

KNIGHTSBRIDGE NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

FEBRUARY 2016

It is exciting to write the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum's first newsletter as its Chair.

ESTABLISHING THE FORUM

The Localism Act 2011 gave neighbourhoods an opportunity to apply to the local council for their area to be designated as a Neighbourhood Area and apply then to become a Residential or Business Neighbourhood Forum (Forum).

Once designated, a Forum has a five year exclusive right to develop an official Neighbourhood Plan for its area. All development plan policies undergo a process of formal examination and uniquely in the case of Neighbourhood Plans a referendum as well. At the point of being adopted, Neighbourhood Plans have equal standing to other development plan policies, if not greater. For clarity, amongst the variety of material considerations which will influence decisions made, emerging planning policies (e.g. emerging Neighbourhood Plans) can be especially important. A Forum might also produce Neighbourhood Development Orders which effectively automatically grant planning permission for certain proposals and it has a say in the use of Community Infrastructure Level (CIL) funds from developments. It is well worth establishing a Forum.

The Knightsbridge Association (KA) applied for Knightsbridge to become a Neighbourhood Area. Westminster City Council (WCC) accepted its application and designated the local area as a 'Residential' Neighbourhood Area on 27 March 2014. The 'Residential' categorisation is important because it means that only residents will be able to vote in the referendum on any future Neighbourhood Plan. WCC defined the area as being entirely within WCC's boundary and bounded broadly by the A4 and South Carriage Drive from Albert Gate to Queen's Gate.

The KA chose to support enthusiastically an application by a new and independent legal entity to become the local Forum rather than convert the KA's constitution to meet the narrower requirements for Neighbourhood Forums defined in the Localism Act. That decision also reflected an understanding of the complementary aims of the two entities. WCC ran a statutory six-week representation period which closed on 15 May and then designated the KNF on 21 July 2015.

Under the KNF's constitution at least half its board must comprise local residents with the Chair always being a

resident. We are very pleased that local cultural institutions and businesses are also represented on the KNF board and are guaranteed a role in its governance. To be clear, the KNF does not intend to compete with the KA. In essence, the KNF has a chance to make the rules while the KA would enforce them once implemented.

STEERING GROUP MEETINGS

Colleagues involved in establishing the KNF have worked on the project for over a year. Our work intensified again after designation by WCC with the build-up to our first formal Steering Group meeting in mid-September. The Steering Group took a number of important decisions at that meeting including: confirming the formal appointment of 10 directors representing residents, businesses and cultural institutions in our area. I was confirmed as Chair with Emily Candler as Deputy Chair, Chris Barrass as Secretary and Sylvain Ercoli as Treasurer. Emily is Executive Director of the Exhibition Road Cultural Group, Chris Barrass

is Managing Director of the Knightsbridge Residents Management Company and Sylvain Ercoli is General Manager of the Bulgari Hotel. It is a very strong board that includes Baroness Robathan, one of our local councillors.

The Steering Group decided to focus the KNF's efforts on four Quarters called: Hyde Park (including the Barracks); Business (which is mainly along the A4); Residential; and Cultural. Key aims of the KNF that are enshrined in its constitution are to improve the functioning of the Knightsbridge Area by consulting widely on, amongst other things, ways to: protect, preserve and enhance its unique character; make the area more sustainable; have a well-planned and maintained public realm which responds well to the high volumes of workers and visitors to Knightsbridge and the needs of local people; support efforts to reduce crime and disorder and prevent public nuisance; enhance its economic performance for local businesses and suitability for local institutions; improve quality of life for residents; and support measures which improve air quality and reduce noise nuisance.



Hyde Park Quarter



Business Quarter

The Steering Group also decided to send two letters to WCC. The first was on the future of the Hyde Park Barracks land as we know many residents and others are keen to keep and enhance the Barracks. The second was on the use locally of substantial Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments from future developments as WCC is progressing Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) about the CIL. We are

concerned that WCC may give local people less say than Parish Councils and others in the use of those funds. This cannot be right or acceptable. The KNF is asking our councillors to tighten the governance arrangements for the use of CIL monies in favour of WCC's Forums as the Government surely intended in the Localism Act.

Most importantly, the first Steering Group meeting approved the applications of our first members and agreed to write welcoming them to the KNF. We start with 58 members. At a second Steering Group meeting in November we discussed our initial views on the KNF's vision, values and objectives that might shape the Plan. These will form the basis for seeking feedback at our first 'drop-in' events on 26 and 27 February (see below).

NEXT STEPS

A key objective of the Forum is to produce a Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Plan over the next one to two years that will carry weight in local planning decisions. This will involve close work between the KNF, the KA and others to identify the most important local needs and propose new policies for our area. More specifically, the process from here must include:

- Initial public consultation and discussions with WCC;
- Building an evidence base which relates to the kinds of policy topics the Forum wishes to explore and justifies its emerging policies (note - WCC will share relevant evidence they hold);
- Drafting a Neighbourhood Plan (maintaining dialogue with WCC in the process);
- Further public consultation;
- Plan (with any revisions) submitted to WCC – if WCC agree it satisfies legal requirements then a further six week period of formal consultation is held;
- Formal examination undertaken by an appointed independent examiner; and
- Subject to the examiner's conclusions, a local referendum is held on the Plan.

If the referendum supports the Plan then it will be adopted as a 'development plan' document.

The KNF has already asked the KA's Executive Committee for its initial views on local 'needs'. A key one mentioned is to build positively on the strong sense of community locally. This might involve encouraging an increase in the diversity of retail premises and residential properties on offer. We've consulted many others too.

Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum (MNF) (www.mayfairforum.org) was designated 18 months ahead of



Residential Quarter

us as a Business Forum and seems to have done well identifying the needs of its area. It has identified nearly 20 outline policies to address them and five themes under 'Neighbourhood Management' which do not fall within the strict requirements for inclusion in development plan policies. The latter is well worth including in a Neighbourhood Plan as it will influence wider plans for an area.

Please take a look for ideas. We

have! It seems likely the MNF will whittle its initial policy ideas down to about 10 in their Plan plus several themes under Neighbourhood Management.

Our immediate next steps include: working with planning consultants as the Steering Group fleshes out its initial views on 'needs'; and organising the first 'drop-in' events for people who live, work or study in the Knightsbridge area to share their thoughts about the needs of the area that might be addressed in due course by new development policies or as part of Neighbourhood Management. Thereafter, we may hold a second event to report on the themes identified and seek feedback on possible policy areas, as MNF has done, before producing a first draft of our Neighbourhood Plan. If possible, we'd like to get into WCC's formal approval processes by the end 2016. It's an ambitious timetable.

The first 'drop-in' sessions will take place in the foyer of the main building of Imperial College in Exhibition Road, London SW7 2AZ between 10am and 2pm on Friday 26 February and Saturday 27 February 2016. Please come along if you can as there will be more opportunity to influence the shape of the plan in the earlier stages.



Cultural Quarter

JOIN AND DONATE

The KNF is open to new members who live, work or study in Knightsbridge or who are elected members of WCC representing Knightsbridge.

We have just launched our website which can be found at www.knightsbridgeforum.org. You can contact us via the website. Like the MNF, we will endeavour to get back to you within 28 days. As you will have seen above, the KNF has marvellous opportunities but must undertake a substantial amount of work to realise them. We have raised funds to get us started and are likely to focus their use generally on the Quarters or issues generating most support. Please contact us if you are interested in joining or making a donation.

Please come to one of our 'drop-in' days in February to share your views. We want them.

Simon Birkett Chair
Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum