

Thornhill Square Association

Meeting 7:30 p.m. 8 April 2019

St Andrews Church Hall, Bridgeman Road, London N1 1BQ

1 Attendance

1.1 Present

Margie Agnew, Chris Day, Stephanie Hartog, Michael Learmouth, Bridget Learmouth, Robert Milne and Philip Rutnam

1.2 Apologies

Barbara Firebrace, Patrick Firebrace, Marianne Fox, Robert Fox, Anna Longman, Christopher McKane, Claire Milne, William Palin and Beth Wilson

2 Previous meeting

2.1 Notes

The notes for the meeting of 27 March 2018 had been posted on the web site and were formally approved.

2.2 Matters arising

Nothing was discussed.

3 Recent events in Caledonian Ward

Councillor Paul Convery described the causes of, and responses to, the growth in violence locally.

Youths were turning to drug dealing from theft of and on mopeds, perhaps because of falling demand for stolen phones and growing success in catching offenders. Those most obviously in the street were at the bottom of the distribution chain. In our area they are uneducated white boys of 15-16, often with parents who themselves are with little schooling and in unskilled jobs. Some parents might be complicit, as sons that bring home hundreds of pounds can add greatly to benefits. Special local problems are tit-for-tat disputes between the "EC money crowd" and the "Cally Boys" and problems that started no later than 2010 with a particularly brutal stabbing in a fight outside the Thornhill Arms.

The boys felt that there was nothing for them to do locally. They had very limited geographic (and other horizons), except, apparently, when it came to invading each other's turf. Local business expect trouble: shops admit only one of them at once, distributors keep their shutters down, and cafés close early to avoid late-afternoon onslaughts. Parents are worried by the possibility of recruitment after school hours, the ever more challenging behaviour and the pervasive culture of money and "stuff".

Primary school teachers are increasingly alert to potential problems from lack of parental care, such as unbrushed teeth or messy clothing, as well as to disruptive behaviour. While some schools handle these in-house, others dump them on the pupil referral units: there can be up to sixty exclusions in Islington. These might simply exacerbate matters (by providing new contacts, endowing glamour, and releasing their pupils at 14:00 or 14:30) and cost 3 or 4 times as much per pupil. However, a

complicated set of measures, related to the Glasgow “public health” treatment of violence, is being introduced to help. The Council has employed 5,000 people, with 1,500 of them being teenagers.

The Cally has perhaps felt deserted late at night since the recent murder. Even without this there remains much to be done. The Council is allocating £700,000 (including £300,000 from the Mayor of London) to improving the Cally. There will be three people dedicated to it, for solving problems, developing the community (by, for example, broadening the focus of groups that focus on refugees), and so on. Somehow the shopping mix, and the business skills of the shopkeepers, should be improved; for example, Eurocafé could serve Albanian food sometimes and Invicta could make more of Portugal. The Council still plans to commission a consultant to advise. Its policy remains to discourage chain multiples, even if that led to the arrival of Paddy Power instead of Tesco (despite objections at the planning stage and during the appeal).

Though undercover officers appear every few days, the visible police presence has diminished, officers are unable to tackle unpleasant but legal behaviour (such as congregating in balaclavas), and capture is very unlikely except when police effort is concentrated. The police have been reorganised frequently and the numbers on local duties have reduced by 1/3 since 2010 or so (with some of the reduction due to the introduction of extra specialist units).

The Council has eliminated meetings intended to co-ordinate community activities (on youth support, for example). This is partly a consequence of funding cuts, which lead to officers performing two or three jobs instead of one. Still, at least, the Council has been able to keep essential services going.

3 Operations

3.1 Election of the Committee

The following remained appointed without objection:

- Chair: Isobel Morton
- Secretary: Robert Milne
- Treasurer: Stephanie Hartog

3.2 Use of funds

Stephanie Hartog distributed the accounts for 2018.

4 Thornhill Square Gardens and Thornhill Crescent Gardens

Anna McKane explained that though the Council would still pay the Association for gardening as at present it would not increase the payments if the Association took over extra beds, because it already had about fifty such arrangements. Meanwhile her guerrilla gardening would continue.

Will Palin was investigating a new approach to repairing the railings with Lottery Funding and hoped to have more concrete news at the end of May.

5 Future meetings

Stephanie Hartog described the current intentions for the summer party on 26 July. An application for a £500 grant had been submitted to the National Park City fund. The expected activities included

yoga demonstrations, games, an obstacle course, a bug presentation by council ranger, den building by Archimake, an art studio run by two local professional artists, a book swap and film showings (for children and for adults).

The intended improvement to the drainage of the football area should be done before then if at all possible.

The Cally Festival would be on 23 June.

6 Actions

Nothing was discussed.