

Minutes

Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum Steering Group

Meeting held at: 9 St Bernard's Road on Wednesday 18th June 2014, 7:15 for 7.30 pm

Present	Action
John Bleach (chair), Jean Fooks, Angie Goff, Graham Jones (from minute 3.4), Richard Lawrence-Wilson (treasurer), Alex Martyn, Kate Richenburg, David Stone, Bob Keith from Planning Aid (guest)	
1.0 Apologies	
1.1 Bridget Ely, Mike Gotch, Jackie Gray, Christopher Hardman, Sue Pfunder. Anne Charles will attend only if required for business relating to the website.	
2.0 Previous minutes	
2.1 The minutes of the Steering Group meeting of 15 th May 2014 were agreed, subject to deletion of Jane Wilkinson from the list of apologies as she had not been due to attend.	
3.0 Plan making	
John said that as agreed at the previous meeting the main focus of the meeting would be on how to take forward work on the neighbourhood plan. He summed up progress to date and described the present position:	
3.1 Where we are now:	
The 'neighbourhood area' has been agreed and the WNF is officially recognised. WNF has held a number of successful public events and has gained the respect of local people and established a dialogue with local authorities and Oxford University. There have been two strands to WNF's work. One is the active strand, the plan-making which is the forum's core purpose, with transport planning as a sub-strand. The other strand is reactive, with WNF responding to major developments in its area. Pressure of events has led to the main focus of work recently being on the reactive strand and while this has had some success (e.g. in moderating the plans for Elsfield Hall) it has meant there has been no progress on the plan since last November.	
3.2 What we need to do:	
John said that we need to decide on the content of the plan. He drew attention to the advice from Tony Burton in " <i>Keeping it Simple</i> " and suggested that WNF faced a choice between a plan offering a general approach excluding reference to specific current developments, or a more complex plan including them. In practice, given the limited resources available, he was concerned that this might mean WNF either having to withdraw from active involvement with the major developments so as to concentrate on preparing the plan, or putting the plan on hold and concentrating on influencing the developments. In discussion there was a clear consensus that WNF had to try to continue both to develop the plan and to maintain active involvement in the major developments, several of which are so significant that they will profoundly affect the area for decades to come. A neighbourhood plan that ignored these major developments would look irrelevant and make little sense to local people. SG members were aware that the policies and views of the WNF have no formal weight until the plan has been completed and has passed a referendum. Therefore they saw the task as to move the plan on by creating a small number of simple, general policies that will apply to all developments in the area, whilst maintaining a watch on the major developments and actively using the Forum's influence.	
Bob Keith agreed that legally speaking the Forum's policies currently carry no weight. However he advised that they might start to have some influence while still in draft.	
3.3 Timescale:	
Bob Keith said that a lot of groups are aiming to complete their plan by the end of 2014, with a referendum in May 2015. This timing suits local authorities but is not mandatory. He said	

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that many other groups face challenges similar to WNF. It is important to keep up momentum and not get bogged down by complexity or over-ambition. Some groups have a simple plan with just 3 policies, 15 pages long. Case law is developing and it may be possible to take a short, simple plan forward and then iterate it by amending or adding to it later, although currently the slightest change requires a fresh start and a new referendum. He said that some 15-20 plans were now approved with 1000 or so in the queue including WNF.

The Committee felt that 2015 may be too soon for WNF, and the General Election may get in the way.

Bob said that the City Council is eligible for £30k for each neighbourhood forum, and has an obligation to help. The Council has lots of statistics and information about the area. Jean agreed to obtain a copy of the Ward Profile for Wolvercote Ward.

JF

3.4 Priorities and who will do what:

John presented an A3 table summarising work done so far on prioritising issues, drawing together opinions expressed at public meetings, through questionnaires and in SC discussions. He explained how he had identified which items could plausibly form the core of the WNF plan.

The top 3 highest priority issues were traffic, flooding and drains/infrastructure, followed by noise and air pollution, and schooling. All these 5 were core areas of interest for one or more national or local authority. Therefore, whilst the Forum might have views and make comments on proposals in these areas it could not expect to promote policies which would have much impact on them. John suggested WNF should discuss the remaining issues to identify those which should be prioritised.

During discussion the Committee agreed on 4 areas for further examination and research:

- **Green spaces and biodiversity** (linking existing green spaces to City policy and describing how each is used and why it is valuable). It was believed that the City Council had done some relevant surveys and Angie said she would ask about these
- **Building scale, density and design.** It was suggested that Christopher might be interested in working on this one. John to discuss with CH.
- **Mix of housing.** Kate and Alex volunteered. They were both interested in HMO policy and the effect of an ageing population on housing policy. Bob Keith offered to look for examples of housing-related policies in these areas in other plans.
- **Environmental and sustainability** – a combination of several areas including energy related issues. John volunteered to cover this.

AG

JB

KB/AM
BK

JB

'Principle of community' was also of great interest but was set aside due to lack of resources.

Graham joined the meeting and expressed a personal interest in researching Heritage.

GJ

John agreed to circulate his A3 sheet as 2 A4 sheets so that people could print copies.

JB

3.5 Bob Keith said that it would be useful to use a list of standard questions to begin the research in every area and he offered to provide one electronically. He added that the Committee should develop a project plan with deadlines and offered to provide a template within three weeks, so that it could be populated by the next Committee meeting.

BK

BK

The aim would be to compare notes on progress on July 23rd and complete work by the following meeting (August 20th). Jean agreed to be "Mr Nasty" and chase people.

JF

4.0 Updates on planning issues

4.1 Elsfield Hall:

Kate said that the Council had demonstrated the mitigation they had achieved, partly due to the work done by WNF members. However at the last minute some local residents who had

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been contacted several times without showing any interest were getting agitated when it was probably too late to further influence the plans.

4.2 **Elsfield Way:**

Kate reported that the City Council had issued a long and excellent report containing every possible objection, apparently aimed at stopping the proposal.

4.3 **Paper mill site:**

The OU Land Agent had emailed suggesting a small meeting with JF, MG, JB and someone from the Wolvercote Commoners, together with Michael Crofton-Briggs. This seemed to indicate a welcome reversion to the OU's previous position, with them as developer or at least as promoter of an outline scheme. This seemed to justify the measured approach pursued by John and the useful work done on analysing and summarising local objections. John said that the largest number of objections had centred on flooding, traffic, drainage, access to the development, the effect on the community and character of the area and amount of development on the site. He felt that each of these (with the possible exception of the last) should be capable of mitigation. It was very good news that the University was seeking local opinion before deciding whether or not to sell the site immediately.

It was agreed that there should be a pre-meeting to enable others to contribute their thoughts – Angie and Graham wanted to attend and thought that Christopher would also. There was concern that Mike's view might be at odds with the majority, so it was important that he should be invited to attend the pre-meeting.

JB

4.4 **Oxford-Bicester railway:**

John reported on the recent technical meeting relating to vibration. He felt that Network Rail had tried hard and real progress had been made. However the local group chaired by Muir Gray had not been satisfied.

4.5 **Northern Gateway area action plan:**

WNF has been offered another meeting with Rachel Williams the planning officer. She would say what is in the preferred options planning document that is going to City Council on 14th July, after which it will be subject to further consultation. All agreed that we would need to see the document at least 2 days before the meeting so as to understand it and prepare comments. It is not acceptable to be asked to react in real time to a complex document, as has happened. We need more input and control.

Jean agreed to draft an agenda for the meeting and request the document in advance.

JF

There will be an exhibition of proposals relating to Wolvercote Roundabout (date not known).

5.0 **Forum website**

John and Anne were working together and had managed to see Jonathan Gittos. John had purchased some temporary space for the website and tabled details of the service offered by a range of providers. A decision was needed on which to choose as host and after discussion the SG agreed to go with 123-reg.co.uk.

6.0 **Forum constitution and AGM**

Angie and Richard reported briefly on the work they had done to revise the constitution and include a voting scheme to elect members of the Forum Committee and the Forum officers.

It was agreed that the revised document should be circulated to all SG members plus Bob Keith for comment. It was suggested that OCVA (Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action) would have expertise to offer and should be sent the Constitution and asked for their views.

AG, RLW

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7.0 Wolvercote and Wytham summer festival

- 7.1 Jean and John agreed to help run the WNF stall, from 1 pm on Saturday 21st June on Goose Green. Kate said she could help and it was hoped that Sue Pfunder could too. Angie provided copies of the questionnaire and the equipment needed to run a £1-in-a-bucket fund-raising raffle. David undertook to provide a table and gazebo.
- Graham said that he was prepared to help with a stall at St Peter's church fete on 28th June. Angie agreed that this would be a good idea.

8.0 Treasurer's report

The bank balance stands at just over £1,000. John said he had not yet spoken to Dr Bob Watkins about his promise of a donation of £100. Richard needs his address to send bank details. **JB**

9.0 Matters arising from the previous minutes

John had been unable to attend the focus group meeting in London due to Mill Site work. John has not formally met the new Chair of Wolvercote Commoners (previously a member of our steering group)..

Angie said she did not feel able to lead work on fundraising.

Other matters arising had been dealt with during the meeting.

10.0 Any other business

- 10.1 John drew attention to the front page of the latest edition of the Flying Goose, which was entirely given over to a Q&A article about the Forum, written by John and Sue. Bob Keith asked for a copy and confirmed that it would be a very useful item to include in the portfolio to be submitted to the inspector, to demonstrate communication with the community, when the time came for the plan to be assessed.
- 10.2 No new volunteers had come forward as a result of the article. Graham undertook to send reminders to people who had attended the training session in the Baptist Hall. **GJ**
- 10.3 The deadline for the next Flying Goose is 4th August, distribution date around 30 September. A volunteer is needed to write a further article on the Forum. This will be the issue in which to confirm arrangements for the Forum AGM in October. There was discussion of who might speak at the AGM. Bob suggested someone from Woodcote. John agreed to identify and invite someone suitable. **JB**
- 10.4 Headington Forum have a meeting on 9th July in Headington Baptist Church, see www.headingtonplan.org

11.0 Dates of future meetings

Wednesday 23rd July, starting at 1915, at Graham's; Wednesday 20th August at John's.

STOP PRESS: 'Connecting Oxfordshire' meeting has been planned by County Council for 23rd July, therefore SC meeting of 23rd July will be re-arranged.