

FITZWEST

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 8th July 2021

Because of current restrictions, this meeting was held by Zoom

Executive members present: Sharon Banoff, Yoram Blumann (treasurer) Barbara Corr, Mark Dillon, Gwilym Harbottle, Julia Haythorn (Chair for the meeting), Ian Johnstone, Jace Tyrell, Nick Bailey (secretary)

Approximately 25 people attended in total

Apologies: Cllrs Pancho Lewis and Timothy Barnes (Julie Redmond attended on his behalf). Edward Kellow

1. **Welcome and Introduction**

Julia Haythorn, 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, elect new members of the Executive and inform about the forthcoming referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan on 2nd September 2021

2. **Minutes of the last Meeting**

The minutes of the 2020 AGM had been circulated and were approved with no corrections or matters arising.

3. **Elections to the Executive**

All members standing for election made a short statement and then the meeting voted to elect them all. (Yoram Blumann, Julia Haythorn, Ian Johnstone, Jace Tyrell, Walid Sheikh, Gwilym Harbottle)

4. **Presentation of Accounts**

Yoram Blumann, the treasurer, presented the accounts.

We have currently c £20,000 in the Bank, of which £7,000 is ring-fenced for a specific greening project. We also need to retain an amount for our day to day administration expenses.

This leaves c£11,000 to spend on publicising the referendum. Yoram thanked New West End Company for their contribution of £5000 towards the costs of the referendum.

The accounts can be viewed here: [FitzWest Financial Statement 8.7.21](#)

5. **Update on the Neighbourhood Plan**

Nick Bailey explained the purpose of the plan and that it needs to be approved at the referendum for residents and businesses on 2 September.

The main objectives are to:

- Protect and extend the mixed use character of the area through encouraging well designed and sustainable development;
- Encouraging the provision of a mix of housing to meet all needs;
- Support the provision of space for small businesses;
- Use all means possible to increase the amount of green space including the full or part closure of streets;
- Ensure the effective management of traffic and encourage walking and cycling;
- Support initiatives to rationalise deliveries and make greater use of electric vehicles and cargo bikes.

All residents and businesses are encouraged to register for postal votes by 17th August 2021.

Application forms for postal votes can be downloaded here:

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/about-council/democracy/postal-and-proxy-voting>

and should be returned to electoralservices@westminster.gov.uk

Q&A

- It was suggested that Fitzrovia should “badge” itself as London’s art gallery district, there now being over 35 galleries in the area. Shoreditch had previously claimed this informal title but Fitzrovia now definitely had more galleries.

His suggestion was well-received, with Nick pointing to the historic association of the wider Fitzrovia area with art and artists (typified by the former presence of the Slade in Gower Street). Galleries are mentioned in Section 6.2 of the Plan.

- A question was asked as to whether it would be possible for the “pedestrianised on-street dining” to be maintained into the Autumn to support local businesses.

Nick reported that although the current permissions granted by WCC were due to expire on 30th September, businesses were going to be encouraged to apply on a case by case basis for further extensions.

- Zak Polanski Green member GLA: concerned about so called public private space and how it isn’t always available for the general public
- Patrick Lilley Labour candidate for WCC -said he was keen to encourage more art and culture on streets
- It was suggested that bringing back a market to Great Titchfield Street would be a great local addition

- Alix Aiscough (Head of All Souls Primary School on Foley St/Riding House Street) raised the subject of air quality in the area and said that she had some Air Quality reports from monitoring undertaken outside the School in September 2019 and December 2020 and which revealed worryingly high Nitrogen Dioxide levels

Nick said that Air Quality in Fitzwest remained a major concern and was dealt with in Part 8 of the Plan. Aix was asked to share the data with the Exec.

Nick was thanked for his thorough presentation and answers and, indeed, for all of his hard work over several years in overseeing the development and finalisation of the Plan.

He in turn wanted to make clear that many people and organisations had contributed to the Plan- far too many to thank- and that the next focus was to make sure that as many businesses as possible in the area registered to vote in the Referendum (registration letters went out from the Council last week).

6. Update on greening – Fitzrovia Planters

Julia Haythorn presented ideas for potential locations for planters at various locations throughout the area to help address two particular local issues, namely:

- Lack of greening and
- Rubbish dumping

The hope is that, once established, these would then be maintained by volunteers from businesses and residents.

Current thinking is that planters would be installed at various locations along New Cavendish Street: Some outside the Harris and Hoole coffee shop at the junction with Hanson Street; several at the junction with Gosfield Street and several at the junction with Great Titchfield Street.

Julia reported that when she had toured the potential sites with a designer, attention had been drawn to various “dead spaces” and “cut-out corners” in the street-scape which would appear to be ideal for planters.

The Forum currently have money awarded by Tesco for greening in the area and it is planned to use it for this project. WCC have given an agreement in principle to the locations, pending final details.

No objections to the proposals were raised in the AGM and the suggested sites were approved.

Next stage is to consult further with businesses and residents in the area and to develop the plans with WCC.

Julia also talked about further greening projects which would be funded by applications to CIL – the Community Infrastructure Levy – and which would be in other areas of FitzWest –

many of which have been identified through consultation with residents as rubbish dumping hotspots and so would benefit from the deterrence provided by the presence of planters

[Click here for full Fitzrovia Planters presentation](#)

Q&A

Alix Ascough, Headteacher All Souls Primary - school children happy to help look after planters. Julia said that Candover St where it meets Riding House Street would be an ideal location.

Alix also offered to send the Executive a copy of a air quality report for the area around the school.

Zak Polanski, GLA Green – Good to see space for wheelchairs in the locations chosen, pushchair, disabled can still get through

Julia suggested that encouraging businesses to plant on their forecourts means there is no need for planning permission. The Forum could apply for funding from CIL for planters and plants and then individual businesses could water and maintain. This idea was supported by LDG who also asked about hanging baskets and if we could have more of those in the area.

7. Guest Speaker – Jace Tyrell, Chief Executive, New West End Company (NVEC)

Jace gave an informative presentation about the retail response to Covid in the West End area and indicators of key emerging trends as we prepare to leave Lockdown.

Firstly, he explained the role of NVEC - a not for profit partnership of retail leisure and tourism businesses in a quite tightly defined area of the West End – having a footprint of 82 streets and a membership of over 600 businesses and property owners.

Key points to which he drew attention:

The area has three main property owners, the Crown Estate, the Langham Estate and the Grosvenor Estate; all are well engaged in the area.

NVEC had engaged in a survey of 2,000 of their customers, many of them foreign, and the responses suggested that a combination of residual Covid fears plus the fact that Britain no longer provides “tax free shopping” after our departure from the EU (unlike, for instance, Paris or Milan) means that, post Lockdown, it is probably going to be essential that the West End rebrands with a focus on quality rather than price.

Independents are likely to have a key role to play in ensuring that the West End remains a “destination” venue with it being critical to get the optimal product and brand mix within the area.

The successful business of the future are likely to provide Customers with a frictionless experience as a key part of their offer.

Footfall is back to c 50% of pre-Covid levels but it is important to realise that Lockdown reduced by 4/5ths (from c £10 Billion to c £ 2 Billion) the contribution which the businesses with the NVEC area make to the nations’ GDP.

Business Rates are very high, based on a system that is generally accepted as being antiquated. It has been estimated that only c 4% of the Business rates yield finds its way back into spend on the local area by WCC.

[Click here for full presentation](#)

Q&A

- Jace was asked if he had any update on the Oxford Circus proposals (a joint proposal by the Crown Estate and WCC)?

He understood that North/South traffic flow would remain (i.e. on Regent Street) but that East/West traffic flow would be interrupted and two piazza areas created on Oxford Street, to either side of the Circus.

Safety, air quality, servicing of the Piazzas and the potential clogging of side streets running parallel to Oxford Street and the creation of new rat-runs were all legitimate concerns. However, the proposals would facilitate extra greening which was a welcome development.

- Re: the regular protest/marches in the area

This had become such a concern that Jace had met with Cressida Dick to explore whether alternative protest/march routes could be developed (i.e. Park Lane/Whitehall) to provide some respite for West End retailers and shoppers.

- Re Rubbish collection

This was a perennial problem with it often being the cases that multiple organisations had a shared responsibility for collections with minimal coordination. On Bond Street, NWECC had run a successful programme to rationalise rubbish collection, eventually reducing over 70 providers down to just 2, with a 70% reduction in related traffic and a significant improvement in air quality.

However, Bond Street is a much more limited proposition than Fitzrovia and, despite everyone sharing the aspiration of wanting zero carbon emissions in the area within 5 years, it is hard to see how that will be achieved without, for instance, WCC creating a dedicated Department, particularly as schemes such as the Bond Street one are voluntary in nature.

8. AOB

Julia reminded everyone that September 2nd is the date of the referendum and reminded everyone to vote and to support the Plan. She also urged people to tell their neighbours to vote as well and reminded businesses that they needed to register in order to be able to vote.

LDG offered to put a publicity poster in their window.

The meeting ended at 7.40pm.

