

Soho Neighbourhood Forum

Constitution

1. OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSE

1.1 A Soho Neighbourhood Area (SNA) was applied for by the Soho Society which is the recognised amenity society for Soho operating for over 40 years and which is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. The SNA (as indicated on the map at Annex A) was designated by Westminster City Council (WCC) on 17th May 2013. The area has also been designated as a business neighbourhood area by WCC and therefore the neighbourhood forum will seek to reflect in its membership this fact and to ensure that a balance is maintained between business and residential membership during the life of the forum. The Soho Society prepared this constitution and applied to establish the Soho Neighbourhood Forum with its existing members who are both residential and business as the founding members. However, the intention is that the SNF, once designated, is a completely separate and independent body in its own right.

1.2 The SNF is established for an initial period of 5 years from its formal designation by Westminster City Council and may be extended for further periods if so designated by WCC at or towards the end of the initial period.

1.3 The SNF is specifically established to promote and improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the SNA and exercise any powers which attach to the SNF as set out in the Localism Act 2011. This can include producing a neighbourhood plan, a neighbourhood development order, a community right to build order or identifying assets of community value and any subsequent powers or responsibilities that are given to it whilst in operation. It may also choose to comment on any plans and proposals in relation to the area which may enhance the SNA such as transport and health plans, individual planning applications and other proposals which are likely to have a significant impact on the area. It will also exercise its role in relation to the use of community infrastructure levy (CIL) funds and may work to produce a schedule of locally desirable community infrastructure projects.

1.4 Its purpose and aspiration is to ascertain, co-ordinate and reflect the views of the community and use the neighbourhood forum processes to improve the functioning of the area. It will consult widely on, amongst other things, ways to protect, preserve and enhance the Soho Conservation Area, make the area more sustainable, have a well planned and maintained public realm which responds well to the high volumes of workers and visitors to Soho, support efforts to reduce crime and disorder, enhance its economic performance for local businesses, improve quality of life for residents, help to provide housing to enhance social cohesion and support measures which improve air quality and reduce noise nuisance. The success of the SNF is dependent upon involving as many interests as possible within the area and establishing trust and goodwill between them. A neighbourhood plan will only be produced following proper consultation to provide evidence that policies within it are supported by residents and businesses and achievable, but in an area as complex as Soho this will take time and careful consideration.

1.5 The SNF, the Forum Steering Group (FSG) and individual members will seek at all times to act with selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and honesty and do so on the basis

of equality between and respect for all persons regardless of gender, age, race (including ethnicity and nationality) sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability and socio-economic status.

1.6 It will seek to avoid conflicts of interest and any affiliation with any organisation or political party and to act in a manner independent of any individual, organisation or body, but to consult with relevant parties as required.

1.7 Where the boundaries of the SNA adjoin other designated neighbourhood areas the SNF will seek to establish mechanisms for joint working and planning on any 'cross boundary' issues.

2. MEMBERSHIP

2. 1 Membership is voluntary and open to every person over 16 (a member) who:

Lives in the Soho Neighbourhood Area (SNA)

Works in the SNA

Is an elected City of Westminster Councillor for the ward which includes the SNA

2. 2 As at the date of designation the existing residential and business members of the Soho Society are taken collectively to be the founding members of the forum. They live and work right across the SNA and also represent many of its business sectors.

2. 3 Residents, organisations representing residents, businesses and individuals working in those business, provided they are all located within the SNA, are invited to become members.

2.4 Each member whether an organisation, business, resident or employee has one vote. They become members by contacting the Forum and providing their details or by doing so at any public meetings of the Forum. The FSG will keep a list of all members. They may then participate in the activities of the SNF including attending meetings of the SNF, discussing proposals and plans and voting on resolutions

2. 5 Subject to members having provided their details to show that they meet the requirement to either live or work in the area they may be contacted from time to time by the SNF and be invited to participate in events and meetings in connection with the forum and give their views on proposals and plans connected with the forum. Whilst members are entitled to speak at events and meetings the person chairing also has the right to impose time limits on the number and length of speeches in order to effectively progress the business of the event or meeting.

2. 6 There will be an inaugural general meeting and thereafter at least a yearly Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the forum and any other general meetings (GM) which the FSG decide may be required, at which all members of the forum are entitled to attend and vote. In addition a general meeting may be called by 10% of the members or at least 20 individual members whichever is the greater. Notice of an AGM or GM will be given at least 15 working days in advance of the meeting and will specify the items to be discussed in the agenda. At the AGM the FSG will provide a written report of its work over the year and the decisions taken on behalf of the SNF. The AGMs and any other public meetings held, give legitimacy to the Forum Steering Group, its work and the plans that they and any working groups provide.

2.7 All the members of the FSG who wish to stand for a further year will be subject to re-election at each AGM.

2.8 Any proposal to alter this constitution will require a majority of 75% of votes of those present and entitled to vote at an AGM or other general meeting.

3. FORUM STEERING GROUP (FSG)

3.1 The SNF will be run by a Forum Steering Group (FSG) which will co-ordinate, implement and monitor the work of the forum including the potential production in due course of a Soho Neighbourhood Plan (SNP). The FSG will speak on behalf of the forum and also publicise, prioritise and schedule the work of the forum.

3.2 The FSG is a working committee of sixteen forum members (all of whom have a vote) elected at the first inaugural general meeting of the SNF and will be drawn from all sections of the membership both residential and business acting in a voluntary capacity. Eight members will be from the residential community and eight from the business community. In order that all types of business are represented on the FSG it will seek to have three members from small or medium sized businesses (SMEs), two from larger businesses, two from land holding interests and one representing local BIDS. Any vacancy which may occur on the FSG between AGMs will be covered by co-optation until the next AGM, subject to ensuring these proportions are maintained by such co-options whenever possible.

3.3 It is expected that once elected that FSG members will take their role seriously and play an active part in the forum and give apologies whenever they are unable to attend.

3.4 The FSG has the power to co-opt non-voting individuals with specialist skills or invite such individuals to specific meetings and the FSG may set up working groups for specific projects or tasks in relation the SNF. All personal, financial or pecuniary interests which might influence the way an individual FSG member (or member of a working group) may approach and take decisions must be declared and will be recorded in a register of interests.

3.5 At the inaugural meeting the sixteen members of the FSG will be elected. Members may nominate themselves or other members. The Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary and Treasurer will be elected amongst the sixteen FSG members. The FSG will normally meet at least quarterly and quorum for meetings of the FSG will be seven. It will keep proper minutes of its decisions which will be open to public inspection.

3.6 FSG decisions and public meetings of the SNF will be made by consensus whenever possible but where there is a vote required at a meeting decisions will be passed by a simple majority of those members present. If it is necessary the Chair, Deputy Chair or in their absence the person chairing the meeting will have a second and casting vote. 3.7 FSG members will communicate the work of the FSG, its meetings and its plans and proposals as widely as possible in an open and fair way to members of the SNF and as widely as possible to all within the SNA. This may include posting notices and the use of a dedicated website or pages or links on existing websites, email and other electronic methods.

3.8 Members of the SNF may attend as observers at any meeting of the FSG but may not vote at it. The FSG reserves the right to exclude observers where a majority of the FSG members present deem this as necessary for the effective conduct of the business of the meeting.

3.9 The AGM has the power to elect, or remove by a vote of no confidence, any member of the FSG. It also has the right to vote to suspend from membership any member who brings the forum into disrepute.

3.10 Any complaints concerning the conduct of a member in respect of their work or activities for the forum shall be made in writing to the Secretary who will be responsible for investigating the complaint and ensuring that it is dealt with fairly taking account of the circumstances it relates to.

4. FORUM FINANCES

4.1 The forum can raise funds for its activities by one or more of the following methods as the FSG shall so decide:

- A) Charging membership fees on an individual basis provided that no one in necessitous circumstances is barred from becoming a member because of the cost of membership
- B) Fundraising and submitting applications to grant awarding bodies for appropriate funds or support
- C) Working in partnership with organisations which have funds to spend in the SNA to support the forum
- D) By all other means that are in keeping with the role of the forum and which are to be spent on its activities

4.2 The treasurer will establish a bank account and hold funds in the name of the forum and account for them at each AGM with payments requiring at least two signatories drawn from a list of signatories decided by the FSG.

4.3 At the time that it becomes necessary to dissolve the forum, and following a vote at a General Meeting to do so, any assets or monies held by the SNF shall be paid to a successor forum or in the absence of any such forum to local charities. Where required to do so by legislation or the terms of a grant, any remaining monies after all debts, charges and bills have been settled will be returned to the provider on a fair and equitable basis.