



# Columbia Tenants and Residents Association Annual Report 2021

## A. Introduction

A great deal of unexpected disruption and trauma has happened across the whole world since our last AGM in September 2019. This has had huge impacts on our community, not only in the changes everyone has had to make to keep each other safe, but most sadly of all in the loss of several neighbours, friends and family members due to Covid.

We have had to adjust how we operate as a TRA and this has been most challenging for those people who are not able to connect online. At the same time with so many people spending more time near where they live, rather than commuting to offices everyday, the importance of a strong local community and the quality of living on our estates has never been clearer. Lots more CTRA members have engaged with each other online, and then gone to support their immediate next door neighbours physically, checking in on them and making sure they are connected. As well as coming together for mutual aid, the biggest growth area has been our gardening group, which has many more active members than before lockdown and has been leading a positive change to the environment outside our front doors, as well as connecting people across the local community. All this came together this summer, when new cherry trees were planted across our estates as a covid memorial. Hopefully their blossom will bring cheer next spring and for many years to come.

None of the other challenges we face as a community have gone away however. Crime, antisocial behaviour, major works, new planning developments, service charges, repairs, parking and all the other things that are hard to deal with as individual residents, are things the CTRA is there to help us address collectively. Despite the challenges of Covid, CTRA members and the committee have found ways to keep addressing these issues, as you will see from the report below. The main task for next year is undoubtedly returning to things that we did previously, like in-person meetings, while not losing any of the advantages we have gained in the last year as CTRA members have come together in new ways.

As ever, the CTRA is led by volunteers, doing what they can to help the community in their spare time. The only way that more can be done, is if more people get actively involved, in whatever capacity they can. That is why the AGM is so important as it gives the opportunity for more people to join the committee and help. Hopefully several more of you will volunteer this year and if you have a special project, or something you'd like to see happen more urgently, then this is your opportunity to take part.

## B. Committee Members 2019-2021

- Chair – **Kevin McKenna**, Sivill House
- Vice Chair – **Penny Creed**, Pelter Street
- Treasurer – **Ed Furey**, George Loveless House
- Secretary – **Jonathan Moberly**, Chambord Street
- Committee Member – **John Cotter**, Old Market Square
- Committee Member – **Pam Haluwa**, Tomlinson Close
- Committee Member – **Dave Sinclair**, Cuff Point
- Committee Member – **Rupsha Begum-Smith**, James Hammett House
- Committee Member – **Abul Zubair**, James Hammett House
- Committee Member – **Jodie de Haarte**, Cuff Point
- Committee Member – **Nahid Ahmed**, Baroness Road

## C. Overview of activities in 2019-21

### 1. Community Gardening

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/gardening/>

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2020/09/01/new-herb-planters/>

Lockdown has made getting outside, growing things and getting in touch with nature more precious than ever, especially as so many of us do not have a garden of our own. To provide more opportunities for residents to be involved in community gardening, as well as prepare our neighbourhood for future 21st Century challenges like global heating, CTRA has managed to secure funding from different organisations. One of the new initiatives was the creation of herb gardens in Dorset Estate which was built for us by Bouygues, providing a space for residents to share herbs for cooking but also to brighten up the space. We also created a community plant nursery to grow our own plants which will allow us to brighten up the whole area. We are creating a new woodland dell on Baroness Road, an edibles and wildlife garden behind George Loveless, have renovated the plant beds by Cuff Point, and are continuing to maintain the planting on Chambord Street and by Sivill House. We are working closely with THH and the Gascoigne Neighbourhood Association in the creation of a new pocket park on the Gascoigne Estate. This will include new community gardening beds and individual mini allotment beds. Together with the existing Tomlinson Close mini-allotments, this will allow us to relaunch our mini-allotments next spring. Finally we have secured funding to create mini urban orchards on our estates and are looking for people who want to become fruit tree guardians so that we can grow our own fresh fruit for the local community.

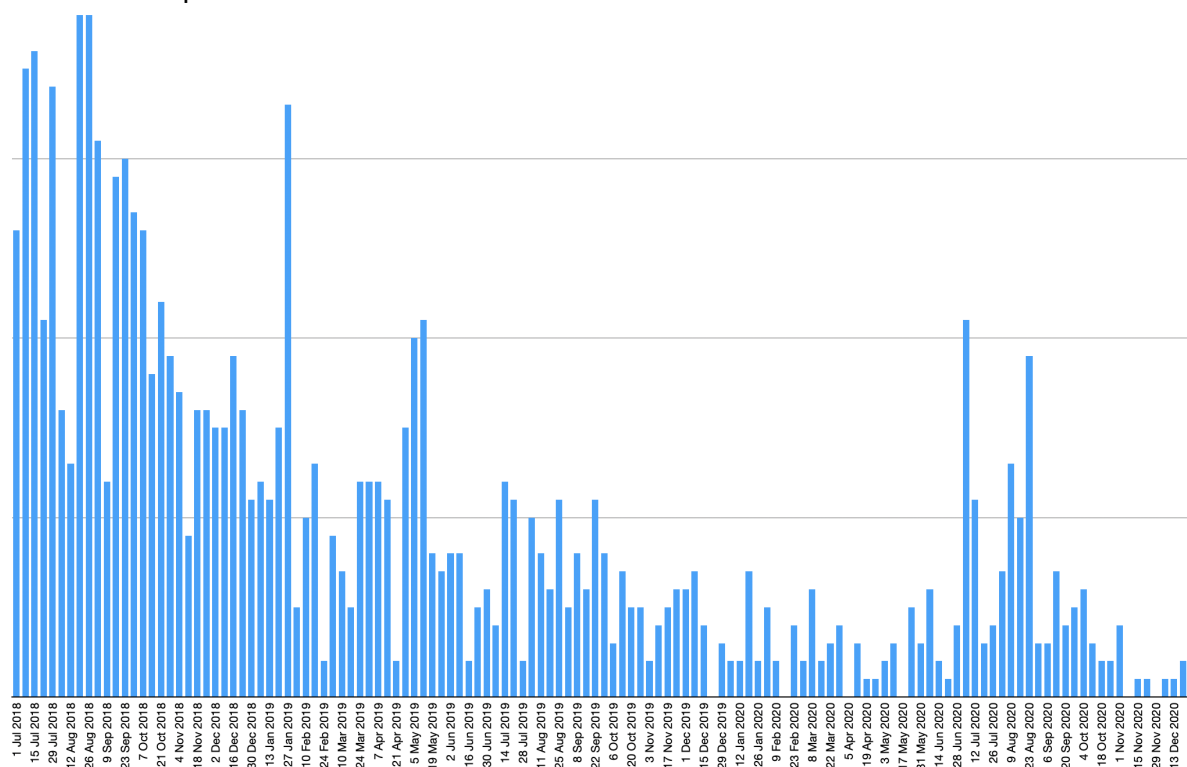
Anyone interested in joining the community gardening group, please drop us a line:

[gardening@columbiatra.org.uk](mailto:gardening@columbiatra.org.uk)

## 2. Crime and ASB

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/anti-social-behaviour/>

Weavers Community Action Group has seen reporting levels drop markedly since the highs of 2018 when we were seeing up to 40 incidents per week. We saw a new spike in August 2020 when lockdown was lifted, mostly alcohol-related. The cocaine and heroin dealing has shifted - but reporting and monitoring continues to be critical. We encourage residents to continue to report.



How to report - [http://bit.ly/weavers\\_reporting](http://bit.ly/weavers_reporting)

## 3. Car Bars

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2020/08/15/joint-statement-on-car-bars-on-the-boundary-estate/>

ASB issues and campaigns have tilted away from the drug dealing issue to that of night time economy disturbance and the new phenomenon of car bars. While this is most acute on the neighbouring Boundary Estate, the growth of the night time economy is shifting night time ASB into the Columbia TRA estates via Columbia Road, Hackney Road and Ravenscroft St.

To help tackle the issue, WCAG members campaigned for 24 hour parking restrictions in Zone A5 (bordering on the CTRA streets) and helped with a piece on the issue for [BBC London News](#).

#### **4. Weavers Ward Safer Neighbourhoods Panel**

[http://bit.ly/weavers\\_ward\\_panel](http://bit.ly/weavers_ward_panel)

The secretary of CTRA is also chair of the Weavers Ward Safer Neighbourhoods Panel. This is our local interface with community-lead policing. The Ward Panel has been quietly campaigning for better comparative ASB and crime data from the police, and we are starting to see an improvement in this area.

#### **5. Fly tipping and Rubbish Collections**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2020/03/04/fed-up-with-seeing-sights-like-these/>

Since the refuse management contract was taken back in-house from Veolia by the Council, we have been seeing some major teething problems. Bulk waste pick-ups are fewer, and the removal of items is taking longer; booked pickups are harder to come by; rubbish and bins are being left outside of bin rooms and corrals and fly tipping is on the rise.

To tackle these problems, the CTRA Committee met with Cllr Asma Islam who took on the role of lead cabinet member for environment and public realm in June of 2020.

Cllr Islam has acknowledged that there are issues and is working on a holistic plan to tackle the issues we are seeing. The Committee is still waiting to see this plan.

In the meantime, the Committee has been spotlighting issues to the Council and Tower Hamlets Homes using our [website](#) and [social media channels](#) to try and to try get them resolved quickly. We ask that residents continue to report issues via the Love My Neighbourhood app and share repeated problems with the Committee. We also urge residents to use the booking system or bulk waste pick-ups and to label their bulk waste with the pick-up reference number so that we can monitor the amount of fly tipping in the area. Doing this will reduce the costs for fly tipped pick-ups to all residents.

#### **6. Communication**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/>

Columbiatra.org.uk has attracted 17.5K visitors to the website in the last year; the Committee issued newsletters in December 2019 and July 2020. Our twitter account continues to gather followers including many local politicians who monitor our posts. The committee also requested new noticeboards for our estates. Ten were installed in the spring of 2020 and have been used for art and information.

In the last two years, the Committee was pleased to be able to bring press and media coverage to several issues affecting residents in our area. These have included: [Plans at Lubetkin's Sivill House to replace windows inappropriately designed replacements; the amended planning proposals at the Bishopsgate Goodsynd; the plight of local immigrants and asylum seekers with 'No Recourse to Public Funds' and the foodbank supporting them during lockdown; 'car bars' on the Boundary Estate; the Grade II listing of Sivill House](#) and concerns over the [freehold purchases driven by a third party](#).

#### **7. Traffic Management Orders (TMO) and Car Parking**

Back in 2014 the council was notified they were operating in breach of parking law and needed to amend it's procedure. It has taken many years and has now been compelled, as

the freeholder of THH land, to introduce Traffic Management Orders. They now have to consult and implement Traffic Management Orders on all THH estates. The plan is to issue permits for areas rather than have designated parking bays.

Weavers ward consultation, which includes the CTRA area, is expected to take place at the end of 2021, after the Gascoigne Greening project is concluded. The CTRA had a walkabout of it's area and a scheme is now being drawn up.

Within this area there is a specific greening project on the Gascoigne Estate which involves a loss in the overall provision of seven parking places, as asked for by residents several years ago during the consultation process.

We will post any updates as and when they come through.

### **8. Baroness Road Development (Orwell House)**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2020/10/13/orwell-house/>

This year saw the opening of Orwell House, a new 20 flat council housing block on the Baroness Road car park. The CTRA helped manage resident issues arising from the building site.

We very warmly welcome the new residents to our estate, several of whom were existing CTRA members as the new local residents housing allocation process means that some of the flats were prioritised to people already living in the neighbourhood community.

### **9. Major Works**

The CTRA continues to be very concerned about the way major works projects are managed by Tower Hamlets Homes and, although our calls for a public inquiry have so far been refused by Mayor John Biggs, we will be monitoring processes and progress closely. To date, the major works at Cuff Point and Dunmore House, finished three years ago are yet to be signed off with snagging issues still to be resolved.

Works at 1-20 and 35-60 Old Market Square, Pelter Street Odds and Hackney Road and works at Sivill House were completed in 2020 but in some areas to a poor standard. The costs have spiraled to almost twice what was estimated with little explanation for residents. .

Residents in some blocks with major works pending were charged in advance on estimates for these works. When the projects were not started as anticipated in the same year little was done by THH to explain the delay nor were reimbursements forthcoming. The CTRA intervened and secured interest for those who had paid, though reimbursements were still slow to be made by THH. The CTRA made a statement on this issue on their website at the time: [\\*\\*\\*CTRA Statement on Major Works Bills\\*\\*\\* | Columbia Tenants and Residents Association \(columbiatra.org.uk\)](#)

We understand that works at Pelter Street Evens, Baroness Road and 21-34 Old Market Square are pending and we have been asked to form a steering committee. We had been told that Tomlinson Close works would start at the beginning of this financial year in April 2021 but no further notice has been given. We will be facilitating the creation of steering committees to oversee these works.

The CTRA has recently been granted a meeting with Mayor John Biggs to discuss our concerns.

## **10. Campaigns and Consultations**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/campaigns/>

### *114-150 Hackney Road Revised Proposals to include Hotel and a Pub*

The CTRA Committee submitted a [response](#) to this consultation on behalf of residents recommending the proposal be REJECTED and made a representation at the planning meeting in February 2021. Unfortunately the Tower Hamlets Planning Committee approved the hotel development which will include the return of The Joiner's Arms, a pub which will operate next to the hotel and is now a legally protected LGBT+ venue.

For past campaigns and consultations which CTRA led or supported, please [check the website](#).

## **11. Covid and Mutual Aid**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2020/03/16/covid-19/>

During the early months of lockdown, CTRA was working with other community groups in the Weaver's Ward to provide a community volunteer-led Mutual Aid Service to bring essential items to people self-isolating. Once lockdowns finished, it became clear it was no longer needed in that form and has developed into a neighbourhood link up group across Weavers Ward. The CTRA has also been asked several times to help the DCA distribute food packages to those in need and has supported THH in distributing community Iftar meals during Ramadan both in 2020 and 2021.

## **12. Collective Enfranchisement**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2020/07/14/concerns-over-freehold-purchases/>

One of our estate blocks has suffered a hostile developer-led collective enfranchisement takeover. CTRA has been active in assisting residents to understand the process and alert others to the pitfalls of being approached by unscrupulous developers. The CTRA is assisting with an ongoing investigation by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors into the rogue developer.

## **13. Tomlinson Close - Infill development**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/tomlinson-close-major-works/>

There is a plan to build two stories of council flats on top of one of the Tomlinson Close blocks. TRA members have engaged with the consultation process and distributed information packs to residents in the affected block, containing material about the proposals and inviting residents to contact the CTRA for support through this process.

## **14. Market reopening**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2020/05/27/statement-on-re-opening-outdoor-markets/>

The CTRA put in a formal response to the plans for reopening Columbia Market after the first lockdown, advocating for community safety measures. This was listened to by the council.

## **15. Sivill House listing**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2020/06/05/sivill-house-listed/>

CTRA and residents of Sivill House successfully campaigned to get Sivill House Grade 2 listed, helping to avert heritage damage by Tower Hamlets Homes.



## 16. Beano - Margate trip 2021

We had a CTRA/THH coach trip to Margate in August 2021 which proved to be very popular. Everyone had a very good time and a chance for neighbours to get reacquainted again after the Covid Lockdown. I was still getting people contacting me to book seats on the coach after all the 50 seats had been allocated. We were unlucky with the weather on the day we did have a bit of rain but with East end stoicism that was not going to stop us having a good time and it did brighten up, and it was still very much a success. For Londoners it's always good to get out of the city for a break and to get some sea air. Some of us also visited the Turner Contemporary Art Gallery to see the Anthony Gorman statue which is positioned in the sea, it was a good trip and was a boost for the community after what had been a very difficult year.

People have been asking us when the next trip will be. We have applied for ICF/THH funding for a Christmas coach trip to to Canterbury Christmas Markets and

Cathedral in December. Hopefully if we get the funding again the CTRA will start advertising the coach trip next month so watch this space!



## 17. Autumn Picnic



Together with the DCA, we organised an end of summer, start of autumn picnic. It was our first opportunity to do a social event in Ravenscroft Park following the relaxation of Covid restrictions. It was a fun event and we will hopefully do another one next year. We also hope to hold an Eid picnic at the end of Ramadan next year, and to have a Christmas social this December.

**18. Art competition**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2020/04/29/art-competition/>

In April 2020, at the beginning of lockdown, theCTRA organised a children's art competition themed around the creation of rainbows with thank you messages for health and support workers. These were displayed on the new notice boards.

**19. Awards**

<http://www.columbiatra.org.uk/2019/12/20/thh-osccas-2019/>

CTRA secretary Jonathan Moberly and the Weavers Community Action Group won recognition at Tower Hamlets Homes Annual Community Partnership Awards, December 2019.



## D. Financial Report

This report contains the 2019/2020 and the 2020/2021 account summaries, as it covers two AGM periods.

Year-to-date Summary Sheet 19/20(Bank account)						
		INCOME	EXPENDITURE			
Opening Balance (01/09/19)					£4,965.77	
Grant Funding (various)		£550.00				
Film Office		£1,337.50				
Events		£0.00	£0.00			
Kid's Football			£0.00			
CTRA Cart			£0.00			
Gardening			£2,158.13			
Running costs			£299.57			
Petty Cash			200.00			
Other			£239.48			
TOTAL		£1,887.50	£2,897.18			
Current Bank Balance					£3,956.09	
Current Petty Cash Balance					£ 42.91	

<b>Gardening Spend Note:</b>
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With Covid, 2020 was a very peculiar year. The CTRA committee decided to spend on gardening as a way to maintain mental and physical health for our tenants and residents, and because it was suddenly our most popular activity. Anyone who had an idea for gardening was encouraged and supported whether it be seeds in a pot in the kitchen or building a plant nursery. We received a great deal of things for free - the herb beds were built by Bouygues; the nursery raised beds and compost bins were built from reclaimed pallets; they hot bins and wormery were supplied by Tower Hamlets Council; saplings from the Woodland Trust; Cherry Trees were donated by the Japanese Embassy and Seeds for Growth; farmyard manure from Hackney City Farm and leaf compost from Tower Hamlets Cemetery. There were also numerous donations from gardening group members, their families and friends.

£2,158.13 was spent on gardening projects. These can be called -: Chambord Street; Cuff Point; Ed's beds; George Loveless House; Rupsha's ring and Sivill House. All 6 of these projects got between £120 and £200 each over the year mostly for bedding plants. Just shy of £1000 was spent on general items, mostly tools and equipment (635.96 spent on a strimmer plus batteries and 4 new hoses) but also seeds, plants and bulbs. Having a collection of tools that residents can borrow is key to enabling as many people to get involved as possible, whatever their personal resources. Tenants and Residents have been very busy gardening during lockdown, and the aim is to build on all this work next year with an ambitious grant application to create community fruit orchards across our patch, which as well as enabling people to get active outdoors, will help support and encourage healthier eating for residents and families.

<b>Total Gardening spend £2158.13</b>	
Cuff Point	£ 119.00
Chambord Street	£ 197.70
Ed's Beds	£132.86
George Loveless House	£127.36
Rupsha's Ring	£127.32
Sivill House	£198.00
General	£968.95

<b>Year-to-date Summary Sheet 20/21 (Bank account)</b>					
		<b><u>INCOME</u></b>	<b><u>EXPEDITURE</u></b>		
<b>Opening Balance 1.9.20</b>					<b>£3,956.09</b>
Grant Funding (various)		£4,772.00			
Film Office		£225.00			
Events		£0.00	£722.00		
Kid's Football			£0.00		
CTRA Cart			£0.00		
Gardening			£1,699.02		
Running costs			£353.43		
Petty Cash			£257.10		
Other			£0.00		
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£4,997.00</b>	<b>£3,031.55</b>		
<b>Closing Balance (as at 31 8 21)</b>					<b>£5,921.54</b>
<b>Current Petty Cash Balance</b>					<b>£ 93.83</b>
<b>Notes:</b>					
<u>The main income was a £3500 grant from the Young Foundation to plant a Community Orchard.</u>					