

VCRA General Meeting Minutes. Meeting 15 June 2022

Venue: Woodberry Down Baptist Church

Committee attendees: Bennie (Chair), Claire, Carol, Deborah, Charles, Chitra (notes)

Apologies from Committee member Luzi.

1. Welcome: Bennie welcomed police representative PC Mahomed and Councillor Barbara Blake and everyone residents that attended the meeting.

2. Current State of VCRA: Bennie reported that VCRA had been active for many years however in the last two years or so had been semi-dormant due to COVID related restrictions. It needed reviving and refreshing. Previous work had included the CPZ zone which had required meetings, surveys and work with council official, traffic calming in the past, events such as park days and winter bazaars, working with London Wildlife trust and looking after our green spaces. VCRA had a little money – not much – which could be used for relevant events, etc. We would be looking for a new Treasurer as Harriet our current Treasurer has not lived in the area for years but out of kindness has continued to help.

3. Councillor and Police reports

a) Councillor:

Barbara Blake apologised that our other Councillor Michelle Simmons-Safo was unexpectedly unable to attend, but said that they worked closely together. They had both been elected in May. Barbara was here to listen to any issues raised by the residents, but before that raised a proposed housing development at the junction of Seven Sisters and St Ann's, part of the Sir Frederick Messer Estate

Concerns were expressed that green spaces were allowed to become poorly managed and unvalued, and then built on. It almost seemed like an intentional mismanagement of green spaces to allow for new builds to go unchallenged. Barbara explained that early plans were that it would be mostly social housing.

Deborah indicated another space from St Ann's Road up to Wickes store, called the 'Gourley Triangle' by the council. Currently it is occupied by a variety of businesses and is now loosely earmarked for a mixed residential and commercial development at some unknown point in the future.

Bennie pointed out other new developments planned in the area.

It was agreed that a further watch needed to be kept on this, Barbara would ensure we would be told when there were consultations, and this needed to include the design process. Barbara and Michelle would also be consulting directly with residents of the Messer estate.

With respect to the various housing developments, it was acknowledged that while housing was needed, a) proposed developments were not necessarily going to be affordable housing which is where the real need was, and b) if large numbers of more people were going to be moving into any area, corresponding services should also be planned, such as doctors, dentists, libraries etc. There was already a lack of those in our area. It was also pointed out that although social or affordable housing was often promised at development stage, this is not what actually transpired once built, then it was too late to do anything.

Questions were asked about the proposed use for the closed Stamford Hill Primary School, as there were concerns that it would be sold off for private development. Barbara indicated that it continued to be earmarked for educational purposes. Relief and thanks were expressed that this was the case.

Street lighting was raised – it was reported that lights often did not appear to work and it took some days for them to be fixed if that was the case. Barbara said she would raise this issue with the council.

b) Police: PC Mahomed introduced himself, from Seven Sisters Safer Neighbourhoods Team. The team was clearly very stretched as there were few officers, either PCSO or PCs on the team. He explained that he had been on the Ward for about a year and a half and was still learning the area. The meeting discussed:

- increase of drug dealing in the area, in all parts but especially around the Church/St Mungos/Seven Sisters Rd.
- anti-social and petty criminal behaviour was constant, breaking car windows, taking number plates, congregating in drinking groups in Manchester Gardens and Paignton Park
- lack of patrol officers was noted.

PC Mahomed asked that everyone who witnessed or noted a crime including drug dealing to please report it, as the more reports there were the more action would be taken. Call 101, or go to Crimestoppers. Use the OWL system – leaflets would be sent in the area about this service. They would also try to distribute Neighbourhood Watch stickers in case some people wanted to put them on their doors. In answer to a question, he reported that if there was a burglary, notice was given 10 doors either way and across the road.

4. Parking, Bikes.

Bennie explained that after years of reluctance to impose one, residents had eventually voted in favour of a CPZ and we now have had one in place for about 3 years. He was aware that recently there had been queries about whether having it Monday to Friday 8 – 6 was too long. Some areas had shorter periods of time, perhaps two or three short periods in one day. This would allow households to have service vehicles doing works such as plumbing etc without having to purchase permits.

There was a general discussion about this. Chitra told the meeting that Luzi who was unable to attend had asked to raise this issue in favour of shortening the period of time where a permit was required.

The meeting was split as to whether it was a good idea to have the CPZ changed or not. Overall, people felt it had worked and felt that businesses such as builders etc were able to buy their own permits through the online system and pass on the costs to the customer, so changing the parking scheme just for that reason did not make sense. Others said that they knew of other areas that had shorter periods and it seemed to work there. Charles said that it was particularly onerous on people attending the church during the CPZ times, and no option for assisting the church was available.

Complaints were raised (which Barbara took on board for raising) about the problems people had with the parking permits website. Others said they had had no problems. It was clearly hit and miss. Chitra reported that the large local Whats App group had many people complaining about struggling to get permits or vouchers. Even proving one was a resident could become a barrier, even if they paid council tax via direct debit and had lived in the area for decades.

It was further pointed out that being online disadvantaged people with no access to the internet, this might include a disproportionate number of poorer and older people. A strong suggestion for a return for paper permits along with a better online system was advocated.

It was reported that if people were having problems, calling Haringey Customer Services and speaking to someone was an option and often they managed to help resolve the situation.

Bikes: there was a long waiting list for a space in the bike hangers. There were two issues, firstly insufficient bike hangers and secondly when people moved out they were not giving up their subscription which meant for up to a year a space was unused.

Solutions discussed:

- asking the council/hanger providers to do a survey as to how many spaces were actually being used within each bike hanger on a regular basis
- Applying for more bike hangers. There was some dissent in the meeting about this as a bike hanger took up parking space. However not all spaces were OK for car parking has the council checked whether there are areas that could be useful for a bike hanger that would not take up a parking space?
- Regarding parking spaces, perhaps the next step would be to paint parking bays along the roads, people were parking in ways that took up so much room that others could not park.
- Also, it was pointed out that there were some dedicated 'disabled' parking spots that had been put in place for a particular resident. On at least one spot on Vartry Road, that resident had not lived there for several years, yet the spot remained unusable, and that disabled spot should be removed.
- Committee should take up these points going forward.

5. Clean Streets and Rubbish collection:

The following points were made:

Street cleaning literally just before a waste collection is a waste of resources. The street needs cleaning *after* the lorries had gone as there is a river of litter following them. We then had to wait surrounded by litter till the next street cleaning a week later. Also, Veolia needed to be more careful ensuring the litter went into the lorries and not the street.

An attempt had been made to solve what had been a serious problem at the bottom of Vartry Road, the junction with Holmdale Terrace. The Houses of Multiple Occupation had had insufficient number of bins, even though there had been bins lining that part of the pavement making it inaccessible for pedestrians. Because there were insufficient numbers, these bins had constantly overflowed.

Now, two large receptacles had been put in place instead, one for waste one for recycling. This decreased by a significant amount the amount of space available for rubbish, which had already been inadequate. Now around those two receptacles there was constant rubbish including food and nappies. The outcome of the solution is possibly worse than the problem it tried to address.

Barbara will take these issues to the council.

It was agreed that VEOLIA should be invited to the next meeting.

The meeting also discussed bins being left by residents on pavements, cutting down the space for walking on the pavement. Some homes have no front gardens so cannot be criticised, but those who do should put their bins out the night before collection, and take them in after. It is unpleasant for people to have to brush or push past bins, and some people struggle to get by these restricted areas with buggies and children and shopping.

6. Green Spaces

The community wants to look after and encourage green spaces. Regular litter picking took place at Manchester Gardens (this green space is between Heysham and Manchester and off Seven Sisters Rd) the last Sunday of every month at 11am, usually about 1.5 hours. Bags and litter pickers provided. Council picked up the bags at 12.30. Deborah and Marcus were thanked for their great job in helping keep this space usable for everyone and looking nice.

Carol and Deborah have also planted bulbs, herbs and flowers in Paignton Park, given to them by the council. (they were thanked).

Haringey was recruiting more gardeners, hopefully that would help with more support for the green spaces. Community members please join in with activities such as plantings etc these will be advertised on our website www.vartry.org.

Concerns were expressed with the ongoing problems of groups of people meeting in Manchester Gardens to drink, day and evening, and now the gardens are not being locked up, concerns about anti-social behaviour and drug dealing at night.

Charles indicated that there were people from St Mungos that had nowhere to go to meet others outside of their rooms. It would be good if a safe space could be found for them, then they would not feel the need to congregate in spaces like Manchester gardens and make other potential other users feel the space is not for them.

PC Mahomed said that ASBOs were being given out where complaints were made. Charles replied that this could not be a solution, that the problem was that there were vulnerable and needy people who needed somewhere to go to be able to socialise and they had few options.

Tree sponsoring: Haringey had earlier planted free trees on appropriate areas on pavements. It was reported that now they had a sponsor a tree programme, it cost around £180 to sponsor a tree and they would work with the paying resident as to where it might be best situated. It was agreed the situation should be somewhere it did not impede the pavement for users.

7. Issues raised by attendees

- Traffic and speeding. Vartry Rd was used as a rat run to avoid Amhurst Park Rd traffic and lights. Cars sped down and it was both dangerous and disruptive, especially when they banged on speed bumps. Motorbikes screeched down the road in the early hours of the morning.

It was agreed to put this item for a fuller discussion at the next meeting and to invite council officers responsible for road traffic calming measures. This area could be explored as a Low Traffic Area.

8 Elections of new committee members.

Bennie encouraged new members, we needed to ensure that there was energy and ideas within our group. Committee met in cafes and occasionally someone's house as needed, and there was email exchanges.

Members already on the committee agreed to stay on (see list at start of these minutes).
Additionally, Mark and Annelise, St Johns Road, Marnie, Vartry Road, Megan, Vartry Road and Regina, Richmond Road agreed to come onto the committee. They were thanked by everyone.

There being no further business, Bennie thanked everyone for attending, reminded them to keep up to date with the www.vartry.org website and the meeting ended.