



## Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum

### Draft Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

14 November 2022, held at Wolvercote Village Hall

#### Present:

In addition to 9 Steering Committee members (Christopher Hardman, John Bleach, Richard Lawrence-Wilson, Mary Brown, Paul Buckley, Tony Dale, Katherine Kaye, Cllr Jo Sandelson and Cllr Andrew Gant), 56 people attended the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (WNF) AGM. The meeting began slightly after the scheduled start time of 7:30 p.m. and formally ended at 10:15 p.m. The Agenda was published on the WNF website (<http://www.wolvercotenf.org.uk/>) and made available in hard copy along with the Accounts at the meeting.

#### 1. Welcome and apologies

Christopher Hardman (Chair) welcomed the audience after a long break brought about by the Covid pandemic. Apologies had been received from two members of the Committee unable to attend (David Stone, Cllr Steve Goddard)

**2. Minutes of the previous AGM:** the previous meeting's minutes for 2019 were accepted by a show of hands (Graham Jones, nominator, seconded by Steve Roberts).

#### 3. A change to the WNF Constitution

A proposed change to the WNF Constitution had been proposed and seconded by members of the Steering Committee, and published on the website (more than one week in advance, consistent with the Constitution) reflecting the wish of Councillors to become non-voting members of the Steering Committee.

The proposal was: Clause 8.4 would be re-worded to read: "The SC may co-opt a member of any local area group (see below) that is not already represented by an elected SC member. Local Ward Council representatives will be invited to attend meetings of the Steering Committee as non-voting Associate Members."

The change was approved by a show of hands (proposed by the Chair, seconded by Katherine Kaye).

#### 4. Election of Officers and Steering Committee members.

Following a brief discussion of the roles and responsibilities of the Committee, and in the absence of alternative candidates, the current Committee officers and other committee members standing (as listed in the agenda for the meeting) were re-elected, as follows.

Chair - Christopher Hardman; Vice-Chair – John Bleach; Treasurer – Richard Lawrence-Wilson. Other committee members – Mary Brown, Paul Buckley, Katherine Kaye, David Stone, Tony Dale.

Two new members were elected to the Steering Committee: Suzy Donald and Tamsin Smith (nominating one another, seconded by Jo Malden and Kate Ward); the Committee and the meeting as a whole welcomed them. Steve Roberts stood down and his gracious and hard-working years on the committee were noted with thanks. He volunteered to continue assisting with the website for the time being. Andrew Siantonas offered to be co-opted to the committee as Minutes Secretary for WNF Steering Committee meetings, and his offer was accepted with thanks.

The Chair once more asked for a volunteer for the post of Secretary, which has been vacant for a number of years. However, no one stepped forward and so this post remained unfilled.

## 5. Presentation of accounts and CIL money clarifications

Following a brief interval, the accounts were presented by the Treasurer; the expenditures of the WNF have been modest. The accounts were accepted (Tony Dale, nominator, seconded by Graham Jones).

During the presentation it was clarified that Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money does not appear in WNF accounts as it does not pass through WNF hands; this prompted a wide discussion. CIL allocations are paid by the City Council directly to the organisations making the applications to the WNF upon WNF approval. Accountability for the process lies with the City Council's CIL Officer. Once the City has approved the payment the WNF follows up on non-payments and traceability. Monies should not be delayed or allowed to fall through cracks in the system: the CIL Officer has a statutory duty to ensure that payments are made in a timely manner.

CIL payments as a whole are a matter of public record and it was therefore considered that they should be recorded on the Council's website; WNF approvals are on the WNF website page.

Councillor Sandelson suggested that payments should go immediately into WNF hands for disbursement to the relevant organisations to ensure that the City doesn't accidentally lose or double-allocate funds; this is to be discussed.

## 6. Reports on Forum Activities.

### 6.1 The Neighbourhood Plan

The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan Referendum was held in May 2021 when the plan was approved by an overwhelming majority (93.61 % of the votes cast) and the Plan was finally adopted. Consequently the Neighbourhood Plan was 'made', which means that the Council Officers and Planning Committee have to take account of this Plan when considering planning applications in the Neighbourhood Plan Area. The adoption of the Plan also obliges the Council to pass over to the Forum 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (discussed earlier in the Treasurer's presentation) which developers are required to pay to mitigate the effects of their developments on local infrastructure.

The referendum had been delayed by one year because of the Covid Pandemic. Had this delay not have occurred the Forum would have been entitled to the 25% one year earlier. The discussion with the Council about this was ongoing.

### 6.2 Oxford Local Plan - Concerns and response.

The Forum's latest response dated 14 November 2022 to the Oxford Local Plan would be published on the Forum's website.

### 6.3. The second round of applications for CIL and arrangements for future applications.

The Steering Committee had received and scrutinised applications for funding from seven local groups. Decisions made had been published on the Forum's website and full details of the successful projects had been forwarded to the Council for payment.

### 6.4 Oxford North and 'Canalside'

(Canalside, part of the Oxford North development, is the area between Joe White's Lane and the A40 road.) The Steering Committee had participated in the recent consultation by the Council concerning the developers' application for approval of Reserved Matters arising from the Outline Planning Consent and had uncovered a number of flaws. However, the Steering Committee's comments had had little effect on the outcome and planning consent was eventually granted.

It was noted that the consultation on the next phase of Oxford North was to be held at Jury's Inn on 26<sup>th</sup> of November. People were urged to attend en masse to raise questions and demand further consultation.

During the Canalside consultation, the City Council Planning Department appeared to assume the recent WNF submission as being from one party rather than as representation of the majority of WNF area citizens. This assumption had not been apparent in previous consultations. It may have been because there had been an absence of comments from individuals in the Neighbourhood Area. The point has been made to the appropriate Council Officer and has been accepted. To avoid this situation in future those present were urged to participate in future consultations and make their own comments no matter how briefly. The Steering Committee was prepared to give guidance on how to do this to anyone in the neighbourhood willing to participate.

### **6.5 The Wolvercote Community Building**

It was the feeling of the meeting that the need to place the deeds in the hands of the Village Hall Committee was pressing. Equally, the use of the building must be decided upon democratically, involving the Mill Site residents as well as the wider community in the area.

CALA Homes were reluctant at the time to extend the mezzanine floor. It was suggested that CIL monies might be used to do this work if CALA finally declined to do it.

Many felt that the building should be made fit for purpose, including the floor extension, solar panels, fitting out of the kitchen.

### **6.6 Joe White's Lane: concern about the hedgerow.**

The Canalside development (southern part of the Oxford North development) was discussed in terms of the encroachment onto Joe White's Lane, the deterioration of the ancient hedgerow, and the possible incorporation of a portion of the land between the hedge and the canal in the 2040 Plan into an additional phase of building if the current environmental protections of the locale are abandoned by new iterations of central government policy. The exposure of residents in social housing to pollutants was noted.

The helpful contributions from the Boating Community Representative were noted: the encroachment onto Joe White's Lane was alleged to be primarily by construction workers driving individual vans.

It was suggested that people might like to write to the Canals and Rivers Trust (<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us>) to complain about encroachment into fragile or protected habitats and that damage to verges and hedges must be avoided.

### **6.7 Developments affecting us nearby**

The development of PR6a adjacent to Cutteslowe Park for over 700 dwellings; the football stadium proposal for Stratfield Brake; St Frideswide Farm.

Speaking to Item 6.7, Suzanne Mclvor gave a 15-minute presentation which can be found in the Appendix to these minutes or on the Forum's website.

### **6.8 The problem of the lack of play spaces, especially for teenagers, in new developments.**

Developers, as at Wolvercote Mill, usually do not provide play spaces until the completion of the development. Appropriate play facilities and spaces for young children and teenagers, especially where there are apartments or houses without gardens, should be provided as soon as accommodation is occupied. This should be a condition of planning approval.

## **7. Matters arising from Minutes of the 2019 Annual General Meeting**

There were no matters arising not already covered elsewhere on the Agenda.

## **8. Any other business**

There was no other business.

## **9. Date of next Annual General Meeting.**

A request for the next AGM to be held at a Cutteslowe Pavilion was made. As the next possible meeting could be on Tuesday, 14 November 2023, it was suggested that contact was made regarding the availability of a Cutteslowe site for this purpose.

The meeting was closed at 10:15 p.m.

## **Appendix**

### **Suzanne Mclvor's address to the meeting**

*Christopher has asked me to say a few words about development in my area which is near Cutteslowe Park. Taking part in the consultations on this has been a time-consuming process. But equally, because of its scale, it has been necessary and I'd like to thank the Neighbourhood Forum for their support.*

*The area shown in red on the map, from Cutteslowe Park in the south to Parkway Station in the north is/was owned by Christ Church. It is now known as Water Eaton and was until recently Green Belt. With 690 dwellings on 48 hectares it's the biggest site. The golf course, will have 670 dwellings and the two Kidlington sites 550 dwellings. So that's nearly 2,000 in total. On top of that is a small site for 134 dwellings in Oxford City, adjacent to the Banbury Road North Sports Ground. And the new Oxford Local Plan proposes a lot more housing on Jordan Hill.*

*Interestingly the capacity of the Christ Church site has at a late stage been upped from 690 to 800 dwellings. Christ Church must be feeling the pinch! If all the sites were to increase by the same*

percentage this would mean about 320 additional dwellings around Kidlington, all of which add to pressure on services and infrastructure which wasn't considered when the Local Plan was being made.

I have listed on the handout the main features of the development which include a primary school, a local centre, and 50% affordable housing. There will also be improved cycling and walking infrastructure.

We're fortunate that this development also includes an 11 hectare extension to Cutteslowe Park and an 8 hectare green infrastructure corridor. It is not yet clear what the ownership of the park extension will be. It could pass to the City Council or remain with Christ Church – both scenarios have disadvantages.

You may know that the golf course is supposed to be relocated to Frieze Farm, albeit as a 9 hole course instead of 18, **before** any development on the existing course takes place. But we anticipate that Cherwell District Council and the University and Exeter College, which owns Frieze Farm, will do their utmost to wriggle out of this commitment.

Back to Water Eaton - A large development such as this has to have a Development Brief to set out the key parameters. Unfortunately, I am not convinced about how this will translate into reality.

Here are a few examples:

- Firstly, it seems to be socially acceptable to put higher buildings along the road frontage to shield the other houses from the road noise (and this does include the A34 which is very close). On the basis that many of higher buildings are likely to be the social housing this seems to equate to using the less well off to protect the better off, a concept that I struggle with.
- I was pleased when I read that "Views from Oxford Road into the site are to be opened up .... allowing long distance views from Oxford Road to the wider landscape". However, I then read that "the housing frontage is to be continuous, as far as possible, and itself act as a further barrier to the noise arising from Oxford Road".

I think it is really important that everyone can still enjoy the views over the Cherwell Valley so which will it be – long distance views or a continuous housing frontage?

- My understanding is that all the homes will have gas boilers and there will be no solar panels, no heat source pumps, and no rainwater harvesting. This seems like a missed opportunity. If all the new houses in Oxfordshire were being built with solar panels perhaps we wouldn't be losing so much agricultural land to solar power farms.
- Thames Water commented on the planning application for the 134 homes on St Frideswide's Farm to say that they only have capacity to serve 49 dwellings. They suggested a planning condition relating to occupation to deal with this and I think it was subsequently fudged in some way. But this certainly doesn't bode well for a further 800 dwellings right next door! Realistically - how is Thames Water is going to cope with the planned level of new dwellings in Oxfordshire over the next few years given their appalling record of sewage discharges into rivers?

## **Biodiversity**

### **Birds and bats**

*Based on information from a treasured local councillor and local knowledge, we have made it clear that this area is close to a breeding Little Owl population, endangered Tree Sparrows have been recorded in the area, and the farmland is important for farmland species under conservation pressure such as Skylarks, Yellowhammer, Barn Owls and Marsh Tits. There are also winter-visiting waders such as Lapwings and Golden Plover.*

*It is inconceivable that this development won't have a harmful effect on a number of sensitive and endangered species. However, the development brief states Farmland bird compensation **MAY** be required for the benefit of farmland birds displaced by the development, **IF** the loss of habitat is not adequately compensated by habitat enhancement measures for farmland birds within the site. How can farmland birds possibly be compensated for in a housing development, even in the 3 hectares of agricultural land? How many skylarks do you find in an urban environment? And who is going to hold the developer which has purchased this land to account in respect of farmland birds?*

*As well as the effect on farmland birds, there will be a similar effect by removal of bat habitat, particularly on the golf course where a very large number of trees will be removed.*

*But it's ok apparently, because bird and bat boxes are to be integrated into the urban development!*

*I don't think this is how biodiversity net gain is supposed to work.*

### **Wildlife corridors**

*As you know there is a scruffy hedgerow and neglected trees along the road frontage. To me, these are true wildlife corridors. The Development Brief says that high and moderate quality trees (of which there are not many) will be retained and ground vegetation removed, except where this would result in harm to existing wildlife corridors. There is absolutely no doubt that the scruffy hedgerow will be removed because this is where the cycle and pedestrian paths will go. The replacement planting proposed by the planners most definitely does not form a wildlife corridor – although the planner that I spoke to genuinely and alarmingly seems to think that it does.*

*One last thing on biodiversity net gain. I think that this is mainly going to supposedly be achieved via the park extension which is criss-crossed by various paths with play areas' allotments etc. BBOWT has commented that to achieve a net gain, there should be areas which are not publicly accessible. They recommend other features such as sensitive lighting eg to keep dark corridors where bats are using lines of trees and hedgerows as flight paths. But as yet there is no indication that these informed comments have been, or will be, taken on board.*

*To summarise I suspect that lip service is being paid to a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. But we won't get any details until the planning application is made.*

### **Stratfield Brake**

*Before I finish I would just like to mention another proposal for Green Belt land which came as a curved ball. Having gone through the Cherwell Local Plan process which took many years and must have cost several hundred thousand pounds I think we were fairly justified in thinking that the new Green Belt boundaries have been established, and can be expected to endure, as is required by the NPPF. The Planning Inspector specifically mentioned the overall sense of separation between Kidlington and Oxford in particular, saying it would not be harmfully reduced. I don't agree with this but at least there is still some separation in the form of Stratfield Brake which is a treasured local green space and nature reserve.*

*Or at least it was, until the County Council decided that this would be a suitable site for Oxford United's new football stadium along with other very large-scale commercial development including a hotel and conference facilities. The County Council's proposal has completely circumvented the Local Plan process. The stadium isn't mentioned in either the recently adopted current local plan or the one that is currently being prepared. And the County Council has made some questionable decisions along the way.*

*Green spaces such as Stratfield Brake and the golf course will only become more valuable as the local population increases and I believe we need to protect them. Stratfield Brake is an unusual situation because the Parish Councils in Kidlington and Gosford hold a long lease on the land so they can stop the stadium being built there.*

*Could I please encourage you to visit the amazing nature reserve which is run by the Woodland Trust? It is a good size and includes a variety of habitats including rough grassland, woodland, and large lagoons.*

*Could I also please ask you to join the mailing list of the Friends of Stratfield Brake:  
email: [info@friendsofstratfieldbrake.org](mailto:info@friendsofstratfieldbrake.org)  
or visit <https://www.friendsofstratfieldbrake.org/> and use the JOIN tab*