

Welcome to our first post-referendum AGM. Some of you will be members of the Forum, others not. If not, I hope after this evening you will be inspired to become a member and get more involved in taking the plan forward.

As I walked into the counting room at The Parade Community Centre as a Counting Observer on the evening of December 1st last year and watched as the polling boxes were carried in, I confess I was a wee bit nervous.

On the one hand I was confident that the plan content was as good as it could be, and I think I've got a pretty good grasp of what its strengths and weaknesses are... we'll talk more about those later...

We'd done a good job of publicising the referendum – the Electoral Services Poll Cards dropping on doorsteps certainly got peoples' attention – but we had also delivered leaflets to every household, hung large banners around Hoylake and sent out press releases to local press and on social media; all helped by some timely BBC Radio Merseyside coverage.

And we could finally put behind us the most onerous aspects of it all... the procedural and legal challenges of the process itself... long delays, unpicking conflicting advice from government agencies and consultants, meeting after meeting... drafting, redrafting and redrafting again... I can tell you it was at times utterly dispiriting and it very nearly sunk us... more than once!

But on the other hand, despite five years of very hard work, there were two outstanding questions: had we done enough to explain what a Neighbourhood Forum is, and had we done enough to explain what the Neighbourhood Development Plan – the NDP – is about?

In the end there was a clear 85.6 percent voting “Yes”.

But that didn’t mean we’d done enough to answer those two important questions... and I’m sure a number of you still have questions about the role of the forum and more importantly how the NDP works.

We know we still have a lot of work to do to get the role of the forum and the NDP better understood, not just by the wider public but also by the Council... we need to ensure the NDP is applied correctly by them ... since it is now a statutory part of the planning process.

But this will be easier now... because without all of that hugely time consuming and onerous legal and procedural “stuff” that we had to deal with while making the current, first NDP... the long delays, conflicting advice, frustration and depleted energy levels... we can focus on what really matters... working with you to concentrate on two key things:

- 1. Monitoring the NDP in action, ensuring it is understood and applied correctly and;**
- 2. Preparing for its next iteration in 2020.**

On the first of these two, I'll talk a little about what that entails.

Well, put simply its about monitoring proposals that come forward that affect the NDP area.

Just this week we have a good example... some of you may have seen our objection to the proposed car parking charges, which is highly relevant to the NDP insofar as it does, in our view, undermine the primary objectives of the NDP and would have a significant adverse impact on the local economy.

I hope you've had a chance to read our letter of objection to the proposed scheme... it's ten pages long so I won't go into it in detail now but please do read it if you have not done so already.

But the main point is this... Hoylake Community Planning Forum is not a campaigning group in the traditional sense.

We're certainly not here just to object to proposals, we're here to support good ideas too... and even help to make them happen... if they accord with the plan. We can attract landlords and developers to take good ideas forward.

Put simply we measure any proposals against the policies and objectives of the NDP as well as other evidence, and this car parking proposal is a good example of that...

In this document we've provided evidence from government and other agency studies such as the Association for Town Centre Management and the RAC Foundation, including local retail and economic data, census data and more from the likes of Experian, Roger Tym Consultants and GVA.

In this way we provide the most robust argument possible, rather than relying on purely emotive or anecdotal arguments which can be easily dismissed.

Individual letters of representation do carry more weight than petitions which are so easily ignored in the planning process, but they too must have meaningful content.

If you want to protest to the council that you don't agree with parking charge proposals because you think it will harm local trade ... or that cars will block your private driveway... or the council should be saving money in other ways, or that government cuts are behind all of this, or that this councillor or that MP is a waste of space... that's fine if you think it will make a difference, but it's not what a Community Planning Forum is about.

We will always use evidence and meaningful consultation, which is where the real power of the NDP as a statutory document kicks in. And we need your help with protecting and developing that principle as we move forwards.

We already know about some other issues we'll face: the ongoing issue of the Presbyterian Church in Alderley Road will no doubt come back to the table before long. Then there's the proposed Golf Resort...

And what will happen to the Old Town Hall building now that the Job Centre have announced they will be leaving Hoylake.

What about the demise (and possible future rise, who knows?) of the night time economy in Hoylake.

What other unforeseen issues may come up?

What if the Co-op eventually sell up... opening all sorts of possibilities for a Town Square redevelopment?

We may on occasion need professional help and support with all of that but we've not got much funding so we need to do as much as we can ourselves as volunteers.

If any of you want to help us gathering evidence, data, trawling the internet for statistics in support of any representations we may make, please let us know.

This kind of research is a valuable part of the process and if you are a geek like me you'll actually find it really interesting!

Then there's the second aspect of what we need to do: preparing for 2020.

We need you to look at the plan, and tell us what you think is missing, or what could be better. Do we need to change some of the wording or the language to make it simpler and more easily understood or relevant? Can you help us with that?

Do we need more about provision for children and young people; elderly care provision; night time economy; the environment?

There's certainly some aspects of the plan that were removed by the examiner pre-referendum because we did not, in his view, provide sufficient evidence for them to be included; for example a shopfront design guide; more about North Parade regeneration and a listing of local built heritage assets.

We do of course still have to demonstrate that we are doing things correctly, gathering and providing evidence and undertaking meaningful consultation for any new ideas and policies that may come forward.

We need your help with all that too.

Most of all, we need you to be champions of the NDP and of the Forum. Tell people about it; help people to understand that we're here to make things happen as well as to protect the best of our existing assets.

If you need a simple paragraph that sums up what we're about, try this:

First and foremost, while wanting to celebrate and protect the best of Hoylake, we recognise that some change is inevitable and necessary in order to keep any town or village 'alive'.

And we believe local residents and businesses should have a much greater influence on future decisions around **how** that change happens, **when** it happens, and **what it looks like**.

It really is that simple.