduit for the views of residents on matters beyond those which are strictly local. Education and Health Services are obvious matters. In addition the RA could be the best route for residents to respond to the increasing use of consultation by local authorities and others.

Relationship with HGS Trust

As previously mentioned, residents often find it difficult to distinguish between the Trust and the RA. We need to develop a systematic relationship with the Trust to:

1. Challenge the Trust (and to be seen to challenge the Trust) about individual matters, and in relation to the Trust's own long term plans in cases where the RA does not feel that the best interests of residents are being served. This might include for example elements of conservation and planning issues and the Trust's own role.
2. Co-operate with and assist the Trust on matters where there is no conflict of interest.

Relationship with London Borough of Barnet

Any improvement that has taken place since the Working Group started its work has been slight. Relationships with Councilors and officials are ad hoc, and it is not clear that the RA is looked on as a serious representative of HGS residents, or that residents themselves or the Suburb are regarded as an important component of the borough.

The RA should be added as an automatic consultee on matters within the Ward.

These changes will require the cooperation of Councillors and Officials. This cooperation should be sought through direct discussions.

Education and Young People

We fail to engage with local schools (also in Hampstead and other areas of London where Suburb school children attend) and educational /religious organisations working with them to provide resource materials (including lecturing) and formulate course work and course opportunities on the History, Historical Connections (eminent people); architecture and town planning history and environmental issues about the Suburb and its important place in the London Story. The RA should develop resources to enable it to do these things.

Focus Groups – bringing in local skills and expertise

By building an effective database and with the help of a Development Officer we can aim to build and task Focus Groups to look at

- Environmental issues affecting Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas – engaging with other organisations with expertise including the Prince’s Regeneration Trust, the Department of Energy and Climate Change, built environment groups such as the RICS and RIBA, University of Cambridge Centre for Climate Mitigation Research etc... where there is a huge debate in which we neither participate nor benefit from their research in an applied manner.
- Alternative energy uses in the Suburb.
- Policy documents on Planning and Design matters (in addition to the outstanding Design Guide that exists).
- Policy documents on issues such as retailing centres affecting the Suburb; adequacy and type of provision of medical services for residents in the changing NHS world.

Publicising Successes

The RA achieves a great deal with limited resources. Too few residents are aware of work which includes:

- The work of the Trees and Open Spaces Committee, including tree preservation;
- The Garden Suburb Gallery; and
- The library group

The profile of the RA could be raised considerably by giving more publicity to its involvement in these and similar matters.

PROGRESS TO DATE ON OUR FIRST INTERIM REPORT

In our March Report we recommended the following priorities:

1. Membership Committee: we believe that additional members should be co-opted to the Committee who are prepared to spearhead a membership drive. Their function will be entirely different from the continuing renewals function, but by being on the committee they will have access to the database and the opportunity to add inserts to the delivery/mail shots.
2. Focus groups – these should be established ad hoc to consider short term issues
3. Communications (per the interim report) – the first step to updating the list of email addresses is, we understand, in hand to coincide with the February/March renewal delivery.

4. Structure – the Executive Committee and Council should function as intended under the Constitution.
5. Meetings with the Trust and LBB to be instituted on a regular basis.
6. Committees – encourage ad-hoc membership for particular issues, or generally to interest a wider net in HGS & add to RA's abilities.

It must be emphasised yet again that these matters themselves do not constitute a strategy but are an essential condition for any strategy adopted. It is therefore disappointing that so little has been achieved so far. Following the above numbering, progress can be summarised as follows:

- 1 No progress
- 2 No progress
- 3 The email list is in the process of updating both as to the accuracy and completeness of the list and new software has been purchased. 1,400 of 2,000 members are now on the list although 100 need updating. However, a recent exchange shows that even the criteria for inclusion on the hgslist (which is separate, but has important links) are not well understood.
- 4 Moving to two-monthly Council meetings, and shifting back to the Executive those functions intended by the constitution to be handled by it, has been implemented. It is too early to say if this is a success, but the breathing space given by giving up half the Council meetings has already been used to hold two open meetings of RA members.
- 5 This has not been done, although there is a general acceptance of the need to distinguish the RA from the Trust in the minds of Residents. The recommendation is still however work in hand.
- 6 There has been limited co-option on to some committees, in particular Consam; however the majority of other committees seem to have made no progress in this regard; it cannot be emphasised too strongly that without the rejuvenation intended to be brought about by the recommendation there is little chance of refreshing the RA so keenly needs. Failure in this regard will make implementation of the 6 year retirement rule near impossible.

With the exception of the first item we have not attempted to prioritise the issues as they represent a coherent whole.

CONCLUSION

The preparedness of Council and the Executive to adopt the suggestions already made and to regard it as their responsibility to take them forward (rather than leave them to the Working Group to implement) is extremely disappointing and has left this Working Group with the sense that there is no real commitment to embrace change. The issues are well enough set out above and in the earlier reports and the limited success of the RA in implementing them is regrettably self-evident.

December 2011 - End