

Minutes

AGM

Wednesday 14th October 2015
Wolvercote Village Hall
at 7.30 pm

Present: Steering Committee members Christopher Hardman (Chairman) John Bleach, Richard Lawrence-Wilson (Treasurer), Mary Brown, Cllr Jean Fooks, Graham Jones, David Stone, Angela Goff, Cllr Steve Goddard, Jenny Attoe.

Other members of the public listed separately.

Apologies: None.

1. Chairman welcomed the audience to the second AGM of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum. He explained the order of the Agenda. He proposed that Matters Arising and Questions be left until after item 4, because many matters would be covered in his report under item 4. There would be a number of speakers from the Steering Committee on draft policies for the Neighbourhood Plan at the end of the report. Then there would be speakers in item 5 on supporting projects. He welcomed Sue Brownill from Oxford Brookes, who would speak to number (iii).
2. The minutes of the first AGM of Wednesday 15th October 2014 (previously circulated on the website and at the meeting) These were accepted as correct without any amendments.
3. Matters Arising (Left until after **Item 4.**)
4. **Chairman's Report (Full text).**

Progress with the plan this year has been slower than we would have liked. We lost our Secretary and one member of the Steering Group during the year because of pressures from their businesses. We are very grateful to Jenny Attoe for joining us recently to replace our Secretary. I would like also to thank Anne Charles for her help - especially the very considerable help she gave in setting up the questionnaire and analysing it. I am, of course grateful to all the other members of the Steering Committee who have done a great deal in contributing to all the demands made on them in relation not just to the plan, but to the numerous applications and consultations in which we have been involved.

We need more help and, as you will see later from the Treasurer's report, more money. In particular we need help in applying for funding. I know that many people are too busy to contemplate standing for the Steering Committee, but joining members of the Steering Committee to help with particular sections of the plan would be very much appreciated.

Our main mission is to create a plan. Plans policies are related to building development and land use only, you will remember. Our circumstances are rather different from those at Woodcote that Geoff Botting talked about last year. There, they had some say in which land in the village they considered appropriate for development. In our case, the Mill Site and the Northern Gateway have already been allocated as sites for development, so we have to produce policies that will influence the nature of those developments.

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Policies on non-development issues are not issues that a planning authority is obliged to consider, but they may still be relevant to the plan and most plans include supplementary information.

There have, as you know, already been applications and consultations going on before our plan is completed, and we have played a role in these as best we could. Despite the fact that we have not yet got an approved plan, we have in most cases been involved in and taken quite seriously in decisions. But doing this has, of course, taken away time from constructing the plan itself.

I can give brief updates on the specific proposed developments included in the minutes of our last meeting.

The 17 dwellings approved at Elsfield Hall

The planning permission requires a start on site by Aug 2017 or else the permission will lapse. Elsfield Hall is therefore the primary site for next year's development programme earmarked to start in April 2016 and all the necessary arrangements have been made. However, the recent changes to national housing policy following the election and the July budget [specifically the RTB extension to housing associations and the 1% social rent cut] means there that there is a need to review the impact of these changes to ensure that the plans remain affordable. So there is a slight hiatus. Once the review is completed, the Council Officer dealing with it will be in touch to talk about how the scheme will proceed, especially concerning the issues in which we have a particular interest such as the road safety audit of the proposed access arrangements and how to manage contractor parking and access during the build process.

The Wolvercote Mill site

The application has recently been resubmitted. There were problems in accessing the Council website during the consultation and we managed to get the consultation extended by a week, and the officer dealing with the application met us and has said that he would consider any later comments. Our comments are on the Council website, and we drew attention to the issues which we believe still concern local residents: the size of the development because of the problem of absorbing such a large development into the community of Lower Wolvercote, the increase in traffic, the sewerage, drainage and flooding issues. We were helped with the technical matters relating to draining the site by Paul Kirkley, for which we were very grateful. One point to make is that when we respond and say that residents are concerned about something, it is always a help if residents demonstrate that that is true by responding individually too. There were a fair number of comments this time in spite of the difficulties. Please don't be discouraged. We had already formally commented in a consultation on the consultation process on the inadequacy of consultation procedures before the problem with the Mill site. One matter to which we drew attention was that notice is no longer given to neighbours when there is a planning application. We put up multiple copies of the notice ourselves in the case of the Mill site.

Northern Gateway

The Steering Committee of the Forum and the Wolvercote Commoners and other local groups spent a lot of time and effort in making representations and attending the examination of the Northern Gateway Area Action plan. We achieved very little. The important issues of traffic congestion and the consequent harmful levels of pollution needing to be sorted out before development went ahead were set aside by the Inspector. The Inspector's assumption that technology will reduce pollutants from motor vehicles to make development safe in the near future seems particularly ludicrous in the light of recent revelations and published research on

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the harm caused, especially to children. Development should depend upon proof that air quality is not at dangerous levels and that congestion has reduced. Until then people should not live or work there.

Elsfield Way

You will recall that the developer had appealed against the Council's decision to turn down the application for 30 dwellings at Elsfield Way. Representations were made by the Forum as well as by others, and fortunately the Inspector rejected the appeal.

During the year we have used The Flying Goose to keep in touch with local residents and in the summer we distributed a questionnaire with it. We had a very good response and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking those who responded. The results, like our meetings and workshops, will feed into the plan. We had been concerned that at previous workshops and meetings representation from Cutteslowe Park had been limited; it was therefore gratifying to see the response from this area was good. As one might expect, the ages of respondents was mostly over 45 and predominantly in 60-74 range. Therefore we need more engagement with people under 30. There was overwhelming opposition from respondents to building on the Green Belt and recreation land and not much support for building on farm land or in back gardens. Green spaces including gardens and allotments and the presence of trees in the urban landscape were all important. There was a mixed response to the replacement of large houses with more houses but it was not an idea which had strong support. It was considered very important that new building should be in keeping in design and scale with existing building. There was very strong support for obliging developers to build homes that achieve the highest standards to conserve energy and resources. There was overwhelming support for providing local accommodation that they can afford for key workers and for reserving housing on the Northern Gateway for those working there. Both of these would help to reduce congestion. In August the Neighbourhood Forum made a submission in respect of the consultation on Houses in Multiple Occupation. We have recently had a meeting with Council Officers and there is now an officer designated to help us with the plan. As you will see from item 5, we are very fortunate in having been offered help with developing the plan from students at Oxford Brookes. They gave a lot of help to Headington. They will also be looking at issues in Summertown. There are naturally many issues that are very similar in all plans, especially those in adjacent areas. We also have a proposal from Cutteslowe Park from the Friends of Cutteslowe and Sunnymead Park to designate an area as Local Green Space. Tim del Nevo will speak to this and Graham Jones will say something about the Godstow Abbey project. I want now to turn to the plan itself. In a moment members of the Steering Committee who have been working on particular sections of the plan will read out some proposed draft policies for their sections of the plan, to give you an idea of what policies have to be like. Remember, they have to be related to building development and land use, though off-plan issues can be included as supplementary. (Different plans present this in different ways but all have to concentrate first and foremost on development issues, as these are the ones that Council Officers have to consider when determining a planning application.) To get an idea of what a draft plan or an approved plan is like, you may like to look at published plans for other Neighbourhood Groups. There are a number on-line. For example there is one – a draft plan - for Headington. When we have completed draft sections of the plan we hope to arrange drop-in meetings so that residents can come and look at them and comment. I suggest we have meetings in Lower Wolvercote - perhaps in the White Hart, in Upper Wolvercote, and in Cuttelowe Park. We already have a series of proposed policies, and many of these endorse

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current policies already accepted by the Council, BUT we need to include them in a plan and be sure that they are implemented appropriately: for example - safe cycling and pedestrian paths, car clubs, bus service improvements, traffic plans.

Members of the Steering Committee then introduced examples of what proposed policies might be like.

First an example of what an off-plan issue on transport would be and how it might be supported:

TRANSPORT – Christopher Hardman

Measures are required to reduce congestion, reduce pollution and improve air quality.

Recent research demonstrates how damaging pollution from vehicles is and recent events (VW) have shown that the current tests for vehicle emissions are inadequate. The optimism of the Inspector at the Northern Gateway examination that technology will reduce pollution sufficiently to make housing and working there safe is therefore unacceptable. **The Council should only allow the development to go ahead as and when the levels of pollution are already reduced and safe. To achieve satisfactory air quality a combination of encouragement and regulation is required.**

We have a series of proposed policies; many of these endorse current policies BUT we need to be sure that they are implemented appropriately: safe cycling and pedestrian paths, car clubs, bus service improvements, traffic plans.

DRAINAGE – Mary Brown

All developments will be required to adopt best practice.

The foul sewerage system must be sufficient to cope with a large development. The pipe work should be surveyed rather than relying on desk-top surveys. The systems need to be thoroughly checked and **the ingress of surface water prevented. There should be no building on land liable to flooding without appropriate measures** not only to protect new building, but to prevent any adverse effect on existing buildings in the neighbourhood. **Run-off onto roads is already an issue and this needs to be addressed before being increased by further development.**

GREEN SPACES – Angela Goff

All existing publicly accessible green space to be retained and development resisted.

Green space providing visual amenity should be protected. Protection where possible should be reinforced by designation as Local Green Space in accordance with the policy set out in the National Planning Framework in 2012. Encroachment on and re-designation of the Green Belt should be resisted. The Core Strategy sets out the amount of publicly accessible green space to be provided for the size of the population. We need to ensure that development does not reduce this. **All developments above a certain size should be required to provide at least 20% of the area developed as green space.** The character of many areas in the Ward is enhanced by trees: **trees should be retained and properly maintained. Any lost trees should be replaced. There should be new planting where appropriate. Private gardens also contribute to both the character of an area and to biodiversity and development resulting in their loss or diminution should be resisted. Allotments too should be protected from development. Informal green spaces like verges should be preserved and where possible enhanced. There should not be development on land where biodiversity will be adversely affected.**

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HOUSING and ENERGY – John Bleach

1. We believe that, without exception, all new residential developments should provide a proportion of housing for key workers and that this should be included as part of the City's housing policy. This is necessary to facilitate recruitment to ensure the provision of essential services and to reduce commuting by those who cannot afford to live in the city.
2. Provision for the elderly is important. It is important to make sure that there is local provision so that people do not have to move away from their community. **The demand for this needs further investigation.** Our study will include an estimation of the need for care home provision, and for sheltered and other types of housing, as well as for smaller accommodation (some of it on single level) for those who wish to downsize.
3. **Planning permission for a major development will only be granted if it incorporates appropriate leisure and community facilities, including sports facilities, for all ages, on site, as part of the development.**
4. The design and layout of any new development must make sure that it is capable of providing a safe and attractive environment and that it encourages the growth of a local community integrated with existing neighbourhoods. It is important to base designs on past experience. Therefore we support the enforcement of design codes developed for major developments (e.g. as published in the AAP for the Northern Gateway).
Planning Permission for new residential developments will only be granted where the layouts and designs pay due regard to recognised design codes. For instance, the Homes and Communities Agency publication: *Urban Design Lessons - Housing Layout and Neighbourhood Quality*.
5. **Planning Permission will only be granted for new Building developments which are energy efficient and meet the highest standards for sustainable design, thus**
 - (i) **New housing developments: housing will be required to meet high ratings in the new BRE Home Quality Mark scheme;**
 - (ii) **New commercial buildings will be required to meet high ratings in the BRE's Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM).**

WNF should set standards.

CHARACTER and HERITAGE – Graham Jones

The Character of different areas in the Ward is diverse. It is important to preserve the best features of an area and where possible improve its character. We need more detail here.

Building should be appropriate in scale and material to the neighbouring built environment. The transformation of the character of an area by replacing large houses and developing the site needs to be very carefully controlled. (There is an argument that doing so increases the number of units of more affordable accommodation, though it can also, of course, produce more cars and more congestion. Frequently, however, one house is simply replaced by two even more expensive houses.) The chairman, in his report, mentioned how important the character of an area was in determining future planning policy. Our policy on this is to ensure that we maintain the diverse nature, preserving its best features and enhancing it where possible. . Wolvercote is fortunate in having many historic buildings, many grade 2 listed. They stretch from Cutteslowe Farmhouse in the east, via buildings like old dairies and local inns to Godstow Abbey in the west and work is progressing to identify all important buildings as well as assessing the street character.

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5. **Associated Supporting Projects.**

i. Heritage and Godstow Abbey.

Godstow Abbey, better known as Godstow Nunnery. In the summer of 2014 we learned of a competition organised by Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) in conjunction with Oxford University for suitable projects related to historic buildings. Having volunteered for “heritage” on our steering group, Graham Jones attended the event along with another 25 or so organisations and submitted a project for Godstow, which to many, had seemed to have become rather neglected. A shortlist was drawn up and we were included in 7th and final place. We had to find a partner from the university and Graham was fortunate to have sat next to Prof. Heather Viles from The School of Geography and Environmental Studies who volunteered her department. Subsequently, we learned that we had won £5,000 for the project to improve the site and to create display boards to explain the history and the conservation of the abbey. We are now working alongside the School of Geography and the Ashmolean Museum to progress our joint aims for the site. Some residents will have attended a special meeting about it as part of the Midsummer Festival and a few have visited the Ashmolean Museum to examine historic finds from the site. Although we had hoped to have a board in place in October, getting all of the data and permissions from people like Historic England takes a little longer, and we plan for this to take place next spring.

ii Cutteslowe and Sunnymeade Parks.

Tim del Nevo said that the council actively encourage residents to form a group of Friends of the Parks. There was concern at the increase in development in North Oxford and that Cutteslowe and Sunnymeade Parks needed a higher level of protection over 35 years or longer so they were pleased to connect with WNF and have the parks included in the Neighbourhood Plan. They would be pleased to assist with obtaining and sharing information and any other help.

iii **Contribution to our plan by students from Oxford Brookes.**

Sue Brownhill spoke of the help her third-year students (from the School of the Built Environment) were giving with the Local Plan i.e. design codes, housing, consultation guides, open spaces and allotments. They would help with evidence and examine already published plans to determine what is and isn't possible. There is a meeting with the steering committee and students on Friday 16th October to discover key areas and what support and help is needed. The students learn how to work with communities through this cooperation.

6. **Treasurer's Report and Accounts 2014 – 2015**

The treasurer emphasised that we need more money; there was a deficit of £500 last year. Savings were used to fund production and printing of the questionnaire. The money from the University is ring-fenced and therefore not available for any other use. The Neighbourhood Forum needs help to make grant applications. Christopher Gowers said how good the housing questionnaire was. He had found it very useful and had used it in community information. His praise was recorded and he was thanked for his comments.

INCOME

No grants were applied for this year. Some cash donations were received during the summer festival and at meetings.

The Steering Committee is actively supporting a project undertaken by the University of Oxford School of Geography and the Environment (OUCE) with the aim of improving public understanding of the history of Godstow Abbey. A contribution from OUCE will be used to

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help pay for display boards, currently under development, to be installed on the site during 2015-16.

EXPENDITURE

Most of the year's expenditure related to the Freepost questionnaire distributed in July 2015. The Steering Committee has continued to meet in the private homes of its members and no costs have been incurred on meetings. No committee members have been paid any fees or expenses.

BALANCE SHEET

The Forum's assets comprise the balance in its current account at NatWest, Kidlington and the amount invoiced to OUCE for their contribution towards the Godstow Project.

Richard Lawrence-Wilson, Treasurer

7. Feedback

It was asked "How long will it take to get a Plan?" It was thought at least one year but it was difficult to say. Headington, whose Plan is already in draft form, has a project manager – we do not have the funds to employ one (£18-20,000). JB asked if anyone would like to be a project manager to help us with grants applications and obtaining funds and Chairman also said he needed help with filling in grants applications. Sue Pfunder said there was an organisation called "Locality" where grants of up to £8000 could be applied for. Chairman said it had taken three weeks just to obtain advice from Locality. CG offered to pass on the name of someone who may be able to help. Cllr Jean Fooks said there had been protests at the closure of Five Mile Drive but others wanted it to remain closed. There were mixed opinions. The council will re-open it when the roadworks are completed and then decide by evidence. If it remains open traffic calming may be considered as a solution but without firm evidence of traffic levels and traffic speeds there was no money to do anything.

8. Election of Officers. Secretary and one member of the steering committee.

The steering Committee as elected at the 2014 AGM were to serve a three-year term. One member had stood down and one officer had resigned. Position of Secretary: GJ proposed Jennifer Attoe for the position and seconded by MB. JA accepted the position. Committee member: Linda Johnson-Bell of 7 Godstow Road, was proposed by Sue Pfunder and seconded by JF. LJ-B accepted the position.

9. Any Other Business.

- Angela Goff gave notice of the Wolvercote Commoners' Committee's Half-Yearly meeting on Thursday 22nd October at the Baptist Church Hall at 7.30 pm.
- John Thompson asked if tree planting could be considered on Nixey's Field, by the Jubilee Gate, at the White Hart and at the Bathing Place. The university representative said they would consider these suggestions. JB said Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum was a democratic organisation and did not support only projects that we favoured but that it represented the community.
- Michael Ayres spoke of the proposed A40 improvements – some parts of the proposals would make a huge difference to the community and discussion was need with the community to ascertain views. JF said a meeting with the city and county councils might be possible and co-operation was needed but neither the WNF nor WCC had a mandate on this matter.

The Chairman thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. The meeting closed at 9.04 pm.