

**THE SOHO NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM**  
**FSG MINUTES 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

**ATTENDEES:**

Lucy Haine (LH)  
Joan Moynihan (JM)  
Matthew Bennett (MB)  
Matt Smith (MS)  
Tim Lord (TL)  
John Wallace (JW)  
Blythe Dunk (BD)  
Neil Drinkwater (NW)  
Peter Parker (PP)  
Rupert Power (RP)  
Jamie Poulton (JP)  
Patrick Franco (PF)  
Farida Dungarwalla (FD)

**Apologies:**

Dee Corsi  
Max Turner

- **LH** advised that she had not yet updated the website with the Placemaking London information.
- **LH** advised that Rosie of St Barnabus had asked Adam Scott at WCC what the infrastructure situation 'under Soho Square' is and LH will circulate the response.
- Rosie is leaving St Barnabas for the Museum of London and so a replacement will be forthcoming.
- **MB** advised Damien Hemmings WCC had replied and it had been circulated regarding the future resilience of Soho's energy infrastructure. MB was underwhelmed by the response as there seems to be no coherent plan. MB had gone on to speak to the National Grid and had learnt from them that they are expecting the West End to be short on energy in the future, stifling growth. MB then said WCC doesn't seem to have a lot on improving individual buildings and a plan for this to happen.
- **MS** suggested the main document is the Sustainable City Charter. BD mentioned the Westminster Property Association's guides for retrofitting individual building typologies and thought that Historic England had good ones for older listed buildings.
- **BD** has asked LandSec's project management team to attend the primary school to see what the problem is with the climbing frame but cannot confirm if this has happened. MB wondered whether LandSec could be asked to pay to mend it, and JW said he was prepared to ask on behalf of the school.
- **LH** asked whether there was still a circa £15k allocation from CIL monies to the school expected? JW thought that the gates would be £5k and the frame possibly £30k, possibly less but it has not been costed as yet.
- **LH** advised that on greening Soho, a meeting with the WCC head of parks had not really gone anywhere, and that the forum may need to fund a feasibility study for Golden Square to be greened and to host a children's playground. This will be for the Spring.
- **LH** ran through the AGM agenda, which was to follow.
- **FD** updated on the accounts. Current balance of £1.5k. Last year spent circa £15k and even with the ward budget coming in, the forum will likely be short. LH wondered whether businesses could contribute, MB suggested residents could too.
- **LH** said that she will be updating the website (with help) and using the Marylebone one as a template.
- **RP** summarised businesses' position generally that MB's energy update was worrying, energy cost increases very serious (confirmed by JM), that sourcing suitable staff is a big concern, confirmed by JP who also thought that skills were missing and the younger workforce not prepared to

engage in work meaningfully. MB thought it a shame that NW Westminster has high unemployment but doesn't seem to think the 'West End is for them'. RP also thought that staff accommodation suitable for access to work was a big problem.

- Overall businesses are expecting a very tough first half to 2023 but some green shoots in the second. WCC's jobs hub programme has been of use.
- **PP** said that first hand evidence is that family accommodation in Soho is sparse and that the population is shrinking and will shrink over the long term.
- **PP** advised the primary school has a reducing intake due to this.
- **TL** wondered if the forum should conduct a survey to understand the number of holiday-lets now in place in Soho. There was a discussion as to how many AirBnB type flats now existed and anecdotal evidence from Greater London Properties (an estate agent) suggested around 500 flats.
- **MB** advised WCC has a dedicated officer looking for illegal holiday lets and to ask ward councillors for the officer name.
- **LH** delegated this to the CIL sub-group.
- **LH** asked for a representative to attend the 'forum of neighbourhood forums' held by WCC on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> January as she cannot attend – TL selected to go (JM/JP also possibles).
- **TL and LH** advised three quotes are now needed for CIL spending projects, a new WCC rule. There doesn't seem to be a threshold. This to be queried and a project-spend threshold suggested.
- **LH** said it is still not known whether a portion of CIL income can be used for administration.
- **LH** proposed not to run through the next set of CIL projects as these are to be presented to the AGM.
- **PF** to assist with a quote for TL for a toilet review project.
- **LH** set the dates for the forum to meet, agreed around 20<sup>th</sup> of each quarter month – next meeting 22<sup>nd</sup> March.
- **BD** is to update the forum on CIL changes proposed in the National Planning Policy Framework review coming from Government, which might entirely change the process legislatively.
- There was a discussion on the mooted loss of Tesco from Dean Street, TL asking for all interested to write in support of keeping it.