

Draft minutes of the meeting of Pimlico Neighbourhood Forum

Tuesday 23rd July 2024, St Saviours Hall

Present

Steering Group: Peter Ruback (Chairman), James Ingham, Andrew McCarthy, Simon Clark, Sarah Moncrieff

35 members of Forum at the outset (plus Cllr Robert Eagleton)

By invitation as observers: Graeme Cottam (Victoria Neighbourhood Forum), Angela Forrester (Churchill Gardens Neighbourhood Forum), Richard Breville (Churchill Gardens Neighbourhood Forum) and Christine Walsh (Churchill Gardens Residents Association)

1. The Chairman opened the meeting at 7.30pm and welcomed members and guests.
2. The draft Minutes of the meeting of 24th October 2023 had previously been made available to members. One member said that the draft was inaccurate in relation to the presence or absence of a steering group member, the failure to invite a person who had been refused and sought to attend the meeting and various issues relating to the compliance with the Forum's constitution.

It was resolved that these points should be reviewed after the meeting and that the draft, amended if needed, would be submitted for approval at the first appropriate opportunity.

3. There were no matters arising from the previous meeting not dealt with in either the agenda or the Chairman's report.
4. The Chairman spoke to his report which had been made available to members before the meeting. In particular he mentioned Forum responses to draft City policies on Grosvenor Sidings, planning applications for mansards and long drawn out enforcement cases for cafes and restaurants. He also referred to the following matters raised at previous the meeting that he had discussed with Westminster City Council:
 - A. Grosvenor Sidings. It is anticipated that new plans for development would be published in November but no clarity yet on what these would involve.
 - B. The Council is aware that Network Rail is working on a Placemaking Study including Victoria Station but not of any details.
 - C. The Council had commissioned a Massing Study for the Sussex Street Playground site. This had only been obtained by the Forum through a Freedom of Information request. This foresaw a building for residential accommodation which should not offend the Plan heights policy. However design and loss of play space was a concern and the Forum was trying to find out what architects had been appointed and with what brief.

The following points were raised:

One member asked how the Plan policy on mansards in relation in particular to terraces where no mansards presently existed applied, the example being the pending application in Moreton Street. The Chairman explained that the original Plan would have liberalised this policy, that the Council objected that this would conflict with the City Plan and that the Examiner had come down somewhere in the middle in language which was somewhat ambiguous. Applicants should be encouraged to apply for permission if this was relevant to them particularly if they had commissioned good design aspects and appropriate accommodation. There was a general discussion on the impracticability of all owners committing to build mansards for an entire terrace which had been a problem with a consent in Hugh Street.

One member asked how the Forum and Steering Group could be said to represent the interests of the 17,500 or so residents in the Forum Area including, for example, the Lillingington & Longmore, Abbots Mansor and Peabody estates. The Chairman acknowledged that this was an important issue and had been relevant and difficult to address as much as he would have liked through the Plan development stage. There had been engagement with the Residents Associations of the 3 estates as with all other Associations within the Forum Area and in Churchill Gardens and a number of posters and meetings. However these Associations were more often than not heavily focussed on issues of dispute with their landlords regarding the need for urgent and widespread repairs and the costs of major works that were anticipated to make good the years of neglect. Accordingly, as these were matters where it was the Residents Associations that could best represent residents interests, engagement with the Forum was not a priority to them. This said it was accepted that further consideration should be given to this.

One member extended this discussion to include businesses within the Forum Area. She said that many with whom she had spoken felt left behind and unloved. She cited in particular those affected by the long running road closure in Denbigh Street by Thames Water and the fact that a pharmacy on Warwick Way had closed. She asked whether consideration had been given for possibly securing some relief from business rates for these businesses. 25 businesses were in fact members of the Forum but although there had been frequent 1-on-1 discussions with many of businesses securing strong on-going engagement given the demands on their time has always proved difficult. A business member present pointed out that businesses had been encouraged by the Forum during the consultation on the Plan. Contact had been made with Councillors about the Denbigh Street issue although the pharmacy issue was clearly not in the Forum's remit. It was also accepted that the Forum should redouble its efforts to reach out to businesses.

One member questioned whether the expense and disruption of the proposed traffic scheme in Churton Street was justified and required in relation to the Plan. This is a matter for the Council and whilst not expressly called for in the Plan was not inconsistent with it.

One member asked if the Steering Group asked its members positively to confirm no conflicts of interest and the Secretary confirmed that the provision in clause 32 of the constitution was followed. It was accepted that consideration should be given in the proposed review of the constitution to this.

One member asked if the Forum had consulted with adjoining Fora and other stakeholders and set up an inter-fora committee as mentioned in Clause 7 of the Constitution. The Chairman pointed out that not all nearby areas had fully functioning Forums. The Forum was represented at the Westminster wide Forum of Forums and there had been extensive discussions and consultations with relevant stakeholder bodies as set out in the Consultation Report submitted to the Plan inspector.

Councillor Eagleton told the meeting that

A. Businesses had been adversely affected by works such as those in Denbigh Street and could apply to the body responsible for rate valuations for relief.

B. He had spoken to officers about being kept in touch regarding Network Rail's proposed plans for Grosvenor sidings.

C He was always ready to discuss with his Pimlico South constituents any issues arising out of planning matters.

5. The Secretary opened the item on Steering Group membership by explaining that the Chairman did not in fact require to stand for re-elected at this meeting as he had been re-elected the previous year for a term of 2 years. 2 potential new members had put their name forward for membership and in the absence of any other candidate there were as many candidates as places. 3 members criticised the process whereby there was no positive call in the meeting papers for members to put their name forward if they wished and no identification of which Steering Group members would be putting their name forwards for re-election and called for a secret ballot. Members were asked if any wished to put their name forward but none did. A secret ballot led to the following votes for the 4 candidates for the 4 available seats

Harry Dodd-Noble	24
David McDowell	24
Andrew McCarthy	24
James Ingham	21
Spoiled papers	3

and they were duly elected.

NB the apparent discrepancy between the number of voting papers returned (27) and members at the outset (35) arose because members had left the meeting before the agenda item was reached.

6. The Treasurer spoke to the accounts which had been made available before the meeting and made the following points about the Forum's financial position. There were no questions or comments from members.

7. The Secretary spoke to the proposal that consideration be given to amending the constitution of the Forum to recognise the issues that had arisen with compliance with all processes, the need to reflect the different situation following the formal adoption of the Plan

and the need in 2025 for the Forum to seek re-designation. It was proposed that any initial suggestions for change be brought forward at this meeting, The Steering Group would prepare a draft based on this input, its experience and any other suggestions received from members in the meantime for further consultation and discussion with the Council in the context of the redesignation process and that a final proposal would be put before a meeting.

The Secretary suggested that the basic format of a members' unincorporated association, able to use the services of the Limited Company for banking, finance and contract purposes, was still the preferred vehicle. Additionally Clause 4f would need changing to reflect the new post-Plan mission and that consideration should be given to the administrative provisions of clauses 6 (liaising with other organisations through an inter-fora subgroup) 14 (2 meetings per year) 21-26 (Steering Group membership and elections) 39 (role of Treasurer) 41 (the prohibition on commenting on planning applications) were all candidates for consideration.

The following points were made in discussion: one meeting year was enough, liaison and discussion with other stakeholders was a vital part of the mission and must not be lost in any amendment, consideration how best to engage the business interest would be appropriate, Good Governance Principles were important eg processes for identifying and managing conflicts of interests, publication of Steering Group minutes, possibility within the constitution or in a separate document of setting helpfully exactly what the annual meetings of the Forum were intended to achieve. 3 members expressed concern that various points in the constitution had not been strictly observed. The Chairman said that this was acknowledged, had arisen because the founders had not anticipated the workload and the realities of the Plan development process with a small number of volunteers and limited financial resources and would be addressed in the redrafting of the constitution. One member made the point that in the circumstances of a volunteer organisation with very limited resources setting unrealistic constitutional requirements was a recipe for failure and that the process should identify the significant basic requirements that were relevant and could be achieved.

8. The Secretary confirmed that all statutory requirements at Companies House in relation to Pimlico Neighbourhood Form Ltd were up to date.

9. Any other Business

A. The senior partner of the Victoria Health Centre told the meeting that she is deeply worried that the proposed Traffic Management Order as it affects Warwick Way will be a serious risk to her partners, staff and those attending the clinic (including ambulances). She considered the Council's position to be absurd and did not have confidence in the findings of the traffic studies that had been carried out. The public realm in the area was clearly in need of improvement but this could be adequately done without the 1-way system. She is also concerned that the consultation process was inadequate and not transparent and flawed by having been conducted by the same consultants who will likely be given the construction work if the plan proceeds. A further member endorsed this view. Another member was deeply concerned that the Council was currently refusing to disclose the results of the consultation. The Chairman undertook to relay these points on behalf of members to the Council cabinet member.

B. One member, a resident of Dolphin Square, was concerned about the protection of the art deco shopping arcade and the increased provision of larger flats in the present works were not in line with the Plan, with the originally granted planning and the status of Dolphin Square. The Chairman referred to the comment in his report about the unsatisfactory nature of these developments and undertook to engage the newly elected MP, Rachel Blake.

10. A date for a meeting to consider amendments to the constitution will be announced in due course.

11. The meeting closed at 9.15pm.