

Application to redesignate the Neighbourhood Forum for South Newnham

Background

The Localism Act 2011 made provision for local communities to create plans and policies to guide development within a designated area. Neighbourhood plans, once approved through referendum, become part of the statutory development plan and carry the same weight as a Local Plan in determining planning applications.

The legislation requires local planning authorities to provide such advice or assistance to qualifying bodies as, in all the circumstances, they consider appropriate for the purpose of, or in connection with, facilitating the making of proposals for neighbourhood development plans orders.

The initial stage of preparing a neighbourhood plan is for prospective neighbourhood forums to seek the formal designation of both the neighbourhood area and the forum. Applications must be made to the Council, who are required to publicise the applications for a specified period and invite comments before determining the applications.

In order to be designated as a neighbourhood forum, it must be demonstrated that the body:

- i. Is established for the purpose of promoting or improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of an area that consists of or includes the neighbourhood concerned;
- ii. Has a membership which is open to people who either live in the area, who work there, or who are ward councillors for the area has at least 21 members each of whom falls into one of these categories; and
- iii. Has a written constitution.

The National Neighbourhood Plan Regulations state that a neighbourhood forum ceases to have effect after five years when the group must reapply for designation. There is no similar limitation placed upon the designation of a neighbourhood area.

South Newnham Neighbourhood Forum

In January 2017, a group of residents from the South Newnham area applied for the designation of South Newnham Neighbourhood Area and the South Newnham Neighbourhood Forum. Following public consultation on both the neighbourhood area and the forum Cambridge City Council approved both the neighbourhood area and the forum in March 2017.

Since 2017 the neighbourhood forum has been actively preparing a neighbourhood plan for their area and have had meetings to discuss their draft plan with officers from Cambridge City Council and more recently the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service.



The group that formed the South Newnham Neighbourhood Forum wishes to continue to prepare a neighbourhood plan for their area and voted at their annual general meeting in March 2022 to reapply to Cambridge City Council for redesignation of their forum. A copy of their application is within Appendix A of this report. Officers consider that the application for redesignation of the neighbourhood forum meets the requirements set out in the regulations for being an appropriate group to continue as a neighbourhood forum.

In accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan Regulations, a six-week public consultation was undertaken by the Council, ending at 5.00pm on Monday 21 June 2022. The application documents were placed on the Council's website and all relevant statutory bodies were notified. In addition, the neighbourhood forum was contacted to assist in the publicity of the consultation and placed posters around the designated neighbourhood area. The council must now make a decision on whether the forum should be redesignated within 13 weeks of the start of the consultation – 9 August.

Consultation results

A total of 11 comments were received on the redesignation of the neighbourhood forum. 5 of the comments received were supporting the redesignation of the neighbourhood forum stating that the forum had a good knowledge of the local area and had worked hard on the emerging neighbourhood plan.

There were also 6 objecting to the redesignation considering the forum a group of individuals who did not speak on behalf of the whole community. Some considered that to be democratic there should be elections to become a member of the forum and by this means the forum would have a mandate to speak on behalf of the community. Decisions made by the forum should be transparent. It was felt by a number of the objectors that the forum had in the past had too much influence in the planning process.

In response to these objections, it should be clearly stated that the role of a neighbourhood forum is to prepare a neighbourhood plan. The regulations governing neighbourhood planning state that a forum must have an open membership allowing anyone who lives or works in the area to become a member. It is not a requirement to be elected to become a member of the forum. The membership list provided in the application shows a geographical range of members.

The existing forum is currently preparing a neighbourhood plan and will in the near future have to carry out a six-week public consultation on its draft plan. This will provide an opportunity for everyone in the South Newnham area to comment on the proposals put forward in the plan. The forum must strive to reach all the different groups in the community for their opinions on the plan during this consultation.

When submitting their neighbourhood plan to Cambridge City Council the forum is required by the national legislation to prepare a consultation statement setting out how they have consulted their local community on their plan and responded to any representations made during the pre-submission consultation. They must also carry out an Equalities Assessment of the policies in their plan. Both these documents will be submitted alongside the submission version of their plan and will be provided to the independent examiner who carries out the examination of the plan.



The policies in the emerging neighbourhood plan will only begin to have weight in determining planning applications in the South Newnham area once the plan is submitted to Cambridge City Council and a further six weeks of consultation is required to be carried out which is then followed by the independent examination of the plan.

Ultimately there will be a referendum of the local area where everyone who is eligible to vote will have the opportunity to decide whether the neighbourhood plan should be used to determine planning applications in the South Newnham area.

The Government is currently making available a grant for £5000 for the redesignation of a neighbourhood forum. Cambridge City Council will be able to apply for this grant once the South Newnham forum is redesignated. In addition, for every neighbourhood plan that proceeds to a referendum a further £20,000 can be claimed.

Appendices

- Appendix A: Application for the redesignation of the South Newnham Neighbourhood Forum.
- Appendix B: Summary of consultation responses received to the neighbourhood forum consultation.

