

# Transforming Our Place!

## One Norbiton Annual General Meeting 2013

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### CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

#### Summary

The AGM is a useful time to review what we have achieved so far. The building of an urban villages was always going to be a long haul and exploring how to make localism work for us all has proved to be a real challenge. So I must begin by thanking all our dedicated team of Volunteers namely Jill Preston our excellent secretary, Harry Hall my vice Chair, and John Hall our IT expert, and all our Board and committee members which have included Elaine Kennedy, Ed Naylor, Sheila Griffin, Peter Jeens, Peter Holmes, Rashid Laher, Alma White, Doreen Gardiner, Clare Gardiner, Dorothea Lloyd and Chris Coke. Thank you all for your hard work and dedication.

April 2013 saw the ending of the last of the three pilots we were involved in. Our major achievements can be listed as follows. We have survived despite getting virtually no resourcing from RBK for nearly three years. We have set up an independent stable One Norbiton Company with its own bank account, governance etc. We have held meetings with nearly all of our Locally Integrated Service partners except the NHS. We have set up a Surrey Save Community bank outreach service on the C R Estate. We have extended and increased the scope of Neighbourhood Watch within the adjoining owner-occupied areas. We have started giving work experience to both NEETs and Disabled people. We have advertised our existence by Posters and repeatedly leafleting every dwelling in Norbiton. We have set up a website and temporary office with mobile communications. We have also started recruiting our own local Consultative panel by making face-to-face contact with a proper representative random sample of our citizens. We have developed plans for the future of Norbiton including establishing how we might measure our progress. Finally we had some initial success in opposing a development that threatens to increase urban stress but sadly this was not sustainable because of existing law.

We have learned a lot. Raising public interest in volunteering is hard and it is even more difficult to enlarge the core of those prepared to do central committee work. Not surprisingly some of our local partners have proved less supportive than their rhetoric. They may feel justifiably threatened by our existence and intentions.

Although not much gets done without personal leadership, we have learned how difficult it is to get this right. Unlike in party politics etc., a participatory democratic leader, even if elected, must remain just the "first among equals". *Our task is to facilitate a group voice not magnify our personal point of view.* To do the latter could destroy Localism. Experiencing feelings of annoyance when crossed may be a useful litmus paper to detect an ego trip. Ultimately this organic style of self-management by equals, though less easily practiced than a hierarchism is one of the real changes we are trying to implement. The big interest in One Norbiton is to see if we can bring about

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a significant improvement for our communities by concentrating on increasing mutual personal care. Giving time rather than money may be the key.

## What Problems do we still need to solve?

Despite contacting a random sample and repeatedly leafleting every address, as elsewhere in the country, there are only low levels of spontaneous volunteering in Norbiton. Our current contacts though increasing are still below 600. We need to experiment to maximize this but we already have some ideas why:

**How can we increase active support and friendliness?** – If most people want more community feeling, why do they avoid participating? Theories include:

- Fear of relationship failure,
- Shyness and embarrassment
- Fear of becoming over-committed – too busy,
- Anxiety about meeting strangers.
- Personality problems & mental health,
- Fear of fraudulent callers or that their details would be used by advertisers etc.

**Is a Ward the right size for a locality?** Yes it seems reasonable(See Structure below) But it is clear that Localism may only be necessary in places like Norbiton where there is considerable urban stress.

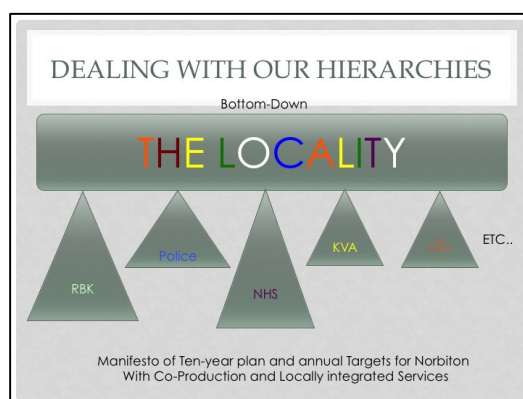
**Who are the local community?** Only about 60% of the population stay put for ten years (my GP figures) we also have many refugees, transients and dependents. This is similar to all urban populations.

**What common purposes and fears does our stable community share?** We need to complete our confidential enquiry and address these with them.

**How can we lessen divisions in our local society?** Can we learn from how our primary schools deal with differences in Language, Culture, Religion, politics, education and Social status?

**How can we support and encourage Volunteering?** “Nudging” may work better than requesting. Flexible drop-in volunteering may be less threatening.

**Are there any difficulties of being too closely associated with the Council?** Some seem reassured by our having official endorsement others are put off by this. We have learned that it is only worthwhile speaking to the top of budget holding hierarchies viz.



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## SUMMARY MANIFESTO FOR DEBATE

1. **Agree the structure and function of One Norbiton.**  
Draft Proposition One
2. **Agree provisional specific targets for the next year**  
Draft Proposition Two
3. **Agree a provisional plan to regenerate Norbiton.**  
Draft Proposition Three  
(Also see past Ten Year plan)

### DRAFT PROPOSITION ONE

## Proposed Structure and Function

### A Proposed structure of our locality group

#### Geography

Having started off as a 'Ward based pilot which has worked, we therefore propose to continue to define our Locality by ward boundaries.

#### Population

In cities, there is a very high population turnover. Studies have also shown that a person's feeling of what is 'Home territory' seems to diminish as population density increases. So we propose that rather than use electoral roles, which exclude those under eighteen, we should maintain a register of all residential and workplace addresses within our boundaries and the locality population would all capable occupants of these at any age. We identified and allocated an individual code to 5973 addresses. These contain a population estimated to be about 10,000.

#### The population's Voice

For the practical purpose of defining what is our residents' voice we are taking two approaches.

#### The Representative Panel

Our first approach has been to recruit panelists by door knocking on an ever-increasing *random* sample of our allocated addresses. Household members who provide contact details are then asked to advise us on contentious issues.

#### Referenda

On special occasions, such as an annual general meeting, our second approach

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has been to deliver leaflets to every address

**Assumptions:** All those who do not vote, despite being properly contacted, will be considered as self-designated or incapable **Dependents** (see below) but who nevertheless are providing **tacit agreement** to the outcome of any election.

## Detailed definition of our Participatory Democracy

**A.** Eligibility to be included as a “Voice” on our **One-Norbiton Participatory Democracy** is achieved by

- 1) **Living, working or studying** at one of our **registered addresses** in Norbiton and by **contributing to the local tax pool** (*in any way*, even as a dependent who consumes VAT able goods and services) and so being a **moral stakeholder** in how this public money should be spent by any agency.
- 2 Choosing to be a **Member** by providing contact details for inclusion\* on our **One Norbiton Members’ voting register** and then actually **voting** on issues that affect Norbiton.

**B.** Others who work for or with Norbiton citizens in a charitable, official or commercial way, but whose residence or office is elsewhere, may also apply to the organizing committee\* to be included on the **One Norbiton Guest voting register**

**N.B.** Ordinarily **Guests** are those who expect to be in Norbiton for less than a year. Among these will be some who are registered as working, retired or job-seeking etc. There is an often very needy population in Norbiton of varying size who may be unregistered by the welfare state - this may be by choice e.g. If earning their income by illegal means such as drug dealing. These citizens may be living with registered friends etc. e.g. Sofa-surfing or be homeless. While in Norbiton they will be seen as guests and be personally approached to co-produce specifically designed services to improve the quality of their lives. They are to be encouraged to provide their contact details for inclusion on our **One Norbiton Guest voting register** and they are encouraged to participate in community life in Norbiton alongside others such as refugees. However the reason for recording their views separately is to prevent their views ever democratically overriding those of the **Members**.

\* Forms are available from the Secretary

## Proposed Functions of our Localism Group

One Norbiton has many possible functions. The broad objects of the One Norbiton Company are

*“To improve the democratic involvement, health and quality of life of those who live, work and study in Norbiton ward and the surrounding area.”*

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In addition we want to improve the environment, reduce urban stress and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of local services.

Our recent work and in particular our team-building event has revealed that we all agree on many important areas of action. We have already begun to make progress on some which we intend to continue:

- Making our neighbourhood more enjoyable for all (Fun day)
- As a part of reducing urban stress (opposing the Duke's Tavern development)
- Promotion healthy living styles (including breast feeding)
- Reduction of social nuisance, crime and addiction (Dog mess Fly tipping)
- Increase personal contacts and neighbourhood collaboration (Neighbourhood +)
- Achieve (particularly the young) more paid employment (One Norbiton Task Force)
- Reduce the cost of loans (Surrey Save Volunteers)
- Promotion and support of volunteering (Panel and confidential enquiry)
- Encourage social independence and mastery of IT use
- Street safety and reduced addiction (Rangers & e.g. CareCredits)
- Develop 'participatory democracy' and mutual respect (e-Democracy)
- Enhance social housing (Mezzanine project See below)
- Homelessness (Support for Joel project)
- Protect our green spaces and improve the local environment (Getting Madingley Green nominated as a social asset etc.)

## **Approximate costing and estimated social benefit for some possible but very ambitious ideas that could be enabled by the new Localism Act.**

### **A) Restoration and refurbishment of the derelict Laundry site in Cambridge Gardens**

Cost £70k Benefits: a well-situated office with a hub for local charities and drop-in cafe.

### **B) Restoration of derelict underground Surrey Sports Centre**

Cost £700k Benefits: An alternative office, a Gym for residents and a valuable Car park which could be a source of employment and of value to the owner-occupiers in Norbiton.

### **C) Restoration of unused storage rooms on Mezzanine of Tower blocks**

Cost £800k Benefits: creation of 16 new flats increasing Social housing stock and even if some of these were sold privately could make enough profit to cover all these schemes.

### **D) Creation of a Hogs mill riverside path from Villiers Rd to the Football ground.**

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(This might be enlarged to make more imaginative use of the cemetery land)

Cost £5k+ Benefits: environmental enhancement solve future cemetery shortage and create more usable green space and orchards for our residents..

**Total cost £1.575 million. Hopefully this could be done in partnership with a suitable developer when returns on their investment would cover all costs.**

## Proposed shape of our Infrastructure team

It was clear at the outset that the terms “community” and “locality” were impossibly vague and we required a definite Organisation to co-ordinate our views. We already had three elected local councilors *representing* the Ward and we did not wish to confuse our role with theirs. Instead we wished to create at a lower level a *participatory democracy* in which individuals could more easily *represent themselves* on an ongoing basis and have their combined views marshaled to be effective.

We therefore set up a ‘**not for profit**’ company that was recognize by both central government and our elected local authority to handle all the financial dealings of One Norbiton. The officers of this company **sought and received** unanimous endorsement by the local population at last year’s inaugural open general meeting which was held after every household had been duly notified 21 days in advance of its time and date.

We have now agreed internal governance and are already operating as a legal entity with a Bank account. To enable fresh ideas, all our company directors will be obliged to resign in random rotation at AGMs. They may offer themselves for re-election but have to be proposed and seconded, as do any rivals for their positions.

For the time being only the existing Directors of One Norbiton are members under Company Law and able to appoint new Directors. We have however agreed that we will only exercise this power at the behest of the AGM and will only appoint as Directors, those who have been duly proposed and seconded whom the AGM has endorsed. In due course all who have completed our membership application form will be Members or connected Guests as per Clause 10 of the Articles of Association of Association of One Norbiton q.v. Thereafter the AGM will elect, as opposed to endorse Company officers.

## Agreed and evolved roles for our central team and administration

- A) Facilitate constructive ‘participatory democracy’ with a system for choosing which options to debate
- B) Present options with best pros and cons to partners
- C) Organize this “balanced” voting on options for spending public money with deadlines etc.
- D) Serve on the selection and promotion panel for key public servants and advise

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- on their bonuses.
- E) Raise voluntary sums of money for agreed purposes and support local voluntary groups via a hub in our offices.
  - F) Encourage local partners to establish mutually supportive personal contacts.
  - G) Establish more voluntary support for dependents
  - H) Create a welcoming atmosphere for guests with possibilities for them to also contribute to 'urban village' life.
  - I) Organize regular open forum meetings and regular executive meetings
  - J) Ensure the proceedings of the latter are accurately minuted and openly shared with non-attenders.
  - K) Manage all the financial and communication activities of the organisation
  - L) Prepare and submit accounts
  - M) Organize relevant research
  - N) Assist in acquiring appropriate infrastructural funding.
  - N) Raise funding for specific projects
  - O) Hold meetings with budget holding public servants to explore co- production and LIS.
  - P) Help appoint our own admin staff and the best external employing agency. We have already found that doing even a part of the above is too much to ask of a volunteer. So if we are to function properly it is essential that we obtain sufficient core funding from an unbiased source. Because of our putative scrutiny role this should be national rather than the local council). Paradoxically this may be fortunate recommendation for other reasons; our experience with dealing with our own local council over three years is that they have yet to offer us any *local* money for infrastructural support. We fear that if other localism volunteers have to rely on the discretion of their local councils for proper infrastructural funding, they would soon become far too discouraged to continue.
  - Q) Additionally we will try to continue to choose staff from the locality that are disabled or unemployed provided they have a suitable skill set. Also in the spirit of this organization our employed staff will be asked to do in addition to their paid employment as much volunteering as they can. This policy will help us keep within the infrastructural budget recommended by Balsall Heath
  - R) To Scrutinize public money spend and co-produce services. When dealing within our agreed themes we will use our position as voice of the local taxpayers to be a force for promoting liaison between existing groups working in our locality. This will involve meeting existing charity leaders and the budget holders of statutory services.  
**As a way of bringing about a change of attitude and understanding of Localism we will issue receipts to the top ten local suppliers as mentioned in the LGiU report.**

## Some Measurable Outcome Criteria

- Reduction in local public service costs (Council publications & ? Repeat LGui report)
- Decrease local crime rates (Police)
- Improved local educational attainment (Schools)
- Reduction in local benefit claims ( Local Statistics)
- Improvement in local health measures (NHS)
- Improvement in local quality of life (we have already started measuring this in our randomly selected panel. (Ourselves)
- Reduced local family breakdown (Courts)
- ? Increased population stability (Housing surveys)

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## **External Audit**

All expenditure of all taxpayers' money by Government and its agents must be properly scrutinized to prevent waste. Even when we, as organized taxpayers spend our own allocation of public money this process would still benefit from independent scrutiny and we think that this should logically be a role for elected representatives rather than public appointees. We hope we can get our local councilors to agree and supervise an annual audit of our use of any statutorily granted public money.