



**Minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Roman Road Bow Neighbourhood Forum,  
held at 12.00 pm on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at Bow Idea Store, Gladstone Place E3 5GT**

**Present:** : Alex Holmes (Chair) Mike Mitchell (Treasurer) David Burbidge (committee member), Paul Ash, Cllr. Nathalie Bienfait (observer), Elizabeth Marshall, Jonny May, Meg Mitchell, Shafiq Pandor, Annika Ramos, John White.

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

Alex welcomed everyone and invited each person to share briefly a little about themselves by way of introduction.

Apologies were received from Cllr. Rachel Blake, Paul Pearce and Seth Pimlott

**2. Minutes of the AGM held on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

It was pointed out that Cllr. Nathalie Bienfait had attended the AGM. Mike Mitchell apologised for this omission, and it was agreed to correct the minutes.

The minutes were then agreed as an accurate record of business conducted at the AGM.

**3. Report on Forum activities over the past year.**

A written summary of the Forum's activities had been provided, and Alex summarised the main points of this. It had been a long journey since the plan process began in 2016, and the past year had seen various highs and lows.

The high point had been the outcome of the local referendum on the draft plan in October 2022. Although only 12.28% of those eligible voted, the plan was the only matter being voted on, as the referendum did not coincide with the election of councillors. 70% (1,743 people) who did vote supported the plan, which was formally adopted by the full Council meeting in November.

Following the expiry of the Forum's 5-year statutory life in August 2022, the Forum had submitted a new application the same month. The low point had been the recent decision of the Mayor in cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023 to refuse the Forum's application for redesignation on the grounds that: 'The Mayor in Cabinet was not assured that the membership of the forum included representatives from different sections of the community in the area and thus refused the application for redesignation.'

The decision was particularly disappointing as it seems to have been based mainly on the names of the 21 people listed on the application form, and not on the wider membership of the Forum. Race is also a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

Mike and Alex had an online meeting with Jennifer Peters and two other planners on 12<sup>th</sup> July in which the planners said they would seek to re-package the Council's offer on neighbourhood planning over the summer and notify the Forum of the outcome.

There was then a wide-ranging discussion about how to respond to the refusal decision, which had been against the Council's internal legal advice and recommendation of officers.

Several options were discussed, including:

- A 'call-in', a way to ask for a decision the cabinet has taken to be looked at again. There is a time limit of 5 working days from the publishing of the decision, and so this opportunity had lapsed. It was also thought this option might have negative consequences in terms of how it would be perceived by the current administration.
- Make an official complaint. The Forum had emailed Jennifer Peters, Head of Planning, on 22<sup>nd</sup> June expressing the Forum's disappointment at the refusal of our application. Ms. Peters replied the same day: 'The officer's report recommended the redesignation of the forum and the team worked hard to ensure the report was considered at cabinet, but ultimately it is the Mayor in Cabinet who makes the decision.'
- Complain to the Monitoring Officer. If the complaint reached this officer, the Forum would have to rely on existing documentation. Given the Head of Planning's recent email response to the refusal decision and the meeting with her of 12<sup>th</sup> July, and without being able to introduce new information in support of our position, the challenge was unlikely to lead to a change of decision by the Mayor.
- Complain to the Dept. of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The Forum had written to planners in this Dept. on 24<sup>th</sup> May over the delay in the decision on our application (their ref: 27698783) . It seems that the response on was a first-tier response rather than from a team of planners. It said the Dept. was not able to comment on specific cases gave general advice: 'If you are unsatisfied with how the local planning authority handled the application, you can formally raise this with them by following their complaints procedure.'
- Write to Rushanara Ali MP. The Forum had written to Rushanara Ali MP on 5<sup>th</sup> July, and followed up by sending a summary of the Forum's public engagement activities and an email of support from a former Forum committee member of Indian Bengali descent. A response was awaited, and it was stated that MPs have the power to write directly to government ministers.

After discussion it was agreed:

- To continue to work with the Council planners, and seek their permission for the Forum to submit a new application for designation.
- To write again to the Dept. of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities explaining we intend to make a new application and seek guidance about the options open to the Forum should a second application be refused.
- To continue to seek the support of our MP, Rushanara Ali.

#### **4. Financial report**

A financial report was presented to the meeting by Mike Mitchell. This showed receipts for 2022-23 of £1,000 and payments of £1,000. The closing cash balance at 31/03/2023 was £355.

John White queried the exact balance of receipts and payments of £1,000. Mike Mitchell replied that this was because the receipt was a government neighbourhood planning grant of £1,000 which had been entirely spent. Payments had been made against separate invoices for work connected with the local referendum and public engagement.

The Forum had now received its full entitlement of government neighbourhood planning grants and was now looking to apply for small grants from local organisations. Several housing groups had small grants schemes, and John White mentioned a Bow charity that might be worth considering. (Paul Ash subsequently identified this as 'Action for Bow'.)

## **5. Election of Forum Committee**

The Forum committee currently meets 6 times a year, alternating between online and in-person meetings.

The following were elected to serve on the committee for the year ahead by a show of hands: Alex Holmes (Chair), Mike Mitchell (Treasurer), general members: Paul Ash, David Burbidge, Shafiq Pandor, Annika Ramos, Seth Pimlott.

## **6. Any other business**

**6.1 Informing people about neighbourhood planning.** Paul Ash said that it could be helpful for elected members and others to be provided with a summary explaining about neighbourhood planning, as there seemed to be limited awareness about what this entails.

It was agreed that this would be pursued, including when a new application for designation was submitted.

**6.2. Planning applications.** Cllr. Nathalie Bienfait asked how the Forum responded to planning applications within the plan area. Alex Holmes replied that the Forum received notification of applications and sought to respond to those which were more significant than minor alterations to domestic buildings and of public interest. These included current developments such as the future of the tower block Clare House and the redevelopment of Caxton Hall.

It was suggested that the Forum could have a role in publicising applications over these sorts of sites and collating responses from the local community in order to make representations to the Council.

The idea was mentioned of holding general Forum meetings over significant applications to inform the neighbourhood about them and support responses by the local community. This was something the Forum would consider over the year ahead.

**6.3 Communications.** Both Cllr. Nathalie Bienfait and John White raised the issue of the generally poor quality of the Forum's communications, and the evident need to update our website. Committee members acknowledged this was an area of weakness, and would be a priority for future small grant applications.

Within our available resources, the Forum would seek to develop the interactive nature of our website and other means of communication over the coming year.