

MOUNT PLEASANT NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON JUNE 20TH 2016

At 6.45pm at the Margery Street Community Hall WC1.

1, Present. Rowan Hodgson, Josephine Vos, Adrian Dicks, Ann Winchester, Claer Lloyd-Jones, Cllr Sue Vincent, Elena Henson, Hilary Fisher, Richard Sawyer, Tony Randall, Jonathan Avis, Oliver Bennett, Ed Denison, Graeme Weston, Bruce McDougall, Francois Smit, Josephine Bacon, Randy McDonald, Annika Miller-Jones, Louise Gates, Miles Hansard, Lucy Shimidzu, Casey Jones, Judy Dainton. (24 people).

The meeting was chaired by Judy Dainton.

2. Apologies received from Cllr Awale Olad, Cllr Julian Fulbrook, Jamie Dicks, Meg Howarth, Julie Riley and DB

3. Minutes of the last meeting. The Minutes of the last meeting held on March 15th 2016 at the Apple Tree public house, Mount Pleasant WC1, had been circulated electronically and posted on the website. No amendments were made at this meeting of June 20 and the minutes were accepted nem. con.

4. Matters Arising from the Meeting of March 15th

The meeting acknowledged receipt of the Newsletter and approved all the actions taken by the Forum Executive. The meeting noted the resignation of Helen Chatterjee and Margaret Williams, thanked them for their service, and welcomed the appointment of Josie Vos.

5 a. Local Town Planning – a presentation from Ben Vickers (Camden planning dept) and Jonathan Gibb (Islington planning dept)

Our two town planners gave a very clear and at times very detailed account of the planning system, with accompanying slides (*copies posted on website*). Their main message was that we should read many planning documents thoroughly, liaise with our local planners on a regular basis and avoid duplicating policies which the councils have already put in place. They also emphasized that our planning policies should be based on evidence, and that our main function would be to add local detail and context to local plans.

The planners also mentioned that our proposed time-table was unrealistic. Judy Dainton replied that it was deliberately so, to keep the momentum of the group at full stretch. Once our priorities had been decided then the Executive would consider reworking our schedule.

This was a structured and workmanlike presentation which the group will find helpful in the coming months. Ben and Jonathan were applauded and thanked very much for their time and their useful contribution to our knowledge of planning.

5 b Question and Answer Session chaired by Councillor Sue Vincent.

Sue Vincent pointed out that planning was political...ultimately it was governed by the wishes of the government of the day. At the moment the national view was about growth at all costs, whilst money had not been spent, for many years, on developing a proper, working infrastructure (roads, rail, broadband, fire-stations, social provision, housing etc). She pointed out that planning was actually good fun.....it was about making the impossible possible. She mentioned Vitruvius who said planning should be fit for purpose, beautiful and robust. She said our attitude to planning should always aim for quality and durability....in fact it should echo the very qualities that made our historic area so special.

Judy Dainton made the point that the planners had inadvertently, no doubt, tried to scare us with the amount of technical work we might have to do, but in actual fact we would be doing very little of that in-depth planning ourselves. We were untrained for that level of professional work. Instead we would be spending some of our grant money on hiring our own town planner to do that detailed work, based on the general policies we thought were important. She said that we had to look at our area and say *“that’s great, I want to keep that, that’s awful I want to change that”* and then we would decide on our policies from that basis....what we want our neighbourhood to be like. She said we had to think of planning as enjoyable....as a positive and real contribution to our future.

The main questions were about

1. the legal and practical problems of having a neighbourhood plan straddling two boroughs and three wards, where maybe there might be conflicting council planning policies. It was agreed that these issues would probably be ironed out in consultation with the local council planners....but that the process should be further explored.
2. it was clarified that Islington did have a policy on height limits for buildings whilst Camden did not. However Sue Vincent pointed out that such policies could always be over-ruled by central government or by the Mayor of London – as, for example, with the huge tower block at Swiss Cottage.
3. it was clarified that it was a good thing for our Neighbourhood Plan to emphasise when we really agreed with a council policy, and that we should put that positive view within our immediate local context.
4. whether Sadiq Khan, as the new Mayor, would help us get our fire-station back....unlikely but maybe worth campaigning for...?
5. there were other discussions about air pollution, the rumoured interest of Holiday Inn in the Royal Mail site, affordable housing, over-development of existing housing stock, loss of local pubs, traffic nuisance and new cycle-routes.
6. it was emphasized how supportive the councils have been of our approach so far and how important it is for the community to keep working together to meet the larger objectives that benefit the whole Area.

6. Our Next Phase of Work

Judy Dainton said that it was planned to have two training sessions as soon as our grant money became actual...and these were planned for July (before the summer break). Groups would be allocated to start looking at our priorities, data maps would be drawn up for our September meeting, as would an outline Neighbourhood Plan. Members would be notified in the July Newsletter. These items were all agreed. She asked all those present to write down issues they felt the Forum should consider in our plan.

7. Report-back from local organisations including MPA

No other local organisations had anything to report. Oliver Bennett reported for MPA. He said the umbrella group had been very busy with the public consultation on CRtBuild project, and with oversight of individual local planning issues. The individual local planning issues were the former Guardian building (119 Farringdon Road), Panther House, the Carpenter’s Arms, 51 Calthorpe Street, Public Conveniences in Holborn, Holborn Library and the new Post Office Museum in Phoenix Place. Some of the details were discussed and it was agreed to circulate a briefing note to all Forum members.

8. Report-back from MPA Ltd concerning our CRtBuild project.

Ed Denison said that the formal consultation finished that very night and it was expected that the submission would be made in the next couple of weeks. He explained that there were still details to be ironed out in the submission papers, and the group was working closely with Camden planners to fulfill requirements. Cllr Sue Vincent mentioned possible access to archeology survey, and there was a brief discussion on this. Ed made the point that procedures such as our CRtBuild were new, particularly for complex inner city areas, and that our scheme itself was not a simple rural post-office but a complex urban development containing housing, retail and office components. As a result there was a correspondingly complex demand for supporting reports and summaries, some of which were beyond the ability or the funds of a voluntary organisation such as MPA – and these were the issues being discussed and negotiated with Camden Council.

He then mentioned that in the near future the Forum would be required to choose the Examiner who would eventually accept or deny our CRtBuild application. The Examiner will be a Whitehall-appointed planner and few of these, we understand, have long-term experience of work in Central London. We will have access to a panel of names, from which we should nominate our choice. The Forum has the duty to nominate and so does the Council. There was discussion. It was agreed that Ed would find out the timescale for this and that the Forum Executive would then act accordingly. Members would be notified in the next Newsletter.

9. Treasurer's Report. Judy said that since Claer had had to leave early, she would summarise for the Treasurer. She (Judy) had heard today that the Forum had been allocated the first tranche of their grant - £3,900 – and she was awaiting the formal letter of award (10 days) and the issue of the cheque (possibly another 10 days) so the Forum should have some start-up money by mid-July. She added that in all the Forum was eligible for some £15,000 total grant funding, but that our first tranche of money was being deliberately kept low, to preserve the majority of funds for the professional services we would need later on in the process.

10. AOB

Francois Smit informed the group that Charles Simmonds House and this very Community Hall were still scheduled for demolition at the end of December 2016, but there were some indications that the demolition date might drift into 2017.

Graeme Weston mentioned that MPA or the Forum should lobby Sadiq Khan about our local Fire Station. It was agreed to find out who actually owns the building...the fire service or...has it been sold? It was agreed that knowing the actual ownership would affect what action could be taken.

11. Date of Next Meeting confirmed as September 19th at Margery Street Community Hall at 6.45pm