

# H-CAN

February 2007

**If anyone can  
Highfields can!**

## Highfields Community Association welcomes the Cabinet's decision to establish Community Governance.



Working  
together for  
Community  
Governance



For 25 years and more HCA 's demands for local control to deliver services local people need has finally been agreed.



Members of Highfields Centre Interim Strategic Management Board

**Congratulations and messages of support have come from:**

A terrific achievement, many congratulations. We move forward, with vigilance! Best wishes. Adam Edwards (ex Chair HCA)

Hi to all, congratulations to all who have been on the frontline of the struggle. Mussa Hajat (Member, HCA MC)

I am delighted with the fantastic news, congratulations to the HCA and Priya for his hard work and dedication. We always knew that there was light at the end of the tunnel, it was just a case of waiting and as they say all good things come to those who wait patiently. Yasmin Nathani (Staff)

Congratulations! HUC, HCA and members of staff who remained loyal to the cause have shown the way and created a platform. Now every member/user 'must learn to govern'. Courtney Hay (friend)

More messages....pages 2 and 3

**“Maureen Milgram Forrest said all members of the ISBM should be committed to making Highfields Centre fully accessible and used and this journey was to establish trust and in moving to Community Governance and any who disagreed should say so now. No one disagreed”.**

Minutes of first ISMB meeting held on 8 January 2007.

The move to Community Governance (CG) is fully supported by:

Highfields Community Association (HCA), Leicester City Council (LCC), Learning and Skills Council Leicestershire (LSC), Sport England (SE), Government Office of East Midlands (GOEM) and East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA). ISBM is made up of 4 representatives each from HCA, LCC and funding bodies.

HCA: Abdul Osman, Iris Lightfoote, Dr. Shofiquil Chowdhury and Matt Follett.

LCC: Councillors Parmjit Singh Gill, Mussa Saleh, Mustafa Karim and Hussein Suleman

Funding bodies: Maureen Milgram Forrest (LSC), Graeme Beaumont (SE), Jan Sensier (GOEM) and Frank Horsley (EMDA).

Advice and follow-up: Priya Thamotheram and Alistair Reid.

**Our journey now is about securing the resources, staffing and equipment we need to make Highfields Centre a place where children, young people, adults and elders know they can use facilities, learn, enjoy and help to develop our area and communities for the better.**

Better prospects for health, education, jobs and leisure activities. Community Governance will enable HCA to draw down funding, develop support and become a Social Enterprise organisation. Social Enterprise means we attract funding and generate income to support what we do in HC and what we do for our communities.

Messages of congratulations pages 1,2 & 3, Highfields Centre Interim Strategic Management Board page 1, HCA AGM page 2, Interviews—Cllr Parmjit Singh Gill, Maureen Milgram Forest page 4. Priya's ET Cases Settled! page 4



## Highfields Community Association's Annual General Meeting held on 8 December 2006 at Highfields Centre.

At the well attended AGM, Abdul Osman (Chair) stated that following recent meetings with Cllr Parmjit Singh Gill (LCC Cabinet Lead for Adult and Community Services) and Alistair Reid (LCC Service Director), we were on the cusp of a historic decision by the City Council at their forthcoming Cabinet meeting on Monday 11th December to support HCA assuming responsibility for the community governance of Highfields Centre.

He added that this was made possible in part by the lengthy and determined struggle for community governance by HCA, HUC and our supporters and also, by the critical intervention of the local MP (Sir Peter Soulsby) in bringing together all four of the Centre's external funding bodies, as well as the City Council and the Association.

Abdul and the other members of the Executive (Iris Lightfoote, Matt Follett and Dr Chowdhury) were thanked for their continuing readiness over the previous year to pursue community governance. At the subsequent election, all four of the retiring executive were re-elected, and then, the meeting proceeded to elect the other members of the Management Committee.

Dilshad Ahmed (Islamabad Cash & Carry) attended as the Guest Speaker and he referred to his long association with Highfields Centre and his support for our campaign for community governance. He then proceeded to talk about the regeneration of the Highfields area and he said that not once in the last fifteen years of running his business in the St Peters Precinct had he been consulted, approached or visited by any of the organisations (i.e. Leicester Chamber of Commerce, LABA, LACBA, Business Link) set up to represent businesses. He concluded by wishing the Association the very best for its onward journey.



**Congratulations and messages continued...** Who better to lead and determine the best use of community resources than communities themselves? We need more leaders like Priya Thamotheram - with their feet on the street, and their heart in the struggle. Monica Hingorani (friend)

Fantastic news - the Centre's under use was rapidly becoming a scandal - I'm so glad that the road to commonsense and honouring pledges to funders has been 'found' by all concerned! Hopefully the people of Highfields can now start to enjoy full access to the fantastic facilities that HCA and staff like Priya have fought to achieve for them over many years - and which are vital to moving the area forward and reducing the social exclusion of its residents. Chris Bailey (friend)

We know that there is significant, untapped potential for people in this vibrant community to get more active and enjoy sport and physical activity as an integral part of their everyday lives. The work of this group is the start of the journey to realise this potential. Graeme Beaumont (Sport England)

It's amazing how different the world can look when everyone is working together in a positive manner. On behalf of the LSC and our other partners, I am delighted to be part of the process that will see the Highfields Centre become the amazing resource to the community that we invested in originally. Maureen Milgram Forrest (LSC)

With such untapped potential in Highfields, and across Leicester, places like the Highfields Centre are crucial in realising that potential. Matt Follett (HCA)

May I add my voice to the happy chorus congratulating you and the team on a genuine result for the community. This has been a long hard road for you all, and I can only applaud this very real victory for people power in Leicester. Tom Calderbank (friend)

It has been a long journey and I am pleased for everyone concerned with the centre which provides much needed services for the local community. Your patience, determination and leadership are an example to all of us. Jeremy Crook (friend)

Wow - you got a result! Brilliant. Carole Jasilek (friend)

Maximum respect for HCA's strength, determination, integrity, vision and inspiring fight for justice for Highfields people to determine the governance of their own Highfields Centre of Excellence. Beth Hanna (ex staff)

If you can do it for Highfields we should be able to do it for community services in South Leicester. Peter Thomson (friend)

I am very happy to be part of the ISMB and look forward to making Highfields Centre fully accessible as soon as possible for the benefit of the local community. Cllr. Mussa Saleh (LCC) More messages....



I look forward to seeing ALL the facilities at Highfields Centre being fully used by local people. I hope that we can now move forward and that the Centre can very soon reach its full potential for the local community. Sir Peter Soulsby (MP, Leicester South)

## HCAN Interviews Cllr Parmjit Singh Gill



I think that Cabinet decision shows the commitment is a very firm one. Its very clear that the road to Community Governance is the one we want to take and as quickly as we possibly can.

### Congratulations and messages continued...

Thanks for never giving up. 'Great - we've finally got what we needed from the Council - now we can get on and make the new Highfields Centre a place that everyone in the area can see as theirs.' Chris Williams (Friend)

After a very long strife by all concerned in pursuing Highfields Centre being open to full capacity, I am pleased to say as a ward councillor that the ISMB is now established to provide much needed framework for the development and implementation of services to achieve a sustainable future for the Centre that will reflect the needs of local community. There is much excitement about this new development and it means there will be more joint working between the community and services in securing funding. Cllr Mustafa Karim (LCC)

This is really great news. Many congratulations on the outcome and good luck over the next few months. My words are: "Keep it local; keep it Highfields." Chris Shaw (Friend)

Congratulations Priya. Glad you finally got there. Nathan Tutt ( Friend)

Well done, this is a great move forward. May Almighty bless you for your commitment and loyalty to the community. Ferhana Bhogadia (P/t Adult Tutor)

Great news. Well done. Derek Stimson (Friend)

That is excellent news. As Priya says everything might not be 'hunky-dory' but it is a massive step in the right direction. Congratulations to all. Simon Rutledge (Friend)

Good to hear from you. Just a quick message for now, to wish you and the team big congratulations on reaching this place. Will be in touch. Best wishes to all Cameron Duncan (Friend)

Thanks for the update and congratulations on getting this far. I wish you and all the stakeholders at the Highfields Centre a peaceful 2007. Hansa Patel-Kanwal (Friend)

GOEM is delighted to support the work of the ISMB in bringing into full use the wonderful facility of Highfields Centre - as representatives of 10 government departments we have a strong interest in seeing all aspects of the Centre being used to help take forward a vibrant community. Jan Sensier (GOEM)

Of the many struggles in Highfields we have had to fight for our communities, this particular achievement of becoming self-governing has been a magnificent one. Congratulations to Priya and all those who fought with us. Abdul Osman (Chair, HCA)

### Why is Highfields Centre important for Highfields?

To start with by its very location, its in the centre of Highfields, its like a hub for the local community. Over a long period of time many many groups locally have used the Centre in one form or another. There is a great affiliation by local groups to the Centre, I think the Centre is very well placed to deliver services and again I don't think its being utilised as fully as it could be.

### In your experience and to your knowledge no matter how far back you want go, have you come across a more representative management committee of a community association or organisation than Highfields Community Association?

From my experience and its more recent, in terms of the Highfields Community Association Management Committee. The Management Committee I think is fully reflective of the local community and local groups and its very useful that its constituted and you have AGMs and so of course that there is constant change within the committee which ensures that reflection is as wide and full as possible. Its possibly from my experience the most reflective committee across Leicester.

### Why have you put down the most demanding of stipulations on the Community Association in order to arrive at Community Governance?

By putting down the checks and balances it ensures that the road to Community Governance is first of all a success. In actual fact those stipulations will benefit both the Community Association and the Council and ensure we get a very good positive result on this and difficulties and complexities are ironed out along the way.

### As Cabinet Lead for the Council, do you apply the same level of stipulations and requirements on Officers (senior and junior) in terms of their duties and delivery of services to local people?

I certainly hope so, I am the Cabinet Lead, I'm not responsible for the operational side but I'd be very disappointed if that level of scrutiny is not applied to Council's own officers when it expects external groups to meet those standards.

### The Community Association's view is that in order to arrive at Community Governance over many years, many senior officers have frustrated that journey, what's your opinion about that?

I wouldn't disagree with you, I commended the Community Association at the Cabinet Meeting recently for the very hard work that had been put in, I also respect the hard work that officers put in more recently. But what I am deeply frustrated about and cannot understand is why it has taken so long. The view I arrive at is that officers in the past and administrators in the past have frustrated attempts by the Community Association to make progress towards Community Governance.

### Are you aware of the fact that often times the Community Association was trying to bring Officers and Councillors together in order to have common discussions. Rather than being told that so and so is against and we cant do anything. And so Officers and Councillors wouldn't meet the Association together in the same room.

Well you made me aware of that and speaking to others it certainly confirms that's been the case in the past. **continued...**

**HCAN Interviews Cllr Parmjit Singh Gill continued...**

A huge disappointment because if you're going to make progress it makes absolute sense to have everybody involved in the same room at the same time, so you iron out the issues very quickly. So its disappointing that in the past that's not been the case.

**Given that funders and the Community Association are on board, the decision made by the Cabinet, how important is that decision is for the people of Highfields?**

I think at this moment in time, that decision sets in stone as far as I'm concerned, the direction of travel of the council. There had been some doubts raised about whether the council committed or not, I think that Cabinet decision shows the commitment is a very firm one. Its very clear that the road to Community Governance is the one we want to take and as quickly as we possibly can.

**How soon do you expect the silos (Under 5s, Children & Young People, Adults and Community) to be set aside and the centre become a holistic family centre that it was, that it needs to be?**

It's a well known fact up and down the country that local authorities don't always think in terms of a single picture but they operate separately . I'd expect that to be happening already and certainly I'd be driving that forward as a way of working. You cant work in silos. The needs of a local family will be many and complex, which will require officers from a range of departments. Those officers to work together is fundamentally important, to get the best delivery of service to that family.

**Given Children's Services (from birth to becoming a young person) require all services to provide continuity and coherence, what part do you expect this community centre to play through the Community Association in delivering Children Services for the City Council?**

Clearly a very key role the Centre has and of course the Association. Nobody knows the needs of the local community, better then the local people, better then the local Association that's delivering, will be delivering services to the local community. Certainly not people sat at the local council. So the role the Association has is absolutely key and I hope they fulfil that as well as can be possibly be.

**Priya has served the council and local community for over 25 years and has a particular track record, what are your thoughts about what he's done?**

Certainly from what I have seen I think its indisputable that he has played a very key part in bringing funding into the Centre, in helping the local community to understand what services are available to them. So I would commend him for the work he's put in over a very long period of time.



**HCAN Interviews  
Maureen Milgram Forest**

**Chair of Highfields Centre ISMB  
Chair of Learning & Skills Council, Leicestershire  
Co-Chair of LeicestHERday Trust**

**HCAN: Given the Interim Board is now in place what do you expect to occur in its early days?**

MMF: We're rolling up our sleeves, interestingly enough, we've all got the same vision, we've just got different ideas about it. The vision has got to be practical, putting together a proper budget, looking at where all the money is coming from, making sure we've got the right staff in place to do the right jobs, putting job descriptions together, that's the stage we are at now. We're eventually going to hire a team that will be partly the City Council and partly the Community Association. Eventually the Community Association's responsibility. That team will include the Head of Centre and the people will support that.

**What will you be looking for in terms of Community Governance being successfully achieved?**

I'll tell you the recipe for success for a community organisation and it's the word—you. You, that is everyone that is reading this, can actually participate and some ownership in their community, how does that come about? By participating and being involved with the Highfields Community Association. We're in a period of transition, I'm chair of the Interim Board, that's what it is right now, what will it be two years from now? You, are the ones to make that happen, your voice will be something to do with what happens here at this Centre. We want to build the 'underneathness' that will make that possible. So, I've agreed to be the interim Chair for 4 months. I think there is transition between an organisation that is run by a government and an organisation that is run by the people and its how we do that and I think its up to you.

**What are your thoughts about handing over to the Community Association the position of Chair of the Interim Board?**

The real thing that happens as I step down from as Chair is that transition to the Community Association chairing the Board, that means its no longer a symbolic move to the community running a centre and Governance. It's a real move from one position to the other position but there's a responsibility that goes with that. The responsibility is that the community has to realise that if they are going to do this, there's a huge responsibility, they have to take ownership of that responsibility.

**If you were to come back in two years time what would you want to see happening at Highfields Centre?**

The Centre will be a learning facility for the whole community. It will mean that People will be able to take ESOL classes, Adults Level 1, Level 2, Level3, young people will be able to do all sorts things here. That we wont have young people what we call in the NEET category (Not in Employment Education and Training) but they'll be actually contributing to the community. It'll be an economic regeneration Centre, it'll pay for itself, not from fees that you're all paying but being smart and clever about how user groups that can afford to pay for it will pay for it, they will subsidise the less advantaged of us. The Centre will be thriving, hopping, there'll be a buzz here that you wont believe, but people will be benefiting from it. So it will be the living breathing heart of the community, that what I'd like to see in two years. What would you like to see?



**Employment Tribunal Cases Settled!!**

**"Leicester City Council and Mr Priya Thamotheram are pleased to announce that they have resolved their differences about**

**Mr Thamotheram's employment and have agreed a joint commitment to a positive future working relationship which will have at its core the benefits of the residents of Highfields and the development of a vibrant, successful Highfields Centre."** (agreed joint statement 2/2/07)



**"A very good outcome for all concerned and I am especially pleased for Priya and the Highfields community"** Dr Chowdhury.



**"Brilliant news after a long fight, well done to all, Priya in particular for sticking up for Highfields"** Matt Follett.

☺☺☺**Highfields Community Association thanks all members of our community for supporting our struggle to establish Community Governance. Now, let's celebrate by building for all our futures!!**☺☺☺