**Central Ealing Neighbourhood Forum Management Committee meeting Thursday 27 April 2017
Agenda item 5**

**Future role of the Forum**

**Introduction**

With the successful submission of the draft neighbourhood development plan (CENDP) to a public examination, the Central Ealing Neighbourhood Forum (CENF) has reached a milestone in its history. Policy investigation and formation has now largely been completed, and once the Plan has been put to the vote in the two referendums the Forum’s future role will alter. By December it will have been in existence for five years; under its constitution it will be dissolved by the end of 2018 unless formally extended. Though this may still seem some way away, the Forum needs to develop a view in good time about its functions in the period after the vote and make preparation for any future role. This paper sets out some of the options and proposes action to investigate them further.

**Background**

The Localism Act 2011 did not create the concept of local forums. It sought to engage local communities directly in the process of guiding the use of land in their neighbourhoods, by giving them powers to prepare policies which would become part of the local statutory plan for the development, regeneration and conservation of the area. Subject to criteria which define their representative nature, any community group, parish or town council can prepare a neighbourhood plan. The key test for such groups is that they should engage with as wide a cross-section of the local community as possible, including the formal participation of local businesses where the area is deemed by the Local Planning Authority to be primarily commercial in nature.

In the case of Ealing, both parts of the Metropolitan Town Centre were designated as ‘business areas’ for this purpose. The original stakeholders and constitution of the management committee were balanced to represent local residents, community organisations and businesses within the central Ealing ‘neighbourhood area’. This has remained unchanged since inception, though the Examiner has now recommended that the area within which people should have the vote in the referendums should be wider. The frequency of meetings of both the full Forum (open to all) and the management committee are also set by the constitution, but this has recently not been met.

**Changes since 2011**

Five years’ experience of neighbourhood planning has led to development of ideas about how it should operate in practice. The Neighbourhood Planning Bill 2016-17, which has reached its final stages before returning to the House of Commons (delays to the parliamentary timetable due the General Election permitting), makes provision for a ‘qualifying body’ (one such as CENF which has been designated to prepare a neighbourhood plan) to be kept informed of planning applications in its area, and sets down procedures for that body to submit future modifications to an adopted neighbourhood plan or the neighbourhood area.

Implementation of the provisions of an NDP is also affected by DCLG guidance on how the ‘neighbourhood portion’ of local Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) should be spent. This provides that a local authority should agree with the local community how 25% of CIL receipts should be allocated to local infrastructure, once both the local CIL charging schedule and the NDP are in place. A new date is awaited for the introduction of Ealing’s CIL, due from 5 April but deferred again without any announcement.

**Options**

There are several options for the future for the Forum, with a range of possibilities for its functions. Other than allowing the Forum to close, these could cover continuing to work as a joint body to

* Monitor implementation of CENDP policies
* Comment on planning applications in the area
* Pursue implementation of Recommended Actions in accordance with the Delivery Plan
* Recommend application of the CIL ‘neighbourhood portion’
* Review and recommend possible changes in the CENDP in the light of developments, particularly any review of the Ealing Local Plan
* Work with other stakeholders including local councillors to achieve agreed objectives for the town centre.

**Suggested action**

In order to examine these possibilities in more depth and to draw up recommendations for the full Forum to consider, it is proposed that a small working group should conduct a study of a full range of these and other options and report back to the management committee with a recommended course of action to put to a full Forum before the end of the year. The brief for the group should include the options above, and be based on the considered views of stakeholders as well as experience elsewhere. Its work could include

* A survey of members (ie those signed up to the Forum mailing list) to invite their views and contributions
* Discussions with major stakeholders such as UWL, Make it Ealing/BID, LBE, local residents’ associations and voluntary associations including ECVS.

It should also consider whether the area of eligibility for participation in the management committee should be extended to residents and businesses in the wider referendum area as well as those now within the neighbourhood area.

The committee is asked to consider these suggestions and if agreed nominate members to participate in the work of the proposed working group.

AHJM
19/4/17