



THE FORMATION OF RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS.

FORMING THE MEMBERSHIP OF A RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION.

It is very important to have a membership which is truly representative of the district, and which contains people of all backgrounds, nationalities, income groups, and ages. It is important so that at no time can it be alleged that the membership consists of a clique of people who have their own agenda (rather than the interests of the majority) at heart. The best way to advise potential members that a Residents' Association is to be formed is by means of a leaflet drop, giving the reasons for the formation of the Association and details of the time and place of the first meeting. The leaflet drop should target all addresses within a given radius of the centre of the community area.

REGISTRATION OF MEMBERS.

From the first meeting of the association, details of all those present should be taken, and entered in a membership book. This book should contain details of names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses. The book should also be able to be used as a record of subscriptions which have been paid to the Treasurer of the Association. As the book will probably be used for a whole host of reasons for many years, it is important that it is of stout hardback construction.

THE FIRST MEETING.

It is a good idea for the first meeting to take place at the home of one of the founder members. As there will probably be only a relatively few attending, it is less impersonal to do it this way, than to hire a local hall for the purpose. It will, of course, be necessary to hold subsequent meetings at a public meeting place as numbers increase. A local library is probably the best place to meet, but town halls, drill halls, etc. are just as good. Some residents' associations meet at public houses and hotels, but this is usually a bad idea on account of excessive noise, and the inability of the association's officers to make announcements, unless, needless to say, a private room is hired / allocated.

SUBSCRIPTIONS.

It might be felt that it is not a good idea to collect subscriptions at the first meeting, but the first meeting is the best place to agree on how much the subscription will be. In any event it should be charged for the Household and not solely per individual. i.e. membership costs the same for a family as for an individual. Membership should be open to all regardless of where they live, though the votes of non-resident members should never be counted in a ballot or show of hands. The Secretary should always state that voting is restricted to resident members.

APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS.

At the first Public meeting of the Association, those present should be invited to choose its principal officers. There should be a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman, a Secretary (who is responsible for the day to day running of the Association) and a Treasurer, whose role is obvious. Appointments are normally for one year, at the end of which all officers should either resign or offer themselves for re-election.

APPOINTMENT OF A SECRETARIAT.

The secretariat of a Residents' Association is the Civil Service of the organisation, so to speak. The Chairman and Secretary cannot on their own be expected to deal with all day to day matters as they arise, and it is necessary for this reason to entrust the daily running to Secretaries responsible for the following roles:

PLANNING.

Many of the issues with which the committee of a Residents' Association deals will be concerned with local planning applications, and it is for this reason that the Planning Secretary must be chosen with great care. He or She must have an extensive knowledge of Planning Law, and be familiar with the guidelines laid down by Central Government, The County, and the Borough. Amongst the thousands of Planning regulations and Guidelines controlling them is a new generation of regulations dealing with various aspects of building design and construction with reference to renewable energy. The first duty of the Planning Secretary is to devise a foolproof system of obtaining due notice of all planning applications which affect the Association's representative area. This is best effected by making a direct approach to the Town or City Hall and winning the co-operation of the Planning Department. It is very important to ensure that the Planning Secretary of the Association acts without fail in the interests of the Association and not only in accordance with his or her feelings. In order that the Association's views may be seen to be truly representative of the feelings of the neighbourhood, a decision to oppose a grant of Planning Permission should be made by a quorum of the committee of

the Association, probably not less than three other members including the Chairman and/or the Deputy Chairman. Difficulties can arise in cases where an application for a grant of Planning Permission is made by a member of the Association. In such circumstances, extreme openness is needed on all sides.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH.

A neighbourhood watch Secretary must be appointed, and should immediately get in touch with the local Police station. In the nicest possible way, the Neighbourhood watch Secretary becomes the eyes and ears of the district, and will be responsible for passing the security concerns of members to the Police, and for passing information from the Police to members. The work of a Neighbourhood watch Secretary involves making contacts at all times of the day and night, and, for this reason, is best suited to a recently retired person.

ENTERTAINMENTS.

Most large and active Residents' Associations decide to meet several times a year on a purely informal basis, and for parties at Christmas and Easter etc. This is an extremely important function within the Association, whose principal role is to engender a spirit of community throughout the district. This is, after all, what a Residents' Association is for. The role of the Entertainments' Officer is:

- to advertise such informal meetings of the membership, parties, sports activities, etc. throughout the district. It is vital that such events are open to all, and not solely to paid-up members of the Association.
- to hire suitable premises for meetings (including also Committee meetings, Annual General Meetings etc.), to obtain keys to premises and other instructions on these occasions, and to make arrangements for providing refreshments, wines, music, etc. as necessary. For a Christmas Party, this can involve a great deal of work: other members can be of help at such times.....

TRAFFIC AND ROADS.

Some Residents' Associations find it useful to appoint a Secretary to deal with Traffic and Roads matters, including of course, Parking, CCTV cameras etc. It is not usual for such matters to be dealt with by the Planning Secretary.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

Ever since the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was set up to interfere in the affairs of the citizen, there has been an ever-increasing body of legislation emerging from Parliament which affects us all on a daily basis. Much of this legislation is concerned with renewable energy, targets for the construction of new homes, water resources, changes to rail and bus services, Affordable Housing regulations, and a hundred other things. It is a good idea for at least one member of the Committee to make themselves responsible for monitoring such legislation with a view to determining the extent to which it may impact on the affairs of the District.

THE NEWSLETTER.

It is a good idea to publish a quarterly newsletter, giving updates on a wide range of affairs of interest to members. It can also give information about forthcoming events, and should contain contact information giving the addresses and telephone numbers of all committee members, and emergency numbers (Police Station, Emergency Chemists' rota, and anything of specific interest in the district. It is a good idea to advise the Town / City Hall about the existence of the newsletter, as they may ask you to publish details of local services (waste collection schedules etc.). It is essential to keep on good terms with your Local Authority. It is quite common for the cost of the newsletter to be borne by a local trader / shop / business, whose contribution can, of course, be acknowledged in the newsletter.

THE PRESS.

Your local newspaper will be interested to hear about the formation of a new Residents' Association. Interesting news from the district should be passed to them, if you consider it a good idea to do so.

THE RECOMMENDED TRADESMAN'S REGISTER

This is a register of all local (and possibly other) tradesmen with whose work members of the Association have been satisfied, and should be retained / maintained by a member of the committee. In this way, any member wanting to find a good plumber, for example, can phone the committee member in question, and be led in the right direction. In this age of cowboys, this is an essential role for an Association.

THE COMMITTEE.

The committee should consist of the Chairman, The Deputy Chairman, the Secretary, the Treasurer, the Planning Secretary, the Neighbourhood Watch Secretary, the Entertainments' Officer, and one or two other members. They should all offer themselves for re-election annually.

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Village Residents Association and Friends of the Grove

Royal Tunbridge Wells

Members of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

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