

Southwark Planning Network
Planning & Regeneration Hustings – 14th April 2018
at Christ Church, 676-680 Old Kent Road, London SE15 1JF

Questions and notes from the debate

1 Old Kent Road

This question was taken first as the hustings were being held on the Old Kent Road.

“The Old Kent Road Area Action Plan is meant to steer towards a broadly supported future for this part of Southwark, but the process of preparation has been sadly inadequate. The latest version, the 'preferred option' we are told, includes much detailed prescription, area by area, site by site, on which there has been no consultation. Consultants employed by Southwark have worked on this over many months, behind closed doors, not even talking to most property owners, nor businesses in the affected areas. Most likely this is unlawful. It is baffling that there has been no coherent exploration of options, as is a requirement of the plan making process.

If elected, will you make sure that the OKR AAP returns, urgently, to the options stage, that proper dialogue commences, that options be properly explored and consulted on? Will you then encourage inclusion of an option that meets emerging London Plan policy, including the requirement for no net loss of industrial accommodation from the OKR area, and the protection of space needed for creative enterprise (policies that are ignored in the current draft)?”

2 Developers

The discussion on OKRAAP organically raised issues about developers, so this question was taken next.

“London feels owned and controlled by developers. There are too many news reports about councillors across London and across parties, including in Southwark, who are working in the development and property world or who move into it when they leave their Council. I am not convinced that any candidate or party with these development industry connections can truly represent local public interest (and I think current estate regeneration bears me out). So who can I vote for?”

This question also subsumes another submitted on the day (and which was partially aired during the discussion):

“Why is planning permission for high rise developers being given to offshore shell companies so that capital gains can be taken offshore and avoid UK CGT.”

3 Housing

This section of discussion following the first question was long and passionate, and much of it was about housing. The next question in two parts, which had been agreed in advance, was not separately aired as the person due to pose the question, made an intervention from the floor that largely covered it.

* Given the loss of council housing entailed in Southwark's regeneration schemes (4,000 combined one the Aylesbury and Heygate alone), how would the candidates prevent council house losses in any future estate regenerations?

* London Mayor Sadiq Khan is proposing mandatory balloting of residents for estate regeneration proposals that he funds. Do the candidates support this? Would they extend the requirement to all estate regenerations?

4 Tall buildings

This was a prearranged question which there was not time to fit in, though some of the issues were partially aired in the housing and development debate.

The Council is proposing in the New Southwark Plan to allow new developments including tall buildings without height restrictions anywhere in the borough. Already this is leading to a rash of proposals for many tall buildings across the borough.

How will this, including the building of mega towers in the Old Kent Road Opportunity Area, help in solving Southwark's housing crisis when the majority of the homes provided will not be affordable to local people?

5 Equalities

This question came next to provide a different perspective on the issues raised thus far.

Southwark Council has a duty to ensure its policies and decisions are compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duty, eliminating discrimination and minimising inequalities. Yet recent regeneration efforts - from Aylesbury to Elephant & Castle, from Peckham to Old Kent Road - have had a disproportionate negative impact on BAME and migrant communities, businesses and their people. For example the Gypsy and Traveller community are not mentioned at all in the New Southwark Plan, Old Kent Road Area Action Plan or Peckham and Nunhead Area Action Plan despite the council's traveller sites being located next to development sites, recognised by the council as overcrowded with fire safety issues, and in the case of Burnhill very close to the proposed route of the Bakerloo Line Extension.

What will you and your party do to protect existing travellers sites and existing BAME and migrant businesses? What should be done to satisfy the Council's equality duties when it comes to regeneration schemes?

6 Community engagement

This question was asked on behalf of the Southwark Planning Network and was answered in the affirmative by all the candidates, including Rebecca Lury, who after the election has been appointed Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for community engagement amongst other matters. It is this that has led to the meeting with Cllr Rebecca Lury and Cllr Johnson Situ on 11th July 2014. Cllr Situ is now Cabinet Member for Growth, Development and Planning

Planning affects many aspects of our lives at all levels and times. It is important in managing changes. But when it doesn't work well it can have catastrophic effects. Planning is often inaccessible, people affected are often involved too late, the facts can be wrong, or the effects on people and places can be very negative. Yet there is significant experience and knowledge in the community which could avoid a lot of this. You can see examples of this community expertise in the exhibition here, and there is much more community work like this across the borough. The Southwark Planning Network links community groups on these and related matters, and is a valuable community resource.

I would like to ask if you will work with us in the Southwark Planning Network to change for the better the way the community is engaged in planning and regeneration, and if you will encourage your political party to support us all in working together on this.

7 Environment/parks

The text for the question on the environment that was asked on the day has not yet been typed up, but it was about measures to protect and extend public parks and greenspace to meet the needs of the increasing population. Others submitted on the day that were partially covered in the debate were:

“If Southwark’s environmental policy is the destruction of natural woodland, such as that in Camberwell Old Cemetery, how are we even going to combat climate change?”

“I am concerned about the lack of public greenspace in new proposals. This will put huge pressure on existing green spaces. How can we increase greenspace provision that is public park?”

“Can candidates confirm their commitment to the preservation of the last woodlands in Southwark located in the cemeteries of Camberwell and Nunhead or are they planning a chainsaw massacre to make way for burial plots for the rich?”

8 Heritage

Historic England states that Local Lists of historic buildings - that is those "undesigned assets" which are not listed by Historic England and do not lie in a Conservation Area - play an essential role in creating and reinforcing a sense of local character and distinctiveness in the historic environment. Almost half of Local Authorities in England have developed and adopted a local list as have most of our neighbouring boroughs in south London. Southwark Council has chosen not to take the idea of a Local List forward until recently when a draft Local List has been published on the website of a selection of historic buildings identified in the Elephant & Castle Supplementary Planning Document, the adopted Peckham & Nunhead Area Action Plan and the draft Old Kent Road Area Action Plan.

What are the views of the candidates of the best way to take this forward now in terms of a) ensuring the list covers all undesigned assets in Southwark (and not just those identified in these most recent area-based planning policy documents) and b) how we can use the process of developing a Local List as a way of really engaging people in Southwark in the amazingly rich but often overlooked heritage of its historic buildings.

9 Industrial Land

London’s supply of space for its economy is fast tightening. As shortages escalate, industrial enterprise is being hit the hardest. Builders merchants, fabricators, joiners, printers, couriers, vehicle repairers, food preparers, niche manufacturers and recyclers, all of whom need to be in the city, are being squeezed out. The New Southwark Plan, if adopted, would allow loss of around three quarters of our borough’s industrial accommodation, and through clumsy handling of planning cases Southwark are accelerating the destruction, costing us jobs, and economic diversity.

If elected, will you halt this process, boldly revise the New Southwark Plan so that it meets the Mayor of London’s policy of no net loss of industrial floorspace? Will you make sure that the plan is followed? Will you push the Council into a role as helper of businesses, working to meet their needs, rather than hastening their expulsion?