

TRAM DEPOT IN PECKHAM?

A briefing paper

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INTRODUCTION

The draft UDP (Unitary Development Plan) designated a large site in the middle of Peckham for a tram route, tram depot and a variety of other uses. This site is on the east side of Rye Lane. It includes the land between the railway lines, retail frontage on Rye Lane from the railway line to Bournemouth Road, all the land between the railway line and Bournemouth Road taking in all of the Copeland Industrial Park (CIP) and the buildings along the north of Bournemouth Rd, and the triangle between Copeland Road, Consort Road and Brayards Road, including Blackpool Road. The designation appeared to provide for a mixed use of the site which could give opportunities for creative and constructive developments to enhance Peckham town centre. At the UDP Public Inquiry sessions in June 2005 on the Peckham town centre, however, information became available about the Council's plans for a tram depot on the site which raised several important issues. But the sessions at the public inquiry received little or no public coverage and the information, though now in the public domain, remains generally unknown by the public. This paper aims to give an overview of some of those issues as an introductory brief for those who have an interest in the future development of Peckham town centre.

The public inquiry has now closed and the inspector will deliver his report in early 2006. In the meantime the Council will be starting the next stage of the UDP process for Peckham town centre by the opening of consultations sometime in the autumn on the Peckham Area Action Plan (PAAP). The issues raised in this paper will be relevant to the discussions in those consultations.

It is possible to walk around and through the major part of the site between Rye Lane and Copeland Road during daytime, and to see the scale of the area and also some of the numerous commercial, economic, creative and community activities that take place there now in the Copeland Industrial Park (CIP). The entrance is through 133 Rye Lane, by the alley way through the shop buildings, opposite Blenheim Grove. You can see a large ornate Victorian doorway on the side of the building facing you as you walk along the alley. The path enters a courtyard with potential and then goes through metal gates and along the side of the Victorian 5 storey Bussey factory. The panoramic view of London from the roof is spectacular. The path leads through the site into a space, which leads out onto Copeland Road. A walk to the railway bridge and junction with Consort Road gives an impression of the scale of the land to be taken by the proposed tram depot.

1. PROPOSALS

1.1 The information became available in several proofs of evidence to the Public Inquiry (April to July 2005) into the UDP (Unitary Development Plan), and at the last moment as a result of Freedom of Information Act requests by the McNiven & Cameron objectors (the owners of the corner site on Rye Lane/Bournemouth Rd, ie the two big old buildings, and not the small building between them right on the corner).

1.2. TfL (Transport for London) proposes to acquire the land between the railway lines on the east side of Rye Lane, and between Bournemouth Road and the railway line, and from Rye Lane to the Consort Road/Copeland Rd railway bridge. It would be used as the tram depot. On the frontage of the site on Rye Lane there would be retail units. These would appear to be only about a quarter of the depth of the largest existing units and with no back servicing, and said at the public inquiry to 'be little more than a row of kiosks'. A copy of the plan is attached (needs to be printed in colour).

1.3. The depot would be a shunting and engineering yard used to stable, clean and repair the trams. The plan presented at the inquiry shows that apart from some workshop and storage buildings, the depot site would be roofless. This is a point which needs early confirmation or clarification.

1.4 The tram could come to Peckham without the depot being located here. Expert opinion revealed in documents to the Inquiry is that locating the depot at the end of the line was not the best option. There are other options for the tram depot but they have not been chosen. Nor has there been any opportunity for public examination of the respective merits of the options. The tram coming to Peckham is a separate issue from the location of the depot. This paper briefs on some of the issues about location of the depot in Peckham.

1.5. The trams would come down Clayton Rd and into Consort Rd under the railway bridge, and turn at a very sharp angle into the depot site. The route would terminate at a stop opposite Peckham Rye railway station. There would be 15 trams an hour each way, ie a tram under the railway bridge every two minutes.

1.6. Copeland Rd would be closed between Blackpool Rd and Consort Rd. It was suggested Blackpool Rd might become part of the one way system going north.

1.7. The bus garage would remain as it is between Copeland/Consort/Blackpool Rd. There is a buried reference to a car park between Blackpool and Brayards Rd. No reference to the fact that this is a thriving industrial retail site with Abbey Rose.

1.8 Timescale: The aim is to have the plans for the tram and therefore also the depot included in the Mayor's budget for [2007/8], with construction completed by 2013 at the earliest.

2. CURRENT USES

2.1 Rye Lane shops: all these appear to be in use, though not all the upstairs floors. McNiven & Cameron's site on the corner of Rye Lane and Bournemouth Road (143-147 Rye Lane +1-15 Bournemouth Road) is the subject of a planning application for refurbishing the Rye Lane premises for retail and housing in a new 8 storey block of flats. The application was refused in January 2005 on the grounds that (1) it would interfere with plans for the depot and (2) the tram depot would be a bad neighbour to housing and the two uses were considered incompatible. McNiven and Cameron objected and were represented at the public inquiry to put their case against the need to include their land in the depot site, but also to argue that Peckham was not necessarily the right location for the depot.

2.2 Wandle Housing Association site (137 - 141 Rye lane): new retail and housing being built. Land appears to be owned by Peter Mudahy who says he is selling the freehold and air space above to Wandle with a leaseback for 125 years of the retail space. The new retail space appears to be shallower than the current retail on Rye Lane. These new buildings would have to be demolished for the tram depot. It appears as if Wandle HA is not accepting this as inevitable. Nor is the current owner of the site, who will be selling to Wandle and leasing back the retail units for 125 years. A tenant for the retail is apparently under contract.

2.3 Copeland Industrial Park - Industrial site and buildings behind Bournemouth Rd/Rye Lane: most of these are jointly owned by Mr Tajomani and Mr J Wilson, with one strip of land in the middle behind the Wandle site owned by Dolly Siddiqui. They said they first knew about the proposals during the public inquiry, alerted by the McNiven & Cameron investigations. There are different assessments of jobs on site, but McNiven & Cameron estimates there are over 600. These are a wide variety of uses including 7 African churches - which it is claimed serve a combined congregation of about 700 residents, a large number of artists' studios occupied by around 80 artists, small ethnic businesses including food and clothes making, and a variety of industrial uses in construction, warehousing, distribution and other things. Most of the workers and church people on the Copeland Industrial Park site appear to be BME.

2.4 The UDP depot allocation includes the Bus Garage and the builders merchants. TfL however have now designed the site to avoid the bus garage but now also taking the land between the railway lines where about 150 people are employed (included in the 600).

2.5 Abbey Rose the wholesale/retail building company are on the land between Brayards/Blackpool Roads: this is a medium size business, which is thriving and a major part of the Buildbase company. Until June they were unaware they were on the site marked for development [as a car park, shown in a reference in a proof of evidence at the Inquiry].

3. IMPLICATIONS & ISSUES

The main implications and issues for the community appear to be in the following areas:

1. Economic life of Peckham
2. Blight
3. BME businesses
4. Traffic & transport
5. Retail quality in Rye Lane central
6. Effects on adjacent residential areas
7. Townscape & historic buildings
8. Consultation

3.1 ECONOMIC LIFE IN PECKHAM

Although the buildings are in need of refurbishment, there is considerable economic activity there now. The buildings and the site lend themselves to a wide variety of economic activity and great flexibility in their use by small and medium size businesses. There is especially much potential for the creative industry which the Council is so keen to promote, as well as community uses. The proposals would sweep all this life away, with all its human and economic vibrancy and significant potential of the site for even more diversity. There seems to be a general belief that the depot would have housing and other facilities built on top of it but there appear to be no plans to build on top of the depot. If that is so, all that would be left would be a relatively lifeless large shunting yard with one owner, one employer and far fewer jobs on site (144 is the estimate, with another 200 driving and inspecting jobs off site and not in Peckham, compared with 600 plus on site at present). The churches and other businesses could be difficult to relocate.

3.2 BLIGHT

The blighting effect of the depot proposals are already apparent. The Council has refused planning permission for the MacNiven & Cameron development on a key corner site. An appeal is in against that refusal. Nothing is likely to happen until the future of the depot is settled. There is no guarantee that funding will materialize even if the Crossriver tram goes ahead. Timescales are not immediate and delays could run into years. In the meantime there will be no incentive for investors to invest or retailers to relocate or developers to develop.

3.3 HANDLING EFFECTS ON BME BUSINESSES

Until the site visit in July by the UDP Inspector, very few of those currently working on the site knew about the UDP plans to remove them all at some stage. The majority of these businesses appear to be BME (black & minority ethnic). This could compound the problems, of closing and removing a large number of small businesses & organizations, in the context of the current controversy surrounding the implementation of the Ouseley report, and the implementation of the Council's Equality policies.

3.4 TRAFFIC & TRANSPORT

The use of the tunnel created by the railway bridge over Consort Road for the tram route means that there would be inevitable congestion on this vital north-south through route. This also serves as the alternative route for diversions if Rye Lane is closed either or both ways. There would be a tram every two minutes going either north or south. The effects of mixing this with a constant stream of road traffic including large commercial vehicles appears not to have been assessed. At the inquiry the possible problems appeared to be shrugged off. There seems to have been no traffic impact assessment. None was produced at the inquiry. There are no plans to widen the bridge.

If the junction does become congested it would have a serious knock on effect throughout Peckham. The inevitable bottleneck effect could cause tailbacks on the roads from north and south leading to the Consort Road railway bridge junction, resulting in widespread congestion. Traffic would attempt to avoid it and scatter on other routes north and south including west of Rye lane through Bellenden, Lyndhurst Way, Lyndhurst Grove, and in the east possibly through Kirkwood Road, Hollydale Road, St Mary's Road.

3.5 RETAIL QUALITY IN RYE LANE

The proposed retail units will be much shallower than the largest existing ones in Rye Lane, with front street servicing only, precluding quality retail stores. This plus the continued use of Rye Lane for servicing will reduce the opportunities for improving the quality of the retail offer in this central part of Rye Lane i.e. degeneration, not regeneration and kiosks and lock ups rather than quality shops.

3.6 EFFECTS ON ADJACENT RESIDENTIAL AREAS.

The Atwell Estate is very close to the planned tram depot. While the trams themselves are said to be quiet and clean in operation, the depot would be an industrial site where they would be cleaned and repaired. This would create dirt and heavy industrial noise very close to peoples' houses. One of the reasons TfL gave for opposing the McNiven & Cameron housing development on the corner of the site was that it would not be appropriate to have it so close to the (noisy) depot. It appears that TfL are determined to acquire and demolish 40 nearly built housing association flats on Rye Lane which stand in the way of their preferred depot layout.

3.7 TOWNSCAPE AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS

The plans would demolish a significant part of Peckham's Victorian and Edwardian commercial heritage in the central Rye Lane area. Rye Lane, between the railway line and Bournemouth Road, includes some substantial and attractive Victorian and Edwardian buildings. These seem to have potential for being restored and providing good quality retail, and housing accommodation above the shops. The large building on Bournemouth Road, near the junction with Rye Lane, was the factory for the former Holdron's on Rye Lane (next to the Wandle HA development), and may have potential to be an attractive and desirable conversion into flats. Behind Rye Lane and alongside the railway line is the solid 5 storey Victorian factory of George Bussey, a major Victorian industrialist, which grew its own willow in Kent and manufactured cricket bats. It has spectacular views across London from its roof, and appears to be capable of being restored and refurbished to modern standards. There are several other buildings and there seems potential for a lot of attractive premises for small and medium businesses, artists' studios and other creative industries, some community uses, and popular loft conversions. The spaces between the buildings lend themselves to attractive restoration. The potential for all this flexibility and attractive townscape would be lost forever to a closed uninteresting inflexible industrial site if the tram depot plan goes ahead. Might it be the Peckham small scale equivalent of the 70s plans to demolish Covent Garden? Do the depot proposals stand in the way of an exciting regeneration project bringing varied life back to the centre of Peckham, daring to be different in line with the vision which brought the Peckham Library, and imagines the piazza in front of Peckham Rye station opened up again?

3.8 CONSULTATION

Most of this information about the proposals was available only in the last few weeks of the public inquiry in May/June 2005. It appears that none of the occupiers of the whole site were aware until then of the plans for demolition. The standard letters sent out for the various stages of the UDP process over the last two years appear to have made no direct reference to the implications for the private owners and occupiers of this large site from the railway line to Brayards Road. As a result, these issues were discussed at the public inquiry without the benefit of the facts and views of the current owners of the vast majority of the site. The Inspector will be reporting on the whole of the UDP in early 2006 and this report will include his recommendations on whether the site should be designated for use as the tram depot or not. The Council can then accept or reject the recommendation. Subsequent consultation on the plans will take place under legislation for major transport infrastructure of the Transport and Works Act 1992. This will provide for consultation of the public on only narrow grounds and the Act's procedures appear to provide a short cut for the authorities.

An order under the Act can not only grant the planning permission but also authorise compulsory purchase. Whilst there is a requirement for consultation and the likelihood of a hearing or inquiry into objections it is clear that TfL will be promoting only one option and that they will be promoting this very much as a fait accompli. They are suggesting that unless Peckham is developed as a depot then the whole project is likely to fail or go back to the drawing board. But material provided through the Public Inquiry indicates that there are alternatives, and that these have been considered Peckham may be regarded as a cheap option for Crossriver tram because land values are lower than many other parts of London. It is said that the documentation also suggests that a "deal" may have been struck behind the scenes to move away from the originally preferred location of Kings Cross.

4. SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES

4.1 ECONOMIC REGENERATION: whether the tram depot would have a net benefit or negative effect on the economic regeneration of Peckham in terms of businesses, jobs and the commercial life of the town centre.

4.2 TRAFFIC: whether the effect of the tram route through the Consort Rd railway tunnel would have a harmful effect on traffic flows and patterns in Peckham

4.3 SOCIAL: whether the implications of sweeping away so many business owners and workers, many of which appear to be BME, are properly understood and well handled, and whether the rights of the nearby residents to protect their peace and quiet have been or may be breached;

4.4 HISTORIC PECKHAM: whether the loss of a substantial part of the historic architectural heritage, as well as a loss of flexibility in industrial premises, misses significant potential in the old buildings.

4.5 TRAM DEPOT LOCATION: whether Peckham is the right location for the tram depot - what are the alternative locations and their respective merits?

4.6 ALTERNATIVE VISIONS FOR THE SITE: whether there are alternative visions, and better uses of the site.

4.7 OTHER ISSUES? :whether there are other issues which need to be added to this list.

5. NEXT STEPS

This paper has summarized some of the information which became available during the public inquiry in relation to the proposals for the tram depot, the current uses of the site, and issues potentially arising from all this. Although these issues are now in the public domain through the UDP public Inquiry, they have not been publicized so there is little public awareness. Are these issues sufficiently important to bring to public attention, and if so how can this be done? This briefing paper is being circulated to people who have expressed an interest in the future of Peckham town centre, and can be copied to others who may be interested. I hope it is useful to help the issues to be raised effectively for informed public discussions, including in the forthcoming PAAP consultations. Apologies for any errors or omissions. Corrections, queries, comments or suggestions will be welcomed and can be emailed to me at e.conn@nutbrook.demon.co.uk

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