**Lee Forum**

**Annual General Meeting on 22 September 2021, 7.00 - 8.30pm held on Zoom remote attendance**

**M I NU T E S**

1. **Welcomes and Apologies**

The Chair of the Lee Forum, Sarah McMichael, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Attendees could use the chat link to submit questions. Question time will be available at the end of each session.

1. **Chair’s update on Lee Forum’s work in the past year.**

 **The Lee Forum Neighbourhood Plan:** Sarah gave a brief overview of the Lee Forum; set up under the Localism Act 2011 which allows for the development of a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) which is a statutory planning document that gives communities an influence on the planning decisions for their area. The NP must be considered alongside current National, London and Local Plans when future development, regeneration and enhancement of the Lee Forum area are being considered. The Lee NP has gone through its Section 14 Statutory consultation. A heritage and environmental report now has to go to the statutory consultees and once this is agreed the NP will go forward for examination by professional examiners. This will be followed by a section 16 consultation, the referendum for residents, undertaken by Lewisham and Greenwich Councils and is likely in June 2022.

**Other Work by the Forum** taken forward with volunteer resources.

* Playing fields: playing fields in private ownership within the forum area and nearby, and adjacent to Quaggy River are vulnerable to development. They are designated as Metropolitan Open Land and protected from speculative planning applications from developers. However the Huntsman field has already been lost to development and others are at risk. Lee Forum has joined with other local groups to lobby for more protection by having them designated as Assets of Community Value. These fields are also part of the Quaggy Trail project which is included in The Campaign for Rural England ten new parks for London project, <https://www.cprelondon.org.uk/news/tennewparks/>
* Air Pollution: Lee Forum commissioned an independent study of air pollution by Network for Clean Air at the Lee Green crossroads in 2015 which showed levels above legal limits. Lewisham Council maps confirm that levels are above legal limits and the forum is pressing for monitors at the cross roads along with it being designated as an Air Quality Focus Area.
* Two new conservation applications have been submitted one for Lee Green Crossroads and one for the Lee High Road that lies within the Forum area. Councils will separately consult residents on these proposals, but not before 2022.
* An Asset of Community Value application for The Dirty South (formerly The Rose of Lee) pub has been submitted and accepted by Lewisham council. Local listing allows community groups to have a first option to purchase on any sale and to be consulted on any proposed development of the site. An application for a tree to be planted outside has been successful but TfL have yet to agree siting.
* Because Lee NP does not yet have statutory status until it is adopted, Lee Forum has adopted a cautious approach to commenting on local planning applications, but two applications have been commented upon, one on Eastdown Road and another on Manor Park with a focus on planning codes, and build and design quality.
* Committee members keep a watch on planning applications and as individuals comment. The members also seek enforcement of planning policies within the Forum area.
* Leegate: The Forum is a member of the Leegate working group which has been actively engaging and meeting with the new owners Gilliard Homes as they develop their application to regenerate the site. The application was planned for August 2021 and is now delayed. Of particular concern is that this application seems to fall between gaps in planning policies, with the Lewisham new local plan not finalised and Lee NP not yet adopted. The retail plan is scant and the design and density is not sympathetic to the surrounding area.
1. **Election of committee and presentation of yearly accounts**

The Chair was grateful to all those who were standing for election to the Committee.

Jan Roy named those standing for election to the Committee and confirmed the meeting was quorate with more than 21 participants. Each candidate’s biography can be found on the Lee Forum Website. Lenny Kenny is standing down and Rozina Visram is re-joining. All candidates standing for election were voted in by a show of hands over the zoom screen.

The following people were duly elected for the coming year:

Pippa Bampton

David Brining

Peter Cleary

Nicolette Duckham

David Ford

Carole Hicks

Marcus Mayers

Sarah McMichael

Peter Richardson

Patricia Richardson

Gill Stoker

Rozina Visram

The chair thanked Lenny Kenny for his hard work and contributions to the work of the Forum.

The Treasurer Marcus Mayers presented the Lee Forum annual accounts to the meeting.

The accounts show at the last period end a credit balance. The Lee Forum received £1k grant from Locality in the last year. This is the last tranche of grant funding available and his view was that the remaining funds will be sufficient to take the Neighbourhood Plan process to conclusion and adoption.

The Chair explained that the Forum was funded by Central Government grants for the development of a NP. The bulk of funding has been spent on consultancy fees to develop the Lee NP and that the Lee Forum had avoided additional significant costs because of the talent and contributions to the Lee Forum’s activity from volunteer committee members.

The accounts were approved.

**4. Guest speakers - Cllr John Paschoud, Chair of Lewisham Council's Strategic Planning Committee and Paul de Zylva, Chair of Quaggy Waterways Action Group**

**4.1 Cllr John Paschoud, Chair of Lewisham Council's Strategic Planning Committee**

By its nature the work of strategic planning committee is covered by a good deal of prescription on its decisions, which the public does not always understand. Applications are passed even when sympathies lie with the community objections because planning law allows no other outcome. When plans have been rejected some have gone to appeal either to the Mayor of London or the Secretary of State and been passed.

Cllr Paschoud highlighted Lewisham Council’s response to the Government radical proposed planning reforms and the consensus against them amongst the 33 London boroughs. Lewisham recognises that simplification of the planning process has merit but the proposed reforms for zoning will take decisions out of public view and thereby reduce local democracy and reduce the individuals and amenity groups ability to comment and object to development plans. The reforms concentrate in particular on the physical built environment neglecting place making and the environmental context. Local planners will face penalties and sanctions if the processes doesn’t meet specific time limits but without any additional resources that would speed up the planning application processes. Lewisham wants to see increased use of digital technologies to bring plans to life, to increase funding for amenity groups and to see the introduction of climate levies and the polluter pays principle on developers.

With the recent change of Secretary of State it is not clear what direction the reforms will take, but for now they have been paused.

**4.2 Paul de Zylva, Chair of Quaggy Waterways Action Group**

QWAG was formed in the early 1980s and has been successful in changing the approach to river restoration, so much so that the approach of taking rivers out of culverts and naturalising their flow with open ground offering flood alleviation areas is now the new orthodoxy for regulators and planners. The River Quaggy runs from Bromley through to Lewisham meeting the River Ravensbourne at Lewisham Town centre. In South East London the rivers still run free even though historically much of the rivers were encased in culverts. The River Quaggy can be a troublesome river with a risk of flooding. The examples of Chinbrook Meadows and Sutcliffe Park show how much benefit comes from river which opens up rivers from their concrete channels and allows natural flooding in open land to capture and store flood waters.

Paul’s view was that the whole planning approach needed to be upended with the environment and nature central to the planning process and not dealt with as separate standalone issue. And that doing this would result in a greater public benefit to places. The next iteration of Lewisham’s Local plan needs to reflect this and also address wildlife corridors and the lack of trees, particularly in Central Lewisham. Tree removal is too often done unnecessarily. The new Environment Bill will bring in a requirement to consult on tree removal.

Lee Green is an area with a public open space deficiency. Lee's Quaggy Trail is a project to open up a corridor for walking and cycling between Kidbrooke and Manor Park along the River Quaggy. Many of the sports grounds border the walk and the aim is to open up the river to the playing fields, and remove fences. At the moment money is needed for a feasibility study. Undertaking this feasibility study is a key first step for the project. The Campaign for Rural England has included the walk as one of its ten proposed new parks for London.

**5. Close**

Sarah warmly thanked all the guest speakers for their presentations. Thanks also to all the participants for attending on Zoom.