

Hoylake Vision response to conflict of interest concerns

1. In October, Wirral Council re-designated Hoylake Vision as the Community Planning Forum for Hoylake for a period of five years
2. This will enable the forum to continue our work to update the current Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) which is due for renewal in 2020
3. Objectives, priorities or policies cannot be included in the NDP unless they are supported by evidence and public consultation
4. The current NDP was adopted in December 2016 following independent examination and a public referendum overseen by the Electoral Commission in which 86% of those voting supported the adoption of the NDP into the council's Local Plan
5. During the council's consultation process for the re-designation of the forum three objections were received on the basis of concerns about a conflict of interest with members of the management group being members of the Beacon Steering Group and of Hoylake Village Life CIC. I will address these concerns now
6. It is widely known that members of the management group and of the wider forum are involved in other community groups and this has been declared openly at previous public meetings; that is reaffirmed tonight

7. To be absolutely clear, the management group of the forum **cannot** make decisions on individual planning applications; this can ONLY be done by the Local Authority
8. As a result **there can be no conflict of interest** since we do not have decision-making powers, either individually or collectively
9. The role of the management group of the forum is limited to ensuring the smooth running of the forum; to organise public meetings like this one; to monitor the application of the NDP by the council and to update the NDP with new objectives, priorities and policies in consultation with the forum and the community at large
10. The management group makes representations to the council on individual planning applications on behalf of the wider forum **but these can only be based on objectives, priorities and policies in the NDP**
11. Indeed, **any** member of the public can make a representation on a planning application and it is right that members of the forum, including the management group, are also able to exercise their rights in this way as individuals
12. To repeat and to be absolutely clear, this forum **does not have the powers to make decisions to approve or refuse planning applications; only the Local Authority can do this.**

14. Under the terms of the Localism Act 2012 a community planning forum must have a membership that is representative of the wider community and must be open to all who live or work within the NDP area
15. This rightly includes people who have a business or who are involved with other community groups in the area, including elected representatives; indeed there would be nothing to stop any residential or commercial property owner being on the forum since membership of the forum or the management group does not confer any powers to approve or reject planning applications
16. It would be unconstitutional for membership of the forum or the management group to exclude anyone with business interests or involvement in other community activities within the NDP area
17. As for involvement with The Beacon Steering Group, we have put in many hours of volunteer time attending meetings to move the Beacon project forwards
18. The project has gained widespread support, with over 250 supporting representations and only ten objections on the council's planning pages
19. It has is clear in the objections to the re-designation of the forum that those objectors also object to the existence of this forum more generally, the Beacon scheme and also, to the broader work of Hoylake Village Life, which is also volunteer led

21. HVL have a lease on this room. Hoylake Vision pay a fee for use of the space to HVL, as will other organisations, businesses and individuals. After covering costs, it is hoped that HVL will reinvest surplus funds from such activity, including the Community Cinema nights and other events, to make this wonderful space even better as a public facility, pending further development of the scheme
22. But tonight is a Hoylake Vision meeting. We want to start a positive conversation about the potential benefits of a list of Assets of Community Value; if you still have concerns about conflicts of interest then please take it up with the Local Authority
23. So let's go ahead with this public meeting about Assets of Community Value and we'll have questions later, but I hope that answers any questions about potential or perceived conflicts of interest of which, I repeat, there are none, nor can there be any.