

Forum Newsletter 1

We thought it would be a good idea to circulate a newsletter once a month, to keep members abreast of our progress, and of events which may influence our work. Please let Judy know what you think of this idea (judithomas@blueyonder.co.uk)

1. Forum setting-up process - PROGRESS REPORT (March-May)

We began our Forum on March 25th, with our first meeting. Since then the Executive have been working to set up our programme.

March 25th – first full Forum meeting

Early April – circulation of reading lists and questionnaire for all committee members

Mid April – end May – work on grant application. Application is being submitted and money is expected to be received shortly. Banking arrangements have been made. More news at next Forum meeting.

Meeting dates, times and venue have been booked until end of the year. These are:

Monday June 20	Margery Street Community Hall	6.30 for 6.45pm
Monday Sept 19	Margery Street Community Hall	6.30 for 6.45pm
Monday Dec 12	Margery Street Community Hall	6.30 for 6.45pm

Arrangements have been made for Camden and Islington planners to speak at our next meeting on June 20, with Q&A session to follow chaired by Cllr Sue Vincent.

A general training session has been discussed – date to be arranged - as has a short session on Urban Planning – date to be arranged. The dates of these sessions will be dependent on receipt of grant money. The Executive will be discussing content of these sessions within the next two weeks, and will report back.

The members questionnaire has been collated, and a report will be circulated shortly. A summary is enclosed (below).

A project is being set up to compile and print-up data maps of our designated area – this work is ongoing at present and it is planned that some maps will be available for the June meeting (dependent on funding).

One of our members has produced some draft logos for our Forum and these are being circulated to the Forum executive.

Within the next few weeks we will need to set up the Forum part of our website into some proper format (Forum page exists in vestigial form at the moment). This is quite urgent and we have included money for this work within our initial grant application.

2. Projected Timetable

We need to have some goals to work towards. At the moment the Executive suggests the following:

- June/early July – next formal Forum meeting and two training sessions.
- Sub-groups set-up to work on agreed topics (*eg.... pollution, traffic, history, green spaces, housing, conservation.. etc*) for report-back in September.
- Recruitment and decision on "our" tame town planner.
- An outline skeleton Neighbourhood Plan drafted for September meeting
- Neighbourhood general consultation.
- Oct-December – working on topics – such as, maybe, a "green" audit, and writing out our plan
- Dec – March – producing our plan with help of "tame" town planner/ consulting with local groups
- April 2017 – Neighbourhood Plan goes to Councils for amendments/redrafts
- May 2017 - Neighbourhood Plan goes forward to local referendum.

This is a deliberately tight time-table to produce our plan in just over 1 year – it will probably slip, since we have 2 years for this project – but the Executive thinks that we should aim to keep to these deadlines. If we keep the momentum we might even do this sooner!!

3. Your stated preferences concerning our Neighbourhood Area (survey summary)

In our questionnaire **ALL of us said how much we liked our area as it is!**

We like the mixed neighbourhood – where some people are poor and others are rich, where older people live next door to young people, where there are grannies and babies in the same streets, where some people are British and others come from abroad, where some people are homeowners and others live in social housing. We praise our local primary schools, We're happy with the transport links.

So we are of one mind, we want to keep diversity and sense of community alive.

Your concerns centred on air pollution, on threats of over-development, lack of local affordable housing, green issues and traffic nuisances. .

You rightly see the future as a general "blanding out" of this area – more huge developments, less social housing, more private rental tenants, a more transient and un-rooted population, more hotels and offices. You want to hold back this trend.

4. Planning Notes – clues for "our" Neighbourhood Plan.

I realise that some of us are familiar with planning procedures and others are not. I also know most of us, although willing, are struggling to know how to approach "our" Neighbourhood Plan". So here are some thoughts.

3.1 **Our Plan** has to fit in with local council plans, London plans and national plans – so we can't redesign our world from scratch.

Our value, as a neighbourhood organisation, is to deal with local detail – to enhance and strengthen issues that matter to us

3.2. **Changes coming.** "May you live in interesting times" is often interpreted as either a curse or a challenge. We are living in those interesting times.

Housing is in crisis, and the new Housing Bill, if passed, will destroy the basis of social housing by encouraging home ownership. That will change the social make-up of this area, as much of the present social housing may be sold on into the private and increasingly expensive London housing market. Predictions are that this will produce a more transient

and less cohesive local population. **There is little local urban planners can do in the face of this national housing policy – which doesn't prevent us from stating we still want 50% affordable housing (in what-ever guise) made available in any development or re-development.**

Air pollution is an urgent problem. In part that can be tackled by transport/traffic planning. Sadique Kahn, the new Mayor of London has already extended the central London "green" zone. We are already in the "green zone". **By encouraging bicycling, by discouraging use of diesel, by moderating traffic flow, by pedestrianising streets, by planting trees and pocket-parks, urban planners can make a difference.**

Conservation in the face of redevelopment. This area is a prime target for redevelopment (Kings Cross to the North and Crossrail Farringdon to the South). It is expected that there will be

- commercial redevelopment of existing buildings along Farringdon Road and Rosebery Avenue (the NCP car park, the former Guardian building and the former Fire Station are current examples),
- redevelopment of existing commercial/residential buildings for high density housing (eg The Carpenters Arms. The Pakenham Arms, Panther House, 51 Calthorpe Street.....and possibly the Eastman Dental Hospital!)
- General over development of existing houses by proposals for roof and basement extensions.
- New developments (ie Mount Pleasant, Charles Simmonds House.....and possibly the Eastman Dental Hospital)
- Loss of local workshop provision (eg at moment Panther House....and in the future maybe Wren Street)

We will need to have a view on maintaining and/or extending conservation measures, about whether we wish to ban basement extensions throughout our area, what opinions we have on roof extensions etc

We may want to have a view about workshops.....do they stay or do we let them go?

We may also need to consider what rulings we want to make about new developments – height, style, suitability.

Social needs – schools, doctors, dentists. We need to take a view

You've all said how good the local primary schools are. The new secondary school may be planned for Wren Street; some local people support this, others do not. This is an issue we will have to take on board.

We have good doctor and dentist provision. However it is known that the two Pine Street practices may have to move out and seek new local premises, which will affect a lot of local people.

Retail needs . We have easy transport links to excellent shopping areas. However there is some concern at decline or closure of small local shopping parades (eg Calthorpe Street/Gray's Inn Road and Margery Street/Farringdon Road). **We will need to take a view.**

5. Planning phrases you may need to know and understand.

Affordable Housing. This describes housing which is let out at less than market rent. The phrase describes some private rented accommodation, and all council housing, housing association provision and sheltered housing.

You will often see the phrase used when councils make a provision that a developer can only proceed with a project if they provide a percentage of affordable housing within that development – ie both Camden and Islington usually ask of 50% affordable housing component.

However there are all sorts of wheeling and dealing negotiations which then go on between Councils and developers. The developer provides a Viability Report to show they can't afford to provide 50% affordable housing the councils are

asking for. Bargaining takes place. A conclusion (maybe satisfactory, maybe not) is arrived at, and the development is granted planning permission.

You should also note that in central London NO privately provided so-called "affordable" housing is affordable, since it is often let out at 80% of full market rent – ie for a great deal of money.

CIL – Community Infrastructure Levy. is an automatic tax upon a developer, who has to pay a negotiated sum of money to the council for their development. This payment is a legal requirement. Councils usually spend this money on roads, schools etc.

Section 106 notices are the mechanisms by which the developer pays the Council money to compensate for NOT building "affordable" housing. (see part of our notes on CIL in newsletter1). This is where the council and the developer have to really argue and negotiate....with the developer using Viability Report to argue they should pay very little, and the Council contesting the figures shown to say the developer should pay a lot. Sometimes the conclusion of these negotiations is very satisfactory, often it is less than the council might expect.

Viability Report.This is a developer's weapon which is legally allowed under present national planning policy. It allows "wriggle room" in providing affordable housing.

The developer writes a very detailed and technical report showing how developer cannot make his required profit from his project if he has to provide the number of affordable housing units the council requires. The developer and the council officers argue through the details. Depending on results of scrutiny of the Viability Report the level of compensation money is set for the CIL payment.

However many Labour councils are mounting unified opposition to the current practice in that the details in these Viability reports are not disclosed to the elected members of the planning committee, nor the public, on the grounds of "commercial sensitivity". They oppose this because of the secrecy and the theoretic opportunity for dubious deals behind closed doors.

James Murray (Islington councillor just joining Sadique Khan at GLA) is spearheading Labour opposition to this practice.... so we'll see.....maybe things will change.

6. Over to You

So now we're starting on "our" plan. We're mainly thinking about

- Affordable housing
- New developments
- Air pollution
- Traffic
- Conservation

Let's enjoy meeting our Camden and Islington town planners at our June meeting – and find out how our concerns fit with their plans! See you on June 20th!

(JD, June 1, 2016)

