

Aylesham Community Action ACCF Topics

The project has now reached the point of planning submission, yet there are topics still not subjected to public scrutiny. The following items are suggested as deserving proper consideration before the scheme is formally submitted.

* Environmental sustainability.

This represents an appalling omission as it goes to the heart of the project as a viable proposition. We have raised this topic on numerous occasions and each time BH/ LBS have put off presenting this area as a matter for public engagement, as happened most recently at the last ACCF meeting. This issue has huge ramifications, covering global heating, climate change, carbon emissions, embodied energy, a viable construction strategy, use of concrete, use of sustainable materials, a proper debate regarding ecological diversity etc. How about whole life costing and ideas for future-proofing? The fact none of this has been up for public discussion so far should be sufficient to declare the project truly unviable at an existential level. It now seems likely that any debate in the remaining time pre-planning submission will only be spent on matters of peripheral mitigation, by that stage a complete waste of time.

* Open space

The uses and relationships of public open space have been left until the last minute and relegated to discussion as landscaping. We have in the past suggested there are deeper and prior questions of access, ownership, maintenance, and the nature of 'popas' space. External spaces are fundamental to the everyday use and the sense of inclusion that estate planning should suggest. Are the open areas for the prime use of residents, shoppers or other visitors? Are they conceived as active spaces or closed off to the general public? Will they be hard areas or predominantly made up of soft landscaping? What role will biodiversity play? Can parts be designed to incorporate parkland? Has anyone considered residents' growing opportunities including vertical growing? How about 'field to fork' projects? So many questions, so few opportunities for discussion.

* Cultural space

Peckham is frequently cited as a prime cultural hotspot in south London. Much of this is a form of PR, allusive and implicit, yet it is curious there has been little if any debate on the role the Aylesham development might play in fostering and facilitating creative projects. There are of course good arguments for excluding developers from any role in sponsoring cultural activities. A place like Peckham should ideally generate its own creative arts environment that will be incremental and bottom up, but is there a role for start-up sponsorships say, or investment in a local arts spaces, or a local arts hub? What role could a new residents centre play? And what about sports facilities? Also there seem to have been few if any opportunities for promoting community endeavours as part of the project. What has happened to nurseries, community club spaces, tenants meeting rooms? Again so many questions.

* Development Programme

Broadly this refers to how the project proceeds on the ground. It is understood that development will be divided into two phases mainly to suit the new Morrisons

building, but in practise development will almost certainly have to take place in successive phases. Does this mean a hybrid planning application? Is there not a good opportunity to use successive phasing to try out short life uses? Also to test and reassess what will work best for the town centre as the development rolls out? We are talking of a possible fifteen year programme after all, and possibilities for change should be built in. Demand for new and alternative spaces is bound to happen, prompted not just by the unfolding development itself but arising out of continuing impacts on the surrounding environment. Can flexibility be built into the programme? Has the prospect of continuing construction blight been factored in? What steps are being taken to monitor the ongoing effect of the development etc etc?

* Indicative numbers, density, design and built form

Indicative numbers have been at the heart of the project since it was identified as a PNAAP site. It has never been explained how this developable number is calculated, nor how and why it has been altered as the scheme has been through changes in developer and architect. In practice the architectural solutions have all been forms of slab blocks packed tightly together in a grid format with variable heights. There has been no public discussion on other design formats such as deck housing, clusters of very tall blocks with low rise units, or mixed housing types. The impact when the recent scale model is viewed at street level is egregious in the extreme and with its compression of repetitive facades is totally unacceptable as a civilised urban townscape.

The current scheme is designed against an indicative number of 850 dwellings, in practice 878, yet by the criteria of good planning standards, innovative architectural practice and sound environmental criteria, it is most deficient. Taken together with the previous schemes, the logical conclusion is the use of indicative numbers is ipso facto bogus, and the Council should jettison this reliance on abstract figures. Instead it should adopt a design led approach that is evidence based in favour of good design standards, internally and externally and will enhance the lives of all who live in and enjoy the town centre.

• Residential: housing mix and tenure

Given the paramount importance of the housing crisis, it is of concern that the quantum of affordable apartments proposed is only 35% when the Council's target is at least 50%. There is also concern that the proposed mix is weighted in favour of one and two bedroom flats rather than much needed larger units, and no indication that alternative typologies have been considered such as shared clusters of HMOs for young professionals, or micro-house types for key workers. There has been no suggestion either that alternative models of housing provision such as Council owned development departments have ever been considered.

It is currently rumoured that setting up a Community Land Trust may prove difficult to achieve in practice. So many radical opportunities not discussed or taken. The recent suggestion that the market sector could be targeted at second home owners further dilutes the ideal of a Peckham based vision for the site.

* Traffic transport and parking

The site both benefits and suffers from its position in the heart of the town centre. It is directly served by numerous bus routes, including a bus station next door. The Morrisons car park serves as the de facto town centre car park and the A202, a main TfL trunk route, is routed alongside. Southwark's main cycling spine runs down Rye Lane, and fortuitously positioned, the train station site is 100 metres away. Yet the impact of the new project on this infrastructure has yet to be evaluated.

The decision to restrict parking spaces to half the present number is certain to have longer reaching effects than are immediately apparent. The car park will cease its role as a central car park, and the supermarket may focus its retail offer on the new residents living above them. The future of the bus station is uncertain. At present it is little more than a bus park yet occupies a disproportionate amount of space between the site and the A202, and is the major reason that traffic movements and road junctions are so problematic. Pedestrian and cyclist movements are in any case expected to be more conflicted. In short the scheme should not be allowed to proceed without a joint Council/TfL study of the traffic interfaces.

- Retail and the community

Because of the scale of the project and the extended timeline, the long term impact of shopping opportunities is difficult to predict, especially with the retail area being reduced by c1000 metres. Key causes of concern are:-

- 1 Little attempt to understand the socio-economic characteristics that drive retail
- 2 No consultation on how traders will be supported during the construction period
- 3 Little understanding of how the BAME community will be affected by the development

- Heritage and the Conservation approach

The Rye Lane Conservation Area stretches from the junction with the High street southwards towards the Park, and covers the present-day extent of the shopping centre. The Aylesham site is located somewhat awkwardly at the north eastern corner of the Conservation Area, whose boundary through the western end of the site is no longer defined by present day property boundaries. Whilst containing few buildings listed in their own right, the Conservation Area well captures the retail uses of the town centre dating from the nineteenth century. The Aylesham site faces onto the backs of Peckham High St shops and frontages along Rye Lane.

These latter sites present major heritage challenges for the proposed development yet we are unaware there has been any real attempt to integrate the proposal nor demonstrate how the impact might be mitigated. The new Southwark Plan makes explicit references to the need to restrict development within a CA context, and draws attention to the need to 'robustly justify' any proposed harm. The project fails on both counts.

The new Southwark Plan 2022

The above topics should be checked against sundry relevant policies as noted in the above Plan. The following items are identified although the significance, acknowledgement and conformity varies considerably.

Strategic Policies

SP6 Climate Emergency

Thriving Neighbourhoods and tackling health inequalities

P20 Conservation Areas

P32 Small Shops

P46 Leisure, Arts and Culture

P47 Community uses

P45 Healthy developments

P54 Car Parking

Climate Emergency

P57 Open Space

P60 Biodiversity

P69 Sustainability Standards

P70 Energy