

The Peckham Walkabout 23 October 2010

Urban Design observations

Peckham has a distinct character, in which sounds and smells are important as well as visual impacts but parts of Rye Lane would benefit from wider pavements and more trees and pocket parks. The colours found here are unusual (compared to most London areas), with many stores using turquoise and red, (for example Peckham Library and Burger King) but many shops could be improved by better coordination of their lettering sizes, fascia colour and styles. Imagine if a style appropriate to the art deco period could reappear on the C&A building! Significant views remain of buildings: the nightclub, the tower cinema relict, the chapel, but also important are the glimpses of green along paths connecting to the shopping streets.

1. Peckham Square and views to the start of Burgess Park

The square has no easy-to-use corners, it is windswept, and its character is very much as a crossroads route for pedestrians (and cyclists). The small mounds are used (see photos) but the seats do not really seem attractive. The level changes are also not successfully worked. The trees give welcome autumn colour, but perhaps there should be more at the start of the park (see photo where there is a large grey area). The Shard is going to make a good termination to the vista here.

2. The Rye Lane High Street junction

Despite the recent completion of the townscape scheme here, the area is traffic-dominated. It would be preferable to hold the vehicles away and have the opportunity to cross diagonally, Oxford Circus style, removing the railings. Bus stops are not well situated, being at the point where the pavement is narrowest. If Burger King ever vacates, this would be a good building to take for community uses: library annex, art gallery, cafe, indoor market stalls, etc.

3. Morrison's site

The redesign of this site should enable new routes through the site, e.g. creating a link to the bus station. Need to consider creating genuine public space, a new green area, more tree avenues and retaining the existing trees so they can reach maturity. The area could take much higher buildings, but avoid shadowing the open spaces or creating disagreeable wind tunnels. See the recent Bromley scheme to reuse a car park.

4. Small spaces along Rye Lane

There is room for a pocket park outside the cinema, possibly with a green wall, water feature, seating, cafe/ kiosks and good lighting after dusk for events – could the site become an outdoor cinema occasionally?

At the southern end of Rye Lane there is a wasted opportunity with the trees and space in front of the pub that face south. There are connectors all along Rye lane east and west from the shopping street into the housing areas. The paths all need to be improved and made attractive with good imaginative lighting.

Possible small scale interventions

There are potential easy wins from small scale interventions that could follow a Conservation Area designation, such as recommending better paint coordination, using the vibrant colour palettes sparingly but with a more coordinated approach to backgrounds. If one or two upper floors could be improved they would make a difference. Are there any that could readily be restored as flats above shops? Lighting would make a dramatic effect especially on the smaller paths linking the side streets and cinema to Rye Lane. The Jones & Higgins department store nightclub building and pavement next to it could be lit at night (see Lyon example in photo below). Good restoration with imaginative artistic designed LED lighting would also add to the character of the arch of the former tower cinema.

The fruit stalls give vibrancy and colour to the area, but are constrained in space. A new fruit and vegetable market area could be a good addition, with local produce.

The whole of Rye Lane needs traffic calming. Some of the Ashford shared space principles could be applied. This could be used near the cinema area.

The major sites

Development briefs should be prepared for the major sites that give clear guidance on routes, links, the massing and scale expected, foot, cycle and car accessibility, energy waste and greening policy requirements, and uses should include cultural use appropriate to this area.



Liz Wrigley Core Connections 25 October 2010