

## Residents Views

**25 February 2014**

I read about the public meeting which I will try, but am unlikely to be able, to attend. I'm not immediately local but live in SE1 and have done so for twelve years. I have asked for the report to be made available since it currently is not downloadable.

Whilst not being fully aware of what the antisocial behaviour is - i.e. street drinkers, or people leaving pubs, it being used as a toilet or something else, the council should take a firm stand against the annexation of public open space, which I gather was provided because as a Section 106 provision when built (and thus at the time was legally and in planning policy terms *necessary and reasonable* to the acceptability of the development), as private land.

Its function is as a breathing space to have views of the river. Gating it will remove almost all its value to the public - it is no good looking from the cobbles at the space and a narrow distant view of the river beyond - it is the walk up to the river wall and views from it that are key.

When Minerva House should be redeveloped - almost inevitable in the next 20yrs given land values - the annexation of this open space would count in their favour in building over it or not providing public open space in a redevelopment.

Moreover there are simple measures that can deter antisocial behaviour - removal of seats, bushes, lighting and so forth - your urban design officers will be able to advise. This is the only public open space for a long stretch of historic riverside and a vital if small breathing space from the fascinating, densely developed Cathedral area. You only have to look a little further south to see more neighbourly examples such as Red Cross Garden where antisocial behaviour no doubt occurs from time to time but is managed through design, lighting, staffing and a bit of tolerance.

I trust you know about the Cardinals Cap Alley issue - where private resident(s) have annexed a very historic alleyway near to Tate Modern, locking the gate and hoping the Council forget about it. Indeed they have also tried to annex the cobbled road in front of their multimillion pound houses, and call it private land, and have an olde worlde wooden swing barrier (reaching halfway across, presumably so they don't fall foul of laws about "obstructing the highway"). It is true that the alleyway now leads nowhere due to 1990s office buildings to the south but given the historic interest it is of little doubt that were it opened up people would walk along it from time to time and again the 1990s offices will be redeveloped at some point offering the opportunity to learn from previous mistakes and allowing the opening up of this public right of way and improving the permeability of this large block of buildings in a busy area of Bankside.

It behoves the Council to manage between the public interest in maintaining rights of way and public open spaces in the interests of the public, and resist no doubt individually reasonable but private interests in removing these forever from the public sphere. I find it unfortunate that so many street drunks use the park outside my flat at night (on Falmouth Road) but I understand there are no funds to lock the gate at night and open it in the morning and I remember that there have been public drunks in Southwark for centuries - the only thing that has changed is the neighbours!

## **2 March 2014**

I would like to be kept abreast of all developments as regards the property I own at Minerva House given this has a direct impact on the quality of my immediate surroundings as regards my living environment.

The current state of affairs has been unnecessarily protracted and caused considerable anxiety given the antisocial behaviour that only seems to be escalating. There is a serious threat to all resident in confronting the elements that cause this civil disruption commencing from the evening until the early hours of the morning. The inability of the authorities to deal with matters promptly and convincingly I feel will result in a situation one day that we will all come to ask ourselves 'why did this have to happen'. And who should be held responsible.

## **3 March 2014**

On Thursday evening last week I attended a meeting held to discuss Cathedral Square in Montague Close. Councillor David Noakes called and chaired the meeting and as a Minerva House Resident we attended. At this meeting we learnt that the Council are to review the gating of the Square and that following a report produced presumably by the Planning team a decision would then be reached.

I am not completely aware of the process being followed in this case, but are surprised that the residents as stakeholders do not seem to have been asked for their views. There was mention of a deadline at the end of March which clearly leaves little time for any viable consultation.

To avoid there being any misunderstandings of the Residents view, in what to us is a critically important decision, I have summarised the key issues as we see them and having included the rest of the residents and neighbours into this email assume they will add any further points we may have missed.

### **1. Stakeholders**

Stakeholders are mentioned continuously in all conversations relating to this matter, but we would ask that the Council carefully distinguish the difference between daytime and night time stakeholders. Although there are offices adjoining the Square and of course the Cathedral itself, they are not present during the hours of 10pm to 4am when the worst of the antisocial behaviour occurs. Clearly all stakeholders can have an opinion but those that are most affected must surely be given a heavier weighting when any decision is made.

We would also ask that stakeholders other than residents, who are interested in the future of the Square are pointed towards the Residents, as we can then inform them first hand as to the problems we face and that they do not provide their opinion to this decision based on hearsay and outdated facts.

### **2. Planning Application 13/AP/3540**

The planning application lodged by the Council for "installation of a ripple railing along/on top of coping stone on river wall at Cathedral Square." has been granted but will only add to the already long list of measures e.g. signage that can not be seen at night and an alcohol control area that is not enforced, that have apparently been put in place to reduce anti-social behaviour in the Square and failed. We have no doubt this token measure will also fail and if anything will be disruptive to the daytime visitors who enjoy the square, which most importantly none of Residents wishes to disrupt. The money spent on these railings will be wasted and would be better put towards more effective solutions.

### 3. Noise & Anti Social Behaviour

On this subject we need to be clear about what problem we are facing. In and around Montague Close there is the general transient noise from passers-by and this is all part of living in Central London, however what we are experiencing every night of the week, which peaks every Friday is the drunks rolling out of pubs and clubs in the early hours finding that Cathedral Square is a destination and trap for anyone wishing to scream, shout, smash bottles, urinate, defecate, vandalise, jump off the parapet to commit suicide, drink, play football, fight, have sex in the bushes or on the ground in full view of children in the flats, all with impunity. What right do they have to 24 hour access to do these things against our basic rights as Residents for a peaceful nights sleep? No one at Southwark Council seems to want to face up to this question and answer it.

### 4. Parking

In recent months the Square has become an informal car park for delivery trucks, builders vans and market traders. We have taken photographs and can share these if necessary. Again this shows how poorly managed the area is.

### 5. Alcohol Control Zone

According to the signs which are at high level the Square is an Alcohol Control area, however on numerous evenings during last Summer/Autumn there were drinkers spilling over from the pub and using the Square as an extension of the pub premises. This is not enforced and was another wasted effort.

### 6. Rough Sleepers

As our apartment is on the ground floor we have had first hand experience of rough sleepers using our balcony as a bed for the night.

### 7. Events in Cathedral Square

There have been a number of events held in the Square all raising revenue for the Council, why has this money been siphoned off onto other projects and not re-invested in the Square itself. Assuming that the park idea were implemented and the area made more attractive than it is now, there could still be events which everyone could enjoy.

### 8. Police Response

During a recent evening incident where people were standing on our flower bed and shouting at us through our lounge window, we tried calling various the various council teams but got nowhere, we were then told by the 999 dispatcher to call the Police in all cases of Anti Social behaviour. We have done this on a number of occasions where it has helped but we can not believe this is a good use of police resources, as by the time they arrive those causing the trouble have generally moved on. This in no way fixes the problem.

### 9. Pocket Park

A long time prior to our purchasing the flat there was talk of a "pocket park", at the present time the concrete plinths do no more that provide parking spaces. Surely a properly landscaped area open to all would be better for everyone. As residents we do not want to be seen as trying to close off the space, we genuinely want to work with Southwark to find a solution that provides the maximum amenity to the most people. We do not want to continue with the approach where at nighttime we actively promote and attract anti social behaviour.

To summarise the points above, there are new proposals for the Tube to run 24 hours, our problems will not be going away anytime soon and as new businesses move into the area the way that Cathedral Square is managed becomes even more critical to get

right. The residents have proposed gates as it is the only solution we can see that would actually work. The series of small measures tried to date are poorly enforced and have all failed. If we the Residents are wrong, then please create a team that will come up with something that will actually work, is properly funded and lets get it implemented. If we are right and there are no other effective options then please treat this as a special case and agree to gate Cathedral Square.

### **3 March 2014**

My wife and I are residents of Minerva House which directly overlooks Cathedral Square. I am writing to you following our attendance at a meeting held last Thursday kindly convened by Councillor David Noakes to discuss the increasing problem of unchecked anti-social behaviour in Cathedral Square and its impact on nearby residents.

At the meeting Councillor Noakes informed us that there was currently a consultation in progress regarding the future of the square which would be addressing proposals to gate the square. As a resident whose amenity is directly affected by activity in the square, I am surprised that we have yet to be approached as part of the consultation, and look forward to Southwark Council's invitation in this regard.

I am aware that several other residents have written to you on the topic and I don't wish to repeat what they have stated in detail. However, there are certain key points which I feel necessary to make/reinforce.

- The underlying concern of Minerva House residents is the continuing level of anti-social behaviour that takes place in Cathedral Square during the night hours. This is a nuisance at best, but increasingly a cause of major anxiety arising from on the one hand, risk of attack, theft and/or damage to property, and on the other, the possibility of serious injury or death to persons mounting the river wall.
- The square has been refurbished in the last two years, at which time these concerns were raised by the local residents. Certain measures were taken in the hope of deterring anti-social activity (signage, removal of benches and vegetation), but they have proved wholly inadequate.
- The square is NOT a thoroughfare, and is not well lit late at night or in the early hours. As such, (1) it appears to attract persons who wish to act anti-socially and who will remain in the square for some time at night (often several hours), and (2) in spite of the river views it offers, it is rarely visited in the night hours by members of the public wishing to enjoy its amenity.
- In common with other residents, we have concluded that gating the square at night is the only workable solution – the 'last resort' if you will - for the following reasons:
  - o The ingredients for anti-social behaviour in the locality are increasing – the number of licensed premises, the working population and, in the next year or so, 24 hour public transport on the Tube;
  - o The complete failure of measures taken to date to reduce anti-social behaviour in the square;
  - o Gating the square at night will not reduce its value/amenity to the public at large – it is not a thoroughfare and it is not used peacefully at night but for the rare exception.

At the meeting last Thursday, certain points were raised about the precedent that gating the square would set, particularly given that it is a local park, and affords a view onto the river. It was added that this would be in conflict with the general thrust of the council's 'open space' and planning policies. Particular mention was made of the

Thames Path initiative which was noted as a highly successful approach to improvement of the environment and use of the river, and which the council wished to continue pursuing in Southwark.

In this regard, I note the following:

- In other boroughs, there has been a similar desire to open up the river for the Thames Path, but this has been balanced very effectively with restriction of free access during night time hours close to residential areas, mainly by use of gating...
- In many cases, this results in diversion, but other routes are available. In the case of the square, this is not an issue at all as it is not a thoroughfare...
- Regarding 'open spaces' more generally, Southwark Council (in common with most if not all other London boroughs) already locks up certain parks and open spaces at night...

I appreciate that other boroughs may have different priorities regarding open space and access to the river, but there are clear examples in London of a balanced approach being taken which combines both public amenity and the privacy, peace and safety of local residents.

I sincerely hope that Southwark Council will find a similar, balanced and workable approach to resolving the growing problems of Cathedral Square – gating seems the obvious answer. As a resident and stakeholder, I would welcome the opportunity to participate in your consultation regarding its future and its security.

#### **6 March 2014**

I'm not going to go on at length (you'll be relieved to hear;) - as I'm sure you are more than aware of the issues we have nightly. I am forwarding my only other correspondence to the Council (from December 2012) as the problem still stands and has definitely got worse. I have personally seen people having violent arguments, defecating and having sex directly outside my window and we're slightly dreading the onset of warm summer evenings.

The only other thing I'd like to add is that my husband and I were surprised by the police response. The officers I've spoken to on the ground (most recently when they were stepping over bottles and trying to put the safety equipment by the river back together following a drunken groups' party) were well aware of the extent and frequency of the problem.

We're absolutely not in favour of gating the Square in the day as we like seeing people using it and the various events there. We also take part in and are grateful for the brilliant stuff BOST does in the area. However, we'd be delighted if gating would be considered at night as we really can't see another solution that'll work.

#### **7 March**

It has just been brought to my attention that Cathedral Square could be gated and a green pocket park created. The Council have not written to me about this.

It is a great idea as it will take out of play a notorious after hours gathering place and might have an effect on calming the area at night. I would also really enjoy a proper park on my door step as the current one does not make the most of itself or its location.

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**9 March**

Thank you. I agree that noise and other nuisance is an increasing problem in Bankside – we are far enough away from Cathedral Square for nuisance there not to affect us but we have our own noise and other nuisance in Clink and Stoney Streets. I am sympathetic to the Minerva House residents and will happily support them.

I don't know the answer. I agree that gating off the square is probably not the right answer. It is partly a matter of education of the general public – some posters and some signage indicating that the area is residential and quiet will be appreciated; coupled with better patrols, whether by Police or by Local Authority wardens. A regular patrol with people being asked to behave responsibly – and arrested and dealt with if they will not co-operate.

You are welcome to feed in these comments to whoever is best placed to receive them. In the last few days, as the weather has improved, the footfall along the Thames path has increased considerably – I don't think it has even been as busy. When we moved here in 2000 there was not much footfall along the street. The increase must, please, be managed, with passers-by seeing notices that the area is now primarily residential, etc.

**9 March**

We have been awoken again by a group of 6 people drunk out of their minds cycling around Cathedral Square on TFL Barclays hire bikes.

I will attach film footage and will send photos under cover of another email shortly. I don't want the attachments to prevent receipt of this email. Please confirm the film works on your IT system. In the case that it does not, they are screaming and shouting as they ring their bells, periodically crashing as they ride up as down the steps of the dias by the river.

They could stay for 5 minutes, an hour or all night. In any event our current priority is settling our children who have now been woken for the second time this night.

They are speaking Spanish, so I assume they are tourists.

This cycle of drunks turning up for a while, waking us up and then departing continues all night.

Please tell us how groups of randoms turning up in the middle of the night can be controlled by any measure other than erecting a gate that is locked at night. This problem did not exist when we all moved into Minerva House in 2005 and is a creation of policies designed to grow the night time economy along Bankside.

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#### **11 March 2014**

I write to support the current proposal to create a 'pocket park' at Cathedral Square with gating of the area during the night. Such parks work really well in Manhattan, for the pleasure and health of visitors and workers alike during the day, without threatening the amenity of residents who need to sleep at night.

Southwark Plan policies 3.30 and 3.29 seek to protect and enhance access points for the public along the river. The residents have no objections to this at all. Indeed they would like to see the area made greener and more attractive for everyone to use during the day.

But I would like the officers to consider who needs access to the river during the late 'antisocial' hours of the night? Sadly, the answer in general is this: people who have been drinking, have been at nightclubs or are looking for a place to deal drugs, take them, to urinate or sleep rough.

Why are the rights of such people more important than the amenity of council-paying residents and businesses?

The residents and business around the Square having been suffering anti-social behaviour for years, and all palliative measures have failed. Families with children struggle to sleep. The Southwark Noise Unit no longer operates during the crucial hours when it would be called in – the office is closed from 2am till 6am, as I confirmed this morning in a telephone conversation with the department. Even if a call is made within their opening times, the officers may take hours to arrive, or not arrive at all. The police have better and more urgent things to attend to.

Any lack of calls to the police or Southwark Noise Unit reflects not a lack of issues, but the fact that residents know that there is little point in trying to secure their attendance. Certainly, in Clink Street, where I live, we have all learned the hard way that there is not much point in trying to get help for anti-social behaviour, as the drunks/drugged/fighting people will have moved on by the time anyone arrives, if they do.

In Clink Street, we have been concentrating on more proactive ways of dealing with the noise, making management agreements with restaurants and their landlords, examining leases for antisocial behaviour clauses etc. But the residents of Cathedral Square have only Southwark Council to help them.

The Local Government Ombudsman recently found Southwark in breach of its requirement to consult with local stakeholders, which I feel should have included the residents of Cathedral Square

I am writing in support of, therefore removing a gathering point for antisocial elements, as well as in support of providing us with a pleasant green space for everyone to enjoy during the day. As a neighbour and writer, I often take pieces of work to the area, so that I can clear my thinking. I see other people there with computers and notebooks. But none of us have any reason to be there between midnight and morning. And if we wanted to be by the river then ... we could walk a hundred yards in either direction and find open access to the river - which are not overlooked by the bedrooms of residents trying to sleep.

**27 March 2014**

I am writing in regards to your letter on the 4th March regarding the restricted access of the Cathedral Square.

I have been a residence of Minerva House for approximately 6 years and in all this time I have been repeatedly woken by loud and antisocial behaviour in the square. I have had numerous phone calls with police and have also witnessed a theft.

This disruptive behaviour is getting worse and worse and I see no other solution than to gate the square in the evening.