

# OLD BERMONDSEY VILLAGE

# OBV

## Neighbourhood Forum

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Councillor Mark Williams  
Southwark Council  
PO Box 64529  
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20 February 2015

### Revised Application for designation of a Neighbourhood Forum

As per your letter dated 26 January, we submit this revised application for designation of a Neighbourhood Forum.

- 1) **Name** of the neighbourhood forum, adopted by general meeting on 18 February 2014, is the Old Bermondsey Village Neighbourhood Forum ('OBVNF'), coordinated by Bermondsey Village Action Group ('BVAG').
- 2) Written **Constitutions** of OBVNF and BVAG, are enclosed. The BVAG constitution, as originally submitted in 2012, has been revised and was formally approved at a BVAG/OBVNF general meeting held on 18 February 2015. The OBVNF Constitution is a new and parallel document adopted at the same meeting.
- 3) **Area map** for the OBVNF is attached and is precisely as designated by Southwark Council in its report: 'Neighbourhood Planning – Designation of a Neighbourhood Area in Bermondsey – 28/08/2014'. The Group adopted this area at a general meeting of BVAG/STP on 12 November 2014 and resolved to name the area Old Bermondsey Village by general meeting on 18 February 2015.

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#### 5) Statement

### Background

#### Bermondsey Village Action Group (BVAG) - 2010

BVAG was formed by local residents and businesses in March 2010 in response to what they considered to be a failure of Southwark Council to engage with local people in the formulation of Planning Policy. This was exemplified by the Council's conduct in relation to consultation on the Draft 'Bankside, Borough and London Bridge SPD' ('BBLB SPD'), published in February 2010, which proposed the introduction of a high-rise zone around specific sites and intruding into the Bermondsey Street Conservation Area. The newly formed group increased local awareness and drew a many fold increase in public responses as compared with the Council's own 'consultation'. The broader objective of the Group is to preserve and enhance the character of the area designated Bermondsey Village by Southwark Council in the BBLB SPD itself. Since its establishment BVAG has campaigned for the opening up of the planning process, improving local awareness and improving consultation channels between the Council and local people over planning issues. These activities are pursued through, among other things, attendance at Council meetings, participation in the annual Bermondsey St Festival and raising petitions. BVAG has played a major role in advancing understanding of significant development proposals, including Sellar's proposed Shard satellites, 'The Quill' and London Bridge Station. It has successfully lobbied English Heritage for Listing of the St Thomas St/Crucifix Lane Viaduct. It is working to produce proposals to conserve and restore important heritage assets in the area.

Both BVAG and OBVNF now have a subscriber's mailing list of over 750 and over 35 registered members who include (i) those who live in the area, (ii) those who work in the

area and (iii) at least one elected ward Councillor for its designated area of interest. Members and Subscribers are informed of OBVNF/BVAG's meetings, current news and activities through our mailing list and website. Open meetings are held about once a month for consultation and discussion. All important decisions are made during these meetings which are normally held in BVAG's Bermondsey St coffee point hub. We have also run exhibitions there and at our information office on Crucifix Lane to inform local understanding and canvass local opinion on planning issues and the built environment. A fundamental objective of OBVNF is to facilitate the engagement of local people in the planning process. We therefore operate with an open organisational structure to promote maximum openness to participation without any restrictive membership or eligibility formalities.

### **ST THOMAS STREET PLAN (STP) - 2012**

BVAG coordinated a neighbourhood plan initiative focused on St Thomas Street and its immediate surroundings – representing essentially the northern part of 'Bermondsey Village'. The BVAG/STP initiative was formalised in a joint meeting of BVAG and Bermondsey Neighbourhood Forum on 9 May 2012 where members unanimously voted to proceed with an independent plan ('STP') for the area we then designated. The application for the STP was accepted by the Council in September 2012. An area to the South was to be coordinated by another group, known as BNF but that initiative failed for want of support and in the event an application was made for a different area in the name of BNF but without any general support.

The St Thomas St Plan aimed to produce consensus on suitable building heights in its area, balancing the interests of growth and development with preservation of the area's historic and economic character. To this end it aimed to produce a specific height envelope for developers to work to which would be presented in the form of a contour map for definitiveness and clarity. A second important objective was to update the Bermondsey St conservation area northern boundary. A third was to produce site briefs for the key St Thomas St sites.

## **OLD BERMONDSEY VILLAGE PLAN - 2014**

After more than two years of unaccountable delay and without consulting BVAG/STP, in August 2014 the Council designated a Neighbourhood Forum Area ('Area A') (see attached) that is an area for which there was no application. Despite widespread dissent and a call-in by opposition Councillors to the Council's Oversight and Scrutiny Committee, that decision was upheld on 20 October 2014. Area A includes some of the SPD area but unaccountably excludes a significant part in the north (notably St Thomas St itself) and greatly extends it to the south.

The universal perception of local people is that Southwark Council is resistant to the whole idea of a local plan in this area. The unjustifiable delay in determining our STP and subsequently our revised, Area A application has caused disillusionment where there was considerable support for a community plan – many people having concluded that the Council will contrive to stop such an initiative by any means available to it.

Despite representations from BVAG members, Area A was formally endorsed by the Council's Oversight and Scrutiny Committee on 20 October 2014. Shortly after, at a meeting held on 12 November 2014, BVAG resolved to accept and work with the newly designated Area A. That decision was immediately notified to the Council by way of an amendment to the STP area. After a further two-and-a-half months, by letter of 26 January, we have been informed that the Council now takes the view that the application is incomplete/defective. This revised application addresses (without admission that the Council's complaints are justified at such a late stage) the defects that the Council has cited.

In the face of the Council's less-than-supportive attitude to local planning in our area it is unrealistic to expect a community group to raise the necessary resources to increase levels of awareness and participation in the very substantially extended area now determined by the Council to the levels that prevail in the original STP area. Once the application is approved and we know it is not in vain a major awareness and participation drive can be undertaken in the enlarged area. This will include direct leafleting of all residents, businesses and non-commercial organisations in the Old Bermondsey Village area informing them of the opportunities for participation that Council recognition of the NF presents and how they may participate.

Please now confirm that the Council will expeditiously determine this application. We would draw your attention to the statutory time limit for considering such applications brought into effect in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amended) Regulations 2015. Further, we would rely on s.6A.(2)(b) of those regulations stipulating a time limit of eight weeks for the Council to determine our application since that section differs from s.6A.(2)(c) to reflect the situation where a neighbourhood area is uncontroversial. Clearly there can be no controversy about an area specifically designated by the Council itself as a neighbourhood area.

### **Old Bermondsey Village Neighbourhood Forum**

# Appendix I - AREA MAP

