



ANNUAL REPORT MARCH 2021

Annual General Meeting

Last year was to be the Society's 40th AGM. Sadly it had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. We didn't know then that life was to be put on hold for more than a year. Here we are again, preparing for the next AGM, only to find ourselves in the same position. Our plan now is to defer holding an AGM until Autumn this year; if at that time restrictions are still prohibitive, we will organise an online video meeting AGM.

An online meeting would mean that we won't be able to hold our fabulous raffle or have wine and nibbles, so lets hope we can all meet in person in the Autumn!

The Committee's Annual Report

We have not held a face to face committee meeting since 11th March 2020 but fear not we have not been idle! We have held monthly, 2 hour long Zoom meetings and, like most other people in the country, have now become quite au fait with the

platform. To save on the Society's funds (especially this year, as our fees have been suspended in these difficult times) we have used the free version, re-dialling in every 40 minutes after the free meeting time ends! If we were to use Zoom Professional there would be a yearly charge of £120, which the Committee believes can be much better spent on projects to help the local community. Many thanks to the Society's Secretary Julie Wright for keeping us all on track in this virtual world.

These are rather challenging times and we, the Committee, are aware that we have been unable to hold two Annual General Meetings, so if you have any questions, queries or concerns about what we are doing please contact us on:

rsascommunity@gmail.com

The Committee

This year the Committee remains unchanged, with members from Regency Square, Clarence Square, Clarence Gardens, Stone Street and Queensbury Mews. We would love to have someone from Russell Square, as well as more members from across our area. It really is not a large time commitment – one meeting a month for a few hours – and you really could make a difference to our area. And it's fun!

Wanted: New Committee members

If you think you might be interested, any of our existing Committee members would be delighted to give you more information and you could even attend a meeting to see if it is for you.

RSAS COVID-19 Community Initiative

Thank you to all those who responded to our initiative putting helpers in touch with those needing help during these exceptionally challenging times. Our thanks also to Committee members Julie Wright and Mike Davies for setting up and running this scheme.

During this last year we have matched those in need in our community with those able to give help, and we will continue to run the Initiative this year to ensure no-one in our local community slips through the cracks. So remember: If you need help with basic shopping, pharmacy collection, dog-walking etc, OR Can provide help to those RSAS members who need it then please email us at rsascommunity@gmail.com

Supporting local businesses

The Committee has also spent a lot of its time this year trying to support local businesses through these difficult times. Our newsletter is read by 500+ local residents, and is made available more widely on our website, so we were in a unique position to provide free advertising for our local businesses in need.

We have tried to help by making sure residents were aware of the businesses that were still open and the services they were offering. We know that take-away and click and collect have been a lifeline for many local businesses and we were delighted to play our part. Several businesses have been in touch to thank us for 'getting the word out' and helping them to stay afloat.

Special thanks goes to Committee member Mary Hunter who undertook a socially distanced tour of all our local restaurants so that we could provide accurate information to residents on opening times, deliveries, etc.

Planning and Conservation

This been a very busy year. Our thanks to Mike Davies who has done a tremendous job this year running the planning and conservation portfolio for the Society. It has been a particularly tough brief as many of the usual planning and consultation processes have all but disappeared due to Covid.

Every planning application submitted in the Regency Square Conservation Area (34 streets) has been checked for its effect on the local area and compliance with planning and conservation rules. Over 200 local applications were reviewed this year. Enforcement requests or planning portal comments were made where applicable.

The Regency Square Conservation Area has been represented on the Conservation Advisory Group to the Brighton & Hove City Council. This involves monthly cross-City group meeting attendance, along with 11 other members, each representing one of the Brighton & Hove conservation areas. For several days ahead of the meeting, an average of 10 planning applications across our City are analysed by Mike per month from a conservation standpoint – an estimated 3,000 separate documents assessed over the year.

Our Society has campaigned and encouraged local residents and businesses to engage with the major

development proposals in our area, for example the (now approved) Cannon Place Hotel. While this development is far from perfect, together we have at least brought about some positive changes to the design and tried to minimise some of the negative impacts on local residents.

The Society has also played an active role in city-wide campaigns, and we have joined with the fourteen Brighton societies "*Stronger Together*" against big developer and big money proposals at Brighton East Gasworks. Why do we feel it is important to support a campaign against a development that is in Kemptown? Because Brighton is 'Stronger Together' and the next campaign might just be on our doorstep.

Representing residents has also involved resolving local planning related issues over the course of the year. One example is the work Mike undertook in engaging the Managing Director of Best Food Logistics, the distribution company for 13 major fast-food brands across the UK including Pizza Hut, KFC, Wagamama and Nando's. The company delivers to 10,000 outlets every week. However, the deliveries to just **one** of these, on Stone Street to the rear of Western Road KFC, are now no earlier than 8am daily – much to the early morning relief of residents affected by the noise.

Another example is the ongoing work to protect the privacy of numbers 33 to 42 Regency Square. Since Russell House was refurbished in 2016, there have been frequent planning applications attempting to overturn the restrictions imposed on that development that were put in place to protect the residents of Regency Square whose houses are

adjacent to the development. This year – yet again – attempts were made to overturn the restrictions. The Society worked with the residents of Regency Square to deal with this problem once again.

And thanks once again to Committee member Nigel Massey for his special attention to Clarence Square. Along with many watchful interventions to help keep the square a pleasant and safe place (including personally locking the gardens at night to prevent anti-social behaviour), Nigel has pursued any and all planning applications submitted for Clarence Square, ensuring the character of that neighbourhood within the conservation area is maintained.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is still very prevalent throughout our area. This has been exacerbated by a lack of availability of drugs as COVID-19 suppressed the activities that usually lead to supply, and drug dealers simply stand out more when the rest of the population is forced to stay at home. The interruption of substances supply has heightened withdrawal effects and anti-social behaviour on our streets.

With that in mind, the Committee has continued to meet with our Police Constable Support Officers (PCSOs) over the past year to provide information on where PCSOs and surveillance are most needed in our area. The advice to residents is to report every incidence of anti-social behaviour and drug taking as this will ensure that police resources are properly allocated in our area. The Committee has

found that the easiest way to make these reports is to either (i) send an email to 101@sussex.pnn.police.uk or (ii) use the forms on the Sussex Police website <https://www.sussex.police.uk/>

The Committee intends to meet regularly with our PCSOs over the coming year, so if there is a problem that you need us to bring to their attention, please contact the Committee.

New signage

Committee member Ani Watson has also been working on a project to help address anti-social behaviour by improving the signage in our three gardens. The police have informed us that it is difficult to move along anti-social groups drinking in our gardens as (unlike other gardens in Brighton) we do not have signage prohibiting such behaviour. As with many issues at the moment, there are no public funds available to introduce this signage, so the Committee has agreed that the Society will provide the funding.

With thanks to Ani who has spent a number of months working with the police and the Council to address this, and to improve our garden signage more generally. We hope that the new signs will be in place by Summer.

Our Gardens

We are all grateful to our fantastic team of volunteer gardeners lead by Gill Wales. The Committee is delighted to fund and support this group to keep our gardens looking wonderful,

especially in recent years as the Council's funding for garden maintenance is under severe stress.

The team have had a frustrating year being unable to work collectively for much of the time due to Covid restrictions. But despite this, they have made a tremendous difference to Clarence and Russell Squares, and both are now havens of tranquillity – Thank you to the whole gardening team.

Regency Square Regeneration

But what of Regency Square? In contrast to Clarence and Russell Square, despite a significant amount of person-hours being spent in the top/north garden, it still looks bleak at times despite our gardeners' best efforts, and the cheery daffodils in bloom at the moment.

This is not unsurprising as the borders in that garden were created 20 years ago. Many of the shrubs that were planted have now reached the end of their natural life. As a result, huge gaps have emerged in these beds which are being repeatedly colonised by weeds. There is no quick fix. To right this is going to take a considerable amount of time, effort and money.

As Members will be aware, a significant sum of money is "owed" to our gardens: as a pre-condition under Section 106 of the BAI360's planning permission 1% of its ticket revenues are required to be used to develop the three areas directly adjacent to the BAI360. The Regency Square gardens is one of those three areas and the Society has previously secured a commitment from the Council that one

third of this fund is ear-marked for the regeneration of the Regency Square Gardens.

The plan, agreed with the Council, for this regeneration work (based on extensive research of local residents' and businesses' wishes) is available on the Society's website at: https://regencybrighton.com/regeneration_strategy_for_regency_square_document/

As a potential roadmap out of lockdown has been announced, the Society is able (once again) to renew engagement with the BAI360 and the Council regarding the promised "West Pier Area Fund". We know from the Freedom of Information request previously submitted by the Society that in September 2018 this fund stood at £39,870. Two further annual payments have since been made into the Fund.

A new five year plan

However, based on past experience, we also know that the release of Council funds – even those ear-marked for a specific project – is likely to be slow, and the north garden of Regency Square needs work **NOW**. With that in mind the Committee has been working with the Head of the volunteer gardening group over the last few months to come up with a plan to tackle the immediate problems with the Regency Square gardens while we await the release of the Section 106 funding.

This new '5 year plan' will sit alongside the bigger Regency Square Garden Regeneration project, but will start to tackle the serious planting needs in the top/north garden. We hope to be able to self-fund

the most immediate and urgent work. With that in mind, we are delighted to announce that in the last few days we have received a very generous donation that will allow us to get that work started. The Society's thanks on behalf of all members, local residents and local businesses, go to The Telemarketing Company, and MD Niall Habba for a significant donation that means work should be able to begin this Autumn.

Please watch out for our next newsletter, which will set out the '5 year plan' proposals in detail as we would like your thoughts and comments before work gets underway in the Autumn.

New railings and a restored war memorial

The front of the South garden of Regency Square also got a make-over this year, with brand new railings alongside our beautifully restored South African War Memorial. Enormous thanks to Committee members Julie Wright and Mary Hunter who pushed for these new railings to be installed. The initial plan of work did not include replacement railings, but thanks to Julie and Mary's persistence, new railings were added to the work programme and they look great.

A history of our gardens

Gill Wales produced a wonderful history of the Clarence, Regency and Russell gardens, which we made available on our website this year, at https://regencybrighton.com/our_garden_squares/ There are also some rare pictures of our three gardens through the ages.

Wanted: More Volunteer Gardeners and Tidy –up team members

And finally on gardens, do you have green fingers? Or are you handy with a litter picker? Or do you just love the thought of working outdoors after being cooped up for a year?! If you would like to help keep our gardens looking beautiful, we would love to hear from you as we will need more volunteers than ever when we launch our 5 year plan.

Commercial Bins

Earlier this year the council launched a consultation into the problem of commercial bins on our streets, blocking pavements and generally creating a nuisance.

It proposed that commercial bins be kept inside premises and could only to be put outside for collection between 6am-9am. We approved of keeping bins off the pavements but registered our concern that the Council's proposals would significantly increase early morning noise in what is still a heavily residential area – local residents do not want to be woken up at 6am to the pneumatic noise of commercial bin trucks outside their homes. We also pointed out that the result would likely mean more bins on the street as many local businesses would surely put the commercial bins out overnight rather than employ someone just to open up and put the bins out at 6am?!

We know that many members expressed similar views, so we hope that the Council will rethink and come up with more sensible proposals for areas like

ours where businesses and residents peacefully coexist.

Communications

Newsletter

This year we have changed the format and frequency of our Newsletter.

We now aim to produce four issues a year which have longer, more in-depth articles, with a revolving editor. Our Treasurer, Nicola Floyd has proved so good at this job that so far only Ani Watson has stepped forwards to help. Feedback so far has been very positive on these changes, but do let us know if there is anything we can improve.

Our website

Sadly, it has become evident over this year that the RSAS website is no longer fit for purpose in the fast moving world we live in today. While it still looks good to visitors to the site, the back end software that runs the website is now rather old, and limited in what it can do and how it can be changed.

When the website was first built it was state of the art, but as we all know, these things have moved on a lot in the last ten years! The Committee would like to be able to provide more real time information to members, and to provide services that people have now come to expect (eg to be able to join the Society and pay membership fees via a form on the website, for the website to look good on mobile phones, etc). These changes are not really possible with our current content management system.

Over the past year we have been in discussions with our web manager about how we can resolve these issues, and have now come to the conclusion that we need to upgrade the 'back-end' of our website in the next year.

Contacting us

While we hope most of our members know most of the RSAS Committee personally, we also know that it is sometimes annoying to try to work out who to contact for information on the Committee. This year we also conducted a review of our public presence and internet safety. While the Committee wants to maintain our transparency and ease of access there are risks with too much personal information being widely available in the digital age.

With both of these concerns in mind, we set up a centralised RSAS email account so that our members can contact all of the Committee at once. We continue to be open to all input, and want to hear your views – good and bad!

So, if you want to contact us about anything please do at: rsascommunity@gmail.com

Social Events

Our Social Secretary Ani Watson has had a bit of an easy ride this year but we are all desperate to gear up and get back together again, once we are safe and allowed to do so!

RSAS Christmas tree

We were unable to organise our annual flight on the BAI360, due to COVID-19 restrictions, but felt

that the local community still needed the magic of the Christmas tree in our gardens during the very difficult Winter that we all went through. Thanks to Committee member Mary Hunter's powers of persuasion and organisation skills we managed to erect and light the tree, despite all of the Covid difficulties. The person-power was supplied by the BAI360 maintenance team, despite them being furloughed, and a donation from The Artist Residence alongside our own funding, made it all possible.

Unfortunately, two days after the subdued lighting of the tree, the lights were stolen! Not to be deterred we immediately bought new lights and the BAI360 team replaced them on the tree. A very BIG thank you to all involved.

Thanks....

....to everyone who has supported the Society over the year, and especially those who continued to provide donations to the Society to continue to fund our work during these exceptionally difficult times. Without the interest and enthusiasm of our members nothing would be possible!

Diana Dunn, RSAS Chair

Elections

Elections for the Committee will be postponed until we can hold our AGM, hopefully in Autumn 2021. But in the meantime if anyone would like to join the committee, please do get in touch. We have established processes under our constitution to co-opt members onto the Committee prior to the AGM.

Annual accounts

Income & expenditure for the year ended 28 February 2021

INCOME	£(out)	£in
Subscriptions (incl forward subs)		45.00
Donations		89.00
Functions and other		0.00
Interest		<u>12.29</u>
Total General Fund income		146.29
Gardening Fund		10.49
Christmas Tree Fund		127.99
Bicentenary Book Fund		<u>95.52</u>
Total Income (incl gen fund) for the year		<u>380.29</u>
EXPENDITURE		
Postage, printing, IT, etc.	61.00	
Insurance	63.53	
AGM/functions	0.00	
Other Gen Fund Expenses	<u>0.00</u>	
Total General Fund expenses	124.53	
Gardening Fund	186.61	
Christmas Tree Fund	308.82	
Bicentenary Book Fund	<u>0.00</u>	
Total expenditure (incl gen fund) for the year		<u>(619.96)</u>
OVERALL SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) THIS YEAR		<u>(239.67)</u>

Balance Sheet as at 28 February 2021

General Fund at start of year	5,846.62
Net Income / (Expenditure) for the year	<u>21.76</u>
General Fund at 28 February 2021	<u>5,868.38</u>
Gardening Fund at start of year	234.54
Net Income / (Expenditure) for the year	<u>(176.12)</u>
Gardening Fund at 28 February 2021	<u>58.42</u>
Christmas Tree Fund at start of year	(68.50)
Net Income / (Expenditure) for the year	<u>(180.83)</u>
Christmas Tree fund at 28 February 2021	<u>(249.33)</u>
Bicentenary Book Fund at start of year	(595.24)
Net Income / (Expenditure) for the year	<u>95.52</u>
Bicentenary Book Fund at 28 February 2021	<u>(499.72)</u>
Additional Special Fund (Superbin)	
Superbin fund income for the period	1000.00
S.bin committed expenditure at 28 Feb 2021	<u>1000.00</u>
Additional available funds at today's date	<u>0.00</u>
Total funds (liabilities) at 28 Feb 2021	<u>5,177.75</u>
Cash at bank	5,076.43
Cash in hand	<u>101.32</u>
Total assets	<u>5,177.75</u>

Treasurer's Report

This has been a very unusual year for the Society's finances as the Committee took the decision to suspend annual subscriptions and roll forward everyone's RSAS membership free of charge until March 2021. Since then, we have taken the decision to suspend annual subscription fees again until March 2022. While we know that RSAS fees are small, we still felt that it was the right thing to do. During these difficult times we wanted to be able to support local residents and businesses and did not want our fees to be a barrier to anyone who needed help.

Several members insisted on paying fees or providing donations to help us to continue with our work, and for this we were immensely grateful. Those fees and donations were enough in total to cover the Society's basic operating costs. It also helped that the basic costs of running the Society were reduced, since we could not hold any of our usual in person events, such as the AGM.

But overall for the first time in many years the Society's annual expenditure of £619.96 outstripped its annual income of £380.29, leading to an overall loss for the year of £239.67. Thankfully our surplus built up over many years means we were able to absorb this loss without it affecting any of our community projects.

A significant part of this overall loss is due to our expenditure on the Christmas tree this year. Despite the Artist Residence's generous donation towards the cost of the tree, there was still a material cost for the Society to absorb. However, based on the

number of emails that we received from Members outlining how much joy the tree brought in what was an otherwise bleak Winter, we felt that this expenditure was worth it.

Our volunteer gardening group continued to operate whenever they could over the past year, and we continued to fund their activities. Looking after the Clarence, Russell and Regency Square gardens is an important part of the Society's role. As discussed earlier in this report, we expect that expenditure on the gardens will increase substantially in the next five years, and once lockdown ends we will begin fundraising in earnest to support this work. We are immensely grateful for the significant donation provided by The Telemarketing Company, which has secured our ability to get this work underway. As this donation was received in recent days (after 28 February 2021) it will appear in our accounts next year.

People continued to buy our Regency Square bicentenary book, and we are immensely grateful to Suzanne Hinton who continues to give her time to manage sales of the book for us. Given that authors' talks are one of our major points of sale, and all were cancelled in the last year due to Covid, we are glad that sales continued to trickle in. If you would like to buy a copy of the book – they make great gifts! – please do get in touch with the Committee.

Members will also notice an exceptional item in our accounts: we have received a £1,000 grant from our ward councillors to put a Superbin in the local area. This money is only permitted to be spent on this item, and it is unclear whether this acquisition will now go ahead due to changes in the Council's

processes. In the event the acquisition does not go ahead, the grant will be returned. Owing to this uncertainty we have separated it out from the rest of our accounts for transparency.

As well as suspending our fees, setting up the RSAS Covid Initiatives and advertising local businesses, we also found other ways to help out this year. Banks have struggled with opening new accounts for new volunteer groups and local Societies as a result of Covid restrictions. But without a bank account, these groups were unable to fundraise especially from national or local government organisations. RSAS has offered help as a 'guarantor' for those who need it, as we want to help other local volunteer groups who are working to improve our local area and the lives of local residents and businesses.

After reading this annual report, Members will no doubt have gathered that we have a number of high spend projects coming up in the next year: new signage to help address anti-social behaviour, a replacement CMS for our website to improve real-time communication with Members, and, of course the beginning of our five year garden plan.

We are confident that we can continue to meet our operating costs and fund these projects despite suspending our fees again this year. However, if you wish to donate to the Society or to any of our specific projects we would be delighted to receive your donations. If you want your donation to be linked to a specific project (such as the gardens or the Christmas tree) please just let us know and we will ring fence the donation accordingly.

We are always amazed at the generosity of our Members – and it is your generosity that has kept RSAS running for more than 40 years.

Many thanks!

Nicola Floyd, RSAS Treasurer

Society Contacts

To contact any member of the committee please use our new committee email:

✉ rsascommunity@gmail.com

You can also contact us via:



<https://regencybrighton.com/contact/>



<https://www.facebook.com/regencybrighton>



<https://twitter.com/RegencySquareAS>