



## **Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum**

### **Application to London Borough of Camden to be redesignated as a qualifying body for the purposes of the Localism Act 2011**

Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum (STNF) was granted designation as a neighbourhood forum in 2013 and wishes to be redesignated. Since its establishment, STNF has carried out extensive engagement with residents of and businesses located in the neighbourhood area. In 2016 it published and consulted on a Regulation 14 draft of a Neighbourhood Plan. However, during that time the planning context for the area changed and the Plan was put on hold. Since then, STNF has been meeting monthly and holding special events and workshops, particularly on environmental issues. STNF is now ready to revisit the Plan, revise and update it, taking into consideration the considerable effect of the Knowledge Quarter, which has grown rapidly since its December 2014 inception.

This application explains how STNF meets the conditions contained in section 61F(5) of the 1990 Act.

STNF meets the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 to be recognised as a qualifying body. It was established with more than 21 people to promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of Somers Town in a manner which reflects the diversity, character and inclusivity of the area and includes people who live, work or study in the neighbourhood area and local councillors.

**Name** – Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum

**Constitution** – Appended below – adopted at meeting on 12 February 2013; draft amended constitution, to be adopted at our November AGM, also appended below.

**Name of neighbourhood area** – Somers Town (boundaries defined in map below)

**Statement of purpose** – The constitution states the purpose of STNF is to promote sustainable development in the neighbourhood of Somers Town by:

- Promoting sustainable means of achieving social well-being, economic growth and regeneration;
- Improving the opportunities for and abilities of local people to secure jobs in the local and London labour market;
- Promoting a distinctive, healthy, safe and sustainable environment where people feel valued, secure and committed;
- Encouraging young people to realise their potential and play a full and active part in the local community;
- Bringing people together and celebrating cultural diversity.

STNF aims to achieve its purpose through the creation of a neighbourhood plan. We have worked in an open and transparent way to engage with people across the identified neighbourhood area. The results of the engagement are being used to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan that will balance the different concerns of the people who live and work in the area. In particular, it will balance the needs of residents living in an area of high deprivation, with the needs of a growing knowledge economy. Preparing the plan is the principal focus of STNF, but it also concerns itself with other issues that affect the area. In particular, it has responded to an unprecedented number of consultations and planning applications in and around the Plan area over recent years.

### **Background and next steps**

Since 2013, STNF has held open monthly meetings, including online meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have also held walkabouts, workshops and larger meetings. Regular meetings are advertised online and through word of mouth. We produce flyers to advertise larger meetings and workshops.

From 2017 to 2018 we worked with Voluntary Action Camden, UCL and the Environmental Law Foundation to hold an inquiry and produce a [report and action plan](#) on the cumulative impacts of development on the health and wellbeing of local people. The experiences of approximately 1,200 local people were recorded over three days at sessions, resulting in an inquiry report and action plan to try and protect our mental and physical health in the face of more development.

In 2018 we worked with UCL's Engineering Exchange to better understand our local [air quality](#) and design actions to improve our air in Somers Town.

In 2021 Somers Town became one of only two Future Neighbourhoods in London, with significant investment from the GLA, Camden and other partners to ready ourselves for climate change by 2030. Alongside Somers Town Community Association, STNF has been a key player in developing the [area-based strategy](#) for the programme, and we want to embed that strategy into the Neighbourhood Plan. This would be a significant undertaking that would influence all aspects of the Plan, from housing to air quality to green spaces to jobs.

Recently, we have taken time to review the Draft Plan. There are existing policies on Local Economy and Employment; Meanwhile Use; Movement; Housing and Building; Environment, Green Space and Air Quality; and Community and Cultural Facilities. As well as updating these policies to reflect the new planning context for the area, including the Knowledge Quarter and Future Neighbourhood 2030 status, we want to include two new policies.

We have long known that people in Somers Town have significantly shorter life expectancies than those living a few miles up the road. Also, that Somers Town residents are more likely to have life-debilitating conditions than others in the borough. We would like to address these issues in a Health and Wellbeing policy.

Secondly, STNF has held meetings and workshops on Somers Town's heritage and are supportive of the People's Museum: Somers Town. A Heritage policy would celebrate the built heritage of the area, much of which is either under threat from development or as yet undervalued, as well as understanding the importance people – past and present – in creating a sense of place. Community identity and history plays such a crucial role in creating a sense

of belonging and diversity, especially in a highly urban area. The history of a place both subconsciously and subtly as well as visibly shapes how a community behaves, what they value, and how they relate to others who live around them. Thus heritage plays an important role in integrating that communal identity which in turn helps deliver more equitable and sustainable economic development.

To move the Plan forward we are revitalising the existing Business, Employment, Education and Training (BEET) subgroup, and creating new subgroups on Health, Heritage and Climate. We are also trialling a subgroup for Somers Town's many VCS organisations as one way of reaching and involving all sections of the community on an ongoing basis, harnessing the user bases of organisations that currently deliver for specific age or ethnic groups.

We have recently received grants from the Future Neighbourhoods programme as well as Somers Town Big Local to pay for professional support in plan-making, and intend to hold a series of events, workshops, walks and talks over the coming year to reach as many people who live and work in our neighbourhood as possible, and to write a Plan that reflects their vision.

### **Membership and support from the community**

Our constitution states: "Membership of the forum shall be open to all residents living in the area, local ward councillors, and all businesses and civil society organisations operating in the area."

We have **resident members** from across our area, including members who play a lead or significant role in their tenants' or residents' group. Our resident committee members come from across the neighbourhood and are listed in Appendix 1 (not for publication). We also make efforts to reach out to those Somers Town estates that are not regularly represented at Forum meetings, attending TRA AGMs or arranging 1:1 meetings with TRA chairs or other residents.

Since 2013, STNF has engaged with a wide range of tenants' and residents' groups, voluntary and community sector organisations, faith groups, public sector organisations, schools and colleges and businesses that reflect the diversity of Somers Town as well as the activity that is taking place in and around our area. A list of the organisations and groups that have been represented at our meetings or expressed interested in and support for the Forum to date is attached as Appendix 2.

Somers Town is a diverse area and that **diversity** is reflected in our membership and committee members. We have recently amended our constitution to include a section on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and propose to adopt this at our November 2024 AGM. We will review at least annually the membership of the committee and act accordingly to ensure we have a diverse and inclusive team; we started this review process in June 2024. We already know that we need to reach out to seldom heard groups during this next phase of our work to canvass their views. In particular, we need to make sure that we hear from young people and will be contacting local **schools** and **youth groups** as the Plan develops.

We know from the 2021 Census that 21.3% of residents in the Plan area identify as Bangladeshi. Several of our current committee members are of Bangladeshi heritage and can help in advising us on the places, organisations, times and methods to best reach their community. We are confident that, by following their advice, we will have good

representation from the Bangladeshi community at our forthcoming Plan workshops. Some 14.0% of residents in the Plan area identified as Black African in the 2021 Census, with many of Somali heritage. We need to work harder to make sure that Somali and other Black African ideas and concerns are reflected in the Plan and will contact the British Somali Community Centre and other Black African societies to see what they suggest.

We have good contacts with local **faith groups** and will build on these in our next phase of engagement to ensure that Plan workshops are advertised at local churches and mosques and their members are encouraged to get involved. We have been working closely with St Mary's Church on Eversholt Street during the recent threat to its building. We have close links with the Faithful Companions of Jesus, one of whose members regularly attends our meetings. We have worked with St Aloysius Church to ensure access during recent changes to Phoenix Road and Eversholt Street. We have members who attend and have strong links with local mosques and who we have signposted during discussions with developers including HS2. This summer Slaney Devlin's work with STNF was recognised at the first Camden Faith & Belief Awards.

A significant proportion (19.5%) of people in Somers Town are **disabled** under the Equality Act. We have disabled committee members and so ensure that all our meetings are held in accessible spaces. Somers Town is a neighbourhood that is constantly changing, and this can be particularly challenging for those with disabilities. Bus diversions and roadworks can make the area inaccessible; the changing streetscape can be confusing for those with learning disabilities or dementia. Over the last decade we have done walkabouts with disability groups including Attitude is Everything, Camden Disability Action and Camden People First, working with developers to lessen the multiple barriers to getting around that exist.

We continue to work with a wide range of **voluntary and community sector organisations**, who bring a wealth of experience and expertise to our meetings on topics. Our Climate, Heritage, Health and BEET subgroups will be chaired by members from the voluntary and community sector. They will draw on their expertise and networks as well as residents' lived experience. As mentioned above, we are also trialling a VCS subgroup to help our reach during the more focused consultation phase of our plan-making.

In terms of the **public sector**, our local councillors are permanent members of the Forum and regularly attend and input at meetings. Council officers attend as part of the consultation process to changes in Somers Town, particularly as part of the Future Neighbourhoods programme. We've also worked directly with the GLA as part of FN 2030. TfL update the Forum to changes to transport in and around the area, most recently on changes to key bus routes, and attend meetings on occasion.

We are keen not to duplicate the work of the Safer Neighbourhoods Team, but some committee members sit on both groups so that communication channels exist between the two groups. We did attend meetings with the team and police after the shooting outside St Aloysius Church last year.

**Businesses** are a key part of our neighbourhood. The Knowledge Quarter is centred in Somers Town, and the British Library and Francis Crick Institute are important permanent members. The Plan area includes two neighbourhood centres: Chalton Street and Eversholt Street, both of which we'd like to see thrive. We work with Euston BID to try and maximise the benefits to local businesses and ensure that they stay relevant and useful to residents.

Major construction projects are a fact of life locally, and we spend significant time responding to consultations or attending construction working groups to try and make sure that local benefits are maximised and construction impacts are minimised.

### **Engagement strategy**

From our previous work, including recent work with the Future Neighbourhoods programme, we know there are significant barriers to engagement in Somers Town, including language barriers, time barriers, and a lack of access to technology. Word of mouth remains the most important communication channel, and we may employ local community researchers to go door-to-door, revealing local concerns. We will hold a series of events to publicise the work of the forum and the emerging Plan, and workshops to develop that Plan. Although the digital divide is significant in Somers Town, platforms such as websites, blogs and apps are important forms of communication, as are social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. We know there is a need for more physical noticeboards in Somers Town and will ensure that physical notices of events and workshops are displayed around the community.

One of the key challenges in Somers Town is that residents are already over-consulted (and perhaps under-listened to). We will have to work to convince people that the Plan is something that will make a difference to their lives.

### **Our committee**

STNF has a core committee of up to 28 people, 50 per cent of whom are representative tenants and residents from across the area. The other 50 per cent are local stakeholders including local councillors, the voluntary and community sector, businesses and institutions.

The Committee membership should reflect the population make-up and diversity of the neighbourhood. It can co-opt advisors as necessary to provide expertise and guidance.

The current members of the committee are as follows:

- Slaney Devlin, Chair
- Joan Doherty, Treasurer
- Paul Tomlinson, Secretary
- And 21 other members.

The committee meets monthly at open meetings. A list of the 24 members of the STNF committee 2023–4 accompanies this application, but will not be made public.

Slaney Devlin, Chair, is the named contact for the purpose of this application and she can be contacted at [slaneydevlin@gmail.com](mailto:slaneydevlin@gmail.com). Further information on STNF and its work is available online <https://somerstownplan.info>

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