Minutes - Tuesday 22nd November 2022

Annual General Meeting – Zoom with online voting to 1st December 2022

1. Attendance and confirmation of membership of those present

Members attending live (13 members): Judith Ford* (Chair), Stacey-Louise Wilson* (Vice-Chair), Simeon Jackson* (Secretary), Paul Pearce (Treasurer), Pam Gardener*, Hugh McGlyn*, Sarah Randall*, Tim Waite, Jessica Balsdon, Fred Capon, Frances Cooper, Nicholas Jackson, Hilary Wakeman

Members voting online (13 members including two who were present at live meeting): Marek Ignatowicz, Tony Balsdon, Jemima Jackson, Grace Willmoth, Jessica Balsdon, Robert Meyers, Oliver Chastney, Rachel Watkins, Nicholas Jackson, Lisa Nunn, Therese Bennett, Martin Claxton, one anonymous member

Total number of voting members: 24. Where voters were present at the live meeting but also voted online, their online vote is taken in preference to their in-person vote. The anonymous member is assumed to have not been present at the live meeting.

Supporters attending in person: Pipa Clements*

Apologies: Carrie Sant*, Debbie Hill, Tracy Hawes

* = Members of administrative committee

2. Minutes of previous meetings

Motion to approve the minutes of the inaugural AGM on 18th November 2021. *Proposed by Fred Capon and seconded Hugh McGlyn. Approved unanimously.*

Motion to approve the minutes of the last general meeting on 12th September 2022. *Proposed by Pamela Gardener and seconded by Simeon Jackson. Approved with 22 votes and 2 abstentions.*

3. Officers' Report – What we've done this year

The chair presented a report of what the neighbourhood forum has done over the past year. A written summary of that report can be found here or by going to https://norwichoverthewensum.org.uk/about/.

4. Accounts, financial report, and budget

Pipa Clements presented a report on the forum's financial situation. Note: The forum has not held any money directly, so there are no yearly accounts to present.

Pre-Designation – we applied for and received a grant available to nascent forums in unparished areas[1]. We negotiated with Community Action Norfolk to administer these funds. We received just over £1800 – this was spent in accordance with our grant agreement. This grant covered the following.

- *Accountable body charges*
- *Printing costs for Forum newsletters and postcards*

[1] *Locality offer a small grant of up to £2,500 to prospective neighbourhood forums in non-parished areas for activities such as room hire or awareness raising communications to enable community engagement activities.*

- *Requisite Public Liability Insurance*
- *Room Hire costs*
- *Website Development*

This grant period ended March 31st, 2022, and end of grant report was submitted.

Post Designation

The NOW Forum became designated in April 2022

Locality Grant funding is available to designated forums to cover costs associated with developing the Neighbourhood Plan. Basic and Additional grants can be accessed[2].

To apply for and receive such funds the Forum needed to become an accountable body, or to find an accountable body to hold and administer these funds on its behalf.

As mentioned in my report at September's meeting, we experienced difficulties in achieving accountable body status as the costs involved in creating and maintaining an accountable body are significant and are not simple to fund. We have not found a means by which to achieve such, though may be able to revisit and reconsider this at a future time.

Given this issue we again approached Norwich City Council to ask if they would take on this role (as other councils have done for their local forums). It is difficult to find organisations willing and able to take on this role. So, we are happy to announce that they have agreed to take on this role.

This allows us to consider submitting a grant application.

Under the grant award conditions this grant can only be for activities that can be delivered before March 31st, 2023. It is advised that funding be applied for at least one month in advance of work beginning. All spending and reporting to be complete by March 31st, 2023.

We can make further grant applications after March 31st, 2023, during the next grant period, this would be to cover activities till end March 2024.

5. Plans for the future/timeline

The secretary presented a draft timeline of future activity of the forum. This can be found online at https://norwichoverthewensum.org.uk/about/. *Please note that this is a draft only, and assumes that appointment of consultants would be agreed at this meeting. Since this was not the case, the next few months of activity are likely to be partially delayed.*

6. Renewal of Officer Appointments

The meeting was asked for volunteers to be nominated to officer roles. The following candidates were nominated for re-election. No other nominations were made.

- Chair: Judith Ford
- Vice-Chair: Stacey Louise Wilson
- Secretary: Simeon Jackson
- Treasurer: Paul Pearce

Motion to renew the officer appointments as above. *Proposed by Hugh McGlyn, seconded by Nicholas Jackson. Approved with 23 votes and 1 abstention.*

[2] *Basic Grant £10,000. Additional Grant £8,000 subject to conditions. Maximum total amount of £18,000 to apply for from the programme. (DLUHC extended 4-year support programme for fifth year 2022/23).*

7. Appointment of consultants

There was a considerable amount of discussion regarding the appointment of consultants, and the proposals that had been put forward. Some key points from the meeting are picked out below.

- Two consultants were approached for prices on the basis of a brief produced by the forum Secretary for work to be carried out within this funding period (up to March 2023)
- One of the consultants was far too expensive, and on the basis of this, was ruled out by the Administrative Committee
- The Administrative Committee was not entirely satisfied with the proposal from the other consultant, Rachel Leggett & Associates, which differed considerably from the brief we set, and therefore we asked whether the stage one work could be amended, in particular a request that the initial workshop would be open to all forum members, rather than just the 'steering group'. The proposal was amended, but the consultants clarified that they would want the initial workshop to be with Administrative Committee members only.
- Although members of the Administrative Committee have not been able to meet up since the proposal was revised, informal conversations indicated that there were increasing doubts as to whether the approach outlined was appropriate for our neighbourhood forum, in particular because our situation is quite different to the previous neighbourhood plans these consultants have worked on for Parish and Town councils, who, as elected bodies, have a much clearer line of accountability to the community.
- There was therefore an inclination at the meeting not to proceed with the engagement of these consultants on the basis of their proposal (one person present voted for proceeding with their engagement).
- There was support for going back to Rachel Leggett & Associates to renegotiate a different form of consultancy work (in a straw poll, 9 members present supported this option).
- There were also suggestions of approaching other consultants (in a straw poll, 4 members voted for this option).
- However, no specific motion wording could be agreed that satisfied the meeting, and therefore no specific alternative approach motion has been agreed at this point.
- The meeting recognised the need for some action to be taken between now and the end of this funding period, and therefore it was proposed that a grant application is still made for non-consultancy aspects of the forum's work (e.g. public liability insurance, Zoom and MailChimp subscriptions, printing and room hire costs, and mapping software). This has therefore been proposed as a motion below.

The online voting form included a box for members to give further comments regarding the appointment of consultants. The responses to this question are attached as an appendix to these minutes.

Motion: To engage Rachel Leggett & Associates on the basis of their revised proposal. *For: 6 votes. Against: 15. Abstentions: 5. Motion falls.*

Motion: For the Administrative Committee to submit a grant application for non-consultancy costs of neighbourhood planning up to the end of this funding period (end March 2023). *Approved unanimously.*

Suggestions were made as to what activity we might want to take before engaging consultants. These included: talking to other urban forums; doing some outreach in the meantime; defining our brief more

rigorously; looking into other consultants; and going back to Rachel Leggett & Associates with a clarified brief for their elements of work.

8. Reviewing the terms of reference of the administrative committee and renewal of mandate

The meeting ran out of time to discuss this item. Therefore this item was put straight to the vote.

Motion to readopt the terms of reference as previously adopted. *Approved with 22 members voting for and 2 abstaining.*

End of meeting

Appendix: Comments made via the online voting form open text question 'Comments regarding appointment of consultants'

Comments from 3 no. members:

Member 1: "I feel that £18000 is not a huge amount of money once consultants are involved, so I would appreciate more clarity on what specifically they would deliver and the desired outcomes from their involvement. (This may well be just me not following closely enough.) However I feel the community engagement and outreach needed to all the diverse and varied groups and organisations in the area outlined by Judith in the meeting is the outstanding focus going forward, as that would then give more legitimacy for a steering group to liaise with the consultants. I would like to see money spent on anything that would promote more community engagement."

Member 2: "It was quite apparent - and quite correct in my opinion - that any decision on the choice of consultants could not be made at the meeting. I would suggest that the criteria for selection should be seriously reconsidered."

Member 3: "I favour preparing a revised tender request for early next year and including Leggett in the new tender list, ideally alongside other firms with experience a neighbourhood forum. I think their quote offered good value for money but is not quite what is needed in our case. While I hope that the consultant would be able to advise on the consultation process and assist with the preparation of documents, I believe that the consultation is where our local knowledge should give an advantage and would suggest that the consultation strategy should primarily come from NOW. I am not convinced by the viability of numerous forums within the budget.

"I would also suggest that the mapping element of the work is relatively complex due to the nature of the area but not demanding and would be an inefficient use of a specialist consultant's time. This might be carried out by the group on a voluntary basis and would also greatly facilitate good consultation with the community.

"Although, as a non-elected group we have a limited mandate from the local community, we do have more local knowledge than an external consultant and I think we need to refine likely policies to put to the local community rather than expecting them to do this. These policies can be expressed in terms of tiered options and put to the wider community at the consultations, (leaving the option open of 'none of the above' and inviting external comments). If some of options are provocatively draconian they are more likely to galvanise the local community to comment and attract press attention, saving us publicity/consultation costs and increasing engagement."