



Kings Heath Neighbourhood Forum

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting Held on 23rd March 2006

1. Welcome and Chairman's Remarks

The Chair, Jimmy Hill (JH) opened the meeting at 7.10 p.m. and welcomed the around 50 people present to the 2006 AGM of Kings Heath Neighbourhood Forum (KHNF).

The Secretary, Philip Briggs (PB) announced that he had been notified by Birmingham Council 2 days previously that speakers would not be present to update the meeting on progress at the Wheelers Lane Campus development.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr Susan Burfoot, and from KHNF committee members, Jim Brady, Adrian Davenport, and Ian Galloway.

3. Minutes of the last A.G.M (January 2005)

These were accepted.

4. Matters Arising From the Minutes of the Last Meeting (January 2005)

A member asked whether any progress had been made in improving the frequency of the 1, 35 & 69 buses to Broad Street. PB said that no progress had been made.

5. Annual Report

The Secretary (PB) touched on the main points of the Annual Report (copies of which had been provided to those attending, and posted on the website for several weeks). There had been 2 major meetings, one on the Wheelers Lane Campus development and one on a Traffic Plan for North East Kings Heath.

The Forum had used the discussions at the Wheelers Lane Campus meeting as the basis of its response to the campus planning application.

The Traffic Plan report had been amended and improved in light of issues and opinions raised at the public meeting although subsequent progress had been slowed by difficulties over the issue of the bus routes along Addison Road. It had recently been agreed between councillors and the Forum to detach this item from the report for further consideration, and progress the bulk of the proposals.

The Secretary drew attention to the upcoming makeover of the Forum website that would improve its appearance and functionality, including the ability to host on-line

newsgroups to gather views on existing topics and identify new topic of potential interest. He encouraged members to use the website to contact the Forum with their email address because this makes broadcasting information and papers to members much simpler, faster, and cheaper.

The Secretary drew attention to the complexities of the Councils 'Devolution' project, and the desirability for the Forum to have representatives at Ward Advisory Boards and Ward Committees in the 3 Council wards overlaid by the Forum, and the 2 District Strategic Partnerships. He noted the change in constituency (parliamentary) boundaries recently decided upon by the Boundary Commission, and strongly opposed by the Forum.

The Forum had been instrumental in forming the "Kings Heath Centre Partnership", intended to be an umbrella group, drawing together all the various parties with interests in Kings Heath. Now a new body, a company, had recently been formed called, rather confusingly, "Kings Heath Centre Partnership". After initial misgivings regarding the weight of resident influence in the management of this new company, the Forum had received commitments from the company secretary, Graham Kay that 50% of the board would be residents and half of them would be from resident's organisations. As a result the Forum would be joining the new Partnership. It had been agreed that the original Partnership would mothball itself for several months in the hope and expectation that its functions would be taken over by the new Partnership company.

The relentless rollout of telecommunications masts was noted, as was the Forum's ongoing resistance to them on the grounds that permanently bathing the resident population in electromagnetism seemed inherently unlikely to be beneficial, and potentially hazardous. In this respect he drew attention to the death of Forum committee member Godfrey Featherstone, a tireless campaigner against masts, and a lifelong community activist and campaigner, whose integrity and tenacity would be sorely missed.

In conclusion he noted that the Forum had arranged fewer meetings than anticipated during the year, and was intending to do better in the coming year with five topics already pencilled in:

- ❖ Kings Heath Local Action Plan
- ❖ Wheelers Lane Schools update
- ❖ Queen Elizabeth Hospital Development
- ❖ Police briefing on Policing in Kings Heath
- ❖ Traffic Plan for North West Kings Heath

Cllr. Cox paid tribute to the contribution Godfrey Featherstone had made to Kings Heath life.

A Member asked if the Police were represented at the AGM, and when advised they were not suggested that in future years they should be invited.

A member, Linda Steel, noted that the Kings Heath Local Action Plan (KHLAP) had been hijacked by land planning issues and had lost its way during its gestation. She made a detailed critique of several of the KHLAP reports proposals, noting that proposals did not have estimated costs or set timescales for action.

6. Treasurers Report

In the absence of the Adrian Davenport the Forum Treasurer, the Secretary presented the annual accounts, copies of which had been provided to members.

The Accounts had been signed and were approved by the Meeting.

A member enquired the low amount of interest accrued on the main body of funds and suggested using a more fruitful account. PB explained that the main grant had been received fairly late in the year so had not been in the account very long. Even so he agreed this deserved consideration.

A member expressed concern that the Forum had not used all its previous grant and enquired whether this might put future grants at risk. PB said that it behoves the Forum to be as economical as possible with grant money because it is public money at its source. If that frugality meant that it could operate effectively and skip a year's grant from time to time this should be a cause for gratification rather than concern.

7. Nominations and Election of Management Committee

There were 12 committee places open to election and 12 candidates. Those present at the Meeting stood and introduced themselves. The Meeting approved their election.

The committee now consists of:

Ongoing members:

Jimmy Hill, Adrian Davenport, Pat O'Brian, Margaret Braithwaite, Howard Drury, Jim Brady.

Incoming Members:

Linda Steel, Lewis Lucas, Sue Ball, Andy Savage, Sajid Hussain.

8. Appointment of Inspectors of Accounts

The Forum sought 2 Inspectors of Accounts to vet the accounts before the next AGM. Cllr Emily Cox, and Mark Houldcroft agreed to perform this function.

A member questioned whether a councillor acting as an inspector of accounts of a public funded body raised a conflict of interest. PB said that the chain of involvement did not lend itself to any probity issues and he was satisfied that a conflict of interest did not arise.

9. Presentations

9.1. Forums LOGO Competition for Schools

PB said that as part of the website overhaul the Forum was seeking to update its image and had approached all schools in the Forum area with a competition for a logo. There were prizes for 3 age categories and an extra prize for the eventual overall winner.

9.2. AQUARIUS Route 50 Project

Saneal Randeria of Aquarius described the history and role of Aquarius in pursuing projects to reduce harm caused by alcohol and drug misuse. He is leading a project based on the 'backbone' of the No 50 bus route to reduce alcohol related harm. He drew attention to the massive costs faced by industry in alcohol related absenteeism, lost productivity, and accidents at work. More broadly alcohol is a major contributor to public violence and anti-social behaviour; and to domestic violence and abuse.

The project is working to reduce alcohol sales to minors by testing knowledge and behaviour of off-licence staff. It is seeking to reduce alcohol abuse generated

through public houses by education programmes for bar staff, who often have little idea of their legal responsibilities nor an understating of the potentially lethal effects of binge drinking.

Work will proceed with bus and taxi firms to avoid anti-social behaviour that occurs when groups of drunken people are waiting for transport.

Saneal noted that residents are usually unaware that there are new powers that allow them to challenge public houses they feel are infringing the law in some way, and can call for a review of their license.

The project is trying to find out what local communities wish to see done and has set up an advisory group (that the Forum participates in) and he invited residents to contact Aquarius directly or through the Forum with issues of interest or concern.

A member asked how long the route 50 project would last. Saneal said the research element would last 3 years with the intention of providing a sustainable programme thereafter.

A member, Linda Steel, asked whether schools are being included. Saneal said that the project is keen to get involvement from youth interests because this strikes at the root of several of the core issue. The project hadn't approached schools so far because they hadn't had the time.

A member, Noel Kavanah, suggested that the effort should go into preventing drunkenness rather than into a research project. Saneal agreed noting that the research included elements on prevention, and Aquarius brought to the project a track record of practical achievement.

9.3. Redevelopment of Wheelers Lane Schools

PB said that he had been notified by Birmingham Council 2 days previously that neither the Council nor its contractor "Transform Schools" would provide a speaker for the meeting because they are involved in contract finalisation discussions that evening and have no one available.

PB apologised to those members who had attended because of their particular interest in this matter and who must necessarily feel disappointed. He noted the Forum's intention to organise a public meeting on this subject.

9.4. Kings Heath Centre Partnership company & Kings Heath Business Improvement District

9.4.1. Kings Heath Centre Partnership company

Graham Kay is the company secretary of the newly constituted Kings Heath Centre Partnership company. This will build a membership of businesses, business organisations, community organisations, and residents groups throughout Kings Heath as the basis for planning and driving forward the betterment of Kings Heath for everyone who lives, works and uses it.

A similar Partnership company operates successfully in Erdington, and GK intends to emulate and built on his experience there with the Kings Heath Centre Partnership company.

It was intended that the company would provide direction for a new Town Centre manager to start work this year. S/he would be employed by the Council but controlled by the company.

Cllr Summerfield thanked Cllr Mullaney for pressing forward with these initiatives.

A Forum committee member, Bob Prew (BP), sought and obtained the commitment from Graham Kay that 50% of the KHCP company board would be residents and half of them would be from resident's organisations. BP noted the importance of building off existing institutions such as the Kings Heath Business Association. GK said he is working closely with KHBA.

Members commented on the number of charity shops in the High Street. A member drew attention to the effect on 2nd-hand bookshops of charity shops. GK noted that it was beyond anyone's power to prevent this, although a resurgence of conventional trade stimulated by the KHCP and the BID may eventually lead to fewer.

A member noted that despite talk of Vibrant Urban Village initiatives by the council there is a decline in quality and independent shops in and off the High Street.

A member was highly critical of the visual and design mess that the High Street has become.

9.4.2. Kings Heath Business Improvement District

GK explained that a Business Improvement District (BID) is a new designation enabled by a relatively new law. It allows the formation of a company that will operate to secure the betterment of a primarily business area. A BID is formed when a vote is arranged of businesses in the potential BID area, and if a majority agree. When a BID company forms it will raise money by a levy on all businesses in the area. The money is collected by the Council's business rates operation and passed to the BID company. The Company is free to pursue other fundraising by way of grant and lottery applications and the like.

Improving the appearance of the area will hopefully attract new businesses and new residents thereby generating a virtuous spiral of more business and of residential property turnover.

Cllr Mullaney commented that KHBA supports the BID project and are also pursuing the idea of a Framers Market because these generate spin-off custom for local shops.

10. Any Other Business

A committee member, Margaret Braithwaite, drew attention to the fact that ambulances cannot get into Highbury Park because they do not have barrier keys.

11. Close.

The Chair thanked and closed the meeting at 8.55p.m.