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## AGM Report to the Highgate Society 50th Annual General Meeting

Jan Morgan, Chair

The year started with Stephen Panke as both President and acting Chair of the HS. We owe Stephen a great vote of thanks for steering the Society through a tricky time with style, wisdom, humour and success for nearly two years. The Highgate Society is now in good shape and we are thoroughly enjoying celebrating 50 years of caring for Highgate.

This year has again been dominated by Planning and Development and especially Athlone House. Michael Hammerson has summarised the campaign for the Heath and Hampstead newsletter. Together we had been seeking the restoration of the House for ten years. February saw the Society at a 12 day long enquiry, led by barrister David Alteras acting for the Athlone House Working Group (comprising HS, Heath and Hampstead Society, CAAC). A series of expert witnesses including Gail Waldman and Susan Rose and others were put through their paces. In June the Athlone House appeal was dismissed by Inspector Colin Ball, but then the developers challenged the Planning Inspectorate's decision. Finally there was a judgement by J Bird that quashed all appeals in October. Now there is a new owner who is working with the local groups to restore Athlone House. Thanks to everyone who helped.

After the Garden Centre Appeal the previous year and Athlone House this year, the Planning and Development team are spending more time contributing to National Policy frameworks and discussion papers. Much of this comes from the continuing growing reputation of the Society and its active membership of the National Civic Voice and the London Forum of Civic Amenity groups. HS is able to submit not just well argued views but very practical examples of what is being done. Michael continues to keep us in touch with these changes by his report in Buzz.

The Highgate Neighbourhood Forum will have statutory powers this October, thanks to the work of Maggy Meade-King and Rachel Allison. I greatly appreciate my monthly meetings with Rachel which enable us all to work better together. Similarly the breakfast briefings that Katherine Ives at Lauderdale House has set up for the many local groups have helped us all.

As you will have seen in Buzz, the Highgate Society's Environment Committee is also concerned with the Archway Bridge, Hampstead dams, Parkland Walk, Winchester Pub, Richardson's, Haringey's 20 mph zone, Magistrates Court traffic while building, Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood Consultative Committees, Water House, Islington CPZ, Bishops basements, Clean-Up, Pond Square Toilets and Telephone boxes and the refurbishment of Highgate's street lamps. Meanwhile Elspeth leads a monthly planning group to monitor and comment on the key planning applications in Haringey and Camden; their understanding of the Conservation area designation and what that means is crucial. The sheer volume of work they undertake is mindblowing and we thank them sincerely.

Saturday mornings at 10A get busier and busier as more and more local residents come in to share plans and ideas and discuss changes to their home at the Saturday Planning surgeries. But worries continue and the wish for basements in the larger detached houses of the Bishops Area has now

spread to the streets of Edwardian terraces. Changes in the law also mean a rush to change business premises to residences along Archway Road.

The Sustainable Homes group ran a successful “Green a Neighbour” event where homeowners who had undertaken eco-refurbishment invited their neighbours to have a look and consider Haringey Council’s smart homes scheme. There are plans to introduce sustainable home renovation workshops to complement the Home Packs.

The Society now has its own Transport and Traffic group formed from the ongoing work Richard Webber led. There was public pressure at the Dyne House meeting four years ago to find a safer and more convenient location than Pond Square for the 271 bus to turn round. TfL accepted that the current terminus is unsafe and have considered several options including moving it to the end of North Road and standing by the Esso garage. As a result of consultation with local residents and businesses, TfL agreed to come up with a revised plan to address a number of concerns: that the bus stops and starts in the High Street, the changes not exacerbate traffic jams, that access to private entrances be safeguarded and not obstruct deliveries to the Red Lion or filling station.

John Plews continues to lead the Business circle within the HS and has joined with Transport in actively protesting against the traffic and bus plans at the Archway Gyratory. The group is concerned by the empty site on the corner of Highgate High Street and Southwood Lane where there has been a grocery store for over 200 years. But it is the only for sale/let sign. Several businesses have changed hands including the Gatehouse pub and we hope they will prosper.

With membership stable, we enjoy the variety of skills the members bring. As with most voluntary bodies, we all have to decide how much time we can commit. You all give so much and yet we need more of you, always. This year we mark the death of a former Chair Chris Ryder and a former President Ivor Burt and will remember both fondly.

There have been no elections of new council members at this AGM. We will regret it next year when 10 of the current council stand down. So we propose co-opting new council members now so they can play a part before the official elections next year. The tasks vary from stuffing letters in envelopes, serving coffee, clearing up, displaying posters, replenishing leaflets, watering a newly planted tree, listening, writing, charring groups, following up – leads, ideas, councillors, plans, creating slogans, persuading people to donate, join, tweeting, updating the website, updating data base, paying in cheques and so on! You can be sure we have a job for you all, so do pop in Saturday morning to find one!

10A, the Highgate Society building, is a very special place for us at the HS. We rent it from HLSI on a nine year lease which comes up for renewal in 2017. It is tended by an expert team led by Pippa Rothenberg and visited daily by Pat Fox. This year they have sorted heating, toilets, cleaning, new tablecloths and coffee pots, and piano tuning. Apart from Saturday morning coffee, HS members use it Mondays for Bridge, Tuesdays for Life drawing, Wednesdays for French Circle monthly, Thursdays for watercolour painting. In between it is used by various groups as well as for Council meeting held every eight weeks.

The Monday Bridge club is now looking for additional players so pop along at 1pm to 10A.

The French Circle, now led by Ruth Hazeldine and Penny Sewell, has music, art, poetry, play reading and the occasional feast at its monthly meetings, all in French.

The Life Drawing Group continues to appreciate the opportunity the sessions provide to practice this challenging but rewarding area of figurative art, using various media, and to enjoy wide-ranging discussions on art and other topics during the coffee break.

Besides painting at 10A, the Watercolour Group like painting or sketching locally, or going on outings further afield. In August they had a very happy day out painting the canal and the canal boats at Broxbourne. Once again their stall at the Fair in the Square was very popular, giving visitors a choice of buying cards or unframed paintings. Their annual exhibition was well attended.

The Hall is subtle to recoup some of the costs to local groups who offer ballet, Pilates, religion, beekeeping and music. Last October it was transformed by Marius Reynolds our VP into a showcase for the work of Hans Unger, a former Highgate resident who designed Transport posters and glass installations in the pre war years. Children's parties, anniversary celebrations and receptions are also booked at 10A.

We store stuff at 10A and many of the back copies of our now famous Buzz magazine are there. Tamar Karet edits four issues a year with help from an advertisers, proofreaders, distributors and writers. This year the advertising team under Tessa Henghes increased the number of colour ads. There are always so many events and general articles, as well as Michael Hammerson's invaluable Environment Committee Report, that our valiant street distributors would bow under the weight if the magazine were any thicker. It is a vast undertaking quarterly and we are so grateful to all of you involved.

This year's anniversary issues also aim to offer a snapshot of what life has been like throughout the past fifty years in Highgate in general, and the Society in particular. Combing through the archives has been a delight, revealing some heroic editors, amazing contributors and persistent planning battles (some of which still rumble on). When you glance through previous issues, you can see how the idiosyncratic nature of the various editors has shaped the magazine. Tamar asks, who would like to be next?

Thank you to those members who pay by Direct Debit. The membership team have produced a new membership leaflet, run at least three new members welcome parties, held a reception for the local estate agents who introduce new residents to the HS, and shared HS news with residents at Jacksons Lane as well as 10A. They take the leaflet and banner to the community day in Highgate Woods and on Hampstead Heath. We have 1300 members and want a further 100 this special year.

The Events Group led by Sue Hall is very active running events which get us all together and introduce new members to HS activities. Carols in Pond Square are the highlight, with mulled wine and sausage rolls after the singing. The Group has introduced Friday night socials at 10A and these are easy evenings for us all to enjoy chat and be neighbourly. Then there is the Fair in the Square, Music in Highgate Homes, House Walks and Talks, new members parties, the Hans Unger reception and the AGM so we thank them all for their energy and time.

Community groups like ours flourish expand and glow when we get additional help and expertise and Andrew Sulston and Allan Rapley are stunning examples of individuals doing just that. They have progressed from a Clean-Up Highgate day to pursuing 50 trees to be planted in and around Highgate, safeguarding the red telephone kiosks and the Pond Square public toilets. Many of you have joined in and we are happy to see non-members as well.

Our Treasurer William Britain has kept count for us along with Secretary Harley Atkinson. They will also lead the lease negotiations with the HLSI this Autumn. We love the premises we rent in the middle of Highgate but they do cost us.

The walking guides publications produced several years ago by Richard Webber continue to sell well from local bookshops and visitor destinations such as Highgate cemetery, Kenwood House and the Isokon gallery. Restocking the 20 retail outlets, invoicing them and chasing monies due has in recent years taken precedence over new publications.

“Life in a London Village- the story of the Highgate Society” is a 150 page book due out this Autumn. The chief focus of the book is the activities of the Highgate society over the last 50 years. How has the community organised to make Highgate a more enjoyable place in which to live and work? It covers the early battles over the transport Ministry plans to widen Archway Road, the foundation of the Harington Scheme, Jacksons Lane, Highgate cemetery and Friends of Highgate Bowl.

Our communications are always being reviewed. Outside 10A are new oak framed crafted notice boards displaying the HS logo and the words from 1966, with hinges and locks of the best quality. This is a wonderful gift from Peter Mostyn, a HS founder member, for our 50<sup>th</sup> year.

The e-newsletter is a great way to stay in touch between copies of Buzz. The website, Facebook and Twitter mean the society is at the forefront of these new ways of communicating, too. Ian and Tessa Henghes do a great job of converting our reminders into messages to you directly.

You will have seen on the screen on a loop some images from 50 years of HS. The People on the Hill was great in February this year and some of you will have enjoyed the Literary walk last Monday around Highgate thanks to Ruth Hazeldine.

Next week Tuesday 17 May is the Annual Quiz with HLSI so we ask you all to come along and pool your knowledge so we can maintain the winning streak. Stephen Panke and Richard Webber, along with the HLSI, have been working hard to devise a fun evening for us. Stephen also has a team preparing the HS stand at Fair in the Square on June 11 as the Highgate Society is again a main sponsor.

Our 50<sup>th</sup> celebrations continue: Richard Webber, working with the archives at HLSI, has an exhibition about the Great Houses of Highgate and he will talk not only there on May 31 but especially for the HS on June 2 at 3.30. It will make us think about living here now and what it may have been like then.

There will be a social evening at 10A on Friday July 8 celebrating the Harington Scheme. The Watercolour Group will be painting and drawing in the village on Saturday 9th July. At the end of the afternoon the work will be shown at 10A.

In October Elspeth will show us Modern homes in Highgate with a display at the Museum in Highgate School and a series of talks at 10A so we can all know more about the extraordinary architecture in Highgate.

There are two concerts this year to continue the support the HS has always given to young musicians by enabling them to perform publicly. Sarah Kaye has excelled in finding new musicians for us to hear. There was a Jubilee Quartet playing on May 22 and a BBC Young Pianist of the Year will be at the URC hall on Saturday October 15. We will also celebrate Yehudi Menuhin's centenary.

And then finally we will celebrate with a dinner and cabaret on Saturday 12 November at the Highgate Golf Club. And of course I cannot forget the Book of the history of the Society which will be published later this year.

So you can see we are enjoying our 50<sup>th</sup> year celebrating Highgate. Do join us.