



Report of the Co-Chairs, June 2023

Introduction

This year we have decided to hold the AGM as a face-to-face meeting, together with a Forum meeting. We chose this because alongside reporting significant progress over the past year, we are now in a position to ask for member's participation in Neighbourhood Plan-making for real.

The AGM allows the Chair's Report to be presented, and provides an opportunity to ask questions. We expect (hope!) the formal business part will be straightforward, allowing the Forum to discuss proactively how we move forward to make a Neighbourhood Plan, and who among the membership would like to be actively involved.

Certain parts of the AGM are mandated by our constitution, and we are following those as required. An opportunity has also been given for any other formal motions to be considered in the agenda. The AGM provides an opportunity to summarise and take stock of the past year.

Summary

The key points are given here as bullets, with further explanation in later sections.

- We have achieved Designation, with the area we wanted.
- We have run Management Committee meetings, a forum meeting and a public meeting
- We have gathered views on topics where the community wants to see planning policies
- We have continued to engage on selected topics via our website and social media
- We attended the Waterways Fun Day to further engage with the public

Designation

We achieved designation of both Forum and Area in December 2022, with the area we wanted. The survey on area (MNF-initiated) and the formal RBWM consultation both received a good public response, strongly supporting designation of Maidenhead's 7 unparished wards:

Extract from the Officer's decision: *"Overall, it is considered that the supporting statement, taking account of the response to the public consultation, has justified the designation of the Maidenhead Neighbourhood area, as proposed in the application."*

The improvement in Forum membership diversity was also noted in the Officer's decision. A take-away from the overall experience is that designation of an unparished area, and without an existing Town Council, is significantly harder than other scenarios – it took 3 years!

Running of the Forum in 2022-2023

With designation achieved in December 2022, somewhat later than hoped, 9 months of the year was spent pursuing it leaving only 3 months to activate MNF with the actual business of plan-making.

Prior to designation we did not ask our membership to engage in policy development work to avoid wasted effort. After designation we had a Forum (full members) meeting on 23-Feb-2023, followed by a public workshop on 30-Mar-2023 where we met interested community members face-to-face and gathered ideas for policies. The dates were set to get plan-making started, and to maximise use of our funds in the time window they could be spent – which was by 31-Mar-2023.

It was important that we re-engaged with the community to find current topics of interest, as the previous early draft Neighbourhood Plan dated back to Feb 2019. As perhaps expected, there were many inputs related to biodiversity and climate change as well as ongoing and longer-standing issues such as housing and getting about – and building height.

The filtering of these topics into those that could make Neighbourhood Planning policies is advancing, but strictly belongs in the next financial year 2023-24 – as does the challenge of resourcing the work. We are intending to have more regular Forum meetings with active member participation.

We have agreed in principle to meet every 3 months with the RBWM Planning policy team, and await the first meeting with interest. The Borough has a duty to support Neighbourhood Planning.

Community views on planning

Our main foray to find out Community views on planning was a public workshop on 30-Mar-2023, attended by about 40 members of the public – including a forum member who has subsequently become Lead Member for planning, and an unexpected visit from our Maidenhead MP.

The tone of the meeting was helpful, positive and co-operative, encouraged by an independent facilitator Maria Evans. We outlined the scope, opportunities and limitations of Neighbourhood planning in the context of Maidenhead and the recently adopted BLP. The key part was then a workshop where community members posted ideas for policy topics, in parallel with an online facility to contribute ideas which was open for two weeks. There was also a question-and-answer session.

The meeting was publicised widely both online and in the local newspaper, together with reaching out to community groups via e-mail. Interestingly, we were not allowed to publicise it via the RBWM e-mail Resident's newsletter because of the then-approaching local elections.

As mentioned above, the filtering of these topics into those that could make Neighbourhood Planning policies is advancing, but belongs in the financial year 2023-24. By the time this report is circulated, the topics together with the outcome of the first two rounds of filtering (Is it within scope of planning? and Does it fit with existing National and Borough policy?) will have been made available.

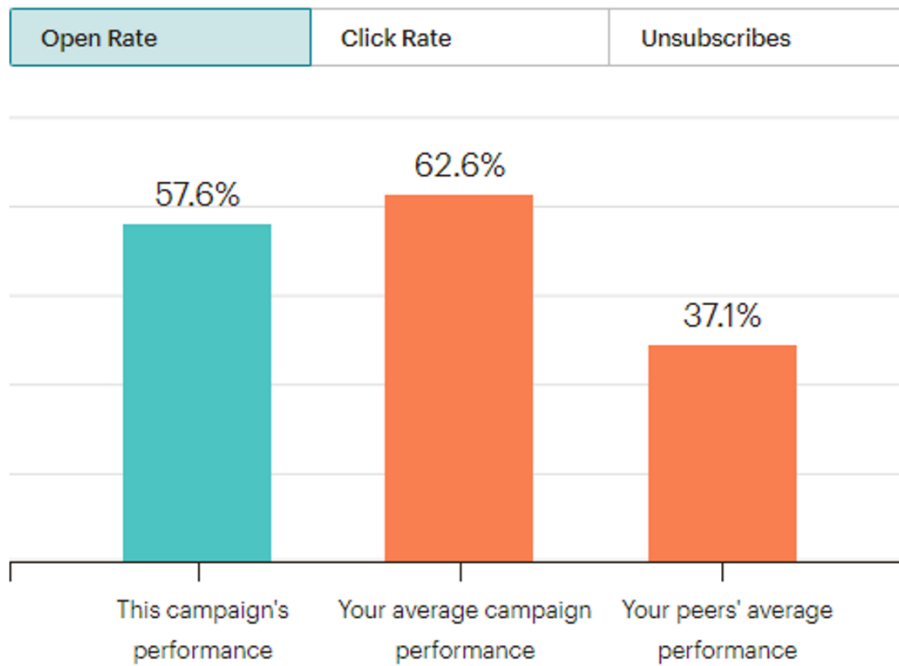
Ongoing community engagement

Our main line of communication with our members and supporters is via our email database of around 450 people, and it is clear from the MailChimp analytics that our content is valued. Our Facebook following which has gone from about 200 to over 900 Followers, mainly driven by the posts we share

on the Maidenhead Future discussion group. The overlap between MailChimp and Facebook is unknown.

Members and supporters on MailChimp are far more inclined to open our emails compared to similar organisations

How your email campaign compares

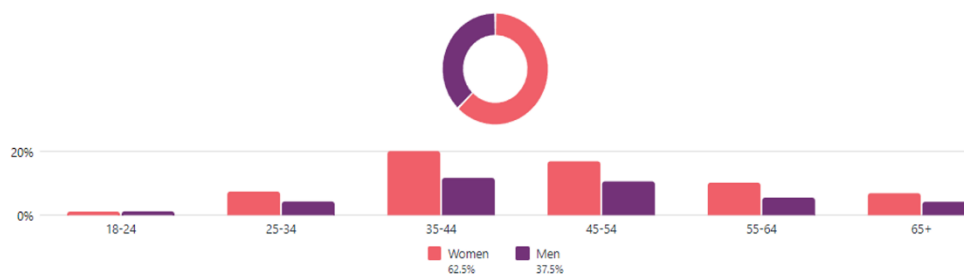


The profile of our “Likers” on Facebook (838 of total 913 Followers) is younger and less male than the Management Committee

Facebook Page likes ⓘ

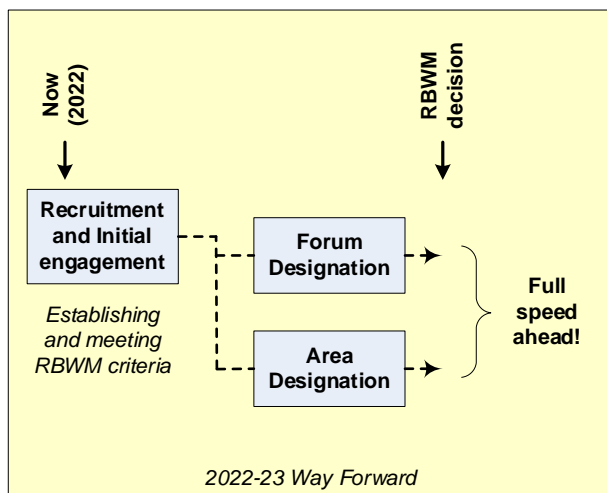
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Age & gender ⓘ



Way forward and next steps

We have achieved the 2022-23 Way Forward presented at the last AGM:



So now we should consider what “Full speed ahead” means in practice. The key steps are:

- Find out what local people want planning policies on – first iteration done, Mar 2023
- A filtered list of policy topic candidates – first iteration done, May 2023
- Form topic groups to develop policies – in progress
- Find out what MNF can realistically resource – in progress
- Develop the policies and associated Evidence base
- Produce a draft Neighbourhood Plan

MNF has a programme with more detail of the tasks and deliverables. The rate of progress will depend on getting the grant funding without further delay (see next section) and on having enough active volunteers to make the topic groups work.

Funding & support

Funding in 2022-2023 was from a central government grant administered by its agent, Groundwork UK on behalf of Locality. The grant received and details of the expenditure are given in the accounts. We spent about 70% of the grant, mainly on the 30-Mar-2023 public meeting to gather community inputs on planning. A requirement of the grant was that all unused funding was to be returned to Groundwork UK at the end of the financial year (31st March 2023), which has been done.

The main reason for not being able to usefully spend the whole grant was that designation took longer than expected. Locality has a limit of £18,000 total grant (including extra for being a large area) to a Neighbourhood Plan, so we have to keep an eye on our cumulative spend.

We did have an offer of money on designation from RBWM, but it was also for the financial year 2022-2023, and we would not have been able to spend the (public) money usefully. We are currently asking whether it can be made available in this financial year 2023-2024 instead.

The Grant has to be administered by an accountable body, which must be incorporated – MNF is not. Maidenhead Waterways, which is incorporated, has kindly offered to continue administering the grant for us in the financial year 2023-2024 and we much appreciate their support.

We are waiting to start the process of applying for a grant from Locality for the financial year 2023-2024 – but at the time of writing the process has not yet been opened, and is awaiting agreement from DLUHC. Assuming it opens and our request is successful, we have as yet no defined date to receive it, and are once again in the position of having no funds available to use in the meantime. They don't make it easy!

Management Committee

Over the year 2022-2023 the Management Committee has been:

- Andrew Ingram and Ian Rose (Co-Chairs)
- Sue Ingram (Secretary)
- Phil Adkins and Nicola Stingelin (Treasurer March 2023 onwards)
- Martin McNamee
- Mark Fessey
- Andy Woodcock
- Richard Davenport
- Mick Jarvis (February 2023 onwards)

Ian Rose and Andrew Ingram

Co-Chairs

Maidenhead Neighbourhood Forum