

## **SOHO NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM**

**Forum Steering Group Minutes of Meeting held on 21 June 2023 at Jones Laing LaSalle, 30 Warwick Street London, W1B 5NH**

### **Present:**

Lucy Haine	Resident
Tim Lord	Resident/Chair of Soho Society
Matthew Bennett	Resident
Patrick Franco	Resident
Peter Parker	Resident
Neil Drinkwater	Resident
Rupert Power	Sophie's/Soho Business Alliance
Joan Moynihan	Nimax Theatres
Matthew Smith	Shaftesbury Global
Dee Corsi	NWEC
John Wallace	Soho Housing
Jamie Poulton	Randall and Aubin
Blythe Dunk	Jones Laing LaSalle

### **Apologies:**

Jason Fisher-Jones	Resident
Farida Dungarwalla	Resident
Manuela Campbell	House of St Barnabas
Max Turner	Soho Estates
Robin Smith	Soho Dairy

1. The meeting started with the presentation of a photographic portrait of Leslie Hardcastle to his widow Wendy and his grandson. MB and LH spoke about Leslie, commending him for his commitment to Soho and Wendy responded.
2. The minutes of the last meeting were approved. The consultants on the public toilets provision are being asked to look at provision in other cities and the outline paper for an alcohol-free community centre has been circulated.
3. In FD's absence LH reported that there is £1500 in the account and that the ward budget provision had covered the website update but that funds were low. Business members were asked to consider contributing to cover future AGM and associated costs. JM will email the business members separately about this. The CIL balance has not changed.
4. Prior to the meeting MB had suggested to LH that the steering group might consider reviewing and updating the Plan, it being noted that it has been 2 years since the Plan was completed and 8 years since the steering group was formed. LH had circulated a paper MB had prepared on this. This was discussed. MB said he didn't have a strong view but that there had been changes in the area such as short-term lettings. It was noted that there is a requirement to keep the Plan under review, that it needs to be a living document and that it is generally accepted that neighbourhood plans have a 10-year life even though the stated end date for the SNPlan is the same as the City Plan i.e., 2042. The possibility of a subcommittee to do this was discussed as well as the formal process for making changes to

the Plan and the extent to which this would necessitate public consultation. RP noted that the landscape had changed post COVID and it might be worth looking at how consumer and worker attitudes had changed and how making Soho appealing to people to visit/return to was important. MS suggested that the group re-read the Plan and that this issue is brought back to the September meeting.

5. MB reported on the Westminster Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP). In an attempt to make Westminster net zero by 2030, WCC is introducing local energy plans and Soho will have one. Westminster has high carbon emission levels and Soho is known to be inefficient. Consultants Buro Happold are beginning a review on a building by building, street by street basis. From 2023 onwards all new buildings will need to have a low energy rating. This could be a concern for Soho buildings that are not able to perform efficiently. There was a discussion about electrical supply and solar panels as well as gas heating/cooling being replaced by air source and how the latter could work with heritage buildings. The question was asked as to whether SNF will be a stakeholder to be consulted and MB thought it would. It was agreed it would be a good idea to keep a close watch on progress and that the property/planning business members would be key to this.
6. There was an update on CIL projects and the regular monthly CIL meetings. WCC have taken on air monitoring and there had been no update for a while. The children's playground will be located on Golden Square. The WCC rep on this has a background in garden design and it will need Cllr Patrick Lilley's support. PP noted that a friend of his had just managed to obtain £27,000 ward budget for a playground. Various locations have been identified as potential sites for the community space though this isn't yet a CIL project. There are regular monthly meetings to pursue this and a detailed proposal will be needed. The school gates upgrade is ongoing and there is also a rope climbing frame that has degraded. This would cost approx. £40k to £50k to replace and £5k to repair. There is also a potential library project that would cost £10k. The timetable for submitting applications to WCC was discussed and the need for quotes. It was agreed to go ahead with the school gates and discuss with the WCC rep working on that what would be needed for the other school projects. It was noted that ongoing maintenance would be down to the school as this can't be funded by CIL. Equal Access to St Anne's Court was discussed. It has been thought this would cost in the region of £50k but it is now looking like £120k as it's an ancient burial ground. One possibility would be to seek to fund half from CIL and ask WCC to fund the balance. Given its an equal access issue there may also be funding from other sources. MB noted that the Plan's remit is to improve Soho as a whole and therefore there could be an issue committing the whole £120k to a one site project which is why it would be worth negotiating with WCC for a significant contribution. The next CIL deadlines were confirmed as 10 July 23; 2 Oct 23; and 15 Jan 24.
7. The meeting moved to consider a heritage survey. This would be a map noting street furniture and unlisted buildings of merit. The need for a permanent record of heritage assets in Soho was discussed and the fact that many are disappearing without trace. It was questioned as to whether this would be regarded by WCC as an eligible infrastructure project as it is concerned with the maintenance of infrastructure.

The meeting then had 3 very brief presentations from consultants interested in doing this work:

- Tess MacCann, a senior urban designer at Publica with a background in urban design and heritage as well as digital use in placemaking;
- Bahar Drinkwater who has worked in Soho for many years having studied her PHD on Soho in 2009 and since published a lot of work on the area; and
- Dan Johnson of Placemaking London with a experience of working in theatre in Soho when he first came to London and having studied social and economic history.

LH, prior to the meeting, had circulated the consultants' respective quotes for the work. The meeting discussed all 3 proposals (ND absented himself for part of the meeting as married to Bahar). The meeting then discussed the project and the proposals and considered whether the survey would have a life of its own or be a link on the Plan website. It was thought the survey could be a benefit to the BIDs and be marketed through pop ups and publicity which would raise the profile of the Plan. The consultants needed to have technical expertise; be cost effective; able to carry out community research and have historic capability. There would need to be a consideration of what is a heritage asset and how much could be preserved.

Taking everything into account the meeting shortlisted Bahar Drinkwater and Publica. Placemaking London was rejected on price and ND was asked to contact Dan Walker to let him know. Bahar's tender led slightly in the discussion- it was felt she would do a very thorough job, lives in Soho and understands what the survey is trying to achieve, while there were some reservations to be explored around the finish/polish of her final results. However, the group felt that while Publica may deliver a stronger-looking presentation they may not necessarily grasp "the intangible spirit" of what constitutes Soho heritage i.e., the Las Vegas sign.

It was agreed, particularly as the presentations were necessarily brief, to invite both Bahar and Publica to an online CIL meeting on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> July at 5pm to put some questions to them and the CIL committee would then make a recommendation to the Forum.

#### 8. AOB Nothing to report

The next FSG meeting will take place on 20 September 2023, venue TBC.