

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM – another view

Another perspective on the challenges and opportunities presented by the Localism Act
Jim Humphris – 6th February 2012

Summary

Hugh Lake, in his excellent summary paper on the Localism Act, dated 27th January says: “*The new Localism Act provides a framework for local people to be involved in the drawing up of a Local Plan. This will become the basis for decisions by local government which affect their area..... Residents have to decide **if** they want to set up a Neighbourhood Forum to develop a plan.*”

This brief paper takes another view of the issues ... the ‘**IF**’ issues.

If you

- Have a clear vision of what your neighbourhood really wants to achieve
- Have a specific campaign to promote or to oppose a particular major development
- Can define and agree a meaningful geographical area with sufficient size, need, social mix, motivation [consider your local Parish area as a starting point] ...
- Can muster a genuine cross section of the local community and neighbourhood, including businesses, churches, schools, residents and obtain recognition and commitment from all (ideally) or most other community groups in the designated area
- Can secure the support and active involvement of your local government and parish councillors
- Can win support and commitment to help from lawyers, planners, architects, marketing, communications and other professionals
- Have a broad understanding of local planning rules and procedures; as well as familiarity with the Local Development Framework, the London Plan and the Localism Act ...
- Can set up, run and mobilise a significant contacts database
- Have a core team to create and drive the Forum, liaising with neighbouring Forums, groups, parishes, civic societies as well as with local government officers and planners...
- Have a core team that has considerable energy, effort, resourcefulness, determination, persistence and patience and who are vigorous serial networkers and communicators
- Can do all the above without local or central government funding and
- Can accept that despite your best efforts you might not achieve your objectives

Then you might find it worthwhile to

- Form a group to develop a Neighbourhood Plan or
- Form a smaller and less ambitious group to specifically inject a considered (and mandated) Neighbourhood view into the Local Development Framework or
- Lend your expertise to support your local Neighbourhood Forum.

If you do not create a Neighbourhood Plan you will

- Still be able to have some influence on local planning issues via Neighbourhood Development and Community Right to Build Orders, via CAACs, as campaigners and via other pressure groups but
- Inevitably have less influence in the planning process!

One final thought!

BIG is probably BEST (economies of scale, recognition, mandate-worthy, effectiveness) unless you are just fighting a specific campaign! Neighbourhood Forums are not about campaigns – they are long haul, ‘Big Society’ projects.

End: jph