

Notes of Meeting of Brixton Community Groups, 22 June 2011

Held at the Karibu Centre, Stuart Horwood (BMTF) in the chair.

Review of Draft Constitution for a Brixton Neighbourhood Forum

Bill Linskey (Brixton Society) introduced a draft, which included provision for individual membership as well as local organisations.

If the final version is compatible with the Localism Bill, the Forum will be entitled to:

- Initiate a Development Plan (in effect to set up our own version of the Brixton MasterPlan);
- Initiate a Development Order within the same area;
- Use the Community Right to Build.

To be a recognised forum, 21 members are required. The neighbourhood boundary can be defined by the members, provided it does not overlap with a similar neighbourhood forum. There can only be one forum covering an area.

Comments from attenders:

Matthew Clarke (Carlton Mansions): Lambeth Council appeared to have lost interest in the Brixton Masterplan recently – it would be good to take charge of this ourselves, provided it was not a burden to do so.

Paul Hill (ABC): We need to lead on this, rather than leaving it to others.

Devon Thomas (Business Forum): Individual groups tend to have a narrow focus, but there are benefits in coming together occasionally on issues of common concern. The main special interest groups need to be involved.

Nick Weedon (Brixton Hill Court/ FoWG): If the responsibilities of leading on neighbourhood planning issues were too great, we still needed to be able to act as a check or restraint on proposals from others.

John Gordon (BMTF): In the past, we had to react to agendas set by the Council. The MasterPlan provided a promising framework.

Alan Piper (Brixton Society): In the past, active local groups had been influential in re-shaping local plans, notably when the Council's wholesale demolition of residential streets stalled in the mid-1970s and when Town Centre plans were reviewed in the early 1980s.

Devon Thomas added that community interests still influenced the Brixton Challenge programme during the 1990s.

Jean Kerrigan (Renton Close/ FoWG): The forum should not define itself solely in terms of the Localism Bill – members were concerned that other provisions in the bill were detrimental to Council housing, for example.

Matthew Clarke (and others) were concerned that larger “not for profit” organisations, such as housing associations, were not accountable to the local community.

John Gordon (BMTF): The Council tended to take key decisions first and only consult the community afterwards. Recent experience of the car park demolition for the temporary ice rink had shown the need for a forum where different groups could come together to co-ordinate their opposition.

John Spicer (Angell Terrace): Provision for individual membership was welcome for allowing involvement where formal groups did not exist. He pointed out that his block no longer had an active tenants association, though he has tried to organise a gardening group to look after the grounds.

Devon Thomas referred to experience in Lewisham, where the local forums are led by ward councillors, but preferred if others were able to get involved.

Area of Benefit:

In the past, Lambeth based its network of local forums on ward boundaries, or we could define the area for ourselves on a map. Since the bill does not allow overlap with other forums, we will need to consult with them over practical boundaries, e.g. the Herne Hill Forum is well-developed and includes parts of Southwark, so may wish to seek recognition under the bill. The Council would have to arbitrate if there were disputes over boundaries with other forums.

One suggestion was the area currently covered by the Brixton MasterPlan, but some felt this was too restrictive and may not allow enough attention for the concerns of other residential areas surrounding the town centre. A wider area allows more people to participate. There was interest in including at least parts of Vassall ward, which had been left out of the earlier Brixton Forum's area.

Devon Thomas suggested that sub-groups may be useful to allow a focus on smaller areas or specific issues, as a way to allow the forum to do more.

Something like the Brixton Society's current area attracted wide support, but would need amendment because it provided for casual overlap with adjacent areas.

Agreed a map should be circulated for further comment.

Comment on Clauses of Draft Constitution:

Name: Brixton Neighbourhood Forum agreed.

Aims & Objectives: at present the minimum required by the bill, though more could be added later if desired.

Subscriptions: proposed at £20 per group (so that 10 groups would cover core admin costs) plus £1 per year for an individual member, to be affordable. An annual sub renewal cycle avoids the mailing list becoming clogged with people who have lost interest or moved away, a problem for the previous Brixton Forum.

Equal Opportunities clause is at 5.6 – some grant funders like to see this provided for.

Forum officers: 5 are provided for, and preference was for annual election.

Annual accounts should be subject to independent examination, and two signatures required on all cheques. Borrowing will not be allowed.

Amendments to the constitution should be made at an AGM or EGM, with sufficient notice (see clause 8.2). Amendments require 2/3 majority both of groups and of individual members (clause 8.3). Subscriptions may be set by a simple majority.

Dissolution: should provide for any remaining funds to pass to a local group with similar objects.

Suggested that provisions should be included also for:

- Exclusions from membership;
- Quorum for meetings;
- Urgent action between meetings.

Next Steps:

Bill Linskey would prepare a revised draft based on the evening's discussions, and circulate it prior to the next meeting, with a view to agreeing the final version then.

Next Meeting: provisionally on Wednesday 24th August, venue to be confirmed but John Gordon to enquire about use of the Karibu Centre again.

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The Brixton Society

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