

Minutes

Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum Steering Group

Meeting held at: 65 Five Mile Drive on Thursday 15th May 2014, 7:35 pm

Action

Present

John Bleach (chair), Anne Charles (until item 6), Jean Fooks, Angie Goff, Mike Gotch, Jackie Gray (until item 6), Christopher Hardman, Graham Jones, Richard Lawrence-Wilson (treasurer), Sue Pfunder, Kate Richenburg

1.0 Apologies

1.1 Bridget Ely, Alex Martyn, David Stone, Jane Wilkinson. Jonathan Gittos has resigned.

2.0 Previous minutes

2.1 The minutes of the Steering Group meeting of 26th March 2014 were agreed with the following changes:

Minute 3.1 Omit "and Wolvercote Commoners", Angie confirmed WCC had not requested an extra week and had not responded to the Northern Gateway options questionnaire.

Minute 4.1 typo line 3 "make" not "made", and the judgement on Elsfield Hall will be announced on 24th June.

3.0 Update on planning issues

3.1.1 Elsfield Hall

Kate reported that an amended application had been submitted after concerns had been raised about the height of the buildings following the 'Swiss Poles' demonstration. The revised scheme shows buildings set further back, with a shallower pitch. She felt the Swiss Poles approach had been validated. Another poles demonstration will be held to assess the revised proposals.

3.1.2 Elsfield Way

Jean and Mike were adamant that the County Council will never allow a vehicular entrance into a new development from the A40 to the east of the Cutteslowe roundabout. Similarly the City Council will not allow a development with no element of social housing. Therefore proposals for developments which break these rules can be ignored for practical purposes. Graham said that the group had put in an objection to the latest one, just in case.

3.2 Wolvercote paper mill site

Jean, John and Mike had met the University's Land Agent (Director of Asset and Space Management), Carolyn Puddicombe. She had explained that the University are considering withdrawing their planning application, for three reasons: (1) there have been over 90 objections to the outline proposals, including this Committee's; (2) the University is feeling very bruised by the Castle Mill Flats debacle; (3) they now feel that they are not really qualified to be housing developers.

John said that the issues raised by the Environment Agency can be overcome.

Proposed actions from the meeting were for the Forum SC and the Commoners to get together and establish exactly what the local objections are, and for the Land Agent to talk to the Chair of the University's Property Committee to see if the University would be attracted to a key worker element to the scheme (but note the City Council has no key worker policy). Jean and Mike had followed up this meeting with David Edwards (City Council housing dept) who would prefer the University to persist with their plan.

The danger is that the University will withdraw and sell the site to a large commercial developer who will be far less willing to consult and take notice of the community than the University, and will simply want to cram as many units as possible on to the site, and will aim to minimise infrastructure and amenity costs.

The Steering Group felt strongly that this would be a retrograde step, and discussed how the University might be kept on board. Could the objections be weakened or withdrawn?

AG said that the Commoners had heard that the Steering Group might withdraw its objections. The Commoners were adamant that they would not do so, they would refuse to be blackmailed by threats of something worse.

Jean and others were against simply withdrawing the objections. Graham felt that the University could overcome most of the problems raised, but some people have objected to the number of housing units. Angie said that some people still believe they can stop any

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houses at all being built, which is completely unrealistic.

It was agreed that the most important issues were drainage and flooding, transport, and the road junction between the two pubs.

Actions: Graham and Christopher agreed to collate and summarise all the comments and objections and Christopher would then draft a letter to the University.

CH & GJ

3.3 Sue was concerned at the time and effort devoted to discussing the Mill Site. It was not the core purpose of the Forum to focus on specific developments. Other developments, such as the railway project, are important to other parts of the community. She had come prepared to report briefly on the Northern Gateway.

Discussion of the railway and Northern Gateway developments was deferred.

3.4 John and others agreed that the Steering Group was being distracted. Individual developments should be noted and monitored, but are incidental to the core purpose of the Forum, which is to develop the neighbourhood plan. Nor should the Forum behave as a pressure group.

Steering Group members agreed that it would be preferable for brief reports to be given on current developments, perhaps circulated in advance, with the bulk of meeting time devoted to progressing the plan.

4.0 Plan-making

4.1 Next steps

John explained that the Forum needs to create policies which will carry legal weight, and we will need support from a planning expert on this. The result must be of practical use in the determination of planning issues. Furthermore the Steering Group will need to present the policies to the external examiner, with evidence to support them.

One part of the evidence will relate to the professional credibility of the plan, and the other part will be the demonstrable support for it from the local community. We will have to take local people along with us as the plan is developed. Questionnaires and surveys will be needed.

Mike said that the City Council is supposed to be offering professional planning advice. This does not seem to have happened.

It was agreed that discussion of the way forward for the plan should be top of the agenda for the next meeting.

4.2 Transport report

John has sent the report to Nicola Blackwood MP and Council leaders.

Jean advised the Committee that the County Council has appointed consultants to prepare a "North Oxford Transport Strategy", presumably taking account of the new parkway station and the Northern Gateway. Consultation arrangements were not known. There was scepticism as to whether a strategy prepared now, before the plans for the Northern Gateway are known in any detail, will be valid or useful.

5.0 Website

Anne was confident that she could do the technical work on the website but she would require help with obtaining and organising the content. It was felt that some moderation would be needed; not by way of censorship but to deal with possible anonymous comments that could be damaging and unpleasant.

Anne needed a handover from Jonathan Gittos. John would arrange a meeting.

AC, JB, JG

6.0 Forum constitution and AGM

John had commented on the existing constitution but others had not. Angie and Richard had made a start by email but had not had time to meet. The existing wording was out of date as it had been drafted before the Forum area had been agreed; however the main issue was the lack of any description of arrangements for the election of Steering Committee members and officers at the AGM (15th October at the Village Hall).

Angie and Richard agreed to prepare a revised document as soon as possible, to be circulated for comment before the next meeting.

AG, RLW

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7.0 Management and help

7.1 Feedback requests

Graham said that Bob Keith had asked how we were getting on. He had replied that we were OK but had had to put in a lot of effort on local developments, especially the Northern Gateway. BK is willing to attend a meeting of the Steering Group, or to provide support for the plan. The Committee agreed we need to use him more. Graham will email him to say that we would like his feedback when we reach the next stage. We should email him the transport report now, and the constitution, when revised.

GJ

Graham reported that he had had a telephone interview with the University of Reading who were carrying out research on behalf of the Department of Communities and Local Government. John said that the DCLG were also running a focus group in London, which he would attend.

JB

7.2 Publicity and engagement

John had arranged to meet the new Chair of the Wolvercote Commoners.

JB

It was agreed that the Committee should put on a display during the Wolvercote and Wytham Summer Festival. John will email people to ask for help with this. One possibility is to pilot a questionnaire.

JB

7.3 Funding

Drawing up requests for funding takes time and effort. Volunteers are needed. Angie said she could not lead the effort but would be willing to help. She would look into the requirements; and wondered if Bob Keith could help.

AG

We need to put in a bid for the DCLG grant administered by Locality. GJ said that Headington Neighbourhood Forum had got further with this and he would ask for their advice.

GJ

8.0 Treasurer's report

The bank balance stands at £1107.82. Richard did not know about a donation of £100 from Dr Bob Watkins, which the previous minutes stated incorrectly had been received. JB to follow this up.

JB

9.0 Matters arising from the previous minutes

Has the information on transportation promised by Tom Flanagan (Oxfordshire CC) been received?

Check

Information about the AGM needs to go in the next edition of the Flying Goose – copy deadline was not known and needs to be discovered.

Other matters arising were dealt with during the meeting.

10.0 AOB

10.1 Logo and strapline

Various possible straplines were considered, including the four that JB had circulated along with "representing North Oxford communities from Wolvercote to Cutteslowe". After discussion it was agreed that brevity was vital and the strapline could not include a detailed description of the area or a comprehensive list of its components, so the Committee settled upon "**Representing the community of Wolvercote Ward**"

10.2 A Wolvercote Parish Council – recognised as an idea for the future, but not discussed.

10.3 Oxford Civic Society – Oxford Futures report is at www.oxfordfutures.org.uk.

11.0 Dates of future meetings

Wednesdays, starting at 1915: 18th June at Jean's - 9 St Bernard's Road, OX2 6EH
23rd July, at Graham's - 67 Rosamund Road.