

Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum

EXECUTIVE MEETING THURSDAY 13 th April 2021 BY ZOOM

MINUTES

Present: Nick Bailey, Sharon Banoff, Barbara Corr; Yoram Blumann, Gwilym Harbottle, Julia Haythorn (Chair), Ian Johnstone, Edward Kellow, Jace Tyrrell , Cllr Tim Barnes (Ward Councillor), Cllr Pancho Lewis (Ward Councillor); Mark Dillon (Minutes)

1. **Apologies:** None

2. **Minutes of the last meeting** (available on FitzWest website). These were approved.

Matters arising:

Councillor Lewis referred to the discussion at the last meeting on CIL and whether management and maintenance were legitimate heads of expenditure for CIL monies. He had understood (as recorded in the Minutes) that it was clear that CIL funding could be used **only** for capital schemes and that any revenue costs needed to be funded through other City Council departments and/or local funds i.e. BIDs, business. This has recently been clarified by WCC following inaccurate information shared with Forums in February.

However, he referred to a recent paper from the Authority's Policy Team which appeared to imply monies could be spent on defraying the impact of a capital scheme (for instance by paying for maintaining of a capital item). There did seem to be then, an element of uncertainty in this regard.

Councillor Barnes commented that his understanding was that any such expenditure would have need to have been "bundled-up" in the original application with the overall objective being to avoid the creation of any ongoing capital expenditure liabilities which are unfunded.

Jace asked what then was the position with ongoing maintenance obligations? *Councillor Barnes* believed that these could be covered by pre-agreement.

Jace observed that an application by Soho Neighbourhood Forum to spend CIL monies on a feasibility study for greening options in the area had been rejected, even though this could have been genuinely impactful in terms of the community.

Councillor Barnes said that the over-riding requirement was that any prospective CIL expenditure needed to have "defined and settled outcomes" as its primary object.

3. Neighbourhood Plan/Referendum update

A formal note of thanks was minuted for Nick for all his hard work over a number of years in helping us get to this stage. Nick commented that it had very much been a Team effort with many individuals and parties involved but he was pleased that we were now in a position to seek approval from local people and businesses for the Plan.

Nick confirmed (as set out in his email to us, yesterday, 12th April) that he is still waiting for final approval from the planners as to the wording of the Plan, based on the comments of the Examiner.

The e-mail sets out what the necessary next steps are, starting with getting the final version type-set and then proceeding to the practicalities of the Referendum. This will not be carried out by Westminster Electoral Services as they have reported that they are currently too busy so it is likely that the task will be outsourced to Consultants. It is likely that our Referendum and that of Soho will run to the same timetable.

The Referendum will need to be on a Thursday (as there is an established tradition of public votes being held on that day) and the expected commitment of Executive members is that we will make ourselves available for a few evenings and a weekend before the Referendum in order to “canvass” local residents and businesses, making them aware of the forthcoming vote and explaining the benefits which it can bring to the Community.

A discussion took place as to whether we could employ someone to knock on doors/contact people during the day as it would be essential to raise awareness of the Plan and Referendum, particularly when the effects of Covid/Lockdown are likely to have had a significant impact upon the make-up of the local population and businesses.

Jace announced that he was able to offer £5,000 in support of the costs of administering/supporting the Referendum (the New West End Co. offering this to each Neighbourhood Forum in the year that they go to Referendum). NWECC can also offer their security team to support as needed (for instance on the day of the Referendum).

The Exec thanked Jace/NWECC for this kind offer.

Jace also reported that P.R. and communications specialists Comm Comm were invaluable in their support of the Mayfair campaign and did not charge on a for profit basis when working with Neighbourhood Forums. **It was agreed** that Jace would make contact with them.

Actions: Jace to check with [Anna Doyle?] who provides admin support for the Soho Forum as to whether she might be interested in performing a canvassing/general support role for us.

Jace also to speak to his contacts at Comm Comm to see if they are willing/able to make a proposal to support the project management and communications element of the Referendum.

[Note: Update to position since Exec Meeting: Jace has reached out to Jessica Stewart at Comm Comm and she has agreed to provide a costed proposal covering all the communications and project management work for the Referendum.

Their normal fee for such work would be c £20k but she has promised to come back with a figure in the region of £5k (reflecting the not-for-profit nature of our Forum. [Proposal now in- See Nick's e-mail of 5th May].

More generally, it was agreed that the general skill-sets required for such a role included:

- Being a good record-keeper
- Having good persuasion skills
- Good coordination/project management skills

In terms of some of the practicalities of the Referendum, the following were noted:

- The Polling station would be at the Fitzrovia Community Centre on Foley Street
- In order to be passed the Plan only needed to receive greater than 50% of those who vote (i.e. there is no minimum turn-out requirement)
- It will be essential, particularly in relation to businesses, to determine who will be the person who will be completing any postal vote. This may prove to be a particular challenge in relation to businesses as it is a requirement that they have registered in order to be able to vote and, even if registered, the person entitled to vote on behalf of the company may not be the individuals who are picked up at the business premises through canvassing.
- Therefore, it is essential that we need to acquire both a copy of the Register of Voters and a List of Business Rate Payers.

Yoram advised caution re: the currency of any information which we might access re: business rate payers. Many local businesses are still not operating and some have closed down. It is likely then that information on ratepayers will be out of date.

Yoram also asked whether we needed to take into account the lifting of lockdown arrangements into account in terms of agreeing a date for the Referendum. In particular, did we need to consider the impact of the (anticipated) full lifting of restrictions on 21st June in choosing our date?

After discussion, **it was agreed** that although there could be some merit in delaying a vote to the Autumn, it was preferable now to press on with the vote as soon as possible. **Consequently, a target date was agreed of Thursday 24th June.**

Prior to this date, in order to build momentum towards the Referendum **it was agreed** that we would hold a meeting, an **AGM**, and that this should be on **Thursday 10th June.**

Other points made re: The Referendum:

- Need to start interacting with Businesses as soon as possible (*Jace* thinks that numbers of Office Managers are starting to come back and so this could be time well spent).
- *Yoram* made the point that he understood that Westminster would send out a letter to each rate paying business inviting them to provide a nominated person, but do we not need to catch/ get sight of that letter if we are to both identify which Businesses are on the list of Business ratepayers and who is the contact to whom the letter has gone in order that we can engage effectively with that organisation re: both registration for and voting in the Referendum? Once the letter is sent to the nominated contact it may well be sent on to another, different individual within the organisation and so surely we need the initial point of contact if we are to be able to track the right person to speak to?

More generally we need to understand the end-to-end process re: communications between Council and Business Rate Payers, and particularly when the letters go out and whether every Business gets a postal vote? *Nick* thought that Businesses would need to be given at least 28 days' notice of the Referendum.

Action: Nick to enquire about the process and report back to the Exec

- *Jace* informed us that In Mayfair they had a calling card which seemed to work well, containing 3 or 4 key bullet points on it setting out the benefits of supporting the proposed Plan and that separate versions were produced for residents and businesses. The Exec liked this idea but, **it was agreed** that if we use such a card there should be a single one for residents and businesses with the highlighted benefits/advantages chosen being ones which accrue to both groups.
- *Yoram* suggested that those of the Exec who still have contact with former Exec members should now reach out to them as they have all contributed to the work of the Forum and the Plan and may well be willing to get involved in pre-Referendum canvassing and support.
- *Jace* offered to contact the Langham Estate office as they could potentially play a proactive role in encouraging business registration and support for participation in the registration.

Action: Jace to contact Langham Estates.

[Note: Update to position since Exec Meeting: Jace has had a positive discussion with Langham Estates who have agreed to promote Business registration and the Referendum amongst its tenants.]

Re Funding for the Referendum: *Yoram* summarised the position as follows:

1. **Funding allocated already in budget:** We have £7,000 in the bank to spend on the referendum.
2. **NWEC** - *Jace* – (as per note above) has offered £5,000- which has been gratefully accepted by the Executive.
(Action YB to invoice NWEC for the funds.)

3. **Locality:** *Yoram* mentioned that we can apply for some funding from Locality (the national membership network supporting local community organisations). This was limited to £18,000 per forum; We have been granted £13,624 already, so there is £4,376 still available for us to claim. Unfortunately, we have to wait until the 2021/2 funding stream becomes available- before we can apply again.

Action: Yoram to apply for this as soon as it is available- (to cover the costs of graphic editing, printing and posting the NP, and printing costs of leaflets for residents and businesses).

Third-Party insurance: *Gwylim* had sourced a quote for £157 - premium for third-party insurance; this would cover the risk to volunteers on FitzWest activities.

The Exec agreed that this offer would be taken up.

Action: Yoram and Gwylim to liaise re: taking out insurance

4. Riding House Street Greening Project - update – Gwilym, Barbara and Councillor Lewis

Gwilym reported that the Highways Authority are “on side” re: the revised Riding House street location (and had been extremely helpful, agreeing to match our Tesco funding) but that it was always clear that local residents would need to be consulted.

That initial consultation had now taken place and, unfortunately, it appeared that a number of residents were strongly opposed

Councillor Lewis remained hopeful that he could persuade residents to approve the proposal and wanted to make time to sit down and listen to concerns in detail.

Action: Councillor Lewis and Barbara to organise a further meeting with Riding House Residents as soon as is possible (not least because there are concerns that the Funder’s patience will not last forever).

[Note: Update to position since Exec Meeting: The Riding House Street proposal has now been abandoned as it has become clear that residents simply do not want Planters in the Street. Julia is currently looking at new potential locations and hoping that Tesco will agree to a third choice of location. Julia met the original designer during w/c 26th April and she is going to supply new designs for possible locations along New Cavendish Street and ends of selected adjoining Streets [see update for item 5 below] which will then be consulted upon.

We have also attempted to incorporate learnings from our experience on Riding House Street into our CIL Greening Proposals – see item 5 below and Update].

5. CIL - Community Infrastructure Levy (1) - update on discussion of greening locations – Julia

An initial suggested location list- based on clustering (to be used as a “proof of concept” to measure whether installation of Planters had a material impact on reducing rubbish dumping)- had been compiled (as per agreement at last Exec Meeting) and included on the Forum Website (for members and local residents & businesses to review) and in Newsletters to members

Julia had been tasked at the last meeting with selecting a Cluster and publishing this on the Website and her initial suggestion was:

1. Corner of Hanson Street/Foley Street
2. Candover Street
3. Langham Street

Julia thinks that the next step is to start going into local businesses, not least to assess whether they might be willing to maintain Planters once in situ.

[Note: Update to position since Exec Meeting: As per Julia’s emails of 16th and 20th April and 1st May (summarising discussions between Exec members) we now appear to have two separate but related projects:

1. Tesco Greening [see item 4 above]- where the current thinking is to utilise some of the rubbish hot spots, avoid residential spots and seek areas where the pavements are wide and where the proximate premises are primarily commercial (or potentially sympathetic, such as the All Souls Primary School). Current (slightly revised) Cluster list comprises locations on New Cavendish Street, and the ends of Great Titchfield, Hanson and Titchfield Streets.
2. CIL funded rubbish hot spots – where we hope to use our experience from the Tesco Greening experience to choose our locations and achieve most impact]. Here, the current revised, suggested list is:

1. Langham Street/Gosfield St – 2 locations/ A real and visible hot spot with lots of and residential dumping.

2 & 3 Hanson Street /Foley Street – 2 locations on Hanson Street/Foley Street corners. One of the corners by the bin is very prone to dumping, and there is plenty of space.

4 & 5 Candover Street – Four planters, one on each corner with Riding House Street and Foley Street. Prone to persistent dumping, would link to and echo existing planting outside local businesses on Foley Street.

[But see update on position re CIL applications below]

Community Infrastructure Levy (2) - CIL Application

The next application date was 17th June. Would we make an application in advance of this date and get local businesses involved? If so we needed to work out how much the basic cost of a Planter was (Jerry Warner had given us a basic Planter cost but plants and maintenance would be extra). We also needed to agree how man Planters we are thinking of deploying (this in turn is dependent to an extent upon the success of the “proof of concept” – see 5.1 above).

Barbara expressed regret that it seemed so difficult to make progress on greening in Westminster.

Jace mentioned the “Mound” planned for Marble Arch and the possibility of using some of the green material from that for Neighbourhood Forums (Councillor Barnes confirmed that all greening material used should be recyclable). However, that material was unlikely to become available before early next Year (when the Mound is scheduled to be removed).

Yoram advised that it was a condition of CIL applications that they had been approved by the membership of a Forum and so **it was agreed** that we should include an item on the agenda for the AGM which we have agreed for Thursday 10th June and then, having hopefully gained approval, submit a CIL application the next day.

Action: Yoram to co-ordinate preparation of an Agenda item on CIL for the AGM (liaising with Exec members as appropriate) and submit a CIL application if proposal approved.

[Note: Update to position since Exec Meeting: as per Yoram's e-mail of 1st May, the current suggestion is that timelines for a CIL submission for the next CIL Committee Meeting on 17th June are simply too tight (particularly in view of the priority which we must surely give to the Referendum) and that we should therefore focus on the Tesco Project first (particularly as we are using that as a "proof of concept").

We can (and should) still prepare draft proposals on the proposed greening projects for presentation at the planned AGM (presenting as part of an overall Greening strategy including the Tesco Project). This is necessary in any event because a successful CIL application will need to demonstrate wide consultation and community agreement, but the application itself can be deferred to the Autumn sitting of the CIL Committee (thereby giving us chance to give the application the attention it deserves).

6. Oxford Street District – Update – Jace and Councillor Barnes

Jace reported that yesterday was clearly a significant day for Oxford Street and the West End with the reopening of non-essential retail outlets and provision for hospitality venues to provide service in outdoor settings.

In anticipation of the change £200k had been allocated to "the Clean Team" to effect a general refresh and tidying-up of the Street.

In relation to news on former flagship stores: Re: Debenhams, NWECC have been able to "dress" the current unattractive hoarding to make it more presentable. A mixed use planning application has been submitted in relation to the Site.

Re: House of Fraser have submitted a revised application in relation to their site.

More generally NWECC is working effectively with WCC to give effect to lots of planned temporary spaces and "pop-ups" with WCC granting rate relief for e.g. charities and certain categories of Business.

However, *Councillor Barnes* reported that where there is currently a particular focus of planning and development- related activity is around Cavendish Square. One of the trends to look out for in particular was the expansion of service and treatment- related facilities – sometimes at the expense of traditional retail. Many of the Harley Street practices, for instance, were seeking increased treatment space rather than traditional consulting rooms.

Nick reported that the new City Plan had just been approved (relevant in this context because any local developments would need to be concordant with it).

7. Licensing and Planning update- including Bellaria

Councillor Barnes reported on the Berwick Street market situation. Traders have the right to pitches there whether or not they are in fact taking them up. It has not been possible therefore, in practice, to extend the space for additional external restaurant tables without the approval of the traders. They seem to think that any temporary incursion into their space will affect their rights. WCC is committed to making the potential space active and has spent thousands of pounds on storage and cupboards.

Yoram confirmed that the Bellaria extended licence application had been successful. We were represented by Richard Brown and joined by Langham Estates. Despite our representations, they got a 12.30 AM closing time (although had actually wanted 1.30 AM).

Yoram advised that if residents are unhappy about noise from a licenses premises they must complain to WCC Environmental Health and ensure that the compliant is registered; otherwise it will count for nothing in future licensing appeals.

Jace queried whether (not least in the interests of balance) we sometimes, as an Exec, supported Licensing Applications? It was agreed this would be a good thing to do and the feeling of the Exec was that it would be easier to do so as and when our Neighbourhood Plan was approved and in place. Officers can then actually refer to the Plan in making decisions (if the Plan is not inconsistent with the nature of the application) as well as to the City Plan.

8. AOB

Jace reported that the Community updates had gone out on Friday and we were invited to give feedback. Future ones would include details of the Neighbourhood plans.

Barbara said that she was worried by the noticeable increase in traffic in our area and was particularly concerned that new parking spots appeared to have sprung up outside flats with minimal consultation. *Councillor Barnes* advised that these could well be temporary replacements for spots no longer available where consent for alfresco restaurant tables has temporarily removed parking spots. If so, these could have been implemented easily via a traffic Order (with notices probably attached to contiguous lampposts/bays).

Next Exec Meeting: Tuesday 25th May 6 PM (Meeting details to be circulated in due course)

AGM: Thursday 10th June

Mark Dillon 5th May 2021