



## CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE FORUM

*This report explains the work of the Interim Steering Group until the point of designation by the City Council in September 2014.*

### Designation of the Forum

1. There was overwhelming support for the creation of a neighbourhood plan at the public meeting held to discuss it, and the Forum came into existence during 2013 and a small steering group have charted progress towards (a) the definition of the plan area and (b) the agreement of the City Council that the Forum should be designated. With this completed the constitution is now operative, and an annual meeting of the Forum has been called to elect a steering committee and to discuss progress.
2. I should like to pay tribute to the members of the interim steering group who have put in a huge amount of effort to bring the Forum to the stage that it is. Many members have expressed willingness to be elected to the new committee, but I should like to pay tribute to those who took some part, particularly Christopher Taylor who has served through the whole life of the group.

### Planning a course of action

3. Neighbourhood planning is a new exercise, a creation of the Localism Act. Although there is a framework established by the Act, and its associated statutory instruments, there is scope to undertake the process in ways that suit the neighbourhood. We have been fortunate to learn from fellow neighbourhood forums and to be supported by Oxford City Council and DCLG colleagues. There is an increasing amount of information about the process, and approaches that can be taken to it, and we have benefited from drawing on these in choosing our own methodology. The steering group has used the forum meetings to explain our approach as we have gone along.
4. The framework provides that we must consult about the plan that we preparing, that we must then go through a series of specified steps with a draft plan (including an inspection) before the plan can be approved for a referendum. We are working with the Council on meetings these stages.

### Policy Groups

5. We have decided that the heart of the process will be the consideration of areas of potential policy through separate policy groups. These groups, with open membership, have been undertaking informal consultations, meeting key

stakeholders, and preparing for our issues consultation. After consulting the public and the forum, the groups we have decided on are:

- Amenities and Green Spaces
  - Character and Identity
  - Education
  - Housing
  - Retail and Business
  - Transport
6. The groups are in different stages of preparedness. Some, such as transport, have built on existing networks and engaged with emerging strategies. Others are having to develop information from scratch. In itself, this tells us something about the nature of consideration of the issues facing Headington – some have been actively considered for some time, others somewhat left behind or treated generically in an Oxford or Oxfordshire context.

### **Communications, Collaboration and Consultation**

7. We are attempting to communicate through traditional media, social media and through various meetings and events. The Steering Group agreed a community engagement strategy, focused particularly on the issues consultation, but also to ensure that we reach different parts of the wider Headington community. We have used existing events to share information about neighbourhood planning, and to gather views from residents. The Forum is now represented on Headington Forward (a meeting of Institutions and Residents groups) and Headington Community Action. We are reaching out to employers and students through online versions of the consultation.
8. The Oxford Civic Society has facilitated a number of events for neighbourhoods in Oxford. Members of the forum have also engaged with other events touching on neighbourhood planning.

### **Treasurer's Report**

9. The constitution specifies that we should receive a treasurer's report, but misses the essential contradiction that until the forum has come into being, we have not had the ability to handle money. Headington Action have agreed that the Forum should have £12,000 available to it for the purposes of preparing the plan. This act has enabled the work so far to go ahead, and I wish to take this opportunity to thank them for putting so much faith in the process. We have also secured a grant of £ 6,425 via the Community Development Foundation to support the work of the forum.
10. At the next annual meeting we will present accounts outlining the expenditure of the forum.

### **Project Management Support**

11. In our discussions with Headington Action, having examined the approaches of other neighbourhood plans, we agreed that formal, professional project management support would be invaluable. We undertook a selection procedure and have appointed, jointly, a project manager (although as we

were not designated, the contract lies with Headington Action). This has been very successful, providing a balance to the voluntary activities of forum members. I would like to pay tribute to Adam Symonds for his work with us, enabling the forum to move forwards.

### **Next Steps**

12. Our most important next steps in our project plan are to complete the issues consultation and then consider all the information that gives us. We expect (and hope) that it will challenge our thinking; are these the biggest 18 issues for Headington? What thoughts do people have on these things, what other things should we chase – already we've had comments on twitter – the forms have only just gone out.
13. We have agreed that it should be the job of the steering committee, drawing in advice from specialists such as found in groups like Low Carbon Headington, to start the discussion on priorities between groups, and we will present these to the Forum. The Forum will decide what is planned for. We will then draft a plan, the policy groups and the committee, for re-presentation to the forum and for wider comments. The draft plan will then go through formal stages, including the City Council, before an examination and finally a referendum. There's a way to go, but we seem to have reached the end of the beginning.

Mike Ratcliffe  
Chair, Interim Steering Group