

# Summary of HOME Residents' Association AGM 2024

The 20th HOME Residents' Association AGM was held on Sunday 20th October at the Ismaili Centre, Addiscombe Road at 1.30 pm.

Invited guests were Natasha Irons, MP, Jason Perry Executive Mayor of Croydon, Neil Garratt, London Assembly Member and Councillor, and Jeet Bains, local ward Councillor and Head of Planning and Regeneration on Croydon Council.

The usual confirmation of the previous year's AGM minutes was attended to, followed by an annual report by the Chair, Mira Armour. As this was the twentieth anniversary of HOME, Mira outlined HOME's achievements since 2004. During the previous year members had taken part in the Mid Croydon Conservation Area Advisory Panel, Neighbourhood Watch and the Safer Neighbourhood Team; there had been good collaboration with the authorities. On planning, inconsistency of planning officers' decisions as well as lack of enforcement had been a problem, not only for HOME but for CHASE and ASPRA also. The issues raised at our two previous AGMs were still unresolved. The traffic campaign was ongoing, and we expected some proposed solutions to be approved soon with final consultations taking place in November. Finances were healthy. A new website had recently been developed. Upcoming events included a Quiz night on 6th December and Carol singing on 14th December.

The election of committee members was conducted, with previous members confirmed and one new member added.

Then each of the invited guests presented their work and involvement in the area. A summary of each is below.

After the formal AGM, refreshments were served, including a splendid 20th Anniversary cake. There was opportunity to speak to neighbours and guests, and a chance to make comments on post-its as to how HOME had helped residents over the years, and what could still be done.

Summaries of invited guests' presentations:

## **Natasha Irons, MP**

Natasha introduced herself as our new MP, with a constituency spanning South Norwood to New Addington. Her main cases had been on planning, anti-social behaviour, and housing. She had had some success with a rehousing case, a Thames Water case and reinstating the vehicle scrappage scheme. She was concerned about safety on trams, young people being mugged on trams, and the police and Tramlink had worked on a plan for kids going back to school to keep them safe. She highlighted the need for new trams, needing stability of TFL funding from the government. Also in Addiscombe high street, a business forum was being set up, and at national

level there was a change in the business rate system. Shoplifters, who operated in gangs, could now be prosecuted for theft of goods worth less than £200. Shoplifting was one of the reasons for the closure of Boots in Addiscombe this December. In Parliament, Natasha's focus was on young people, helping to emphasize their concerns. She was Chair of the youth affairs APPG, which invited young people into Parliament to meet ministers. Croydon had some wonderful groups working with young people and she aimed to work with them. Natasha had also been elected onto the culture, media and sport committee.

### **Mayor of Croydon Jason Perry**

After two and a half years as Mayor, Jason reported on:

1) the town centre, where Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield controlled both the Whitgift Centre and Centrale. Recently, planning permission had been granted to site 7 commercial units at the front of the old Alders building facing North End, to open in the first part of the New Year. Their master plan for the whole site that they control would be in place by the end of 2024. Planning applications would be submitted for the site by the middle of 2025. He had had a meeting with people who masterminded the regeneration of Kings Cross/St Pancras. An urban room would open in the Whitgift centre where people could see the plans and work that was being done and where they could give thoughts about what they wanted the town to look like in the future. Drugs, alcohol and anti-social behaviour were being dealt with, supporting people involved, including the removal of the encampment at the Lansdowne Road car park.

2) Traffic: in 2015-2018 changes in Addiscombe West pushed traffic to the HOME area. The council was trying to address this, but without moving the problems back. They were taking a holistic approach. Abu Barkatoolah had

been appointed by the Council to lead this work, and was working with all RAs - HOME, CHASE, ECCO and ASPRA. There had been many meetings, with more consultations coming. Night road closures in the HOME area had been tacitly approved. Jason commented that Residents' Associations kept them on their toes and this partnership was so important for the Council.

### **Jeet Bains, local Councillor**

Jeet stated that the Conservative administration under Mayor Perry had made a commitment to solve the problem with traffic in such a manner that the Addiscombe area gets the right solution, unlike previous efforts which unduly

favoured one small area. Many meetings had taken place with the people of Addiscombe, to look at what was possible and to try to narrow down the number of options to arrive at an agreed solution. So it may be something around night time closures of roads, it may even be something more, like making ladder roads more accessible just for the residents. These were just options at the moment, but he did recall the many meetings with HOME under the previous administration which got nowhere and so this time round he was making a genuine effort to try to get to a solution.

As Cabinet member for Planning and Regeneration, Jeet was committed to preventing over-intensive developments. Previously, many unsuitable applications tended to be approved. The Council had now got rid of the SPD2 planning policy which allowed garages to be converted into flats. The Local Plan had been revisited. It set out the policies, rules and regulations around how Croydon would be developed and within that review the Council had tightened up what was allowed and what was not. On the question of multiple applications submitted by the same applicant on the same site, as had happened within HOME roads, the Local Planning Authority was legally obliged to process every application as long as the correct fee had been paid. To change this would require Parliamentary legislation. There was a wider question (beyond just planning) about whether unreasonable resources were being committed by the Council in such cases.

Jeet assured the meeting that the Head of Enforcement had inspected no 16 Elgin Rd. The enforcement order was being complied with, but the Council would like to be told if there were any other problems, so asked the meeting to please report this if this was their view. The dormers (one application refused, the next one granted) had been approved as part of the application for 16 to be converted into one house. The full record of all applications submitted, and whether they were refused or otherwise, was available online. If anyone felt appropriate action had not been taken for any planning application, he was happy to take this forward and, ultimately, explain the complaints procedure. He commented that the 'permitted development rules' that existed within national planning legislation now allowed developers to develop much more without requiring planning permission. The issue of 19 Ashburton Road was raised, and Jeet suggested he could take this up with the enforcement team. The other case on vans and cars parked at no 56 Ashburton Rd was to be addressed separately.

**Neil Garratt, Leader of the Conservative Group, London Assembly member for Croydon and Sutton.**

The London Assembly held the London Mayor to account, and at City Hall, oversaw three things: TFL with red route roads or traffic lights, the London Fire Brigade and the Metropolitan Police. In addition to the Mayor he had some London wide planning policy powers as well; however while most

decisions were made in Croydon according to the Croydon Plan, they had to fit in with the Mayor of London's overall plan.

Neil spoke about the 25-year old fleet of 24 trams, at the end of its useful life, needing renewal. It would take 3-4 years to replace them all from the moment the Mayor ordered them, costing approx. £200m. There may be additional trams as there were only 2 spare ones operational currently. On ULEZ, the benefit had been minimal, and £374m in fines was unpaid. The Superloop high-speed buses were appreciated, and popular.

The Met police needed reforming, and better neighbourhood policing should result. Neil said he would like to know in due course if residents did find it better. MET commissioners planned to reform the culture, leadership and practices within the MET as it had a poor image, with many vacancies, and reform including leadership training and good management practice were essential. This needed the Mayor of London to approve of a second budget of approx £17m. However, only the budget to fund business as usual had been approved so far. Neil was the chair of the budget committee at the London Assembly and had pressured the Mayor to approve the second budget. That programme would then be run over two to three years.