

*Alex Nicoll's opening remarks to public meeting on 31 January 2023, launching public consultation on revisions to the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan.*

I shall just say a few words about why we are all here and then I will hand over to Janine Griffis who will present some of our thoughts about how we might modify the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan, and then we will open the meeting up for your questions and issues.

So first of all, I'm Alex Nicoll, and I'm the chair of the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum. The Forum is a group of local volunteers, and we set it up nine years ago under the terms of the Localism Act, which enabled communities to have a bigger say in shaping their local areas. The way that you do this is by writing a Neighbourhood Plan, which contains planning policies like those of a local plan, in our case Camden's.

There is an elaborate process attached, but in short, we wrote a Plan, it took four years, after which it was approved first by an independent examiner, then by Camden and finally in a public referendum in 2018, with 91% support. It derived entirely from very wide public consultation. Though it's less comprehensive than Camden's, it does carry the same statutory weight as a local plan.

The Plan is still relatively new, and we think it's been pretty effective, so you might ask why we would be so crazy as to bring upon ourselves the very large amount of work involved in opening it up again. There's nothing that says we have to do this. There are a couple of reasons. First, I think we need to be sure that it still carries a mandate from the community. You can't just assume that. And second, life does not stand still. Since we began our work on the Plan, the demand for sustainability and for alternatives to fossil fuels has increased enormously. So how can we translate that into our planning policies? Also, the lives of Hampstead residents have changed because of the pandemic. Does that mean that anything should change in our Plan?

Just a couple of caveats before I hand over to Janine. A Neighbourhood Plan is a planning document. Planning policies are the main activity of the Forum. Of course there are big issues that are related to that, like traffic, the local economy, and so on, and no doubt we will be talking about them shortly. You'll find that these issues are very much in our thoughts and they are included in the Neighbourhood Plan, but the plain fact is that our mandate and influence in the areas of transport and commerce, for example, are limited. So we don't want to build false expectations that we can deal with everyone's issues, and we don't want to pretend that we're something that we're not.

So now I'm going to hand over to Janine Griffis, who as the founding chair of the Forum led the creation of the Plan. She will talk about the Plan and some themes of possible changes to it.