



Woodford Community Council

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2014

WCC members present:

Paul Rodman Chairman
Helen Buszard Secretary

Ron Beatham, David Buszard, Ken Coxey, Bryan Leck, Rev David Russell, Morag White.

Apologies: Robin Berriman, Treasurer

Guest:

Mr Mark Hunter MP

A further 14 residents attended the meeting.

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks

The Chairman opened the meeting by extending a warm welcome to residents and to local MP Mark Hunter. He noted that WCC had been very active during the last year, particularly in support of the newly established Woodford Neighbourhood Forum. He also commented on the sad loss of Stephen Taylor, who had died in August. Stephen had been a member of WCC for a number of years and had been the first Chairman of the Forum. His unbounded energy and enthusiasm would be much missed.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM held on 14th November 2013

Consideration was given to the draft Minutes, which had been available on the WCC website since the beginning of the year. Approval of these Minutes was proposed by Mrs White, seconded by Mr Coxey and carried unanimously.

3. Chairman's Annual Report

The Chairman began his report by reviewing the formation of Woodford Neighbourhood Forum (WNF) at the end of 2013 and explained how it had superseded the original Working Group, Woodford United, which had been wound up at that time. A major part of the outstanding funds from Woodford United had been transferred to WNF, with the small remaining balance reverting to WCC.

A query was raised regarding whether these funds had been ring-fenced for use only in relation to the Airfield development and it was noted that this matter would be covered under agenda item 6.

The Chairman then provided an update on the current status of the Harrow planning application for the Airfield, which had been narrowly approved by the SMBC Planning Committee at the end of July, but which had then been submitted to the Secretary of State (SoS) because of a possible infringement of Green Belt policy. The office of the SoS had already asked for more time to consider whether the application should be approved or called in. If the latter, an Inspector would be appointed to hold a Public Inquiry and the full application would be re-examined, with all the issues - scale and appropriateness of the development, infra-structure and traffic problems, in addition to building in the Green Belt – being looked at again. At this stage no-one knew when that decision would be made.

Finally, he noted that Harrow had just bought the Bodycote site, which was right outside the main entrance to the Airfield on Chester Road, and more importantly that they now owned the whole Airfield site, including the section in Cheshire East. This had serious implications, since they had already indicated that they wished to build at the Poynton end as well.

Residents questioned what could be done to prevent developers totally ignoring the views and wishes of local community. In response Mr Hunter suggested that anyone who had not already written to the SoS could still do so, requesting that the application be called in. He also mentioned that at present applicants had the right to appeal against a decision that went against them, but objectors did not have the same right. He felt that this was wrong and was proposing a change in the law to rectify this anomaly.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Secretary presented apologies from the Treasurer, who was unable to be present at the AGM, and drew attention to his Financial Report for the year up to 31st October 2014. Copies of the Report had been distributed to everyone present and she outlined briefly the salient points.

5. Election of WCC members

The Secretary noted that there were currently 10 members on the committee, all of whom had been elected or re-elected at last year's AGM and could therefore serve for a further two years. The WCC Constitution made provision for a maximum of 15 members and there were thus up to five vacancies available for new members to join the committee. Since no names had been put forward before the meeting, she invited nominations from residents present, but none was forthcoming.

The Chairman suggested that anyone interested in finding out more about the work of WCC should contact a member of the committee after the meeting.

6. Report from Woodford Neighbourhood Forum (WNF)

The Chairman invited David Buszard, who was the WCC representative on WNF, to give his report.

Mr Buszard started by expanding the information already mentioned by the Chairman in his report. WNF had been established at the suggestion of the Rt Hon Don Foster MP, who had visited Woodford in February 2013. At the time it had been expected that the Woodford Neighbourhood Area would include the Airfield and would thus give residents a far greater say in the proposed development. Disappointingly, the Lib Dem Executive of SMBC voted to exclude the Airfield. Nevertheless WNF would still have greater authority as a properly constituted organization under the Localism Act and it had been decided that the community should proceed in that direction. Since there was a lot of overlap with WU, it was agreed that the latter should be disbanded, with efforts being concentrated on WNF. It was known that grants would be available to assist in the preparation of a local plan, but funds would still be needed to pursue the objections to the proposed development on the Airfield, hence the decision to transfer remaining funds from WU to WNF.

Mr Buszard went on to explain that this had been a challenging year for WNF, not least because of the tragic and untimely death of the WNF Chairman Stephen Taylor, as already mentioned. The Forum had undertaken three main tasks:

- Determining local opinion to allow the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) for the future of Woodford, which would be complicated by the exclusion of the Airfield;
- Responding on behalf of residents to the Harrow Planning applications;
- Making representations to Cheshire East Council regarding proposals for a major housing development in Handforth adjacent to Woodford.

He felt that any one of these tasks would have been a large workload for a fledgling Forum, but having to tackle all three at once was a major undertaking, that had been helped enormously by having two excellent professional planning advisors who lived locally – Paul Goodman and John Knight.

With regard to the preparation of the Woodford NP, a questionnaire had already been circulated to all Woodford residents and a response rate of 25% had been achieved. An initial analysis had been reviewed at the WNF AGM in September. A further consultation with businesses in Woodford would be taking place shortly. A planning consultancy with expertise in drafting Neighbourhood Plans had been retained and a Workshop for Forum members would be held on 1st December 2014.

Substantial submissions had been put forward to Cheshire East on behalf of WNF with respect to the Handforth development and representatives had attended several sessions of the Inquiry on the entire Cheshire East Local Plan. These proceedings were adjourned by the Inspector on 6th November 2014 and Cheshire East had been given three options, from which they have chosen to revise the Plan in liaison with the Inspector within the next six months.

Finally, Mr Buszard drew attention to the newly set up WNF website – www.woodfordneighbourhoodforum.co.uk, where detailed information on all WNF matters could be found.

There was a further discussion concerning the Harrow application and strong views were expressed regarding the way that big developers could get their own way by threatening Councils with legal challenges, which if they lost could lead to the payment of substantial costs that they – and Council taxpayers - could ill afford. It was agreed that this was unfair, but it was not clear how it could be rectified other than by a change in law, which might be difficult to achieve.

The possibility of extending the Woodford Neighbourhood Area to include the SMBC part of the Airfield was also discussed. It was pointed out that a re-application could be made at any time, but it was not clear how successful it would be. There might be more opportunity when the first residents moved into the new houses.

It was noted that Poynton and Adlington were currently preparing Neighbourhood Plans for their respective areas, both of which included the relevant parts of the Cheshire East side of the Airfield. There had always been good liaison between Woodford and these two parishes, who had been very supportive.

7. Open Discussion

Further comments were made regarding the Cheshire East Plan. If it were eventually turned down, there could be a threat to other Green Belt sites in the locality and hence a need to be vigilant.

Finally, Mrs Craig, Secretary of the Community Centre Management Committee, expressed her thanks to everyone who had helped to make the Woodford Bonfire night so successful. This was the major fund-raising event for the Centre and thus very important for its financial stability.

8. Closure of Meeting

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Minutes Approved, on behalf of the Community



Chairman

on 26th November 2015