

ADVICE ON FORMING A RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

The Cause:

Usually, as you know, Residents' Associations are launched because a number of residents' find common cause about something and they wish to take action about it, usually with 'the authorities'.

Initial Meeting:

The residents who feel strongly get together to define the cause, plan a strategy, determine actions and leaflet the neighbourhood with a date, venue and purpose for a first general meeting. We suggest this is the moment for the chief organiser to set up a gmail.com (or equivalent) email address for your group, which will serve as a contact address on all publicity.

First General Meeting:

Choose someone to chair and someone to take notes. Here you can brainstorm about the cause, set up your Steering Committee, choosing who will be your Acting Chair, Secretary or other organisers. You may not need a Treasurer at this stage unless there is a significant outlay. Make sure you are voted in properly, nonetheless, because you may have to continue for a while, or you may decide of your own volition, subject to vote, that you want to carry on when you hold your first AGM (Annual General Meeting).

Deal with the Cause as best suited:

Organise public meetings, engage with Councillors, rally more support, petition etc. Once you have dealt - or whilst simultaneously dealing - with these urgent matters, you might wish to give yourself some more permanence and identity and so you go the next step and the Steering Committee prepares to set up an RA proper, but delegate tasks.

Set up an RA proper:

- Draft a Constitution (see notes on p.2) and agree it with your Committee
- Confirm the 3 main Officers (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) and any other role that may emerge (e.g. minute taker, membership secretary, deputy chair etc) – useful to divide the labour
- Decide how many Committee Members besides you will have – useful to get everyone to DO something rather than just be advisors! 8-10 is quite a good number but this may depend on the size of your catchment area
- Formulate why you exist
- Have an idea when to have your AGMs – these are best regularly same time every year because then your membership has it in their diary
- Establish how many Committee Meetings per annum you will have – 4 is usually quite an acceptable number
- Use EGMs (Extraordinary General Meeting) for unexpected issues
- Give notice of Meetings should be at least 3 weeks; notice of AGMs - the longer the better since people have to get these in their diary
- Decide when to have your first AGM to approve the Constitution and the Committee; discuss the way forward with your immediate cause, or plan ahead over other issues that may concern you (parking in the street, an undesirable development, unsightly lamps, crime, public spaces, grass verges, trees etc)
- Do a leaflet drop to announce the date of the AGM, place, time and purpose.

First AGM:

Prepare for this. It's often good practice and will gain better attendance if you make it a social occasion, too. So offer drinks and small snacks, to consume beforehand and after. This way everyone should be punctual for the meeting itself. After quarter-of-an-hour or so, call the meeting. The Chair(person) opens the proceedings with a welcome and summary of the purpose of the meeting. The Secretary takes notes for the Minutes. Obtain a vote agreeing the existence of the RA and its purpose. Then elect the Officers. This gives attendees the democratic chance to re-elect the acting committee or propose others. Debate the issues, but make sure to keep discipline and allow people to be heard out. Also, make sure to keep to time. Most importantly, make sure decisions and action points are made: who will do what, by when. Set a place and time for the first Committee Meeting. Optional: you may wish to record or film the meeting, but always ask permission of those gathered.

Joining FeCRA:

Joining FeCRA does not require formalities. You can let FeCRA know at any point along the process that you would like to join either by contacting secretary@fecra.org.uk (currently Tania Elliott). We would need to have the following information:

- the **name of your Residents' Association and its catchment area**
- the names of the **(three) main officers**: your Chair(person), Secretary and Treasurer (conventionally); but some RAs don't need a Treasurer if they don't collect membership fees. They may have a Deputy Chair and Membership Secretary or whichever officers are relevant to your RA; the **contact emails** of the Officers. (Some RAs prefer to set up dedicated emails, such as 'chair.xxxra@gmail.com', 'secretary.xxxra@gmail.com, and 'committee.xxxra:gmail.com' - not that we particularly recommend gmail...)
- **why you set up your RA and what your aims are**;
- **when** you were constituted;
- whether you have had a **first meeting**, have a (Draft) **Constitution** and whether you are planning to have **AGMs**;
- you can also **register with the Cambridge City Council** by contacting Melanie Jones (Business Support Officer) at melanie.jones@cambridge.org.uk. This will mean your RA details will be currently be accessible also to **Great Cambridge City Deal** for mailings. Alternatively you can request FeCRA register with these two organisations on your behalf.

FAQ: Who is considered an RA? We recognise that community groups may often form in haste to respond to a situation and are not yet be constituted when they contact FeCRA. You can still join FeCRA and let us know of your intention to form and why. In practice we are fairly flexible in our interpretation of a residents' group provided they can genuinely show they represent the broader interests of their community rather than a single interest issue; for instance, we also embrace community groups who are seeking to protect a community asset, enjoyed by all, such as a green space or a library, not just a street or area;

Other forms of publicity/communication:

Many RAs like to set up a website and use social media so as to post events, alerts, links, carry on a dialogue, reach a wider audience.

Notes:

A. **The Constitution** - To include:

1. The Name of the Association
2. The Aims and Objectives - What the association will do.
3. Membership - define who can be members of the association and who has voting rights.
4. Officers and Committee - Which officers? It's customary to have at least a Chair (person), Secretary and Treasurer. You may want to define other roles, eg to include, Vice-Chair (person), Membership Secretary, Meeting Secretary (minutes), website and social media person. How many committee members? How elected? Terms and length of servicing as an officer or member of the committee. Can additional members be co-opted?
5. Meetings (and procedure)
 - 5.1 Committee Meetings - how many for a quorum? Is there a minimum number of times a year to meet?
 - 5.2 Annual General Meetings (AGM) - When held? How often? How much notice needs to be given? Quorum for an AGM? Election of Officers.
 - 5.3 Special Meetings/Extraordinary General Meetings (EGM) - Notice given? Quorum?
6. Finances - the Treasurer will need to keep an account of monies and present this at the AGM. Is there a membership subscription? What will the funds be used for? Do you need to open a bank account? If so, how many signatories.
7. The Constitution - Conditions where it can be amended?
8. The Dissolution - On what grounds would the Association be dissolved? What happens to any assets?

Other items you may wish to include in your Constitution:

Code of Conduct
Data Protection
Equal Opportunities

B Roles:

The three main Officers are (conventionally):

The **Chairman/Chair**, who is responsible for coordinating the whole show, liaising with the RA committee and the outside world, as well as promoting the interests of the RA, writing letters stating the position of the RA to the local authorities, the MP, Councillors, the press

The **Secretary**, whose task it is to support in the Chair in the practical and organisational running of the RA and to be 'guardian' of the Constitution, to send out notices of meetings to the RA membership, to liaise at secretarial level with counterparts at Council level and other bodies), to coordinate or help coordinate the practical management of meetings and venues.

The **Treasurer**, whose job it is to keep the accounts, and produce Annual Accounts for the RA. In practice this role is indispensable if costs are run up, for example, these might be the hire of a venue, any catering, collection of subscriptions from the membership and so forth. The Treasurer will liaise with the Chair and Secretary concerning budgeting for events or services bought.

Other roles can for example be:

Deputy Chair

Membership Secretary

Minute-taker

Website or IT Secretary

C. Examples of Constitutions:

[FeCRA Constitution](#)

[Christ's Pieces RA](#)

[HPERA Constitution](#)

Tania Elliott (Secretary) & Barbara Taylor, FeCRA, 5th September 2016 – Vn2

For any queries, please contact secretary@fecra.org.uk