

FITZROVIA WEST NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SAINSBURY WELLCOME CENTRE HOWLAND ST

18TH MAY 2023 AT 6:00 PM

MINUTES

1. The chair, Julia Haythorn, welcomed those attending in person and also via Zoom. There were 47 in total. There were no apologies.

2. **Minutes.** The minutes of the last (inquorate) general meeting were agreed.

3. **Elections to the Executive.** It was agreed to elect the those standing for re-election to the Executive together. The following were elected without opposition. Nick Bailey, Barbara Corr, Esmeralda Ypsilanti, Dee Corsi and Denise Julien.

4. **Amending the constitution.** It was agreed by the necessary majority and without opposition to amend the constitution to reduce the quorum for AGMs from 20 to 10 and the quorum for executive meetings from 6 to 5.

5. **Presentation of the accounts.** Yoram Blumann presented the accounts. There were no questions.

6. **Traffic proposals.**

- a. Councillor Barraclough introduced Westminster City Council ("WCC")'s proposed changes to Oxford Circus. The aim is to reduce congestion and speed up bus routes.
- b. Tom Rimmer, transport engineer working for NLP consultants engaged by WCC said that the proposals were intended as an introduction to a conversation and were in a state of development. The problems with the existing arrangement at Oxford Circus were that congestion of traffic and pedestrians were returning to pre pandemic levels. There are complex turnings for buses which require a very large carriage way and this is resulting in overcrowded footways. There are also issues about the capacity of the platforms in the underground station and there have been closures. There was also a risk of a hostile attack although there is very little that could be done about that. The purpose of the proposals was to address these problems without pedestrianising Oxford Circus. The proposed new layout would reduce turns and only buses and taxis would be permitted. There were also proposals to make most of Wigmore St, Mortimer St, and Margaret St, two way with a view to reducing the volume and speed of traffic as had been achieved on Baker Street. Some bus routes including on Great Portland St would change.
- c. Manisha Patel the director of Oxford St who is overseeing the decision-making process said that there had been a constructive discussion and walk around 4 weeks ago. She knew there were questions and concerns about Gt Titchfield St and there would be a separate session on this leading up to a formal consultation in June and August.
- d. In response to questions, Tom Rimmer mentioned that it was intended to effectively enforce the limitation of the West part of Oxford St to buses and taxis. It was not intended to drive traffic off Oxford St but to improve the areas around it both North and South. It was not intended to change the traffic in these areas. In relation to the predicted increase of traffic on Great Titchfield St, a longer presentation would be produced and options considered. In Tom's view the traffic on Great Titchfield St was light and could increase

without problems. It is not a rat run and there are other streets available: Gt Portland Street and Berners St. It was necessary to reconcile a number of different interests. Councillor Barraclough said he recognised that Oxford St lacked basic shops and services. WCC are looking at the location of bus stops which are very confusing at the moment.

7. **Policing.** PC Daly, a local ward officer for the Fitzrovia area gave a presentation. He explained that the neighbourhood team covered a wide area from Marble Arch to Tottenham Court Road. In that area in the three months to the end of February 2023 there had been 472 recordable offences, an increase of 11% such that crime was becoming consistent with the pre Covid period. This was the result of higher footfall and was expected. The peak period for crime was Friday and the weekend. Burglary was down on the previous quarter. 24 burglaries had been committed, 21 of which had been in commercial premises. Of the three residential burglaries one had involved a parcel theft communal area. Drug dealing was on the rise. They were targeting it. There had been five or six arrests. Begging and antisocial behaviour were rising but this was normal in warmer weather. The police try and help beggars as well as arrest them. Begging is an offence under the Vagrancy Act but this may not be the case for much longer. PC Daly introduced the various operational teams, covering vehicle crime, ASB, drugs, the sale of fake goods and violence against women and girls. He mentioned that there had been an increase in phone snatching. Those who handle stolen phones are arrested where possible. Drug dealing should be reported by calling 999 with a description of individual.

8. **Update on CIL projects.**

- a. Donna Yay from the Fitzrovia Community Centre outlined what they were doing with CIL money. They intend to increase opening hours. There will be new flooring on the lower ground floor, a security system

so there would be no need to buzz people in and works on basic items such as toilet doors.

- b. Gwilym Harbottle reported on the New Cavendish St planter project. This is finally going to go ahead in late June or early July. He noted that there were already several volunteers but invited volunteers to join a three person committee which is managing that project by emailing him on gwilymharbottle@gmail.com.

GH. 19.05.23