

Thank you for your support for the Wimbledon Neighbourhood Planning Group. Our thoughts are with those of you who have suffered ill health or loss, or are otherwise finding this a very difficult time.

We are managing to keep our work going through virtual means and would like to bring you up to date with our progress.

Our next major milestone is to apply to Merton Council to become designated as a neighbourhood forum. The council will then consult on our stakeholder support and appropriateness of the boundary.

Once designated as neighbourhood forum, we will consult widely on what should be in the neighbourhood plan, and draft it in collaboration with Wimbledon's residential and business communities.

The process is quite long and complicated, but the goal of having a neighbourhood plan that will carry real weight in the planning process and help determine the outcome of planning applications in Wimbledon is well worth the effort.

We have set ourselves the following immediate tasks:

1. Reviewing the structure, aims and strategy of the group, and creating a clear work plan

The steering committee has been operating since our initial general meeting on 25 January. Our first chair, Vince Harris, has stepped down (no connection with COVID-19), and we thank him for leading us through the first stage. The group is currently reviewing the skills and resources available to us to determine the boundary of the proposed forum, draft our application, and engage with the community.

2. Finalising the boundary of the neighbourhood forum area

In order to create the boundary of our area, we started by drawing a circle of one mile radius from the old Wimbledon town hall (Centre Court shopping centre).

To establish the exact boundary, we are now holding discussions with representatives of the communities round the edge of the circle. If any of these communities want to be a part of the neighbourhood forum area, feeling that they are part of Wimbledon, we will include them. If they do not want to be part of it, perhaps because they feel they have a different identity, or because they may want to prepare a neighbourhood plan of their own, we will exclude them.

This is time-consuming work but it is also a good preparation for the wider collaboration that will be involved in preparing the neighbourhood plan itself.

3. Research and community engagement

We are engaging widely, not only just to establish the boundary, but also to build an understanding of and support for what a neighbourhood plan could do for Wimbledon. We are particularly keen to build a good working relationship with the business community, and to contact people who might not normally get involved in planning processes, such as faith organisations, schools and young people.

4. Drafting the application

The application to Merton Council for neighbourhood forum status involves making a formal application. In this we need to set out and justify the proposed boundary; explain why we want to become a neighbourhood forum; and describe the extensive research that we have been carrying out. We are currently getting support from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in the form of consultants assisting the preparation of our application to be a neighbourhood forum in an urban context.

We will keep you up to date with our progress.

A strong and broad membership is a pillar to our success. Please encourage anyone you know to become a member. The more people are involved and willing to help, the more we will achieve.

Many thanks from the steering committee of Wimbledon Neighbourhood Planning Group.