



Woodford Community Council

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 17th NOVEMBER 2016

WCC members present:

Paul Rodman Chairman

Helen Buszard Secretary

Ron Beatham, David Buszard, Ken Coxe, Bryan Leck, Rev David Russell.

The meeting was attended by approximately 150 residents and visitors.

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks

The Chairman opened the meeting by extending a warm welcome to everyone, including Cheadle MP Mary Robinson and local councillors John McGahan and Mike Hurleston. He presented apologies from Cllr Brian Bagnall and from WCC members Robin Berriman (Treasurer), Morag White and Maxine Wood. He drew attention to the revised Agenda, which had been provided that evening, noting that unfortunately Carl Taylor of Redrow Homes was unable to be present because of illness and his update had been omitted. Copies of a document containing extracts from the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) proposals relating to Woodford had also been provided for information. Finally, he introduced and welcomed SMBC officers - Eamonn Boylan, Chief Executive Officer, who would be leading the discussions on the GMSF, and his team, Caroline Simpson, Corporate Director for Place, Emma Curle, Chief Planning Officer, Sue Stevenson, Interim Head of Highways and Transportation, and Richard Wood, Planning Policy Manager.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM held on 26th November 2015

The Secretary noted that the draft Minutes of the 2015 AGM, held on 26th November 2015, had been available on the WCC website for about ten months. No comments or corrections have been received and she therefore asked for their formal approval as a true record. This was proposed by David Buszard, seconded by Andrew Freeth and carried unanimously.

3. Chairman's Annual Report

The Chairman reported briefly on activities in Woodford over the previous year. He noted that the Redrow development had advanced to the stage where the east entrance and construction of the new roundabout had been completed, seven show homes had been built and opened to the public in June 2016 and further houses in Phase 1 had been built and sold, with at least five now occupied. A further planning application had been submitted for the

erection of 55 houses within Phase 2. Demolition on the south side of the site had ceased because the contractors had gone into liquidation.

Woodford Neighbourhood Forum had continued working hard on the Neighbourhood Plan and draft policies had now been made available for consideration by residents. He urged residents to participate in this consultation, since when it was completed the Neighbourhood Plan would represent their vision for the future of Woodford, rather than that being imposed by the GMSF.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Chairman presented apologies from the Treasurer and introduced the Financial Report for the year to 31st October 2016, a copy of which was shown on the screen. He gave a brief summary of the main points, noting that the actual balance of WCC funds, excluding the ring-fenced funds held on behalf of WNF, was £1,161 at year-end. Printing costs for the 2016 AGM, which would be shown in the next financial year, would be in the region of £14.

5. Election of WCC members

The Secretary reported that the existing ten members of the committee were willing to serve for a further term. In accordance with the WCC Constitution, up to five vacancies were available for new members to join the committee. She noted with thanks that Evelyn Frearson, Secretary of the WNF Management Committee, had offered to stand and she invited further nominations from residents present. Jane Sandover, Avril Furness and Chris Coppock volunteered from the floor. She asked for formal approval for the election of the four new members and re-election of the existing members. This was proposed by Kris Hayward, seconded by Jude Craig and carried unanimously.

6. Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) Proposals

Presentations

Eamonn Boylan opened the discussions by explaining that the ten local authorities in Greater Manchester were working together on a joint development plan document - the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) - which was being prepared to ensure that new homes and jobs were provided in the right places, with the transport and infrastructure to support the communities and manage growth sustainably. The first draft proposals were now out for public consultation until 23rd December 2016, but this was only the start of the consultation process. A revised draft would be circulated for further consultation in the summer of 2017 and, if agreed by the Combined Authorities, would be submitted to an independent Inspector and a Public Enquiry would be held. He then handed over to his colleagues to provide more information and details relating to Stockport Borough and Woodford.

Caroline Simpson spoke briefly, expressing her appreciation for being given the opportunity to present the proposals and acknowledging the challenges and disruption that Woodford had already faced with the Aerodrome development and the proposed North Cheshire Growth Village at Handforth on Woodford's borders to the north, plus the construction of the A6MARR and future construction of the Poynton Relief Road. She referred to the statement made by the Leader of Stockport Council, Cllr Ganotis, that this was a genuine consultation and the officers were making every effort to engage with residents via events such as this one

and the various road shows that were being presented before Area Committee meetings. They welcomed questions and wanted to learn about the concerns felt by residents, although they might not have all the detailed answers at this stage.

Emma Curle explained that the GMSF had been developed to underpin the Vision for Greater Manchester, which was stated to be a thriving and vibrant city region looking to compete on a global stage to attract investment, businesses, workers and tourists. It was an ambitious 20-year plan, running from 2015 to 2035, which involved building some 227,000 new homes and delivering 2,450,000 m² of new office floor space and 4,000,000 m² of new industrial and warehousing floor space. Each of the ten Boroughs would contribute to this. Stockport's objectively assessed housing need was 20,212, some of which could be accommodated elsewhere, leaving a target of 19,300. Of that 7,200 would be on sites in existing urban areas, and brown field or previously developed sites, leaving 12,100 that would have to be built within the Green Belt. Four sites had been identified for release from Green Belt to meet this need: Woodford - 2,400; High Lane - 4,000; Heald Green - 2,000; Land near to A34 - 3,700. The key principle in selecting these sites was that they were large enough to be capable of sustaining their own infrastructure - i.e. the developers would pay the costs of the infrastructure needed to make the sites viable, which would comprise about 30% of the development site. Smaller developments were not feasible because they would not be able to meet these costs. Master Plans would have to be prepared for the sites, taking all these factors into account and transport issues would be a key component. There was to be a SEMMMS (South East Manchester Multi Modal Strategy) refresh and a review of the A34.

Questions

The Chairman started the Q&A session by asking a number of general questions and raising matters of concern.

He queried how the map of the Woodford Opportunity Area had been drawn up and why there were inconsistencies with regard to what was in and out of it. It was explained that it would not have been possible to leave small pockets in the middle of the site, for example, the Community Centre or Woodford Cricket Club, hence the boundary was drawn around the outside. He asked whether there was any intention to use Compulsory Purchase Orders on any houses or land within this area and Mr Boylan replied categorically that there was not.

He then drew attention to the geology of Woodford, which was situated on an aquifer of permeable, solid sandstone, above which were layers of sand and gravel, plus extensive layers of impermeable clay. In addition, local land was liable to flooding and to subsidence in places. He also pointed out that Redrow had encountered serious problems when digging foundations for some houses on the Aerodrome site and had been forced to drive piles 20 m deep. SMBC officers acknowledged that account would have to be taken of geological features, but they had not undertaken any detailed studies as yet. It was noted that WNF had commissioned a number of Landscape and Environment studies and had undertaken detailed Habitat surveys of the area - the results of which were on the WNF website.

Finally, the Chairman raised the traffic problems that would arise from the addition of 2,400 in Woodford, not to mention the other proposed developments in High Lane, Heald Green and along the A34, plus the possible development by CEC at Handforth, altogether amounting to over 15,000 extra dwellings - quite apart from the extra commercial properties. The A6MARR was designed to alleviate existing congestion, not to provide extra capacity to cope with this scale of new development. Again it was acknowledged that this would have to be taken into account as a prerequisite for granting planning permission - hence the SEMMMS refresh, etc.

The Secretary asked if all these various factors would have to be resolved before Green Belt land was released, but officers made it quite clear that as soon as the final version of the Greater Manchester Plan was approved, the Green Belt status of the identified sites would be rescinded.

Participation was then invited from the floor and further questions and comments were addressed to the SMBC panel. A vigorous debate and exchange of views ensued. Particular concerns were raised as follows.

It was pointed out that the main argument put forward in the GMSF Section relating to Woodford justified the development because it would be attractive to the housing market, indicating that Woodford had been chosen because of the high market value of houses there, not because of actual needs. Building there would not be addressing a general requirement for cheaper housing, although lip service might be paid to the inclusion of some affordable housing, but would appear to have been driven by developers wanting easy pickings, in other words, a land grab. Woodford Neighbourhood Forum had commissioned a formal housing needs survey by an independent company (AECOM) earlier in the year. The report was available on its website and indicated that about 20 to 25 houses would be needed up to 2025.

Questions were asked about the robustness of the figures and projections for the number of houses stated in the GMSF to justify these huge incursions into Green Belt. Had they taken into account possible down turns caused by Brexit or a global depression? The response was that the process had been defined by government guidance and case law. It was a rigorous and evidence-based procedure, although it would be under continual review and they would continue to look for more brownfield sites. However, it was pointed out that a mere 1% overestimate in the total figure for houses required would mean that the 2,400 houses in Woodford would be unnecessary.

To unanimous support, various speakers deplored the proposed loss of so much Green Belt. It was pointed out that the quiet rural lanes and countryside around Woodford were used by many people in the locality, not just by residents, for the enjoyment of walking, riding and cycling. These were not just pleasant activities to while away an hour or two, but essential to health and mental wellbeing. Destroying this environment would have a detrimental effect on the population and was counter to the overall aims of the GMSF.

Attention was drawn to the comments made by Lord Norman Foster during a speech he had made in Manchester only three days previously: "If I had one plea to make it would be: safeguard the Green Belt. Until you lose it, you don't know what you have, and it is unique to this country". In response, Mr Boylan acknowledged the statement, saying that Lord Foster was entitled to his opinion.

Another major concern, which had already been mentioned by the Chairman, was the traffic problem that would result from building so many new houses in this small area of south Stockport and would destroy the quality of life for thousands of people. The A6MARR would very soon become overloaded, as would the A34, which already suffered severe congestion every day. Small local roads could not cope with the huge increase in traffic, either. In response, SMBC officers stated once again that there would be a SEMMMS refresh, and consideration might be given to the possibility of continuing the A6MARR round to M60, as originally envisaged. It was pointed out, though, that it had taken some 70 years for the road to get the current stage, so nobody would be holding their breath. It was also noted that the Transport Plans for Greater Manchester up to 2040 did not include proposals for any major projects such as extending the Metrolink to this area.

Questions were also asked about the Duty to Co-operate between neighbouring authorities, since the Examiner at the hearings over the CEC Local Plan had emphasised the need for better cooperation between CEC and SMBC. Officers gave an assurance that this was happening.

Cllr McGahan commented that the GMSF showed a complete lack of vision, particularly with respect to Stockport. He felt that the regeneration of Stockport town centre should come first and foremost and that homes should be provided where the jobs and transport links were. The Woodford section in GMSF seemed to address developer profit aspirations, rather than local need. In fact, as had already been mentioned, there was no requirement for more new homes in Woodford and very little need in the ward or the constituency. Unemployment was low and there was therefore no pressing need for new jobs.

The Chairman then invited Mary Robinson MP to say a few words. She started by stating her position very clearly - she felt passionately that we should not build on the Green Belt and she was shocked and angry that the GMSF included plans to build so many houses on Green Belt land in this area of Stockport. There were various reasons for having Green Belt, a major one being to protect communities and prevent urban sprawl. With CEC already intending to build a large development bordering on Woodford to the west and other plans for building close by, she felt that it was more important than ever for Woodford to retain its rural nature. Stockport should be concentrating its development on brown field sites and large scale regeneration projects where communities would benefit from the additional investment. Taking over the Green Belt for development was only permitted under very exceptional circumstances and these did not apply here. She referred to the Woodford Neighbourhood Forum, which was preparing a Plan for Woodford, drawn up in direct response to residents' expressed wishes, in contrast to the heavy handed approach of GMSF produced by unelected officers. She urged everyone to support the Neighbourhood Plan and to submit their comments and objections to the GMSF proposals by the closing date of 23rd December. Finally, she mentioned the Petition, which she had set up to demonstrate the level of support in the constituency for protecting the Green Belt and which she would be submitting to the House of Commons. This could be signed on the back of the leaflet distributed to all residents or online.

The Chairman thanked Mary for her heartening speech and reiterated the need for everyone to submit comments on the GMSF proposals. At the beginning of December WCC would be delivering another flyer, reminding everyone of the deadline and how to submit their comments. The flyer would include suggestions for valid points that could be raised in objection to the proposals. He emphasised that everyone should make a separate, individual submission and do it now - it might be too late to be of value in the later stages of the consultation process. He thanked the SMBC officers for attending and listening to residents' views and expressed the hope that they would now think again about building on Woodford's Green Belt. Finally, he noted that WCC had retained Kings Chambers, ranked as one of the country's leading chambers, to advise on matters relating to the GMSF proposals.

7. Guest Speakers

7.1 A6MARR and Poynton RR

Sue Stevenson, Interim Head of Highways and Transportation, reported that the programme for the construction of the A6MARR was on track for completion as scheduled in autumn 2017. As everyone would have noticed, there had been a lot of activity at the Bramhall

roundabout and every effort had been taken to keep traffic flowing. The roundabout should be finished next spring and new slip roads put into place.

The Poynton Relief Road was now in the planning application stage, with further stages to come, including a possible Public Enquiry. It was expected that work would begin on site in 2018. In response to a query regarding funding, she explained that Cheshire East Council was the lead authority and they had already secured £22million of funding through the Government's Local Growth Fund. A further £2million had been contributed by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and any funding shortfall would be guaranteed by CEC and potential developer contributions.

There were no questions from the floor, but congratulations were offered to the A6MARR contractors for their efficient work and response to any issues that arose.

7.2 Cheshire East Council Local Plan

Paul Goodman, who is an independent Planning Consultant, explained that as well as acting as one of two planning advisers for WNF, he had represented Handforth Parish Council during the CEC Public Examinations. He then gave a brief summary of the development of the CEC Local Plan to date. The Plan had originally been submitted in 2014 and had contained various site allocations, including the Handforth site, which bordered on Woodford. It had gone to Public Examination in autumn 2014, but the Inspector had not been happy with the information that CEC had put forward regarding future housing numbers and economic development and Green Belt and he had sent them back to do more work. This was carried out and the Public Examination re-opened in autumn 2015 for a few weeks, but the Inspector required yet more work. At this stage CEC identified more sites, including three for an additional 400 houses in Poynton. The Examination had opened again in September 2016 and was now closed. The Inspector would be submitting his interim report by the New Year and may or may not ask for further work. If he does not need more work, CEC will have to advertise the main modifications made to the original draft plan published in 2014 and there will then be an objection period and another chance to object to the Handforth development. After that, the Inspector will look at the responses to that consultation and produce his final report, which will say whether or not the Plan is sound. CEC may then be able to adopt the Plan, but that will probably not be until 2018.

8. Closing Remarks

The Chairman noted that there would be a retiring collection for donations to the WCC funds. Alternatively, if anyone would be prepared to assist financially later on if the need arose, he asked them to add their name and contact details to the envelopes provided. There was also a list for people to sign if they would be willing to help the committee either by delivering leaflets, etc or with technical assistance such as analysis of documents.

He thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Minutes Approved, on behalf of the Community

Chairman



Date: 29th November 2017