

Columbia TRA - Annual General Meeting 2019

Monday 9 September 2019

Chair's Report

1) The 2018- 2019 Committee

- a) Chair – Kevin McKenna, Sivill House
- b) Vice Chair – Penny Creed, Pelter Street
- c) Treasurer – Ed Furey, George Loveless House
- d) Secretary – Jonathan Moberly, Chambord Street
- e) Committee Member – John Cotter, Old Market Square
- f) Committee Member – Pam Haluwa, Tomlinson Close
- g) Committee Member - Dave Sinclair, Cuff Point
- h) Committee Member - Rupsha Begum-Smith
- i) Committee Member - Abul Zubair, James Hammett House
- j) Committee Member - Joynul Hoque, James Hammett House
- k) Committee Member - Jenny Dunn. Sivill House

2) Overview of our activities in 2018-2019

The activities and ambition of the Columbia TRA have grown over the last few years. Two years ago the CTRA committee spent time actively listening to members in order to find out what they wanted from the TRA going forwards. This led to us in 2017-2018 creating opportunities for the local community to create their own spaces and activities through the building of the CTRA Cart, which helped us boost our active membership. At the same time we worked to improve the way we communicated with members and started to develop links with other local community groups.

In the last twelve months the greater number of active members has enabled us to develop this further. Key areas that the CTRA has focussed on this year are:

1. Dealing with things that make living here more difficult

- **ASB** - trying to reduce the amount of drug dealing on local streets and the disruption this causes in our blocks
- **The new building on Baroness Road and the major works renovations to several of our blocks** - Making sure resident's concerns are listened to by THH, the council and the building contractors

- **Problems related to the market and local social establishments** - Loud busking, outdoor drinking being too noisy late in the evening, into the night.
- **Filming on the estates** - trying to reduce the problems caused by too much disruptive filming happening on our estates

2. Supporting things that make living here better

- **Estate improvements (“curtilage” works)** - making sure that residents opinions on these are taken on board
- **Improving our green spaces with community gardening projects**
- **Enabling community social events**
- **Forming links with other community groups** - so that we can have an even bigger impact

The CTRA covers nearly 1000 homes. The CTRA can only achieve the things you all ask of us through collective action. One neighbour volunteering an hour or two every month or so, all adds up to a huge potential contribution to the quality of life of everyone who lives in the area. Please continue to volunteer and please encourage more of your neighbours to come and be part of all we do.

3) Activities since the last AGM (September 2018)

a) Community Gardening

The spring bulb planting that we did last autumn resulted in a good display of daffodils etc. We hope to expand on this again this autumn.

The sleepers of the raised beds in the allotments and Tomlinson Close have been replaced by THH. CTRA have taken over the management of the allotments and now that there is a water supply they are looking much better. Tomlinson Close raised beds are now a usable space but need attention after years of neglect. Residents of the Close to make planting and use suggestions.

Chambord Street bed was looking really good until THH devastated a large chunk of it in order to paint the railings behind.

Attempts to improve the spaces at the entrance to the park opposite the Birdcage continue, but between dogs and theft of plants it is 3 steps forward 2 back.

Planting outside George Loveless house was kick-started with a lot of plants left over from RHS Hampton Court flower show that we were given for free. Trellises and some climbers have been added up against the wall. There will be more planting in the next few months. THH are replacing the 2 dead saplings, they have grubbed out the remains of the dead trees ready to plant in autumn. Residents and tenants can have a say in what is planted to replace them if anyone has any suggestions.

Volunteers have been working on the beds in front of Sivill House, hopefully you have noticed more flowers there as you walk along Columbia Road. We hope to bring this highly visible area into full bloom over the coming years.

Now that the major works at Cuff Point are coming to an end, we hope to be allowed access to the beds in front there and create a new cottage garden by the entrance, and a container garden in the walled courtyard. We are in negotiations with THH to make this happen.

Tomlinson Close Community Garden

The mini-allotments built several years ago behind Tomlinson Close have had a number of issues. There was no water supply, the raised beds were falling apart and allotment maintenance has been difficult for plot-holders because of this.

THH agreed to renovate the raised beds and trellises. After coordinating with the CTRA, they also agreed to install water taps and replace the fencing on one side, where the existing fencing had enabled burglars to get over the back wall and into some of the Tomlinson Close properties.

To keep the community garden working and improving, the CTRA has agreed to take on the licence for the community garden and foster an allotment culture. The CTRA sees this as a great opportunity to help local residents who have no garden to grow their own fresh fruit and vegetables, socialise and create a more sustainable community. Already the mini-allotments are over-subscribed, so a key next step is to work with THH to find locations for more of these.

So far we have built new compost bins and plan to create a potting area, a communal seating area so that users can rest together after tending their crops, run community gardening events, put in mini fruit trees, and grow vine fruits.

Dorset Estate Community Herb beds

Residents of George Loveless, James Brine and James Hammett Houses have developed a plan to create a couple of raised plant beds, where fresh herbs can be grown and enjoyed by local residents. This is to provide the opportunity for residents to gain the health benefits of gardening outdoors, meeting with their neighbours, sharing recipes and healthy eating advice, and also as a way of bringing the area into use by residents in order to ward off anti-social behaviour. This is based on successful experiences by other community groups where all the above have been achieved on similar estates around London. The design has been revised following a community consultation exercise carried out by the herb bed volunteers, where there was strong support for the project and the beds are planned to be built this autumn.

Tree Planting

Many members and local residents have asked for more trees to be planted in the area, in order to reduce the effects of air pollution, which is causing significant harm to the lungs of children and adults on our estates, to absorb carbon and as global heating inevitably increases over the next few decades reduce the local ambient temperatures by providing more shade.

The Woodland Trust will deliver 135 saplings of British native trees some time in November. 30 will be hedgerow saplings and small in size including dog rose; crab apple; hawthorn; dog wood and hazel. 105 will be The Wildlife Pack which are a bit bigger and comprising of blackthorn; hawthorn; hazel; oak; silver birch. The trees will be supplied free of charge.

We need volunteers to form a focus group for this project at the AGM to earmark places to plant the trees; liaise with Clare Ruston the Environmental Services Officer at THH; and to organise the actual planting getting as many people as possible involved hopefully including local schools.

b) Football Committee

Football Committee - We really started off strongly with the youth football training, initially started with a very few number, however it gained momentum quite quickly. We were attracting around 20 kids each Sunday afternoon. The game itself was played at the Haggerston park from 14:00 - 16:00. We had two coaches on a regular Sunday and had all the facilities needed to get the kids training.

The sessions we had were very popular with the kids and we received positive feedback from parents.

We ensured we were diligent and had registration documentation for all the regulars kids who attended.

However at the latter part of the year, with the days getting shorter, many children were not able to attend, and we didn't have a [grass] football pitch within Tower Hamlets to partake in for playing. From the close of the year the two coaches were also unable to commit going forwards, so the sessions ceased in the new year..

If we are able to get more volunteers, and have a permanent location, regular football sessions will be more sustainable. We set up a WhatsApp group for all the parents who gave their children to the game and have asked for more volunteers, but none have come forward as yet.

We look forward to get the ball rolling and getting this re-started, but this will take more volunteers. If you are interested in taking this on, please get in touch.

Also, if you are interested in starting up any other community sports or fitness activity, please contact the committee.

c) Crime and ASB

Co-founded by CTRA Secretary Jonathan Moberly, the Weavers Community Action Group (WCAG) was set up to focus on drug-related crime and ASB in our area and now numbers around a hundred local residents.

WCAG's main activity has continued to be reporting of incidents which are collated weekly from two WhatsApp groups and sent to relevant agencies.

In September 2018 WCAG commissioned local artist collective Columbia Road Cartel to produce some street art calling attention to the acute problem in the area. This attracted worldwide media attention and prompted some effective joined-up actions by police and council. Since this activity, reported incidents of dealing and consumption on the CTRA estates and surrounding streets has declined noticeably.

WCAG's activities were the subject of an Inside Out BBC Documentary broadcast in January

The WCAG's WhatsApp reporting group is now running for a trial period on a dedicated screen in the council's CCTV Control Room. This has resulted in a real-time response to incidents. The Group is also working with the council on proposals for improved CCTV coverage of our area.

In January WCAG was invited to give a 'best practice' presentation on its activities at a meeting for the four local wards covering Bethnal Green, Spitalfields and Banglatown.

A follow-up meeting was held with the Mayor of Tower Hamlets and the Neighbourhood Management Pilot organiser, John Fortune in February. The Group has seen an improved interaction between the various agencies and WCAG this year.

In February the police asked WCAG to help gathering impact statements from the community. These were short anonymous statements describing how local drug-related crime and ASB affects our daily lives. More than twenty statements were successfully amassed and these were used and appreciated by the courts when sentencing drug dealers.

A further meeting with the Mayor and other council officers is scheduled later this month.

d) Filming on the Estate

Our estates continue to be in demand as a location for filming. This brings some money into the TRA, but also sometimes causes inconvenience to residents.

Following a TRA members meeting where the difficulties with filming were discussed. Members of the committee met with our neighbours at JHERA who have

similar concerns, residents on the Boundary Estate, our local councilors and also with the Tower Hamlets Film Office Team. This led to a meeting between the Film Office and several local community groups, to raise the problems being caused locally. The report for this is on our website.

If, as a resident, you are approached by a film company to film in your flat, please let the CTRA and the Film Office know, so that disruption to fellow residents can be minimised and a donation can be made to the local community.

If you see filming happening on the estate, or in your block, and you have not had notice, then let the CTRA know. It is likely that it does not have permission and that means fellow residents may be inconvenienced.

The scaffolding from major works on the estates mean that it is a less appealing area for film companies to use at the moment.

An independent film maker based in Hackney, Ayo Akingbade, filmed a set of interviews with local residents about their positive experiences of living in social housing. The film is now ready and a showing for the local community will be arranged. Watch out for announcements.

e) Estate Curtilage Works

THH chose to carry out a set of repairs, maintenance and improvements to the outdoor areas on our estates. This was called the “estate curtilage” programme.

CTRA committee members and other members joined the THH team on a set of walkarounds on the estates. This was to make sure that any changes and improvements were in line with how residents actually used the estates.

The most visible result of this so far has been the repainting of most of the railings on the estate. The colour black was chosen, as in the future it is the easiest colour to match, meaning ongoing maintenance by caretakers or community volunteers would be easier.

The wooden planters on Tomlinson Close have also been repaired.

Work still to be carried out includes putting general waste and recycling bins behind screens, called corrals. There will also be new gates fitted on the estate road between George Loveless House, James Hammett House and the James Brine blocks. This is to prevent the problem of cars being parked without permission along the road and pavements, which blocks not only the emergency ambulance bay, but also prevents the waste lorries accessing the block bins. This has led to rubbish collections repeatedly not happening, with waste building up, encouraging vermin and causing an environmental health hazard.

f) Communications

i) Website: This year has seen improvement and development of the www.columbiatra.org.uk website. An event calendar has been added as well as pages with general information on:

- Campaigns and Consultations
- Anti-social behavior on our estates
- Filming on our estates
- Major works
- Gardening
- The Community Cart
- Children's football training

Visitors to the site have doubled to approximately 800/month on the site over the last year and the website is proving to be a useful tool to communicate with residents.

ii) WhatsApp Groups: A WhatsApp group has been set up for Columbia Residents to post information and allow discussion on issues affecting residents on the Columbia Estates. Take up hasn't been huge yet but little marketing of the group has been done to date.

iii) Google Groups: A new google group has been set up for North Newling Estates in order to facilitate discussion on current major works programmes.

iv) Newsletters: Two newsletters were sent out to residents signed up to receive them.

v) Social Media: Both the Facebook and Twitter accounts continue to relay news about the CTRA.

g) CTRA Cart

This year saw some improvements to the cart carried out. Castor wheels were added - the big yellow wheels left on as floating decoration. Handles shaped and smoothed. Overall handling and steering ability was much improved. Work planned still to be carried out includes the addition of a permanent roof.

Columbia Road Christmas Carols. The CTRA Cart joined the first of the season's Columbia Road Christmas Wednesday celebrations. Parked under the Christmas Tree and festooned with tinsel. Locals and passers-by were plied with hot mulled apple juice, mince pies and an opportunity to chat to residents as carol singers sang around the Christmas tree. At the event, the CTRA participated in the judging of the Christmas window display.

Eid Picnic - 9 June To mark the end of Ramadan - Rupsha designed and organised an Eid picnic in Ravenscroft Park. Residents were invited to join the celebration by bringing a dish to share, with games provided by the local youth centre. The CTRA Cart provided a focus, information point and dispenser for hot and cold drinks.

h) Garage Facilities

Tower Hamlets Homes has given the CTRA the use of a second garage so we now have two facilities, no. 17 behind Sivill House and no. 34 in Old Market Square. This has enabled us to designate no. 17 as a workshop and cart garage, and no. 34 as storage. These facilities will be increasingly important as our community gardening activities, social events and community making expand.

i) Baroness Road Development

Building works at Baroness Road started late in 2018. After some initial teething problems that were quickly addressed during emergency meetings with the developers and LBTH, the CTRA was able to develop a good working relationship with the developers and has been monitoring issues arising going forward.

The building should be completed during 2020 and we hope to welcome our new neighbours towards the end of next year. The block will comprise of 20 new social housing rented flats, going to some of the 20,000 families on the borough's housing waiting list. This is a council housing project, not a private development.

We understand that the building is likely to be called Orwell House.

j) Major Works

- i) "Major works" is the term Tower Hamlets Homes uses to describe the extensive repairs, renovations and improvements to blocks that are required every twenty to thirty years or so. These generally involve repairs to concrete, brickwork, repairing roofs, repainting communal areas, repairing or replacing windows, upgrading internal fire-doors in line with modern regulations and other cosmetic and safety improvements. For large blocks, which include most of the buildings on our estates, they often involve scaffolding being up around the block for a long time and can incur substantial costs for leaseholders.
- ii) Over the last few years Dunmore Point, Cuff Point, Strickland House and Gowan House in the CTRA area have all had their major works. Although the repairs and renovations have generally been welcome, the experience for leaseholders and tenants has frequently been stressful, with uncertainty about exactly what would be done to the buildings, how long it would take, a lack of light due to the scaffolding and all the noise and disruption of living on a building site. The CTRA

committee has tried to learn from our members experiences when work starts on other blocks, in order to help the people living there.

- iii) In the last year, major works projects have started on the following blocks: Sivill House, Old Market Square, Georgina Gardens, Baroness Road, Pelter Street & Hackney Road. The Columbia TRA was invited to set up to Steering Committees to represent these blocks during the works. The Steering Committees have been working closely in order to share learning and best practice.
- iv) Following several issues regarding major works incidents on our estates members of the Columbia TRA Committee met with Susmita Sen and other senior staff at THH to raise and discuss these issues and voice concerns about the communications around and management of current and future projects. The meeting was followed up with a letter from Susmita Sen summarizing discussions to which the Committee responded with further questions and an offer to assist THH in improving major works communications. The Committee awaits a response to these concerns.
- v) **Old Markets Square, Georgina Gardens, Baroness Road, Pelter Street & Hackney Road Steering Group:**
 - (1) The Steering Committee is made up of residents of the above blocks and has met with the Tower Hamlets Homes project team twice (despite requesting additional meetings).
 - (2) The Steering Committee was asked to agree a short list of internal paint colours for the project team to ballot residents on. This ballot is ongoing.
 - (3) Following their most recent meeting with the project team where the project team announced increases in project costs and that they would soon be deciding on whether to install new windows in some of the blocks, the Steering Committee felt it important to write notes on the meeting and share them with residents. A copy of these notes was posted through all residents' doors.
 - (4) The Steering Committee has had major concerns about the management of the project to date and so issued an official complaint to Tower Hamlets Homes in September 2019.
- vi) **Sivill House Steering Group:**
 - (1) Sivill House has not had any major works since the late 1980s, which was when the existing windows were put in.
 - (2) Scaffolding started going up in March, but after delays due to non-completed bomb surveys, it has still not reached the top floor.
 - (3) We have been told by THH that the works should finish by the end of January 2020. The steering group has raised our concerns that from what we have

seen of the project plans and the rate of the work so far, that this date is over-optimistic.

- (4) Following further assessment by THH, the steering group has been told that the windows will be replaced, rather than renovated. This is understandable from a tenant and resident point of view, as many of the window frames are falling apart and becoming unsafe. It will lead to a larger bill for leaseholders than the one in the original section 20 notice however. Leaseholders are still waiting for the revised costs from leaseholder services at THH.
 - (5) Sivill House residents and leaseholders, as well as CTRA members in other blocks, raised a concern that the replacement fire-rated front doors for flats were not in keeping with the architecture of the building. The architect of Sivill House, Berthold Lubetkin, who was the architect for the whole Dorset Estate, designed a number of important, listed modernist buildings in the UK. The proposed doors were mock-Georgian. We contacted the 20th Century Society as well as protesting to THH directly. In the end it was agreed that the doors would be plain, flat surfaced, with simple fittings rather than the mock-Regency style originally proposed. The 20th Century Society also gave recommendations for the window frames. The CTRA committee will advocate for doors in keeping with the architecture of future blocks undergoing major works.
 - (6) Similar to the situation with Old Market Square, Sivill House steering group members are unhappy with the project so far, including the communications to residents and site safety. The steering group is currently deciding how to proceed.
- vii) Tomlinson Close: Works originally planned for Tomlinson Close for 2019/20 were recently delayed to 2010/20 due to a contractor pulling out of the project.
- viii) The TRA is aware that some residents having new front doors installed by the major works teams have had quality issues with these doors. The situation is being monitored. We have raised it with THH.
- ix) The CTRA is ready to support other blocks on the Columbia Estates going through major works programmes

k) Campaigns and Consultations

The CTRA committee took part in several consultations on behalf of residents:

- i) **Consultation on the Creation of a New Town Council of Spitalfields:** The Committee filed a response to the consultation questionnaire on 11 December 2018, it was the view of the Committee that the creation of a new town council in Spitalfields would have not have in in the interests of local residents. The consultation was drawn to a close in July 2019, LBTH agreed to keep the existing

community governance arrangements within the wards of Spitalfields & Banglatown and Weavers and that a parish should not be created in the area.

- ii) **Bishopsgate Goodsyrd Planning Application:** A new consultation period was opened to consult on revised plans for the Goodsyrd. The CTRA Committee responded to the consultation on 13 March 2019 on behalf of residents, it was the strong view of the Committee that the development does not respond to the local social and affordable housing needs of the area.
- iii) **114-150 Hackney Road Revised Proposals to include Hotel:** In anticipation of these revised proposals, members of the Committee have met with members of the Friends of the Joiners Group and will be attending meetings with them, the developers and the LBTH going forward.
- iv) **Livable Streets Consultation:** Members of the Committee attended two workshops to learn more about the consultation and share their thoughts in July 2019.

l) Busking and street drinking issues

The number of buskers using amplification has increased over the last year. There has also been an increase in the number of drinking establishments spreading out across the pavements around Columbia Road. Many of our members enjoy both the culture brought to the area by buskers and the opportunity for a cafe style street social scene. At the same time, when noise goes on too late or too loud, it caused real nuisance and inconvenience for those closest to it. The tall height of some of our blocks and their flat concrete facades amplify and redirect the sound and when particularly bad the noise travels at disturbingly loud volumes into some flats.

This is a problem that also affects our neighbours in the Jesus Hospital Estate, so we held a joint meeting with their residents association, JHERA, on the 15th July. Local residents and business holders were able to raise their concerns and come to a better understanding of their mutual concerns. It was agreed that some residents would work together to refresh the local buskers charter and to look at how licence holders could work together better with their residential neighbours on Ezra Street.

m) Good neighbours

In May we held a meeting with representatives from THH to discuss the more minor, but frequently highly disturbing nuisances that make living in large blocks of flats difficult. Things such as late night washing machines, squeaking doors, heavy footfalls on laminate flooring, loud TV late at night and so on. THH have taken our ideas and are looking at producing a good neighbours guide. For one of our blocks with particular issues, a letter was prepared by the housing officer with input from the CTRA to give people guidance on minimising these annoyances for the sake of their neighbours.

4) Treasurer's Report

Year-to-date Summary Sheet (Bank account)

	<u>INCOME</u>	<u>EXPENDITURE</u>	
Opening Balance (01/09/18)			<u>£4,570.96</u>
Grant Funding (various)	£1,150.00		
Film Office	£575.00		
Events	£0.00	£0.00	
Kid's Football		£304.67	
CTRA Cart		£186.90	
Gardening		£287.68	
Running costs		£300.94	
Petty Cash		250.00	
TOTAL	<u>£1,725.00</u>	<u>£1,330.19</u>	
Current Bank Balance			<u>£4,965.77</u>
Current Petty Cash Balance			<u>£ 48.99</u>