



Photo: Michael Eleftheriades

An appreciative tone at the RA AGM

JUDY MARCUS

I don't usually sit in the front row at meetings but having been asked by the Suburb News editors to write a report of this year's Residents Association Annual General Meeting, I thought I should probably sit front and centre, so I didn't miss a thing.

There was a very respectable turn out in The Henrietta Barnett School Hall. HGSRA Chair, Emma Howard, started the meeting by welcoming everyone and introducing the RA officers. Her style is effective and no-nonsense – think Angela Merkel rather than Meghan Markle – and very good it is too to see the results.

Emma mentioned the late and much missed Philip Okrent following a tragic road accident in November, and reminded us of his good works looking after and keeping safe the Suburb pavements.

This appreciative tone set the precedent for the evening. I particularly liked the thanks given to Suburb News volunteer distributors which I thought was very well deserved. My friend Francine is one such tireless volunteer and is undisputedly a local hero.

Suburb News editors were duly praised by RA officers for a 'wonderful new edition'. Editor Shelley-Anne Salisbury, believing we live in a bit of a bubble, tries to ensure we look beyond the Suburb at the wider world. Recent articles have touched on Ukraine

and the earthquakes in Syria and Turkey. Listening, I recalled the New York Times' remark about the editor of the Ham and High in the 1980s '...the only local paper with a foreign policy'. Shelley-Anne, there you go – a challenge for you!

It was most heartening to hear how the Trees & Open Spaces Committee carefully husband our wonderful natural resources, as well as how the HGS community harvesting team collects apples (and other fruit) from local gardens to supply to foodbanks. And if anyone wants to go hedgehog counting on the Heath (I know I do) this is a thing!

The increased use of Astroturf was mentioned as 'a real shame': but, on the positive side, Grey Close residents want to pay for street trees to be planted in their Close... something for their children to enjoy and for posterity.

It was good to hear about concerted local efforts to try, at however small a level, to improve the environment. The RA's environment committee (REACH) is offering residents advice on reducing heat output in our homes and offering the use of infra-red cameras to locate where heat is escaping.

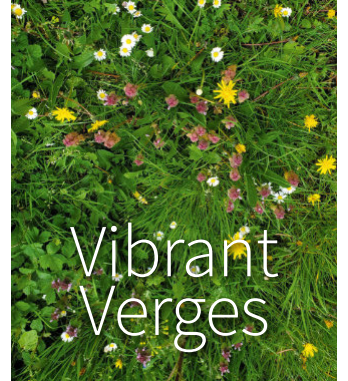
It was sobering to hear about poor air quality in the Suburb (despite all our greenery). We are, of course, surrounded by major ring roads and a lot of cut through traffic. Air quality recording systems are now available, and the REACH committee has been awarded one

which will be installed on Meadway nearby the roundabout with Hampstead Way.

Councillor Rohit Grover spoke on Suburb traffic issues, most pressingly a problem with the mini roundabout at the Hampstead Way/Meadway junction. People sometimes drive straight over the junction and that morning there had been an accident involving a car and a motorcycle. Councillors' interventions have now resulted in a commissioned study being undertaken, with newly acquired funding, to seek possible solutions.

Comments and questions from the floor were presented to the Councillors and generally related to traffic flow problems and anti-social parking across private drives on Northway and Addison Way. Councillors were also quizzed about Temple Fortune Health Centre's proposed redevelopment and the likely impact for local residents if it goes ahead. Participants were keen to have a meeting with the GPs who own the building to try to find out more.

The RA AGM is a platform for HGS residents to have their say on local matters. If you have an issue, or if you just want to glean the depth and breadth of what is going on in the Suburb, and to appreciate the behind-the-scenes work, I would definitely encourage you to attend the RA AGM next year. It is members only so please do join via their website, hgsra.uk, if you are not a member.



Vibrant Verges

Grass verges are integral to the overall design of HGS and contribute to its outstanding character. Grass verges, like street trees, add to the joy of living in this green garden suburb. Looked after verges have many benefits: they host wildflowers, trees and invertebrates, reconnecting natural habitats within green corridor ecosystems.

The delicate charm of our wonderful wildflowers is under-appreciated in our modern 'tidy' gardens, and they have to depend on biodiversity niches such as verges and twittens. Some even adapt to occasional mowing by completing their life cycles in miniature. Small verge sections can grow dozens of important pollinator species such as forget-me-not, speedwell, daisy, dandelion, celandine, crane's bills, candytuft, bitter cress, bellflower, self-heal and clover.

It's a shame when drivers don't stick to the road and mount grass verge pavements to leave deep, compacted tyre indents in the soil. This is not only ugly but destroys what is in fact a public and biodiversity amenity. Sustainably managed public green spaces can add up to support the charity Plantlife's campaign to restore at least some of the 97% of wildflower meadow areas lost over the past century (plantlife.org.uk/case-studies/road-verges/).

Therefore, it's heartening when residents adopt a damaged verge outside their house. We spotted a resident's newly seeded section, imaginatively guarded by balloons on wire posts. Quite a contrast to the churned-up verges further along.

Why not look after a grass verge outside your home!

Maria Schlatter (article & photo)

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