

Supporting Statement

Application for Sydenham Hill Ridge Neighbourhood Planning Area

1. Why is this area an appropriate neighbourhood area?

Boundaries

The proposed Neighbourhood Planning Area runs broadly in a north east/south westerly direction from opposite Horniman Museum in the north east, to the new Crystal Palace “doughnut” roundabout in the south west.

Sydenham Hill road forms the central “spine” of the area, other than the steep section of Sydenham Hill road from Horniman Museum to the roundabout with Kirkdale, in the north of the area, which forms part of the external border.

The proposed borders are essentially defined by contour lines, and characterised by protected woods and green spaces.

The area is predominantly residential, with the majority of the housing stock concentrated on larger post-war social housing estates.

From a geographical and environmental aspect, the area is clearly identifiable and unitary due to its physical and ecological characteristics, steep upper slopes, mile-long but narrow plateau (“the Ridge”), expansive woods and green spaces on the Ridge and upper slopes.

However for administrative reasons, the area has been divided between different councils and parishes, and as a result is often relegated to the edge or margin of other, bigger administrative units.

Roads demarcating the external borders are included up to the midpoint of the highway.

Engagement with our Neighbours

Because of the distinct topography, the area is largely self-identifying.

To endeavour to make sure that there is no overlap with other prospective Neighbourhood Forums (“NF”) and community organisations: we have spoken with the prospective Dulwich Village NF to the north and west; with CP (Crystal Palace) Neighbours to the south west and south; and with individuals linked to the renaissance of Sydenham to the south east, and of Forest Hill to the north east. We have found no conflicts.

We also consulted residents on the western fringes of the boundary area, in Woodhall, to establish whether they identified with Sydenham Hill Ridge or with Dulwich, and taken those views into account when setting the boundary on that side. We have also spoken with the Vicar of St Stephens Church, who is supportive of this initiative.

We have so far had a number of public meetings and community walkabouts.

We have also met with officers of Southwark and Lewisham Council, the Sydenham Society and Forest Hill Society; with members of TRAs of estates in the Area; with Councillors representing each of the three wards within which the Area lies; and with officers of The Dulwich Estate.

Minutes of our meetings are available on our website (www.sydenhamhillridge.london).

There has been a surprising level of interest and widespread support for the idea of a neighbourhood plan. There has been no real controversy about the suggested boundary.

Benefits of designation

Sydenham Hill Ridge is a natural entity defined and unified by topography and character but marginalised and divided by administrative boundaries. It is also a changing area.

Awareness and Responsiveness

What do people in the area want? What do they value? What do they need? How do they want to shape the area they live in over the next decade? Currently there is no body that brings together people across the administrative boundaries in the ridge to articulate a common vision for the area.

Shared character

Early discussions suggest that many residents on both public and private housing estates and in private homes on both sides of Sydenham Hill (there are few businesses in the area) have a sense that the wider area has a shared character that is valued.

A neighbourhood plan could help to articulate this and to help ensure that the characteristics which residents value are enhanced rather than damaged as development goes through. This includes aspects of the built environment, the streetscape and the natural environment in our high, wooded ridge. The area holds its character on both sides of the administrative border. A neighbourhood plan can help make sure that decisions on both side of the ridge are made synergistically and coherently.

Shared needs and services/ An end to marginalisation

A neighbourhood plan could help to focus on the needs of the area. We hope that this will mean that development works for the people who live and work here; and that facilities are more likely to be developed efficiently to serve in ways that take account of the needs of residents and businesses in the area, regardless of which side of Sydenham Hill they lie.

Again, our meetings so far have highlighted a sense that because we are on the fringes of administrative areas, we can be removed from services and facilities. For example, people have raised questions about how well we are connected to the public transport network, and especially public transport links from Sydenham Hill station to homes on the ridge; as well as bus services to Forest Hill. We have also recently seen a consultation about changes to traffic management advertised on the Southwark but not Lewisham side of Sydenham Hill, though the larger residential communities who will be equally affected by change live on the Lewisham side.

A voice for affordable housing

The demand for affordable, well-maintained housing is an important theme for Londoners and we hope that the forum can play a part in focusing attention on how this need can be addressed locally.

A stronger community

The neighbourhood planning process also has the potential to bring people together towards a consensus view of their aspirations for the area. This has the possibility of generating a stronger, more networked, better connected, more engaged community.

The emerging forum is a young body and we hope that the neighbourhood planning process will help to clarify and articulate the different visions that are held in the community for our area.

2. Is the organisation a “relevant body” for the purposes of section 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

Our constitution states that the purpose of the forum is to promote and improve the social economic and environmental well-being of the residents of, and businesses and voluntary groups located in the area, and that it shall address itself to issues of local concern including but not limited to the appearance and conservation of the area, its heritage, the safety and security of those living and working the area and standards of town planning, urban design, architecture and transport planning.

We attach in Enclosure 1 a list of our supporters, which exceeds the statutory minimum 21 already. They come from across the area and from different tenures and meet the statutory minimum requirements. See list attached.

We have communicated with local councillors who have seemed to us to be broadly supportive.

We trust that we met the statutory tests to be considered a relevant body for the purposes of the Act.

Enclosures:

1. List of supporters
2. Constitution