

MOUNT PLEASANT NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

MINUTES

Of the public meeting held on Sept 23rd 2019

at 6.45pm at the Calthorpe Community Garden, WC1X

1. PRESENT: Debbie Radcliffe (Bloomsbury Residents Action Group and BCAAC), Julie Riley, Paul Thornton (Amwell Society), Richard Sawyer, Gillian Daukey, Elena Henson, Derek McAuley, Gloria Mendoza, Edward Denison, Gail Sulkes, Tom Grayson, Josephine Vos, Ann Winchester, Hilary Fisher, Judy Dainton. (15 people)

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Meg Howarth, Graeme Weston, Louise Gates, Jamie Dicks, Susan Haskins, Tim Norman and David Moore. (6 people)

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING: The minutes of the last meeting have been circulated and have been posted on our website, mountpleasantforum.org.uk. **The minutes were formally passed by unanimous show of hands.**

4. MATTERS ARISING Chair reported that the only outstanding item was the invitation to Tim Norman (Warner Street resident) to join the MPNF executive committee. This invitation would be sent forthwith.

5. MOUNT PLEASANT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN. The Chair reported that Forum Exec members had met with Camden and Islington planning officers to discuss the draft plan in late July. The meeting had been inconclusive. The basic situation was that the draft plan was being edited and re-edited with no conclusion, since new criticisms/suggestions were being continually proffered, mainly by Islington Council. She said the Forum was of a mind to put the existing draft forward as the final offering, since really the Forum had nothing more to say. Ed Denison reported on the meeting with local authority planners in detail. He said that whilst the Camden planners had been constructive and helpful, the Islington planner had taken a considerably harder line. It seemed reasonably clear Islington felt Neighbourhood Plans provided little or no useful function, and that planning should be left to the planners. Ed mentioned that so far Islington had accepted no Neighbourhood Plans, whilst Camden had accepted at least three, and others were in the Camden pipe-line. Clearly the two Councils had different policy attitudes to neighbourhood planning. Ed Denison reported that the Forum Exec had consulted their own planning advisor, who was equally annoyed at some of the comments coming from the local authority planners, and **had arranged a meeting within three weeks to finalise a re-write by himself and the planning advisor.** He proposed the Forum arrange a further meeting with the council planners with our final offering the week later, ie in early November. At that meeting the Forum would decide whether to commit to submitting the Plan to both councils for formal consideration. The Chair said there was pressure from some of the Forum executive to submit the Plan without further revisions since we had set out our views and had nothing more to say, and believed we had truly reflected local views. There was discussion.

It was agreed that Ed Denison would arrange a meeting with Camden and Islington planners for the first week in November, where we would present the final document. At that meeting the decision would be made to submit the final plan, unless there were compelling reasons for a further delay. This decision was made nem.con. by a show of hands.

EASTMAN DENTAL HOSPITAL REDEVELOPMENT.

The Chair reported that on Sept 19th Camden Planning Committee had accepted this planning proposal, but with heavy Section 106 notices which covered many of the local objections to the proposed buildings. She said that although many local people had hoped the application would be rejected because the buildings were wrong for the site and needed redesigning, everyone knew that Camden was under pressure from national and London-wide planning requirements to accept these large and important proposals. She said that Camden often got around difficulties inherent in these important developments by passing the application but making the developer do mitigation works to compensate for the difficulties their proposals caused and had done so in this case.

Julie Riley spoke about the poor consultation process: how local residents from the New Calthorpe Estate had been hardly considered until she and the Forum made a fuss, how the plans had been decided before the consultation began so there was no real discussion about changes in the design, and that NCE were still struggling to understand the mitigations and benefits that will be afforded to them (eg triple glazing). UCL have made funds available for independent planning advice but the neighbourly agreement will not get legal assistance, it will be thrashed out informally. She said that NCE had found the whole planning procedure difficult to follow and felt they had had little help from Camden. People did not explain the required processes or the decisions that needed to be made.

No representatives from Calthorpe Community Garden were present at this meeting. The Chair reported on their behalf that at the planning committee meeting a Section 106 settlement of £750,000 had been proposed by Camden, which was much better than the £450,000 proposed by UCL, and that CCG's legal settlement with UCL – which is a separate legal agreement – is still being negotiated.

The Chair made the point that the Section 106 agreements suggested at the planning committee were legal agreements, which would be drawn up by lawyers who had no vested interest in local requirements, which would be set by the Council. However, the findings of the Community Liaison Group (CLO) of which CCG, NCE and Forum are all members, does influence the Council instructions to the lawyers drawing up the Section 106 agreements. So, the Community Liaison Group is where local organisations need to work hard to ensure they get the most benefit from these Section 106 arrangements. She agreed it was a complex arrangement and suggested Forum write an article on website explaining this. Debbie Radcliffe endorsed the opinion that it was most important to work with the Community Liaison Group to get the best results from the planning judgement. There was some inconclusive discussion about whether Chair of CLG should be local or independent, but it was decided this should be sorted out at next CLG meeting.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS: PANTHER HOUSE AND CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

PANTHER HOUSE (Gray's Inn Road/Mount Pleasant).

The Chair reported that there had been some rather unsatisfactory public consultation, in the front yard of Panther House, and at the Welsh Centre. Unsatisfactory in that it was not clear which groups had been contacted or how the events had been publicised. The developer had contacted the Forum, and the Forum had notified member orgs, including residents of Mullen Tower. We do not know who saw the consultation exhibition, nor have we had any feedback, except from the Chair of Mullen Tower t/r group, who said he himself did not like the appearance of the new proposals, and would make the same points as at the previous planning application about late-night noise/parties/entertainments, and light pollution at night, which activities would harm local amenities. He also mentioned inclusion of low rental workshops as a local necessity. The Chair said the Forum had campaigned for local workshops at the last planning application, which had included this provision, in part. The Chair said that she had found the application a bit vague, the design to be unappealing, and the details of provisions unclear. The application made less alterations than the previous accepted planning application. It appeared to give full attention to conservation details on Panther House. Unfortunately, the retail frontages on Gray's Inn Road did not seem to retain their c20th mini-mall details, as in the previous plans. **Agreed Julie would consult residents known to her in the immediate vicinity for their views, and that that Chair would respond to application by closing date, with a mainly negative tone.**

CHILDREN'S SOCIETY BUILDING (Margery Street)

Gail Sulkes reported that local residents at the Margery Street Estate were aware of the development. Francois Smidt (Forum member and Chair of Margery Street t/r Assoc) had circulated details, and made residents aware of the overshadowing problems (lack of light caused by increased height of proposed new buildings). Paul Thornton (Amwell Society) spoke about the proposals and the existing building. He said that the existing building was run down, with rough sleepers using the entrance area, so local residents were keen to see it changed, without realising that the original building itself, when cleaned up, had considerable merit. Paul said the original building was well-designed by a known architect, with large internal spaces. It has received its exterior tile cladding at a later stage, and had only become un-cared for in the last few years. Local residents who liked the building thought it would clean up well, and was eminently re-useable in its existing form. He said the proposed rebuilding was purely a money-making project, adding more office floors. The added height would disadvantage residents in Margery Street and in

Wilmington Square. It also was visually un-harmonious, being too tall for the existing streetscape and roof-line. Ed Denison said his former flat had been near that building, and confirmed that the added height of the proposed structure would certainly cut off direct sunlight to the ground floor flats in Margery Street. **It was agreed that Gail, Francois, Paul and Ed would take this further and the Forum would oppose the application according to their feedback.**

POCKET PARK, MOUNT PLEASANT

The Chair reported that the Forum and MPA were suddenly made aware that this project was part of the Sec 106 obligation placed on Taylor Wimpey, the developer. The Forum (Judy Dainton) and MPA reps (Ed Denison and Graeme Weston) met with Steve Cardno (Camden Chief Traffic Planning officer) who was responsible for the outcome of the pocket park development, and the purpose of the meeting was to discuss how the designs of the pocket park could use the MPA previous designs publicly displayed during the MPA CRtBuild application. Debbie Radcliffe, (wearing her hat as a Community Liaison worker), and a representative of the landscaping firm Taylor Wimpey had employed to work on this project, were also both present. The Forum and MPA had serious reservations about the grounds for this meeting.

Ed Denison explained local reservations. The pocket park was a locally driven concept, and local people should have been involved from the start. The recent public consultation had not invited local organisations, and appeared to be trying, rather feebly, to echo the full consultation undertaken by MPA, including trying to work with the primary school, which MPA had already done. Local landscape architects had volunteered their time and skills to draw up the original local scheme, which this liaison group was now wanting to adapt; yet these local landscape architects had not been considered for work on the project. Also, the MPA design was the copyright of the MPA's CRtBuild project, and needed consent for it to be taken over by the new designers. There was also the problem of Taylor Wimpey, the developer, organising the design and the hiring the work force. The correct procedure would be for the Council and the local organisations to be partners in the project, and the developer to pay for the works.

There was detailed discussion over the procedures. **It was agreed that Camden, Forum/MPA and Taylor Wimpey would be joint managers of the project. The Chair of the Forum would pursue further dates/arrangements with Camden.**

It emerged that Camden had been operating under really erroneous information concerning MPA, their CRtBuild project, and MPA's and the Forum's continued existence. It seemed that these local organisations, who had been integral to local consultation during the run-up to the Mayor of London's permission being granted, had been entirely omitted from the planning follow-up. The errors/misinformation were quite serious. It was agreed that the Forum and MPA would find out more about the source of these errors. **It was agreed at this meeting that the Chair would pursue further enquiries.**

CAMDEN CONSULTATION ON FORMING AREAS OF CUMULATIVE CONSTRUCTION

The Agenda paper was briefly discussed, since everyone was in favour of the proposals. The meeting briefly noted the present and imminent development plans in the Forum's Designated Neighbourhood Area. From south to north these were: Former Poor School (Eyre Hill), Mount Pleasant postal lands, Panther House (Mount Pleasant/Gray's Inn Road), Charles Simmonds House (Margery St/Lloyd Baker St), The Children's Society (Margery Street and then the Eastman Dental Hospital (Gray's Inn Road). Added to this the Forum should consider the ongoing development work at Great Ormond Street and Queen's Square. It was agreed that our whole area would more than justify a cumulative construction area.

It was agreed that the Forum fully supported this consultation and that the Chair should respond to the consultation questions, giving examples from our local experience, and expressing support for the project.

PROPOSAL TO SET UP A GROUP TO LOBBY CAMDEN PLANNING TO GIVE MORE WEIGHT TO LOCAL VIEWS

The Agenda paper was discussed at length. Everyone at the meeting wanted this improvement, but the question was how to successfully make a proposal which recognised the planning system as it existed in practice, but also gave Camden planning authority a non-challenging window of opportunity to make this constructive change.

The Chair pointed out that this issue was key to our Neighbourhood Plan; that local views were fed into prospective plans at the earliest stages. She and Julie Riley pointed out how the Eastman Dental Hospital plans had been “set in stone” before consultation took place. Ed Denison said that the now approved plan showed inappropriate buildings, which could have been better designed if local views had been taken into account at an earlier stage. There was a general discussion about “token” consultation; Julie Riley gave examples about the New Calthorpe Estate experiences with non-consultation over the Eastman Hospital Development.

The Chair said that the meeting should remember Camden Council was under pressure from national guidelines and the London Plan. They often had to accept “grand prestige developments” but tried their best to alleviate the local down-sides of these plans by Section 106 works which would meet some of the local needs. Ed Denison agreed this was the way planning operated at the moment, but it did not produce the best solutions in terms of buildings, or the long-term use of land.

Josie Vos said the Forum had to be realistic about the planning system. All large developments had usually been completely designed before the project went out for public consultation and there was normally no development money left for any radical redesign. So, in that sense, public consultation would always be tokenistic. She did not rate our chances highly in respect of injecting our local views into the planning process at an earlier stage, because the developer could, and would, claim “commercial confidentiality” about the scheme. She herself worked for TfL, and even such a big London-wide organisation could not gain early access to schemes whilst they were under design; TfL could only deal with plans when they were released into the public domain, by which time the design had been solidified. She saw no easy way round that hurdle. She also said that local Councils were themselves suffering constraints; they had targets to meet, such as housing provision, and had no development money of their own; they had to be seen to be achieving their targets, or they ran the risk of losing their planning authority. There was animated discussion on these issues.

There was also further discussion on the useful Camden tactic of using Section 106 agreements to moderate large developments, and how participation in liaison groups on Construction Management Plans helped feed-back local information necessary for the legal framework of these Section agreements. It was confirmed that the Forum, Calthorpe Community Garden, New Calthorpe Estate and BRAG were all included in the Eastman Dental Hospital Community Liaison Group (CLG), which was being set up following the planning decision on Sept 19th. So, in one sense, the local voice could be fed into the planning system at this late stage. However, this did not solve the issue of making local issues integral to the design brief at the beginning of the planning process.

It was agreed that Camden Council were doing the best they could with existing planning conditions. The meeting still thought that there could be room for manoeuvre, since local people did not need to know the early details of the proposed development, but the developer did need to be informed of local needs, which the Council **could** decide to make part of the initial guidance given to the developer. In that way the developer would have a duty to consider local needs and could not claim ignorance. It was felt Camden owed some loyalty to their residents, who were, in the main, tax payers and voters.

It was agreed to write a paper about this, circulate it amongst other local groups, and collect views.

It was also agreed to refer to the present practice of planning in the Neighbourhood Plan, which Ed Denison would discuss with the Forum’s planning advisor. It was also agreed to write a note for the website, explaining how the planning system operates in practice.

AOB

No other items were raised

DATE OF NEXT MEETING, agreed as TUESDAY Dec 10th at 6.45pm at Calthorpe Community Garden.

