



## OUTER AVENUE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

# Annual Report 2018

### INTRODUCTION

In 2018 OARA kept up our regular efforts to maintain and improve the quality of life in our neighbourhood through our cleaning, greening, social and creative projects. In addition this year we've explored ways of developing more "joined up thinking" with partners such as the Council, University, Students' Union, landlords, the police, the local school, doctors' surgery and places of worship - to achieve better "quality streets". This has become ever more important to help counter the effects of significant cuts to local government funding, as well as being a really positive way to develop relationships and community spirit, regardless of funding. OARA has built a reputation as a Residents' Association that looks for solutions and is prepared to work with others to achieve them; this has stood us in good stead when seeking support.

In the course of the year we held 8 committee meetings and four Ordinary General Meetings, in January, March, May and October, with 25-30 residents attending each time. We continued our policy of inviting speakers to give our meetings particular focus, and these included officers from the Planning and Traffic departments & the Cabinet member for Sustainability in March, a representative of the HMO Licensing Team in May, and from the University Public Relations Department in October.

You will find a summary of what we achieved - or are still working on - in the reports from each of our Common Ground areas below.

**Membership:** this year we reviewed our membership database and practices to ensure that we complied with the government's new GDPR- General Data Protection Regulations. By 25 May 2018 everyone on the email list was asked to opt in if they wanted to continue to receive information from OARA. In the summer the whole committee shared the responsibility of knocking on doors and contacting members personally, as well as encouraging more residents to join, as part of a move to a single annual renewal date. As a result, we now have around 100 on our mailing list. This was a reduction from the previous total but is an up-to-date and active list. 54 members paid the voluntary fee of £5 and a handful of members gave extra donations. 7 were new members. A total £330 was raised. We also approved a Data Protection/Privacy Policy. We will continue our drive to make more contact and increase our membership in the year ahead.

### COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL

**Social:-** we have continued to organise social events throughout the year, primarily two street parties in June and October, and a Christmas gathering. For the street parties we have had a lot of support from Southampton University Students' Union. They have supplied games and laminated promotional material and put the events on their calendar. Music and dance societies have performed plus other groups providing close-up magic and cake decorating. We have also had the SU Rag fund-raising group involved. The street parties attract local students plus local residents and are a great opportunity for the two to mix and find out more about each other. Our local Councillors, the police and the local church also came along to give support.

**Arts Events:-** on the creative side we held three arts events this year in collaboration with the Blue Door Estate Agency: a Spring Art Show in April, dedicated to the work of a much-loved OARA member, Rosy McGuire, who died tragically earlier in the year; a Bevois Mount History Craft Fair in June; and a Christmas Craft Fair in December - all showcasing just how much talent there is in our area.

**Police links:-** we attended the Police and Community Team meetings and are also in constant contact with our local neighborhood police team. For example, a resident contacted us about a sudden upsurge of drug dealing in the neighbourhood. We sent in numerous reports and there was a large drugs raid which resulted in a number of arrests. Since then, drug activity has greatly reduced. It still goes on, however, and we need to be constantly vigilant to help keep our area safe.

We encourage local residents to use 101 to report any police-related concerns. The more reports that go in about a specific problem, the more likely that action will be taken. You can also contact OARA directly and we can pass information on.

**Nuisance parties / anti-social behaviour:** We have established some very good contacts to help respond to incidents of late-night noise. These include: the Council's environmental health/locality team; the community relations department at the university; and a recently developed link with one of the major local landlords. This is an approach we hope to extend to other landlords. We also have our own letter that we can deliver to student households in response to nuisance parties. Contact OARA if you need support. Issuing joint information and advice about considerate behaviour, to help avoid and deter such incidents, is an ongoing project.

**Links with local organisations:-** we continue to liaise with Highfield and Inner Avenue Residents' Associations, to attend the North Southampton Community Forum and to maintain links with Bevois Town Primary School, the local Mosque and with Avenue St Andrews Church.

**PPG- Patient Participation Group - at Alma Road Medical Centre:-** this year we've focussed as usual on how we can support the surgery generally. We now have our own Notice Board! Nikki Judd, from the Red Cross and the independent living service manager for Southampton and the New Forest, spoke about the support work in progress to combat loneliness. How can we, OARA, help address this growing issue in our community? We would welcome your ideas.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

**Keeping in touch:-** we have used regular emails and the notice board at the planters to keep members and residents informed, plus occasional Bulletins and Facebook postings. Have you seen the delightful map of the area, showing where OARA has made its mark? We also delivered a Welcome/ Good Neighbour leaflet and Street Party invite to every household in early October, timed to catch the new student intake.

**OARA postcards:** these have proved really useful in several ways - welcoming new neighbours, giving to curious passers-by when we are out litter-picking or greening, giving to Estate Agents to include in packs for prospective buyers, popping a message through a letter box about bins or saying thank you. We have plenty if you would like some to spread the word.

## **SMART STREETS**

**Street Cleans:-** we have continued our twice-monthly litter picks, with breaks in August and December. This means we've had an OARA group out on about 20 Sundays, removing about 200 bags of rubbish from our streets. We have stuck with first and third Sundays and over the year 24 different members have joined in at some point, plus Finn the rescued greyhound, a canine first. A new set of equipment has also been purchased. After each session we have reported any fly-tipping and bin/rubbish issues to our contacts in the Council - who have responded practically and positively, including weekly Tuesday pick-ups by HMO Warden Barry Olson and the Community Payback Team. Overall numbers at each session have, however, declined meaning we have not always managed to tackle every street or individual street blitzes. We are reviewing tactics, including a proposal for individual members to take over designated patches and how to recruit more helpers.

**Joint effort on recycling:-** the University, Council and OARA joined together to produce and deliver blue indoor recycling bags to every household at the start of the academic year, encouraging students to collect and bin loose items. The signs are that this has reduced the number of contaminated bins.

**Traffic/Parking/Pollution:-** a special meeting in March focussed upon issues of improved parking and traffic flow arrangements in the area. There was general agreement that improvements were needed, with a variety of views on how these could be achieved. A significant number of residents as well as Councillors and officers attended and a subsequent meeting of OARA Committee representatives with the Senior Transport Strategic Planner and an area 'walk-about' by the Transport Delivery team leader did result in consideration being given to various proposals and actions. These included resurfacing of the pavements in Alma Road, promising advice about the possible location of another planter, some other minor works and further re-assurances about resurfacing of Avenue Road and carrying out a parking permit scheme survey. However, overall the ambitions of many residents, which included the possibility of a 1-way system that included Earls Road together with significant upgrading of roads and pavements in Avenue Road and Gordon Avenue (in particular), have not been met. OARA will also wish to consider the imminent results of the parking survey and has concern that original assurances about the ineligibility of student HMOs to vote (on the basis that such properties do not pay Council tax) have not proved valid.

**Lodge Road improvement project:-** we have made a little progress with this but need more person-power and funds to make real headway. Bevois Mount signage is going up at the Stag Gates end thanks to the History Group. We have also put in an application for Council funds to improve bins, install planters and hedges (as a way to improve air quality and the street scene), upgrade pavements and other signage. If this bid is successful, more evident progress should follow.

**Council Street Cleaning:** we were successful in negotiating two Council Street Cleans in student vacations, one at Easter and one in the summer. The Easter one included the pavement cleaning machine, which made a big difference. We are still lobbying to get a team out to deal with leaf fall and resulting blocked drains and gutters.

## **HISTORY AND HERITAGE**

During the last year we have:

- continued to raise funds for our projects
- won a grant from the Community Chest Fund to design, create and put in place a 'Welcome to Bevois Mount' sign
- completed murals in Lodge Road featuring Alexander Pope and Anastasia Robinson
- put up plaques commemorating politician, Thomas 'Tommy' Lewis, poet and cricket commentator, John Arlott, artists, Eric Meadus, Roland and Frank McFadden, and Bevois Mount House itself
- given a series of suffragette presentations to schools, churches, guide groups and libraries in the centenary year of partial female suffrage
- given talks at a variety of venues, including Portswood Library, about Bevois Mount and other local history topics
- repeated our 'Walk up the Avenue' and 'Lost Pubs of Bevois Mount' walks
- published our 5<sup>th</sup> history calendar
- continued to update our Facebook page and website
- posted the story of local young men who lost their lives in WW1, on each day leading up to centenary of the Armistice
- produced two maps showing historic buildings and events in our area

## **GREENING**

We have continued to maintain the established areas of gardening such as the Cut, the planters, 25 various tubs and containers, Clifford Dibben Mews, the rear of garages off Earls Road and the tree pit near to Waitrose, where we have recently planted more bulbs ready for spring.

In addition, we have:

- sited 4 more tubs of plants outside individual houses, including a large half-barrel in Cambridge Road for a group of students who expressed a wish for one at the Big Lunch Street Party
- planted three more Prunus Amanogawa: two small new ones at 90 & 92 Gordon Avenue after approaching landlords, who agreed to take up our offer, and one for a landlord house in Avenue Road to match an existing tree at the front of the property
- planted two replacement trees: a new Prunus Cistena in the Avenue Road planters and a Prunus Spire at 46 Gordon Avenue
- planted daffodils at the front of a student house in Gordon Avenue that needed brightening up after the tenants expressed interest – and are looking for more similar plots to brighten up
- raised around £300 funds for greening through a Table Top sale in April, a stall at the Ave St Andrew's Christmas Fair and a raffle at the Christmas Party, as well as through contributions to trees and barrels from landlords and residents.

## **PLANNING**

We have continued to monitor planning applications and to respond as needed, including speaking at the Council Planning Committee. We have objected to those which are inappropriate or seek to further increase the density of HMO and student accommodation, on the basis that the density is already too high, local infrastructure and services already do not cope and any increase will have a detrimental effect on the overall balance in the community. A number of applications have been refused, including for a large purpose-built student block on the old Blockbusters site which the developers are appealing against. Full details of applications are available. Several applications have been submitted under Permitted Development which does not give other residents consultation rights on the application.

We are kept informed of changes to planning regulations by the National Organisation of Residents' Associations (NORA) of which we are members e.g. a lifting of restrictions on change of use from 'Fast Food' outlets to residential use, meaning planning permission will no longer be required, and sharing how other areas are addressing air pollution.

### **And finally,...**

As we hope you can see, a lot has been achieved in the course of the year thanks to the efforts of members and OARA partners who want the Outer Avenue area to be a decent, attractive and safe place. Frustrations still arise but the consensus seems to be that those efforts do pay off and that we need to keep on making them! We will continue to support and instigate measures to improve the quality of life in our area.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed in any way to making our area a better place to live in the past year; please do carry on or come and add your efforts in the year ahead. The more of us there are, the more we can achieve.

Sue Swallow

Chair January 2019