

FITZWEST

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 17 September 2020

Because of current restrictions, this meeting was held by Zoom

Executive members present:

Sharon Banoff

Yoram Blumann (treasurer)

Barbara Corr

Gwilym Harbottle (Chair for the meeting)

Julia Haythorn

Ian Johnstone

Chris Shaw

Nick Bailey (secretary)

In attendance: Chris Martin, Urban Movement

Approximately 24 people attended in total

Apologies: Cllrs Jonathan Glanz, Ian Bott

1 Welcome and Introduction

Gwilym Harbottle, Chair for this meeting, welcomed everybody and explained the purpose of the meeting was to report on the Forum's activities, discuss issues of local concern and elect three members of the Executive.

2 Minutes of the last Meeting

The minutes of the 2019 AGM had been circulated and were approved with no matters arising.

3 Chair's Report

We have to apply to the Council to redesignate the Forum every 5 years and we did this in February. We have updated our website which now works excellently. Fitzwest.org – have a look.

As you know, the main impetus for the creation of the forum in 2015 was to establish a neighbourhood plan to influence planning decisions in our area. We've made a lot of progress this year and Nick Bailey will give you the details below.

In other news, we've been working on three projects in the area, at Market Place, Riding House Street and the junction of Clipstone St and Gt Titchfield St.

Market Place: At the last AGM we presented proposals for greening this area and they can be found on the website. WCC have taken up the proposals and we are represented by Yoram on the steering committee. It will be funded by CIL. Unfortunately the project has stalled because of Covid.

Riding House Street: This project involves pedestrianisation of the Eastern part outside the school. There was a consultation resulting in a number of objections from local residents. We met with the residents and put in a submission supporting the scheme in principle but asking WCC to consult further about its implementation to ensure local residents are heard. Again, this project seems to have stalled as a result of Covid.

The Great Titchfield Street/Clipstone project has also had its difficulties and gone through several iterations. At the moment we're working with the designing out crime officer to overcome some objections and we should be putting in a fresh planning application shortly.

During the year we have commented on a variety of different proposals and developments such as WCC's Air Quality Plan and the reopening of Oxford Street after the lockdown. Have a look on the website.

Finally I'd like to thank the West End and Marylebone Ward Councillors for all their support over the last year.

4 **Update on the Neighbourhood Plan**

Nick Bailey reported that the Plan was making reasonable progress and had undergone a 10 week period of public consultation ending on 4 August. It is now being examined by an independent Examiner who can authorise the referendum to go ahead sometime after 5 May 2021 because of Covid restrictions. Once in place, the Plan will influence the way planning decisions are made and will focus local pressures to improve the management of traffic flows in the area. It will also enable us to access more of the Community Infrastructure Levy funds (CIL) which is paid by those carrying out development. Nick explained that the task is more difficult because both the London Plan and Westminster's City Plan are being reviewed and the Government has recently made it more difficult to protect small shops because shops, cafes, restaurants, offices and other uses have been amalgamated into one Use Class. This means that planning permission is no longer required to change from one use to another. There is also a White Paper setting out possible changes to the planning system.

Q & A

The following discussion raised several issues about the importance of accessing CIL funding from Westminster and the impact of recent changes in planning legislation. Uncertainty surround the future of Oxford Street was raised and in particular how it would need to change in the light of the trend towards online shopping and the reduction of visitors to central London. This led on to a discussion of the impact of the pandemic. There was general support for WCC's action to support the hospitality industry but questions were raised about whether the widening of pavements and new cycle lanes could be made permanent and whether the plastic partitions could be replaced with a more attractive design. Cllr Lewis reported that the experience of the temporary measures to aid the hospitality industry in Soho had been mixed but others noted that they had worked well in Regent Street. Italy was quoted as a good example of how cafes and restaurants used attractive street furniture and planting to create outdoor sitting areas. The current temporary permissions also expire at the end of September and whether they could be extended.

5 **Presentation on Creating a Low Traffic Neighbourhood in FitzWest by Chris Martin of Urban Movement**

Chris gave an excellent talk on the principles underlying LTNs, using some examples from England and Europe and explained how this might be approached in FitzWest. Since streets in the area form a grid, 'superblocks' can be identified where through traffic can be directed onto wider streets, such as Portland Place or Marylebone Road, while narrower and more residential streets can be accessed only by those who have a particular reason for going there. As a result, shared space, walking and cycling can be promoted and more landscaping and recreation areas can be created. Chris showed that creating LTNs often enhanced economic activity and increased spend. He recommended 'The Pedestrian Pound' by Living Streets

<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/3890/pedestrian-pound-2018.pdf>

He explained that the costs of implementing many features of LTNs was reasonable. The first stage is to bring together key stakeholders to discuss the local issues and a strategy for achieving the desired outcome. He quoted Van Gogh Walk in Lambeth as a good example of street improvements <http://www.vangoghwalk.org/p/van-gogh-walk.html>

The Powerpoint presentation is available with these minutes.

Q & A

There was considerable discussion about the issues raised including what could be done to support local cafes and other services which were struggling in current circumstances. Traffic movements, deliveries and the local economy are all closely linked particularly when many people are working at home and there are fewer international visitors.

6 Election to the Executive

Three members were standing down: Chris Shaw, Gwilym Harbottle and Ian Johnstone. The latter two wished to stand again and Mark Dillon wished to stand for the first time. All three candidates made a short statement and then the meeting voted online. The result was that all three were elected.

7 The Accounts

Yoram Blumann introduced the accounts. These are currently in surplus and include funding for street improvements to GTSt/Clipstone Street and for promoting the plan to residents and businesses before the referendum next year.

The accounts can be viewed with these minutes.

8 Any Other Business

There was further discussion of the impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown on central London's economy and what could be done to revive it in a sustainable way.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm.

Nick Bailey