

MOUNT PLEASANT NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

FORUM PUBLIC MEETING MONDAY DECEMBER 12TH AT MARGERY STREET
COMMUNITY HALL AT 6.45PM

MINUTES

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Sue Vincent, Meg Howarth, Cath Cinnamon, Miles Hanson

2. **PRESENT:**

Tony Randall, Mike Sumner, Adrian Dicks, Matthieu Tate, Anne Hewitson, Elena Henson, Bruce McDougall, Francois Smit, Tim Rigby, Marcela Moray Araujo, Richard Sawyer, Lucy Shimidzu, Julie Riley, Oliver Bennett, Graeme Weston, Ed Denison, Dee Searle's partner, Dee Searle, Judy Dainton (19 people plus 4 others who stayed but did not sign in)

3. **MINUTES OF LAST MEETING** SEPTEMBER 19th approved nem.con.

4. **AMENDMENT TO CONSTITUTION.** The proposal re attendance approved nem.con.

5. **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DECISIONS** as set out in Agenda paper, approved nem.con.

These were:

- To submit Community Right to Build Order (done)
- To embark on a second Community Right to Build Order (beginning)
- To upgrade our website to a cost of £2,000 maximum (in progress)
- To apply for further tranches of grant money (in progress)
- To set up work groups (to be discussed at this meeting)
- To open and independent bank account (not yet done).

6. **TREASURER'S REPORT.**

Bruce McDougall confirmed the figures circulated with the Agenda. The currently remaining funds were committed to initial payment for the website work commissioned in November, that payment to be made by end of year 2016.

An interim application for a drawdown of funds will be made in January 2017 (to be received in February and to be spent by March 31st 2017). The Forum would be technically "broke" until receipt of funds in February 2017. Projects in that period Jan-March would include a green audit, an air pollution study and a walk-about and workshop on aesthetics of urban design. Funds to cover those costs will be set out in the January interim grant application and ability to pay should become viable in late February.

A larger draw-down of grant funds would be applied for in March 2017 to facilitate projects for the following 6-month financial period (April-Sept). These may include working with a town planning expert (*expensive*), publishing a draft report, taking part in a local festival and various public consultation events for our draft report.

No application had yet been put underway re the Forum's independent bank account; that work is about to begin. Meanwhile the existing MPA Ltd bank account would act as the holding bank account for the Forum's funds.

7. **AIR POLLUTION ISSUES.** The Chair introduced Dee Searle from the Green Party and Camden Air Action. Dee gave a very informative and detailed presentation on air pollution in Camden, with particular reference to our area. The PDF of her presentation is enclosed with these Minutes and will also be posted on our website.

Open discussion followed:- What could the Forum do?

- We discussed Citizens' Science testing - where we do the testing ourselves with help from approved organisations. Cost, including lab tests, was about £8.50 per test-tube. **It was agreed** to do two sample studies, one in Jan/Feb and a repeat in April/May
- **It was agreed** particulate testing was too expensive for our resources but we should seek out what local information was held by Camden and Islington Councils and by the GLA and make our own judgement.
- **It was agreed** to liaise with the local primary school, Christopher Hatton, on their air monitoring programme.
- **It was agreed** that the working group on green issues and air pollution should consider traffic calming schemes, greening of neglected nooks and corners, and tree planting (and work out who would pay for these improvements).
- **It was agreed** to discuss tree planting in residential streets - and who would pay for this (? GLA fund)

- **It was agreed** to come to some sort of view about on-street parking - we seem to be veering towards being anti-private cars per se, but mindful of tradesmen and taxi-drivers need to park their vehicles, and worried about the increased emissions from delivery vans. We need to draw up some kind of policy
- **It was agreed** to minimize rat-runs where possible.
- **It was agreed** to decide if we support the GLA and the two local councils' green policies - and if we wished to ask for further restrictions on noxious emissions, through traffic etc.

Dee was warmly thanked for her very useful and instructive presentation. She was applauded.

8. BEGINNING WORK ON OUR PLAN

The Chair reminded members that we had spent the first 9 months of our existence listening to community opinion and learning about planning - and now it was time to go to work.

8.1 There was discussion about the purpose of the Forum.

Oliver Bennett said the Forum was only started as a way to progress our Community Right to Build projects and our grand designs for the Mount Pleasant development site, and that the work we had to do on the Neighbourhood Plan was a necessary evil to meet that single goal.

The Chair expressed surprise, disappointment and some alarm at that view, saying that the Neighbourhood Plan would of course include our proposals for the Mount Pleasant site but that it had a wider purpose - to make this neighbourhood a better place in which to live and to hold back the hollowing out of central city neighbourhoods. She said the Forum was not a one-show-pony which only existed to further the Mount Pleasant project and that members should not obsess on this one issue to the neglect of the wider picture. If that was the sole purpose of the Forum we should shut up shop now. Other members agreed with the Chair.

The Chair said that the Forum was not just a means to one end. That would discredit the process. She reminded Oliver that if the Neighbourhood Plan was not properly written, properly supported by the local community and accepted by public referendum, the Forum would fail and the future of the projects we had backed, like our CRtBuild projects, would be placed in jeopardy. That would not help his particular focus of interest. It was

essential that all members of the Forum embraced and engaged with the full scope of the Neighbourhood Plan for the Plan to succeed.

Ed Denison said that the whole process was necessarily intertwined, and that the Chair was right. Apart from the wider purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan, with which he wholeheartedly agreed, the fact that our Neighbourhood Plan, when accepted, would become part of planning law, was a way to prevent big business imposing an hideous development upon our neighbourhood ever again. This was one way to ensure the future of our neighbourhood and that horrors like the Royal Mail proposed development never happened again.

He added that the Forum was not a legal stratagem we were manipulating to help the eventual success of "our" Mount Pleasant. Far from it. The Forum was a formal legal body which would make sure the local voice was enshrined in planning law, and as such was an important asset we should use to our best advantage. The meeting agreed and applauded.

The Chair and Ed Denison both said that this was a neighbourhood which would be subject to increased development and our function was to encourage "good" development and place constraints upon any impending wreckage of our local community.

It was agreed that the Forum's vision was to make the whole of the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Area a better place to live, where the inevitable new developments would fit comfortably with existing structures, where new commerce would accommodate local employment needs, where noise and air pollution would be minimized, where green planting would be encouraged and, above all, where much needed housing would be a priority, and where social needs would be emphasized and encouraged. Of course we also aim to give our neighbourhood a new focus with "our" Mount Pleasant project but we have all confirmed that the Forum was set up to "add local value" to existing planning law, not to drive any one pet project.

It was pointed out that the skilled work on "our" alternative Mount Pleasant was far from forgotten, was ongoing, and would form a salient part of our Neighbourhood Plan. "Our" Mount Pleasant project is, amongst other things, an example of how we would like to see future new development in our area. However, it was not the main purpose of this project of writing our Neighbourhood Plan. Forum members should remember that Mount Pleasant Ltd and its own technical team of experts were dealing with that particular issue of "our" Mount Pleasant, not MPA nor the Forum as a whole. The Forum's job was to write a future plan for the whole area, not to obsess entirely on this one particular issue.

The meeting agreed that members should take time to spread the message about the wide-ranging scope of the Neighbourhood Plan. Although we all originally met in opposition to the Royal Mail's plans for Mount Pleasant, that project is well in hand and our present focus is to make our neighbourhood, as a whole, one that works with an impending tide of change and development for our common good.

Oliver was thanked for raising the issue, which very helpfully aired and clarified this whole problem of focus once and for all. All agreed that we now knew where we stood. "Our" Mount Pleasant project is part of the Neighbourhood Plan, but not the prime reason for our Neighbourhood Plan.

8.2 The Chair discussed our work programme for the next three months: to prepare chapters of our Plan on

- Commercial redevelopment
- Air pollution and green issues
- Design qualities needed in our neighbourhood.

To that end she would send round an email inviting members to join each or all groups - and where members did not respond, they would be included in one or other group, *faut de mieux*.

- She proposed that in January a group would walk round our area and take photos of "good" and "bad" developments - and then the group would meet at the end of January and decide on Forum policy on urban design and on commercial development.
- Another group would take part in the air -testing project (Jan-Feb) and look at the Camden and Islington policies.
- A third group would take part in the green audit project and discuss in the context of commercial development.
- By April we would have the basic material and agreed policies to write up these first few chapters.

The Chair explained that although one our prime concerns was housing, including social provision (schools etc.), she felt the Forum should wait until March to discuss this burning issue in order to allow for the potentially harmful effects of the new Housing Bill to be absorbed by the local councils and to be more clearly understood.

The meeting agreed to these suggestions. Oliver Bennett expressed his interest in the design group. There was general enthusiasm for the walk-about!

9. REPORTS FROM LOCAL GROUPS

8.1 Mount Pleasant Association Ltd.

Ed Denison reported that the CRtBuild project 1 was now with Camden Council and was undergoing public consultation as we speak. He encouraged all members to write in supporting the proposal. The chair said she would enclose the information with the Minutes. (see supporting letter).

Ed reported that CRtBuild project 2 had received its grant funding - which was a separate revenue stream from the Forum's funds - and that Lexi Steed (one of the directors of MPA Ltd) was project managing this Scoping exercise.

The Chair reminded him to notify the Forum that our CRtBuild project 1 had won an international award for community-led development. Ed gave the details and said he had posted notification on the website. He said every piece of publicity and verification of our community-led projects furthered our aim to make Mount Pleasant "ours". Ed was congratulated and applauded.

8.2 Mount Pleasant Association. Oliver Bennet reported that there had been little notified activity - except for a mysterious application to purchase the **Clerkenwell Fire Station on Rosebery Avenue**, which appeared to have been withdrawn/been rejected (*? who knows?*). Adrian Dicks had brought this to our attention via a leaflet he had found. Graeme Weston said he had done some quick research. The applicant appeared to be a charity concerned with water, which had existed for 10 years and had spent a lot of money but done very little, and who now had a "line of credit" from a Dutchman - apparently one Bernard Wonk - resident in Monaco(?). Menheer Wonk had formerly traded under a pseudo-name as some sort of English "lord-of-the-manor" in some unspecified business, had that business wound up and was now backing/involved with this water charity. He wanted this prestigious fire station building as a central office for the water charity but did not appear to be offering a commercial price for the site. The charity's apparent purpose was to persuade hotels to do less laundry and donate their "savings" to the water charity - but this seemed less than credible. The water charity had circulated leaflets asking for local support and it is one of these flyers that Adrian had found.

As Graeme said "if you made it up no one would believe it!".

Graeme and Oliver promised to find out more from the GLA and/or the Fire Brigade. Graeme was thanked for his research. Adrian was thanked for discovering this item. (*Hilarity and cynical comments about this hypothetical water project ensued!!*)

8.3 Other Local Groups. There were no other reports.

9 DATES AND VENUES FOR 2017

It was agreed that meetings would be held on Monday evenings

Dates. The agreed dates are

March 20th (AGM), June 19th, September 18th and December 11th.

Venue. Since Margery Street Community Hall is due for demolition sometime in 2017 (precise date still unknown) it was agreed to hold our quarterly Forum public meetings at the Calthorpe Project, Grays Inn Road.

JD 15/12/2017