

## Correspondence

**From: Clare Baars Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2023 2:32 PM**

**To:** Nabeel Nazir <[nabeel.nazir@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:nabeel.nazir@milton-keynes.gov.uk)>; Mo Imran <[Mo.Imran@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:Mo.Imran@milton-keynes.gov.uk)>; Nigel Long <[nigel.long@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:nigel.long@milton-keynes.gov.uk)>; Waqas Ahmad; < Delia Shephard <[Clerk@bletchleyfennystratford-tc.gov.uk](mailto:Clerk@bletchleyfennystratford-tc.gov.uk)>; Richard Graham ;

**Cc:** Angie Ravn-Aagaard; Leon RA

**Subject:** Resident feedback on Meeting 12th March 2023 - please read and respond

Dear Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Councillors (and those representing MK City Council where relevant),

I'm writing following the meeting on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> March in Bletchley as a local resident who moved to Bletchley during the pandemic. I'm afraid the meeting in question was not a positive experience for myself as a relatively new resident in the area and at points it ventured into disorder and political point scoring. Therefore, I'm writing with some feedback for the organisers to hopefully ensure that this experience is not repeated in future meetings regarding important issues affecting the lives and livelihoods of local people and businesses.

As I mentioned at the meeting, I'm keen to get involved and support local community initiatives and most recently have worked with Watford Borough Council and Three Rivers District Council on a number of initiatives as Head of Community Development. My husband and I were both attracted to Bletchley by its historic significance and intend to put down roots here, raising our growing family and contributing to the community over the coming decades. Since arriving, we have been regular attendees of the Leon and Central Bletchley Residents' Association, I'm part of the Environment group for the Neighbourhood Plan process, and we follow many local initiatives through Facebook.

As you know, the meeting on Sunday 12 March was very lively and many passionate residents shared their views. Unfortunately, I feel that in reality the agenda presented at the start of the meeting was very different to the message Cllr Nigel Long had shared at the latest Leon and Central Bletchley Residents' Association on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> February. At this meeting, which was attended by around 40 residents, Cllr Long briefly spoke about the need for a steering group to give residents a voice in the development around the Sainsbury's and Brunel sites. While some attendees felt this might potentially be useful, no Terms of Reference was provided and I raised the question of if/how this overlaps with the work being covered by the Neighbourhood Plan and other existing groups/RAs and COBRA. A few days later on 5<sup>th</sup> March Cllr Waqas Ahmad shared [a Facebook post on the Leon and Central](#)

[Bletchley RA group inviting people to the meeting on Sunday 12th March](#) which referred to the creation of a '**Sainsbury's Area Residents Steering Group**'. On attending this meeting, it quickly became clear that the aims had shifted significantly and residents were being asked to vote for roles for a whole new, formal RA being proposed: '**Building Bridges Bletchley Residents' Association**'. From Cllr Nigel Long's opening speech, this intends to cover the whole of Bletchley and much wider issues than the development of the former Sainsbury's site such as health care, transport etc...

I'm sorry to say that even after spending 2 hours of my Sunday afternoon at this shambolic meeting, I'm still none the wiser as to why a new RA is being proposed by Councillors and how its aims differ to those of the existing 5 RAs already established within Bletchley. I also feel there is significant overlap with the COBRA group and Neighbourhood Planning activity, so I personally do not support the creation of another group local residents need to attend in order to have their voices heard and engage with significant development projects. *Surely it would be a better use of everyone's efforts and time to reposition/re-engage with the existing infrastructure of RAs to ensure they are well promoted, well attended and well-positioned to cascade information regarding key town-wide issues as well as capturing resident feedback in a constructive and consistent way?*

If no compelling evidence exists for a brand-new RA, it is my strong feeling that the decision to create yet another RA should be urgently reconsidered to avoid unnecessary duplication and confusion for local residents, which could further contribute to the already slow/non-existent community engagement activities on key issues affecting residents. Furthermore, I'm deeply concerned that the Council appear to be driving the creation of yet another RA, whereas the very ethos and purpose of such groups really ought to be driven and led by residents.

I appreciate that there is work to be done to ensure all local residents are aware of the existing RAs, their purpose, and to make sure they all reach, serve and include a wider demographic representative of our diverse and vibrant local community in Bletchley. In my personal view, efforts would be better spent enhancing the existing network of 5 RAs to improve awareness, promotion and representation within the community and I am in discussions with Angie Ravn-Aagaard (CCd) regarding communications for COBRA.

Please can you confirm where the minutes from the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March can be viewed by residents? Also, if you intend to proceed with creating a new RA, please can you confirm the date, time and location for the next meeting along with the agenda and how it will be promoted to residents?

Finally, I would also like to suggest some content that would be useful to cover at the next meeting to ensure discussions are more structured and fruitful for everyone in attendance:

- 1. Providing clear evidence gathered from residents (not Council members) of the demand for a new RA and any gaps it intends to fill.** E.g. engagement survey feedback / minutes from other RA meetings or resident engagement events.
- 2. Full, written Terms of Reference for the proposed new RA / steering group,** including the plans for registration as a formal or informal entity as well as how it will be resident led, rather than led by Councillors.
- 3. Full, written Terms of Reference for the existing RAs and COBRA group** so residents can clearly understand the overlap in remit, or any differences in objectives.
- 4. Presentation slide deck outlining significant development projects affecting Bletchley in the coming 1-5 years** (e.g. Town Deal, Sainsbury's and Brunel Centre development, Neighbourhood Plans, other significant projects). This would include budgets, progress to date, timelines and ways residents can engage or provide feedback.
- 5. Opportunity for residents to decide whether or not another RA is required, rather than Council members and the meeting Chair enforcing this as a given.** Also a discussion on the name of the group. I personally feel that 'Building a Better Bletchley' / 'One Bletchley RA' would be better than the current proposal, which sounds quite divisive. E.g. workshop discussion tables as used in the Neighbourhood Planning process, or themed sections on the agenda to keep feedback focused and constructive.
- 6. Opportunity for meaningful engagement with residents and to gather qualitative and quantitative feedback on concerns around the infrastructure developments.** E.g. paper or online survey, minute/note taker, attributable quotes for use in future engagement opportunities.
- 7. Choosing a more suitable time for the meeting to work around the commitments of key faith groups in the area.** 12-2pm is not a suitable time for members of the Christian faith who attend church on a Sunday and I know this was a barrier for several people who wanted to attend the meeting.
- 8. Ample promotion of the meeting to all local communities via the 5 existing Residents' Associations, faith groups, and via local digital channels at least 2 weeks in advance** (ideally further in advance) to ensure a larger number of residents can attend from different backgrounds to engage with these significant discussions.

I hope that you will take into consideration these suggestions in good faith as coming from a dedicated member of the community who would like to be part of re-building Bletchley and ensuring its success for current and future generations.

Best wishes, Clare Baars-Gordon

**Rely send on behalf of Town Council 21 March 2023**

Dear Clare

Thank you for your considered and detailed email following the recent public meeting which I believe was arranged by Cllrs Long, Khan and Ahmad.

I would like to confirm that Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council was not involved in the organisation of this meeting or in the proposal to set up a new residents "steering group" or residents association. As the meeting was open to all Bletchley residents several town councillors did attend in their personal and individual capacities. However none of them was in a position to represent the town council's corporate view on this matter, not least because the town council did not really know in advance what was being proposed or have the opportunity to discuss this and agree a position. Therefore any views expressed by our members at the meeting can only have been personal ones. At the time of writing, the town council has not been provided by the organisers with any notes or action points arising from the meeting.

You are correct that there is a lot of overlapping work going on in Bletchley at the moment including the Town Deal work, the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan and the implementation of the other goals and aspirations of Milton Keynes City Council, Milton Keynes Development Partnership, the town council, residents' associations and other community and business groupings. It is a matter for residents if they wish to set up their own new groups during this period and the town council will continue to work with and connect with the community through our formal or informal networks. Meanwhile I will ensure that your views are shared with all our members.

Thank you for contacting the town council. I hope this spells out our current position but please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or comments. I believe that your feedback is very helpful but needs to be directed to the MKCC and WBC councillors involved in organising the meeting as I see you have already done.

Kind regards

Delia Shephard

Town Clerk

**Subsequent email on 22 March 2023 sent to alert resident to town council agenda for meeting on 28 March 2023**