HIGHGATE NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

Minutes of the inaugural meeting and first AGM, Tuesday May 29th, 2012, at The Bull, North Hill, Highgate

Chair – Maggy Meade-King (MMK)

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Present : 80 residents (full list available on request)

Abbreviations used (after first full mention):
NF = Neighbourhood Forum LA = Localism Act LPA – Local Planning Authority
NP = Neighbourhood Plan NPPF = National Planning Policy Framework
LP = Boroughs' Statutory Local Plan (formerly Local Development Framework (LDF), formerly UDP (Unitary development Plan).

MMK introduced the purpose of the meeting, outlined the Highgate Society's role in getting a change to the legislation and thanked Councillors Allison and Leach for their active support in helping the Forum (NF) to reach this stage. The Forum Steering Group had approached every local group and interested resident it could find; had talked to the Local Authorities (Camden and Haringey) responsible for designating the NF; and had had constructive discussions with potential Neighbouring Forums to agree boundaries. She stated that no one knows Highgate like the people who live and work there and therefore they should be the people to decide how it develops in the future. She believed the Neighbourhood Forum concept was a good opportunity to unite communities across the Borough boundaries to create a unified vision for the area.

She explained that the Forum Steering Group was loosely following MADE's (free consultants via a Government scheme) idea of Conversation, Evidence, Vision and Plan. The Conversation (i.e. consultation) bit had already begun with a questionnaire asking for views on Highgate's needs and issues for the NF to take forward. Copies were handed round and it is also accessible on the Forum's Website. MMK thanked Ian Henghes for setting up the online survey and Chris Mason for creating the website for us.

As part of the Plan process, there would be a Placecheck walkabout of the area, and a Workshop in the autumn to expand and put substance on the consultation results. This would lead to the Vision and then the Neighbourhood Plan.

Elspeth Clements (EC) (Chair, Highgate Society Planning Group) emphasised that nothing in the way of policy had as yet been decided. The Plan had been taken forward by a preliminary working group, which was set up to take advantage of the free advice from MADE. This had been helpful in forming a structure and advising on how to proceed. What the NF does will depend on who is elected to its Committee and what they decide. The form and nature of the NP would depend on what people in the community wanted included, as indicated by the preliminary findings from the Questionnaire .

The NP could include a resolve to protect what makes Highgate special; to seek improved community facilities and transport; and identify any potential development sites and how the community would like to see them developed. All proposals must be submitted to a public consultation, and then approved by the LPAs. Any Plan is also subject to compliance with other planning legislation, in this case at national level through the NPPF, at London level through the London Plan and at local level through the LDF

Michael Hammerson (MH) (Vice-President, Highgate Society, and Chair of its Projects, Policy and Open Spaces group) emphasised that, although the Society had initiated the process to get it started, the NF would be a completely independent body. The LA had been poorly thought out and constructed, but approached creatively, it was a major opportunity for the whole community. The purpose of the Localism Act, in Government eyes, was to enable communities to promote more development, but it does enable a community to envisage the development of its area. The NP would become a statutory planning document,

and as long as it did not conflict with national, regional or Local policies, could include whatever was wished, and could be as long or as short as was wanted.

Discussion (names of questioners given where possible; otherwise left blank):

----------: What will be the role of the NF once the NP is in place?
MMK – It will continue, and the NP is only one instrument available to the NF – it can act as a Community Developer, for example, and could consider transport or environmental issues, as the community decides. Within the constraints of the legislation – which is, in some ways helpfully, vague – the Forum can do what it wishes. Once designated by the Councils, it will be in place for five years. The Committee will be re-elected annually.

----------: What does the legislation say about collaboration with neighbouring Forums?
MMK: The legislation says almost nothing about the function of NFs. However, we will liaise closely with our neighbours and have already had discussions with Better Archway Forum, Crouch End, Dartmouth Park and others.

Carolyn Naish (Lauderdale House) asked whether cultural and heritage events could come under the aegis of the NF. EC confirmed that they could.

Jacob O'Callahan(local resident and Hornsey Historical Society) was worried that the restrictions placed by Government on NFs could be too limiting and that the work could come to nothing. MMK said that the NF's task was to create a holistic vision for the area. MH added that the NF can, and must devise its Plan as creatively and positively as possible, state what we want and, in effect, challenge local and national government to determine otherwise. EC added that the Conservation Area Appraisal currently being written by the Highgate Society for the Haringey side of Highgate (one already exists for the Camden side) will also be formal local guidance, and will help us further.

Christine Farrell (Friends of Waterlow Park): pointed out that although the Localism ACT is vague on powers, there is always the power of public protest to change decisions and grouping together in the Forum will strengthen our ability to do that.

Neil Perkins (Pond Square Residents Association): Several of their members felt that the proposed Forum area was too big, and was too diverse an area for one neighbourhood. Was it too late to change the boundary? MMK: Yes, and LPAs have made clear that they do not want Neighbourhoods to be too small. In answer to a question about the size of other forums , she added that Kentish Town NF was a little larger, Better Archway Forum a similar size, and Dartmouth Park NF a little smaller. Cllr Rachel Allison (Haringey, Highgate Ward) thought that the size was about right. It is a constant problem to get the Boroughs to talk to each other on issues such as transport, buses, leisure, the Archway Road, etc and this would facilitate the process.

Harvey Goldstein (Fordington Road Residents) added that their streets, on the very fringe of the area, wanted to be in the Highgate NF area.

Paul Dowsey (resident) was worried that it would be too difficult to create a vision for such a large area, and could be a charter for divisions within the community. He asked what safeguards would there be? MMK said that there would not, and could not, be any "dictating" to any area within the Neighbourhood. Areas with separate identities would be sub-areas within the overall plan, with their own requirements addressed within the context of the wider plan. MH said that the greater danger was from divided communities which would occur if a community area such as Highgate was fragmented into small enclaves. Fragmentation could set disastrous precedents which would affect other areas, and that this was a clear case of 'united we stand, divided we fall'.

Cllr. Valerie Leach (Highgate Ward, Camden) said the reality was that the fewer NFs there were, the better it was for LPA's for financial and staff resources reasons. The Government has put a system in place but given no support to LPAs to implement or resource it. They were constrained by the language of the legislation, but there is no reason why a Forum

area should not be divided into sub-areas for more sensitive planning and other requirements to meet their individual needs.

David Porter (resident), believed that the NF was a great way of uniting areas, and that it was a great shame to start by speaking about divisions. The important thing was to get it right.

Michael Rose (resident, and trustee for Age Concern UK Camden) asked if there would be scope to include adult social and health care issues within the remit of the NF. MMK said that it would be up to local people to raise priorities for the Forum's work.

Susan Rose (Chair, Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee) said that the CAAC had been the only organisation covering both sides of Highgate, and would continue to do so. Making the two Boroughs work together was very important and the Forum would be a useful mechanism for doing that.

Catherine Wells. (Dartmouth Park): asked how do you reach out to groups not represented here? EC said that it had been a concern of the working group that individuals as well as stakeholders were reached and to this effect there would be door to door surveying carried out and drop boxes provided in the HLSI and Jackson's Lane for those not IT literate. However, it was essential that stakeholder groups must also circulate their own members or residents. MMK added that giving everyone the opportunity to express their views and involving as many people as possible was the first priority of the consultation exercise.

Andrew Dismore (new GLA member for Barnet and Camden) made the following points:

(1) The NPPF imposed a "Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development"; it was therefore essential for a NP to be put in place.
(2) He would find it very useful to be able to communicate with the representative body for the area, in his capacity as GLA member.
(3) The NP would be subject to a local referendum, which needs to be borne in mind if consensus is to be achieved.

MMK agreed; it would be difficult but must be done.

The Forum Constitution

MMK proposed that the meeting moved to adopt the draft Constitution, which was introduced by Harley Atkinson, who had drafted it. MMK explained the amendment which had been included at the request of the Holly Lodge CAAC. Valerie Leach queried the boundary in Swains Lane – MMK said the NF and Holly Lodge CAAC would meet with Dartmouth Park NF to discuss this.

Hugh Francis (resident) cited 2.2 of the Constitution, stating that affiliated groups were non-voting. MMK said that this was to cover groups who wished to be affiliated and were happy to be a conduit of information to their members – they were a starting point in involving the community. The legislation requires that membership should be of individuals who live and work in an area, not as representatives of any group.

Jacob O'Callahan felt that Hampstead Heath and the Kenwood Estate should be included as they were closely interrelated with Highgate. MH said that he saw no objection to this; indeed, the City of London, had been in favour of the inclusion of Highgate Wood, and would not object to any part of the Heath being included; but it was appropriate to discuss Heath inclusion with the Heath and Hampstead Society.

Josef Davies-Coates (Transition Highgate) said he believed that the Forum should seek consensus and not rely on a majority vote. Christine Farrell disagreed; it was very difficult to achieve a 100% consensus on anything; the need was to achieve a majority balance of opinion.

Peter Mostyn (resident) congratulated the working group on taking things this far, but in his view a Constitution should have a purpose, must deal with membership and the committee, and have a clear vision. It should enthuse and inspire its members. He did not see how the Constitution allowed the Forum to keep track of its members, or defined what was a "worker" in Highgate. MMK: The purpose of a Constitution was not to "enthuse and inspire",

but to ensure that the Forum is in accord with the legislation, which says that it must be open to everyone who lives and works in Highgate. The Forum cannot apply for formal designation without a Constitution, and the draft had been out for Consultation by email and on the website for some time.

Stephen Panke (President, Highgate Society) pointed out that Contractual Conditions, which was what a Constitution was, were not intended to enthuse; that was part of the "sell" which came afterwards.

Gordon Forbes(resident) thought that it represented a good first effort. It can be polished and improved, and he proposed accepting it as a provisional Constitution subject to minor revision later. He thought it was contradictory that the Map was mentioned as defining the Forum Area but could be changed by the Committee.

Harley Atkinson (Fitzroy Park Residents Association; who led the group which drafted the Constitution) thought that Peter Mostyn and Gordon Forbes had not read it carefully enough. It provides that the Constitution can only be changed by a 75% vote at a general meeting, and the appendices were not part of the Constitution. It has provision for changing the map.

Cllr Maya de Souza (Highgate Ward, Camden) said she had been involved in the Constitution Working Group. She thought it was well-written and thought-through. This is a new organisation, and she suggested that it be accepted with an understanding that we review how things are working in a year's time. MMK agreed that it was essential that the Forum gets on with being designated.

After further discussion, Cllr Bob Hare (Highgate Ward, Haringey) proposed that "in one year's time, the Forum will consider, review and amend the Constitution as necessary, but will for the time being vote on and adopt the constitution as consulted upon and as written."

This was seconded by Tamar Karet. It was carried by the votes of all present with the exception of seven abstentions.

Election of the Forum Committee

The newly adopted Constitution provides for a maximum of 15 people on the Committee, plus the six Ward Councillors to be invited to attend meetings and be members of the Committee. Three more people can be co-opted by the Committee. A list of the candidates standing for election was distributed to everyone present, with the instruction that those voting place a tick against the name of those for whom they wished to vote, up to a maximum of 15. MMK read out the list of candidates, asking each to stand and identify themselves as their name was read.

---------- noted that there were more than one name from some groups (Pond Square, the Highgate Society) and said that no more than one person should represent each group. MMK pointed out that the candidates were standing as individuals, not as representatives; they were the people who had offered themselves as willing to carry out the work of the Forum Committee. The organisations to which they were affiliated had been given in an effort to give some idea of their backgrounds and geographical location. The committee was only an overseeing group; there will be other sub-committees appointed and many other opportunities for people to get involved.

It was then announced by Harvey Goldstein that Barry White, of the Fordington Road Association (not present), wished to stand. MMK asked those present to add his name to their voting lists.

Louise Lewis (Friends of Waterlow Park) moved a vote of thanks to MMK for all the hard work she had put into the Forum, which was agreed with applause. She also reminded the meeting that the Forum had no funds, and needed money for printing costs, postage, etc. connected with its work. She appealed to those present to donate some seed money for this purpose. (N.B. a total of £45 was donated].

The following people were elected to the Highgate Neighbourhood Forum Committee:

Maggy Meade-King
Elspeth Clements
Michael Hammerson
Susan Rose
Liz Morris
Harley Atkinson
Christine Farrell
Avril Castellazzo
Louise Lewis
Ian Henghes
John Browning
Martin Adeney
Jill Greenfield
Judith Hermer
Neil Perkins

The meeting closed

Minutes prepared by Michael Hammerson and edited by Maggy Meade-King and Elspeth Clements,
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