

FITZROVIA WEST NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SAINSBURY WELLCOME CENTRE, HOWLAND STREET
26 JUNE 2024 AT 6.00PM

MINUTES

1. **Attendance.** 25 people attended, including some 17 members There were apologies from Nick Bailey, Sharon Banoff and Dee Corsi.
2. **Introduction and welcome.** Julia Haythorn (Chair) welcomed those attending and thanked the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre for hosting and providing refreshments.
3. **Soho Poly Theatre: update.** Jordan Scammell (Head of Development at Westminster University) outlined the history of the theatre and its recent refurbishment (£75,000 of the costs were funded by Neighbourhood CIL). The theatre is a central London venue for emerging artists. The 2024 programme contains a plethora of activities – all free but there is a donation station - which can be found on the Westminster University Website (and will soon be on the theatre's own site). They have included many performances and exhibitions and a poet in residence. Future plans include an acoustic audit, donor wall, painting the façade, a green plaque and development of the upstairs room as a dynamic agile space.
4. **Minutes of last AGM.** The minutes of the AGM dated 18 May 2023 were approved.
5. **Elections to the Executive.** It was agreed to elect the candidates as a whole rather than individually. The following were elected: Julia Haythorn, Ian Johnstone, Yoram Blumann, Mark Gazaleh, Lee Lyons, Gwilym Harbottle.

6. **Finance.** Yoram Blumann summarised the Forum's accounts. There is a positive balance of £13,699 of which something over £8,000 is set aside for the planters project.

7. **Community safety update.**

- a. **Lee Lyons** (COO of the Fitzrovia Partnership BID,¹ “**FP**”) identified the BID's main concerns as mobile phone, airpod and sunglasses theft, shoplifting (over 150 reported incidents last month), harassment, cycle theft and homeless encampments (but the aim is not to criminalise the homeless). Plain clothes officers are policing the area on behalf of the BID and providing evidence to the police. Criminals are discouraged if there is pride in the area. Accordingly, the Partnership operates a litter picker (20-30 bags a day are picket up) and a pressure washer. The Partnership spends £300-350k pa on security.
- b. **Lucy Mitchell (“LM”)** (CEO New West End Company BID (“**NWEC**”)²) said NWEC faced similar problems but again there is no desire to criminalise homelessness. It spends £1m pa on 24 hour security including a dog unit. It works with the Met and the Home Office. The number 1 deterrent is visible policing. Crime in the West End is organised (gangs “traffic” individuals in to pickpocket and engage in anti-social behaviour) and spiralling.
- c. **Patrick Lilley (“PL”)** (Councillor, West End Ward,) said that Westminster City Council (“**WCC**”) works with NMWE on rough sleeping and Anti-social behaviour. WCC is concerned about the amount of private money spent on security and wants more police. Some offenders fly in from other countries. Council employees have worked to remove camps and brothels. There has been organised pillaging of shops and

¹ Business Improvement District. A square whose boundaries include Euston Road, the streets immediately to the East of Tottenham Court Rd, Eastcastle St and Hallam St. For details see <https://fitzroviapartnership.com/about/#whatwedo>.

² <https://www.newwestend.com/renew/district-map.html>. So far as relevant primarily the Oxford St and Regent St shopping areas and hinterlands.

pharmacies in Gt Titchfield St (“**GTS**”). Police have taken no action if the loss is under £200 but Central Govt is changing this. CCTV is a very important part of crime prevention but it needs to be properly directed. There should be more CCTV in GTS in the next 18 months.

d. **Questions:**

- i. **Rubbish.** In response to a question about the number of bins on the streets than before PL mentioned that there had been improvements in the rubbish situation on some streets as a result of the efforts of the Fitzrovia Rubbish Action Committee. He urged people to report street rubbish and nuisance bikes on the streets using Report It.³ Fly tipping can't be prevented by CCTV. It is largely local residents/visitors.
- ii. **Causes of the crime: deprivation?** LM attributed them to the cost of living crisis, the presence of rich pickings (including tourists) and soft messaging to avoid discouraging tourists. There is modern slavery and the crime is highly organised. Tim Barnes mentioned that the shoplifting had been attributed by John Lewis to “greed not need”; goods are stolen for resale. PL said that modern slavery can include adult males, women, children.

8. **Trees update.** Mark Gazaleh (Forum Executive) (“**MG**”) pointed out that the Fitzwest Area is deprived of green space. 20 new trees were planted in the Neighbourhood Area in the last year and there are 390 in the Area. There have been the following initiatives:

- a. **GTS.** The South end is a green oasis for locals and visitors. The Forum lobbied for it to align with Oxford St. There is no space for extra trees. MG is looking at the possibilities further north on GTS. In response to a question from Barbara Corr Mark said that obstacles to trees here include: parking, bike hangars and other infrastructure, turning circles, lamp posts, crossings, services and cellars under the pavement,

³ <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/report-it>.

heritage objections and the expense of buildouts (10 years ago £300k was spent on buildouts for 5 trees on a 100m stretch of Gt Portland St between Devonshire and Weymouth Streets). It would be sensible to await the traffic plan before pursuing trees in this area of GTS.

- b. **Foley St: trees.** 9 trees have been planted outside All Soul's School.
- c. **Berners St: trees.** There have been fears that trees will occlude the "long view" up the street but there is s. 106 money. Funding is being sought to find out what is under the pavements.
- d. **Cavendish Campus parklet to Tower Tavern.** There has been positive response from Westminster University to transforming this area of Cleveland St perhaps in conjunction with the Telecom Tower hotel development.
- e. **Liquidamber tree Market Place/GTS.** This has been saved

9. GTS

- a. **Proposed traffic changes at Langham/Foley Streets.** Yoram Blumann explained that following WCC's decision to make traffic on GTS one-way from Margaret St to New Cavendish St, the Forum made representations to WCC. WCC has now proposed to place a barrier of planters and retractable bollards (to allow emergency services to pass) at the junction between GTS and Langham/Foley Streets. There will also be road humps on the East side of GTS at Riding House St. This will benefit those living in GTS north of Langham/Foley Streets. There will be a 6 week consultation in the summer. Wendy Shillam welcomed this. Cafes, small shops are important to keeping Oxford St going. Westminster should however think about the area as a whole, where there is too much tarmac and too little pedestrian space. There is no need for Market Place to continue to have traffic other than delivery vehicles. Lee Lyons mentioned that the FP had engaged Placemaking to carry out a holistic

review.⁴ The FP would support more al fresco dining and pop up markets in GTS.

- b. **South end pedestrian area.** Yoram presented a proposed plan (obtained from WCC) for redesigning this area, which was last upgraded in 1999. It will remain pedestrianised and greenery will be kept. The Forum has asked for a better balance between the bike stands and the rest area and commented on other details. There is no news on Market Place, which it is hoped will be refurbished by the 6 landowners.

GH

28.06.24

⁴ The Fitzrovia Partnership is co-designing a sustainability strategy and action plan for the area and is engaging the community on its environmental, social and economic priorities to make Fitzrovia a better place to live, work and visit for all. There was an exhibition and consultation about this at the AGM and residents and businesses gave their opinions.