

## **Southwark Network Planning Meeting held on 22 October 18 at St Philip's Church Hall, Avondale Square, London SE1**

**Present:** about 40 SPN members, 3 visiting Council representatives, and 1 action researcher. Groups with members present included: Alvey TRA, Southwark Law Centre, Southwark Studios, Southwark Cyclists, Peckham Society, OKR People, Defend Council Housing, Peckham Vision, SGTO, Vital OKR, Living Bankside, Southwark FOE, Southwark Pensioners Action Group, Walworth Society, Southwark Living Streets, St Philip's Church, Friends of Burgess Park, Southwark Mediation Centre, Grenier Apts, 35% Campaign, Elephant Amenity Network, Peckham Heritage Regeneration Partnership, Copeland Park/Bussey, Friends of Peckham Rye Park.

### **1. Welcome & introductions**

Eileen Conn (EC), SPN co-ordination, opened the meeting and set the scene. The meeting had come about as a result of the SPN Local Election Hustings in April when Cllr Lury had agreed to work with the Southwark Planning Network (SPN) to change for the better the way the community is engaged in planning and regeneration. This meeting had been arranged to start that process of working together, to share ideas about new community engagement processes and a number of planning policies, to be followed up with further work.

EC welcomed Cllr Lury, now Deputy Leader of the Council and responsible for community engagement and equalities as part of her portfolio. The welcome was extended to Cllr Situ, Cabinet Member for Growth, Development and Planning, and Prof Fenton, Strategic Director of Place and Wellbeing. All in their new roles have important things to contribute to how the Council works with its communities, and would give a short report on the major changes relating to planning and to community engagement.

EC also welcomed Ruth Breidenbach-Roe, from the national organisation Locality, who was present to observe the meeting as part of the action research in the further work of the Commission on Localism in Planning <https://locality.org.uk/about/key-publications/findings-from-the-commission-on-the-future-of-localism>. Southwark is one of four local authority areas taking part to examine the imbalance of power at local level.

People were invited to write any unasked questions and unspoken comments on post-it notes. These are listed at the end of each topic section, to note the concerns and comments they recorded.

### **2. Council updates**

Cllr Lury reported on the Community Engagement Review.

- A recent paper had been signed off at Cabinet on how consultation will be improved (<https://bit.ly/2BR1OPT>)
- This dovetails into the Consultation Charter with Developers, now underway by Cllr Situ.
- There will be a single point of access to the grants system (date tbc).
- An exercise on asset mapping is to be undertaken (this is to plot community assets, not property assets)

Cllr Situ reported on key policy areas in his portfolio

- There would be consultation on a Developers Charter for how they conduct consultation.
- The New Southwark Plan (NSP) - further consultation would be needed as there are some policy changes. Not likely to be further consultation on the whole NSP.
- OKRAAP - admission that things could be done better, and that it is a 'work in progress'.
  - Now set up the Old Kent Road Forum, meeting monthly to explore different issues

- A dedicated OKR website - <https://oldkentroad.org.uk>
- A drop-in place on the OKR to help people understand what's happening
- The Heritage Local List - expect to go out for consultation on an SPD (Supplementary Planning Document) later in 2019

Prof Fenton said key things were:

- On social regeneration, how can we ensure this works for everyone?
- For the first time, planning, regeneration, public health and community are being brought together in one department allowing for cross-cutting themes to be identified
- Would develop thinking about 'pride of place' allowing communities to influence what is needed.

### 3. Community Engagement and Co-production

Eileen Conn opened the discussion by acknowledging that the Council recognises that changes are needed in the way the Council engages, but the issue was what change and how that was shaped. The Council's agreed strategy for the voluntary and community sector in the report 'Common Purpose, Common Cause' <https://bit.ly/2s6Pmfy> committed that '*place based decisions will move from information & consultation to co-production*'. This was very welcome, but the key was what it means in practise. It is not more consultation that is needed, but a different process additional to the standard consultations and Community Conversations. Local people working in local groups are a major resource for information and experience and needed to be clearly accommodated in the process.

#### **From the floor:**

Rhiannon Hughes, Campaign and Research Co-ordination, SGTO: Raised concerns voiced by TRAs. These included poor information in relation to planning applications. Information that understates the impact of nearby developments. Unreasonable expectations from Southwark New Homes team.

Amir Eden, Exec Chair, Bankside Living, local resident:

- \* Recommendations for the Consultation Charter: 1. Accurate information including height of buildings. 2. Meetings to include community reps as well as Council and developers. 3. An evidence base of what is needed locally.
- \* Engagement: Community groups become delivery arm for Councils to engage.
- \* Health and Well being: If people think things are being done to them it has a negative impact on well being.

Richard Lee, OKR people, local resident: Actions needed for Planning Committee to shift the balance from it being a developer friendly space to a more balanced forum:

1. Make more time available for deputations and allow objectors more than 3 minutes to make their case.
2. Increase the time available for objectors to view Planning Officer report. 5 days is completely insufficient. An early draft might help.
3. In the same way planning officers are able to brief the Committee, allow community reps the same.
4. What is the planning policy framework? How can we have a more equal discussion and not more meaningless consultation?

Dave Walker, Southwark Mediation, resident: gave the Thames Tideway as an example of the way poor consultation before development badly affected people's health and this could have been avoided if the people affected had had been genuinely involved at a very early stage.

Mark Brearley, Vital OKR, & local business owner: Gave an overview of planning policy (Skeffington and the more recent Raynsford review) and the deficiencies of current system. Highlighted the absolute lack of fairness when consultation is done with developers at a pre-application stage behind closed doors, with no community or business input. It is unethical. How will the Council remedy this?

Greg Smith, Southwark Cyclists: The evidence base for the NSP is now very outdated. How will the Council present EiP when there have been big changes in National policy?

***From post-it notes:***

- How will compliance with the new principles of community engagement and consultation charter be monitored? What will happen in the case of non compliance? Will planning permission be refused if developers don't follow it?
- Please, please, please use local Community Groups in Southwark, like Southwark Mediation.
- On co-production - set parameters eg. are you coproducing a whole vision or just a bit of it? Clear objectives for all co-producers involved.
- Thank you SPN for giving the people a voice!

#### **4. Impact of planning & regeneration on health and wellbeing, & on equalities**

- **Housing:**

Janine Rowe, resident OKR: Questions the Council's tall buildings strategy. They will have a detrimental impact on local communities. Why have the Council not defined upper limits to Tier 1 buildings? Why not insist that developers explore lower rise options and respond to local housing need?

John Gardiner, local resident: provided evidence that density can be achieved without going tall. Gave the example of Mount Pleasant, and the work of Create Streets. Pointed to Westminster planning decision to turn down application for Paddington Basin where new lower rise design has the same density. Pointed out the only reason for going high is to increase developer profit not for local need. The Council and developers need to share the financial viability assessments so they can be critically assessed by members of the community who have the relevant skills. It is unacceptable to view these as developers' intellectual property. Is there an active decision about the types of community the Council wants to attract?

John Taylor, Canada Water resident: The plans for CW are so extreme, Historic England have lodged an objection - 6 tall towers. The social housing element is far removed from the private dwellings. It is segregating people.

Cllr Situ responded to the concerns raised by explaining the Council's position on the issues raised on height and density/delivery of social housing against targets/Fairer Futures/affordability. Challenge is how to look constructively at where housing can be built. Agreed to look into how financial viability assessments are shared.

Tauni Launer, OKR resident: Highlighted problems with current housing market: homes not selling, impact of Brexit, ghost towers all over the capital. Southwark Council produced a report in 1999 (?) that argued against the building of towers. Why aren't the Council following their own advice?

Jerry Flynn, 35% campaign: Questioned the enthusiasm for build to rent. New type of private development that doesn't put anyone on the ladder. New tenancies are for 3 years only. This doesn't contribute to community stability or cohesion. This is housing managed off shore. On viability assessments - only days are given to interrogate before the determination.

Liam Hennessy, local resident: Can we have detailed information on the current level of social housing Southwark have? According to GLA figures, Southwark is losing more social housing than it is gaining and on present trends it will take 393 years to get to 11,000 (! What a good stat!!). Can Southwark publish these details widely please? (Would make a good tweet)

Rhiannon Hughes, SGTO, gave some local resident quotes: "When you come out and see cranes and you know that these new builds are not for you." "A new health centre has just been left to rot."

Piers Corbyn, Alvey TRA, local resident: We have a Council that represents the developers and not the people. Ask former residents of the Heygate and Aylesbury. Destruction of neighbourhoods has resulted in suicides. We want accountability - respect the ballot of the Aylesbury and keep the whole estate as Council Housing. Ballots should be introduced for all OKR developments. The public sector borrowing cap has been lifted so the Council can change its position.

***From post-it notes:***

- On tall housing and social housing, don't reinvent the wheel. Remember the failures of the 1970's with tall housing and the subsequent problems with housing families with children above the 2nd floor.
- 65% of 'unaffordable' housing doesn't make a liveable, healthy, sustainable place.
- Respect the Aylesbury ballot and refurbish the estate. Demolishing is destructive for communities and the environment.
- Downgrading fire safety in Southwark: New towers in E&C shopping centre, Ruby Triangle, Bermondsey Biscuit Factory etc are planned with no alternative means of escape in case of fire.

• **Green/open spaces & environment/transport**

Paula Orr, Friends of Peckham Rye Park & Peckham Vision: our green spaces have a wonderful positive effect on mental and physical health but parks are under threat from encroaching private 'spaces', cafes, festivals, cycle routes. Need for more than 'pocket parks' in new developments.

Jeremy Leach, Walworth Society, & Southwark Living Streets: Real wish for greater engagement with the Council, on transport planning. MTS - vision zero - Well being and public health at the heart.

Stephanie Lodge, Southwark Friends of the Earth: The Council needs to improve vastly in providing information for residents with disabilities. It is very difficult to get documents in different formats eg on CD for those with visual impairments.

Catriona Sinclair, Friends of Burgess Park: Highlighted a range of problems with new developments; buildings go right up to the edge of the plot, outdoor spaces are put on roof tops, claims that existing homes enjoy an excess of light so this can be eroded by new developments. This erosion is irreversible and negative.

### ***From post-it notes***

- Small open areas at the foot of towers are low quality. If one wants to encourage exercise, people can walk to the park using the new green paths (response to Cllr Situ).
- Please ensure developers provide community halls for local residents – plan open space for children.
- Quote from 13 year old boy @ Bells Garden football pitch “someone told me my flats might change. I’m scared something will happen to the football pitch. Where will we play if there is 2 times more boys?”
- Never ignore climate change - leave the trees where they are - for air quality and biodiversity.

- **Economy & employment:**

Mark Brearley, Vital OKR: Plans for the OKR will dramatically reduce industrial land. Yet economic and civic life wants to grow substantially. There will be a significant loss of manual and skilled labour impacting on BAME communities. Southwark Council need to undertake a Borough wide fine-grained audit of its economy.

William Austin, Southwark Studios: Developers are proposed 100% market rent as affordable for local workspace. Can the Council provide policy and guidance on their expectations before it loses this vibrant, successful part of its economy?

### ***From post-it notes***

- It’s the local economy on the OKR that needs to be acted upon. Poverty is the biggest problem. No point in wiping out the economy that is here and building flash towers that do nothing. Build on the economy that is there now.

- **Social Regeneration:**

Richard Lee, OKR People: Monitoring indicators are vital for community engagement and accountability. It is crucial they are shared with the community as now they are not. In the NSP, annexe 5 hardly anyone contributed. Involve talents in residential, business and equalities sector.

Ann O’Brien, Southwark Pensioners Action Group (SPAG): NSP is not age-friendly, it does not refer to it in any meaningful way. Lots of examples provided.

Celia Cronin, SPAG: one example - of 85 sites in the NSP, 17 mentioned elderly housing, but only one was highest priority - as a re-provision of an existing facility. The other 16 mentions were all the lowest 'may be provided'. Regarding health facilities, 6 potential sites are mentioned, but two are re-provisions and 4 are at the lowest priority level.

Comment from Southwark Traveller’s Community: They would like to be included in the main body of the NSP and not in a separate document.

### ***From post-it notes***

- Will the amendments to the draft NSP and OKRAAP include assessment of need and allocation of land for Gypsies and Travellers? If not, why not?
- Manage the impact on health of long construction periods - decades on the OKR.
- Impact assessments eg. Health, environment, equalities, air quality etc need to look at the cumulative impact of multiple developments NOT just single sites.
- The Council and developers should take into consideration the affect of growing crime within these development areas and the impact of our crowded families living on the estates which effectively must lead into crime.

- How to get the Council out of the pocket of developers? How to get the members of the Planning Committee to exercise independent judgement free of party control? These are key questions.

### **Response from Council:**

Prof Fenton: Re discussion “fascinating and important to hear all the perspectives”. Need to find a much more structured way to engage and demonstrate that we are working and listening and taking on board what people think and say.

Cllr Lury: There is a real passion to make the Borough better. Working out the principles for consultation is a good start, including how we can work with you better.

Cllr Situ: “We have a way to go”. We are committed to the journey. We may not always agree but to get to where we all want the Borough to be, we need constant reflection and engagement. Have appreciated this discussion.

### **5. Conclusion & thanks**

Eileen Conn: The meeting showed the widespread local knowledge and experience that exists in community groups across the borough. There needs to be a different and better way for the Council to engage with the organised community sector. The SPN looks forward to taking this forward with the Council in their community engagement review.

She thanked everyone for their contributions and said there will be an SPN meeting to follow up the matters raised during the discussion, also follow up with the Councillors and Prof Fenton.

Thanks to St Philips Church for allowing us to use their hall. The donations we received at the meeting will go to the Church. Thanks also to the SPN volunteers who helped in the preparations for the meeting and the clearing up and the follow up.