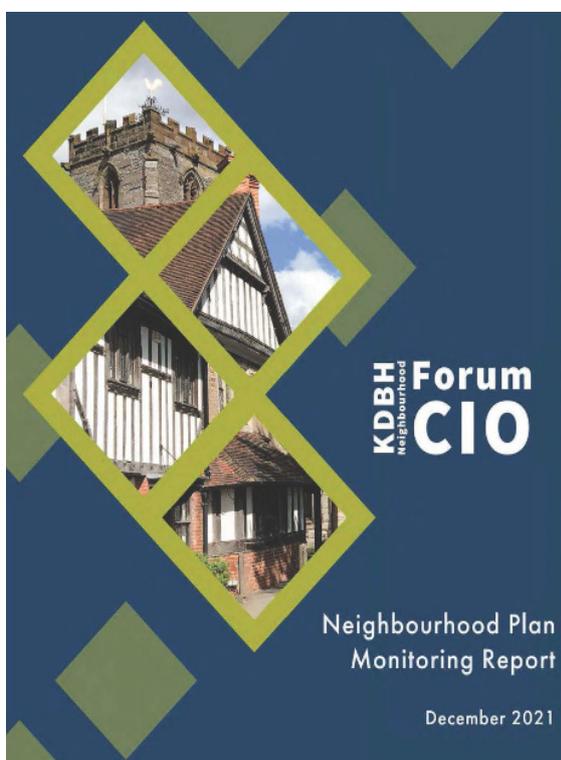




Newsletter March 2022

Back, To the Future

This special newsletter briefs you on activities and progress as we pass our first Year End as a charity, with food for thought on your Neighbourhood Forum's future sustainability.



Back..

Autumn/winter 2021/22 has seen increasing demands on our time, as explained in recent newsletters. Alongside all this, the team has been undertaking its first full operational review since becoming a Charity. As part of our commitment to openness and transparency, we want to provide in one place a clear and easy-to-read summary of Forum activities and outcomes, including an assessment of the evolving planning context and what this could mean for our KDBH Neighbourhood Plan.

We are therefore very pleased to publish our first [Monitoring Report](#), which also forms part of our first set of Year End documents to the Charities Commission.

The Forum successfully transitioned to a registered charity in July 2020. For consistency, we chose to keep our Year End as 30 September. In October, we therefore set about preparing a summary report and accounts for review at AGM. This year, we had high hopes of finally being able to get back to welcoming members to a Forum meeting, a much valued opportunity to present and talk through the report and accounts and, equally importantly, seek member input to discussions on future plans (see below). The sudden rise of Omicron came as a huge disappointment, once again putting a stop to large group meetings.

On 15 December 2021, the Trustees and Forum Team met to hold the AGM (in a large room, with masks, sanitiser and somewhat cold with doors and windows wide open). In addition to the Report, the [Accounts](#) were reviewed and approved. We were especially pleased to formally appoint and welcome a new Trustee and a new Forum Team member, as recorded in the AGM [Minutes](#).

To the Future..

As touched on in our last newsletter, the team is starting to take a long, hard look at future sustainability of the Forum - financial, resourcing, capability and capacity, community and other stakeholder involvement and support. Challenges include, for example:

- **Finances:** Neighbourhood Forum funding ceases once a Neighbourhood Plan is 'made'. We have, of course, sought alternative sources of grant funding; over the past couple of years, however, schemes have (quite rightly) focused on Covid and activities supporting those in need. The Forum does not qualify for these, since our charitable purposes relate to place, the built / natural environment and planning. Hence why, in March 2021, we put the necessary supporting systems in place to launch our first on-line campaign and raise funds directly. Donations have been the primary source of income supporting Forum operation, totalling £926 to date. We're very grateful for all the donations received. The Forum is not, however, sustainable at this level of income, while at the same time we are very conscious of the cost of living squeeze people are already facing.
- **Resources:** We're proud of, and have received many plaudits on, the professionalism of our team. Since its launch, however, the Forum has operated with a number of key person dependencies, most notably relating to expertise in planning, IT, communications and stakeholder management (which is why, with so much else on our plate recently, we have not had the capacity to update our website as regularly as we would wish - apologies). We have been extremely fortunate in the level of commitment of team members, dedicating large amounts of personal time over nearly 8 years at no cost. However, this is not sustainable; understandably, some now wish to take a step back. Going forward, expertise previously provided by members of the team at no cost will need to be resourced (and paid for) externally - the most pressing need currently being the wide range of web and other IT tools and capabilities that underpin our activities. **If you have experience and expertise in this area and wish to contribute to your local community, we would be delighted to hear from you** for an informal chat - in the first instance, email us at kdbhforum@gmail.com with your contact details and we will get back to you. Similarly, we are also very interested to hear from you if you have skills in planning and fundraising for charities.
- **Support:** Covid has been ever-present since becoming a charity. Maintaining and, where possible, extending our reach across the KDBH community has been challenging, but is fundamental to our role and the nature of our work. Our drive to do the best by our community remains as strong as ever; however, experience has taught us that planning can become toxic (particularly through social media) where you get caught in the crosshairs of stakeholder interests pressing their own agenda. A handful of people (at most) persistently seek to question the Forum's legitimacy, most recently necessitating this [response to the Council](#) that we sincerely hope finally concludes the matter when formally discussed at the Council's Planning and Housing Decision Session, 6pm, 23 March 2022. This is frustrating, but much more importantly diverts significant Forum effort away from what we should be doing for our community. Future sustainability depends on openly re-confirming and re-establishing with our members, the KDBH community, Ward Councillors and other groups with whom we work closely what they want and expect of their Neighbourhood Forum going forward - a process we also went through following completion of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Monitoring Report provides a clear and objective starting point for these discussions. We have no fixed view on what the outcome should or could be - but whatever it is, we need full support on a clear set of agreed activities and priorities going forward.

We have kicked off our review activities with a view to holding a Public Open Forum meeting, and other forms of consultation, after Easter. Once again, we anxiously watch the rise in Covid cases, keeping everything crossed that our desire and need for open, interactive, face-to-face community discussion will not once again be thwarted.

Important though all this is, it is insignificant against the backdrop of current world events.

Our hearts and thoughts go out to anyone affected and to all the Ukrainian people.
