

Feedback Form Peckham Rye Station Area drop-in, 30 Nov 2013

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BOARD 1 Background and aims

This board says:

The project responds to long-established local desire to improve the station setting through adding a useful and attractive public 'square'. This would allow the beautiful historic building to be seen and provide space for both commercial and community activity. In addition, it is felt that improving the arches and the area to its rear would stimulate further commercial and cultural activity. This is documented as a key aspiration, with overwhelming public support, in the Peckham and Nunhead Area Action Plan (PNAAP) – planning policy for the evolution of the local area, developed in close consultation with local people. The PNAAP sets down principles for the evolution of the local area that must be followed in any development project.

As a local resident, I have taken part in each stage of the PNAAP process, and have been working from the community to improve Peckham Rye Station since I set up the Rye Lane and Station Action Group in 2004 with the Council's Peckham Programme. The original consultant's study in 2008 of re-creating the station square, commissioned by the Council, arose from that work. The overwhelming support expressed throughout the PNAAP process which started in 2007 has been for the creation or re-creation of the square in front of the station and the restoration of the station building as the 'We are making this designation...' text says – 'overwhelming support for improving the station and removing the existing forecourt buildings.'

I am a founder member of each of the 6 community groups* mentioned in that text on page 178 of the PNAAP and involved in every step in the process leading to this Gateway project. The idea of creating a link between the new square through to the rear of the station and creating some kind of commercial or market area there was in the consultant's first study published in 2008. However while there has been support for 'improving' the rear of the station, and a possible market, the way that would happen, beyond the possibility of a link through the ground floor of the station building, has never been discussed and it has not had attention in public discussion. This is important in the current context where 'development' as distinct from 'improvement' seems, from Board no 4, to be the idea for the rear 'improvements'. Development of the rear of the station has never had overwhelming or even strong support, if any support at all, as this short 30 November 2013 event is the first time there has been any consultation on it.

In the PNAAP designation the site specific guidance is

'development ... should include the creation of a public square in front of the station ...'

'development should conserve or enhance the historic character of the listed station building ...'

'development of this site should consider the opportunity to develop a market at the rear of the station building.'

While the first two are 'should include...' or 'should conserve or enhance...' and these were strongly supported, the third about the rear is simply 'should consider the possibility ...' and is another indicator of the difference in the public discussion and support for the creation of the front square and restoration of the historic station building, as distinct from the 'development' of the rear. And 'the possibility of developing a market' has no detail and in so far as it has had any attention has been seen as possibly market stalls in the road space and not about re-development of Dovedale Court as a whole.

* Peckham Vision, Peckham Society, Rye Lane & Station Action Group, Southwark Rail Users' Group, Bellenden Residents Group and Friends of the Old Waiting Room

BOARD 4: What Are Our Initial Thoughts As Designers? This board sets out initial ideas about what might be both achievable and desirable on the site.

4.1 Are there any aspects of these initial ideas that you think are particularly good?

If so, what are these and why?

Yes, the creation of the square if done appropriately, and if part of a carefully redesigned public realm in central Rye Lane, will transform for the better the experience of Rye Lane and the entrance to Peckham from the rail station. We were led to believe that there would be some period of public discussion about this when local ideas could be taken into the discussion. This is why we are all so concerned that there has been solely 4 hours of an event and a following week to get comments together. It is wholly inadequate for any major project. In this case it is deeply disappointing given the commitment and interest local people have taken in it to be prevented from having any time to discuss locally and to have to get comments together so fast. There sadly has been no focused public discussion about ideas for how the square would be created or clarification about the kind of square which local people think would work. For example how the commercial units would be created in relation to the space in the square and their relationship to the station building. Not having an iterative discussion before designs are developed for the planning application is extremely disappointing and a huge lost opportunity especially given the community origin of this idea, and the community nurturing of it for so many years.

4.2 Are there any aspects of these initial ideas that make you feel worried or concerned?

If so, what are these and why?

As I know many others are as well, I am very concerned at the idea that the area alongside the station building and to the rear should be part of the same 'development project' to create the square and the demolition of the arcade, and the whole site treated like a 'development site'. To distinguish the different parts of the site for these purposes of discussion, we have produced a map (see page 6 of these comments). This shows the arcade and the buildings adjoining those front arches on both sides of the rail tracks coloured blue. The buildings alongside the station, ie 12-16 Blenheim Grove and 4 Holly Grove, are coloured pink. The buildings and arches at the rear of the station, ie Dovedale Court and Blenheim Grove are coloured green. As my comments above show, and as a local participant deeply involved in all the details of the emergence of the idea of creating the square and restoring the station building, I know that the consultations and discussion have never been based from the community perspective on wholesale development of the total site adjoining the station. Even during the last 9 months when local residents and local businesses took deputations to the Council Cabinet to clarify worrying aspects of the project as they were emerging, which indicated full site development was being considered, we were told that this wasn't the case and that the plans would build on existing creative businesses which have and continue to take root on the site alongside and behind the station. These initial ideas on your display board number 4 all seem to require demolition and rebuilding across the whole site and so would be incompatible with those reassurances. I hope that this is not so, but my following comments address this in case it is the intention.

The project has grown from (a) the concern local people had over the last 10 to 15 years with the poor state in front of the station and its immediate surroundings - the forecourt, the three paths out onto the roads Rye Lane, Blenheim Grove and Holly Grove, and the state of those roads near the station, and (b) the desire to restore the historical features of the station building itself. These factors gave rise to the community action from 2005 to promote the idea to recreate the station square, successfully to seek the listing of the station, and to recover the Old Waiting Room and original staircase from dereliction. The idea to link the new square with the rear of the station, by

a new pathway through at ground level and what would happen at the rear, emerged and was accepted as an interesting idea but was not developed in public discussion.

So the 'overwhelming support' recorded in the PNAAP was focused on the front and the station building itself, especially as from 2009 Peckham Vision was leading the way by bringing back to view and to life the Old Waiting Room and then the original staircase. So not surprisingly when a Council paper reported in April 2013 that they were seeking vacant possession across the whole site it was a shock and led to the deputation on 13 April 2013. We pointed out that seeking vacant possession was not consistent with the Council's policy of building on the creative industry that was taking root in that area including on the station site. Reporting to the Cabinet after that Cllr Colley said:

"Since the last report I have taken the opportunity to visit a number of the cultural businesses who were concerned about their future. I hope I have provided them with a level of reassurance that far from wishing to evict them from the area, that the Gateway to Peckham project is an opportunity to build on the best that Peckham already has to offer and create an arts, culture and leisure hub that will create jobs and business opportunities and be an exciting new destination in London."

This appeared to give assurance that the physical restructuring of the land and buildings on the station site would be related to the creation of the square and that the land and buildings housing the new creative enterprises to the side and behind the station were not part of that. However we were concerned yet again in October 2013 when we received the architects' brief for the next stage of the work as a result of an FOI request. This showed that a 'preferred option' included new buildings and work to the arches throughout the site which seemed to imply once again a complete clearance. A deputation to the Cabinet on 22 October 2013 led by the creative businesses to the rear was told that the preferred option was just a technicality. This preferred option has however been taken further by being used as the basis for Board 4 as the 'designers' initial thoughts'. So the concerns that were expressed to the Cabinet in the two deputations in April and October, and to the Scrutiny Committee on 7th May 2013, appear justified as these ideas about including the sides and the rear in the full physical redevelopment of the site are the ones under consideration. This is our only opportunity to express the case for this not being the right approach. But, because of the short consultation of only a 4 hour public drop in and just a week to respond, it is sadly without the opportunity for the public discussion that there needs to be.

The new kinds of businesses that have and are continuing to establish themselves in the sides and rear of the station site are all significant illustrations of how the natural development of the market in Peckham is creating jobs and economic activity with links at grassroots level below the radar of the big authorities. Once destroyed it can't be restored by relocation and return. The Inspector at the PNAAP public hearings in July 2013 accepted our argument about the importance of not disrupting the living nature of business relationships between the artisans in Blenheim Court. In addition the Inspector accepted our argument that the PNAAP needed to offer more protection for 'artistic and creative uses' on the development sites in this central part of Rye Lane including the station site and he pointed out that:

"the AAP acknowledges Peckham's reputation as a creative 'hotspot' and makes specific reference to the artists' studios in the area around 'Peckham Station', along Blenheim Grove and on the Copeland Industrial Park. It also expresses a wish to build on this reputation, to help create new jobs and contribute towards the vitality of the town centre through, amongst other things, opportunities for training and learning. I find the failure of Policy 6 to expressly address this objective to amount to an inconsistency which renders the AAP unsound."

He has suggested amendments to the PNAAP which are, with the rest of his suggestions, out for public consultation right now. The significance of this is that the Inspector accepted the case that the physical premises housing existing small artistic and creative businesses extended throughout

the station site and needed some form of protection and support. This reinforces the need to approach the 'improvement' of this part of the station site, ie to the sides (pink) and rear of the station building (green), with great care and not with a simple redevelopment model.

4.3 Are there particular issues or ideas that you feel it is important for the architects to think about in developing proposals for the site?

The number of current creative businesses on the site, while still small is now increasing steadily and the links between them, and with the local grassroots economy, are also growing. They are also demonstrating their ability to be successful social incubators of new jobs and new small enterprises with significant spin-offs for local employment, skills training, enterprise and the local economy as a whole. This is a living system which needs to be nurtured where it is located to keep it alive. Demolition and rebuild in the land and buildings they currently occupy would kill off the system that is taking root. It could no more be successfully put together again after the disruption of 'regeneration' than a plant can be put together again if it is taken apart. This would have a life threatening effect on the other parts of the new economy taking root in the Copeland Park, and also in the cinema and multi storey car park site which the Inspector recognised has significant cultural potential that has to be explored by the Council before deciding the designation for that site.

So the development model for the three major sites in this central part of Rye Lane – the Peckham Rye station site, the Copeland Park site and the multi storey car park site – needs to reflect an understanding that for their potential to be realised they need to be seen as a sub-system of three linked sites in terms of enterprise, employment and economic linkages.

Another reason for exploring a new way of approaching the station site is that the more demolition and rebuilding there is, the more there will be a serious disruption of trade in the rest of Rye Lane as well. Within the last three years there was a period of road works in Rye Lane for about a year. The businesses in Rye Lane were severely affected and have not yet recovered their lost trade. So the aim for the works on the station site for these wider reasons must be to keep demolition and rebuild only to that which is essential for the creation of the square and the restoration of the station, minimising disruption and public cost. The emerging plans, with no discussion until last Saturday with the local community - businesses and residents – may unfortunately be the opposite - disruptive, destructive and costly.

Fortunately however, the buildings to the side of the station (ie 12-16 Blenheim Gv and 4 Holly Gv - pink) and to the rear (green) are not essential for the creation of the square. Moreover, the continuing natural emergence of the creative enterprises interspersed with other small local businesses is part of the attractiveness and character of Peckham which is part of Peckham's identity. The key to helping this to work to Peckham's benefit is not major physical reconstruction, but high standards of public realm management by the Council, Network Rail, property owners and businesses. This needs a strong collaborative effort from all these stakeholders which the Council has a leading role to play, and it is not costly, not disruptive and does not interfere with trade. These are all excellent attributes for any public policy.

So it is not essential to demolish and rebuild the sides and rear of the station to make the major transformation that has wide public support. Moreover the creative businesses and the mix of enterprises will be an excellent complement to the new square. It is worth noting that there are now 6 new types of businesses in this new economic sector on the site to the sides (pink) and the rear (green) that have taken root since the 2008 report on which the Gateway project is based. The 'preferred option' has not reflected this phenomenon.

To summarise: there is very wide and strong local support over many years for recreating the square in front of the station and restoring the historic station building, and a strong desire to get that part of the project moving, together with much improved public realm management. These are not dependent on redevelopment and new build at the sides and back of the station. And for those parts there has been no public discussion and so no opportunity yet to discover the local preferred option for that.

This suggests that a solution to the problems caused by the very short deadlines the architects are working to might be found in distinguishing between the planning application for the land and buildings needed for the works essential to create the square, and the planning application(s) for everything else on the Network Rail site.

Already the station building has been separated into a different planning application stream, and so not part of this brief. Since any works to the rear have to involve a public path linkage through the station between the front and the back, this makes an additional case for separating the planning stream for the sides (pink) and the rear (green) from the creation of the square (blue) and the works essential to that. This would give the time necessary for a facilitated community engagement and discussion process, and to enable a review of the employment and economic benefits of enabling the local natural market conditions to stimulate the regeneration rather than the current approach implied by Board 4 of physical demolition and rebuild.

A lot of the concern expressed about the project focuses on the sides (pink) and back (green) of the station and what we need now is to separate the project into these two streams – 1. the front (blue), and 2. the sides (pink) and back (green). That would enable the creation of the square to be carried out without delay. It would also give the Council and Network Rail and architects some more time to discuss in public the different ways of securing improvements to the sides and back to ensure that the chosen option not only has widespread community – residents and businesses - support but also is the one most likely to build on and support the new economic sectors in Peckham and realise their potential to provide jobs, skills, increased life chances, and a vibrant local economy.

BOARD 5: Community Priorities

i) Which 4 priorities did you choose? Please tick below.

ii) Why do you see these as priorities?

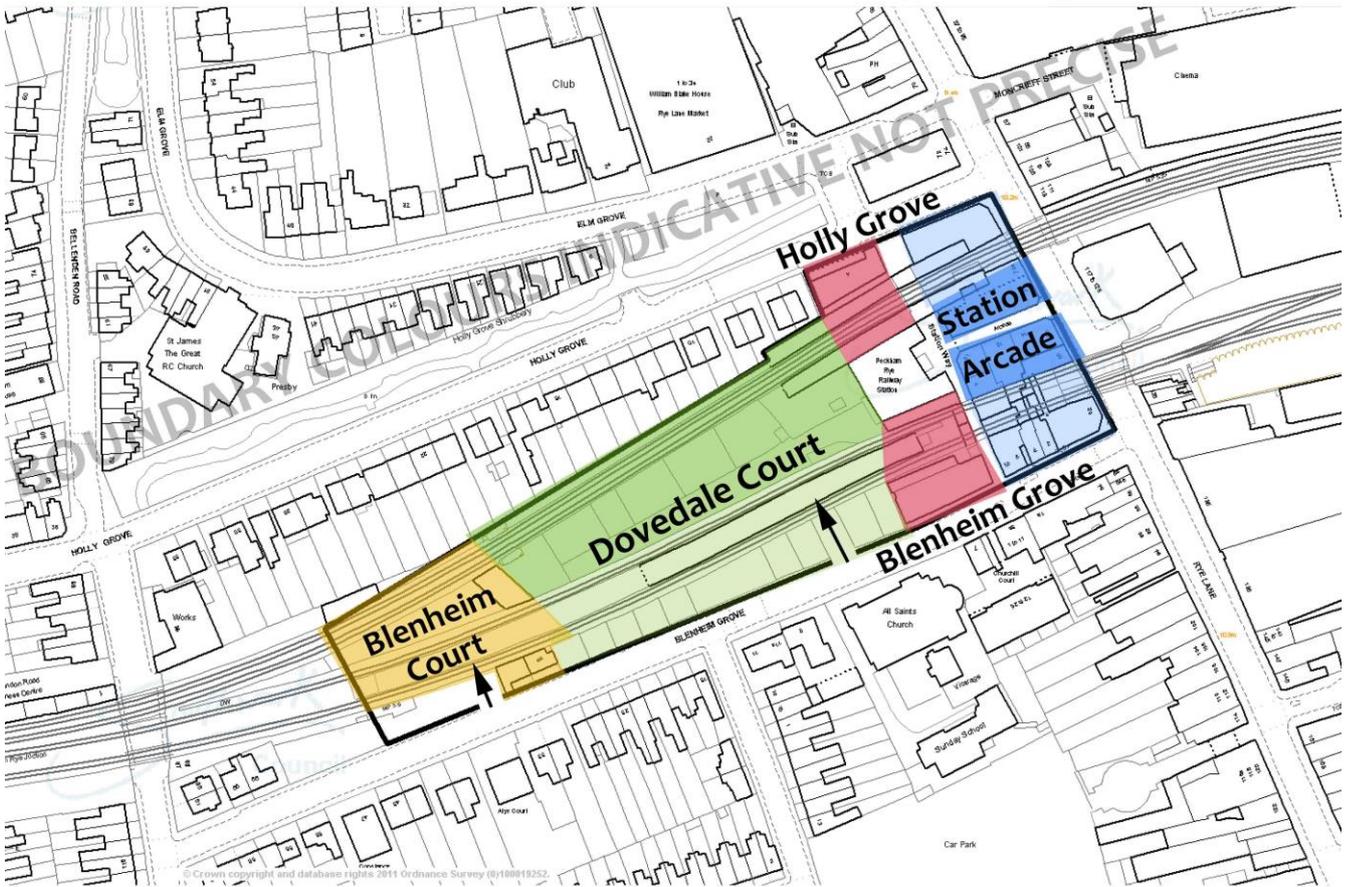
- Provide more useful facilities, like newsagents, cafes and public toilets.
- Support the presence of an artistic, creative community in the space.
- Make the area around the station cleaner, and easier to keep clean.
- Support local independent business.

They will realise the potential of Peckham effectively in terms of employment, local economy and as a good place to be.

In September 2013 a joint initiative by the Rye Lane Traders' Association and Peckham Vision presented to the Community Council a public petition of 4,200+ signatures collected in the town centre for public toilets to be provided as part of the Gateway project. See http://www.peckhamvision.org/wiki/Toilets_petition This is a very high community priority.

Saved Southwark Plan 1.7 requires new developments in town centres to provide 'amenities for users of the site such as public toilets'. A suitable space needs to be found in the redesign of the area in the station Gateway project to provide public toilets which can be managed by a public toilets management company in collaboration with Network Rail and the Council.

Gateway to Peckham - different parts of Network Rail land, central Rye Lane west



Base map from Gateway to Peckham Cabinet report <http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?id=27873>
Boundary colours indicative not precise, produced by Peckham Vision 2013 as a discussion aid