

Westbourne Neighbourhood Forum

Forum Committee

Plenary session 19 # 4

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 21 October 2019

Venue: Westbourne Park Baptist Church, W2

Present

Jack Gordon, Resident, *Chair*
Lawrence Harrault, *Secretary*
Geoff Biggs, Voluntary and Community
Jason Swerling, Resident
Toby Gale, Paddington Development Trust
Sophie Nguyen, Business community
Keith Cookson, Westminster Housing
Patience Owen, Resident
Fr. Henry Everett, Resident
David Boothroyd, Ward Councillor
Adam Hug, Ward Councillor

1 Opening and welcome

Jack Gordon, as Chair of the Forum, opened the meeting at 18:34 and welcomed all present.

He then thanked Geoff for hosting the meeting and Lawrence for preparing it.

2 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the May meeting of the Forum Committee had been circulated by email, and there were some printed copies available at the meeting. The minutes were approved as true and accurate by all present. There was no matter arising other than covered by further items on the agenda.

4 Forum finances

Geoff circulated the most recent bank statement. He mentioned that the account was still working with the chequebook pending finalising of Internet banking.

So far this year, small expenditure had not reached the £100 figure.

Budgeted for the Global Food Festival was between £3000 and £4000.

Budgeted for the Summer Festival was between £10,000 and £15,000 – probably closer to the higher figure, based on previous years.

5 What future for Westbourne Forum?

Jack introduced this item by stating that there was need for the Forum Committee to take stock of where the Forum now was and discuss how members saw the future of the Forum. He expressed the wish that all members contribute to this debate.

Geoff informed members that the Standing Committee had met a few times over the summer.

Points made at such meetings were:

- Things have not been working as well as they could.
- How could we make the Forum more efficient?
- How can we move forward?

Two emails were sent to present these issues, and it was felt important that all Forum Committee members could express their feelings and share their ideas.

Jack felt that concerns related to where we were as a Forum and where we were going. Whereas, on the positive side, the Forum is reasonably well financed at present and has benefited from the impetus of the Summer Festival, other areas of Forum activity have not progressed so well. The question was whether Forum Committee members would be prepared to take some responsibilities in order to achieve objectives more effectively and more swiftly. This would require agreement on objectives and strategy.

Patience felt that the Forum had to be community focussed and to bring residents' views. She had noticed that there was a lot of formality in Committee meetings as opposed to substance. We would need to clarify what the objectives were. There is nowhere else where people can bring ideas, and time should not be entirely used up by "Committee business".

Sophie shared similar feelings. Her expectations were that the Forum be connected with the community and improve the lives of local people. An issue was people's awareness of the existence of the Forum, and we should find better ways of interacting with residents, especially those who feel they do not have a say. So far, it has been difficult to get feedback, as evidenced in the case of the Canal side project.

Patience observed that it looked as though there were three “worlds” within the neighbourhood area. Westbourne Park North felt like a “no man’s land”. She also wondered how we should address issues related to Taxi House.

Cllr David reminded members that the Forum had started as a LARP, whereas the Localism Act had brought it back as a Neighbourhood Forum, as it just happened to be convenient. We had never thought that the Neighbourhood Plan was the major work we were doing. We could have been a residents association. Westminster has a few amenity societies, but this is not what we are doing. Some neighbourhood associations do more campaigning and/or lobbying. We need to work on communication (remember the elections that were supposed to happen in 2017). We should also consider the impact of the geography of the ward.

Jason noted that some areas at the edges of the ward tended to turn toward other neighbourhood areas. He also noted that the railway line acted as a cutting.

Jack felt that the Forum was searching for direction and for an identity to be recognised.

Keith remarked that there were groups of residents and agencies that helped identify ways of improving quality of life. The Forum’s former priority related to social housing. What were our present priorities? The Committee had busied itself too much about governance rather than “stuff”. How could we shape things? It was about a Plan that sets civic spaces, to get a chance to have some impact, while it is much harder to get positive outcomes. How can we learn from others? We should plan within our means.

Cllr Adam compared Westbourne with other Forums. Church Street is in a different situation, with a Regeneration Project going on. Maida Hill has residents with a drive. In contrast, Westbourne’s community engagement is limited to festivals.

Jack considered that all these comments so far include some degree of foresight. We could look at starting again, opening “a new chapter”. There have been no elections for quite some time; we need to regroup, recruit people who are prepared to contribute. We need a Committee with a clear view of what it stands for and a pathway to meet its objectives and means to review achievements. The Forum should be achievement led. Without purpose, energy and drive, no chance of achieving much would obtain.

Fr Henry felt that the problem was to identify objectives. Some past objectives were achieved well, such as Festivals. Not so with the Neighbourhood Plan. It is difficult to see how to define possible objectives at the moment.

Toby observed that producing a Neighbourhood Plan is a big job. He wondered whether it would be possible to make it a more modest thing.

As to the future of the Forum as a whole, we should look at the strengths and opportunities that exist and welcome cooperation from other sources (such as Maida Hill) “with open arms”.

The discussion continued along those lines, confirming the points already made. There was a sense of consensus on the need to reflect further and to make progress at the next Forum Committee meeting.

6 Forum Community events

Due to lack of time, this item was not covered.

7 Other updates

7.1 *Grand Junction (SMM)*

Grand Junction Opening Festival took place on 12 October and was very well attended.

7.2 *Westbourne Park Baptist Church and Family Centre*

Geoff confirmed that the whole project was now complete, and that the Children Library was about to enter its new premises.

8 Planning updates

Due to lack of time, this item was not covered

9 Any other business

During the discussion about the future of the Forum Lawrence left the meeting and offered his resignation verbally and later sent an email to confirm his decision.

10 Conclusion

Jack thanked all present and closed the meeting at 20:05.

Date and venue of next meeting to be announced.