

SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE B – DECEMBER 3 2008

SUBMISSION BY COUNCILLOR IAN WINGFIELD

I would like to preface my comments by referring the Committee to the analysis and recommendations contained in the 'A Vision for Camberwell' report, which although about a year old is still a very relevant and valuable piece of work.

I have detailed my comments under broad policy areas that are compatible with the areas under consideration by the Committee.

- **Regeneration & Planning Policy**

What is required is a broad strategy that lays out a vision for what the Council would like Camberwell to become.

There needs to be in terms of planning policy supplementary guidance that seeks to control piecemeal development and instead directs itself to facilitating the co-ordination of specific proposals with the Council's vision for Camberwell.

In essence a 'Camberwell blueprint' – not a 5-year plan but a framework that realises sensible and sympathetic development within the Council's overall UDP and future vision for Camberwell.

This should encompass a number of potential sites for large scale development in central Camberwell such as the:-

1. former Walworth Bus Garage between Camberwell New Road and Medlar Street,
2. current Camberwell Bus Garage off Camberwell New Road,
3. Butterfly Walk shopping arcade and surrounding area (Inc. Police Station),
4. Post Office sorting office in Station Road,
5. Lambeth Council's Car pound in Warner Road,
6. Valmar Road industrial estate,
7. Medlar Street area including the Gala Bingo Hall,
8. Salvation Army Training College on Champion Hill.

The Council through its planners should be pro-actively engaged in discussions with the owners of these sites on their future plans and how that may link into overall development in Camberwell.

In addition the resident Hospitals of Kings College, the Maudsley and the Institute of Psychiatry have their own development plans for their sites and the Council should be involved in negotiations on them both for their integral worth and for the wider impact on the area and particularly for transport links. Shopping in Camberwell - the range of retail outlets is limited, there is a perceived lack of variety of shops especially specialist outlets with instead too many (and growing in number) off-licenses, open-fronted small grocery stores, fast food outlets, nail shops, and a general poor appearance of shop frontages. The recently conducted Shoppers' Survey supports such findings and highlights the potential retail strengths of Camberwell due to its compact, walk-able nature, the large volume of passing traffic and its historical background.

The Council should be devising a strategy that specifically targets SMEs to both encourage their establishment and to give them on-going support. This strategy should be targeted to increase the range, diversity and appearance of the shops. This can be done through a maximisation of 'better business' practice to encourage more diversification and through planning policy in regulating specific business concentration. There are also a number of revenue streams that can be utilised in this regard such as the Improving Local Retail Environments scheme, through English Heritage and through the introduction of a Business Improvement District for Camberwell.

In order to monitor and process a development and retail strategy Camberwell needs a Town Centre Manager with full powers and resources. This can be backed up with community engagement though co-option with local groups either on a partnership board or community trusts basis. In addition co-operation at all levels with Lambeth Council is essential if the impact of strategy is to be sustained and pervasive.

- **Housing**

The condition of a great deal of the housing stock in most of Camberwell is in a very bad way this includes both street properties and the larger estates. The condition of some of these properties is probably the worst or amongst the worst in the Borough. This situation is exacerbated by both recent building developments that have occurred bordering rundown properties, and by the extension of the timetable for Camberwell estates and street properties to be refurbished under the Decent Homes Standards scheme. This has created a great resentment and anger towards the Council.

There are three areas in Camberwell in particular that are either rundown or contain major pieces of derelict land. These are:-

1. Elmington Estate along Edmund Street,
2. Corner of Vestry/Peckham Roads,
3. Southampton Way both the road and the estate.

The Council should be both revising the priority of estates and street properties across the Borough solely on the basis of those most in need of refurbishment, and bringing forward developments on derelict land as quickly as possible. Where the Council does not own the derelict land it should be seeking compulsory purchase orders to encourage the owners to develop that land.

The number of housing Conservation areas ought to be extended in Camberwell to maintain its architectural heritage to cover the following four main areas: –

1. Around the Town Hall complex,
2. The Lucas Gardens area – Wilson, Graces, Maude, Dagmar & Vestry Roads,
3. Brunswick Park area – Brunswick Park, Benhill, Elmington, St Giles, Ada Roads and Havil Street, Vicarage Grove & Brunswick Villas,
4. Lyndhurst Gardens area – Lyndhurst Grove, Bushey Hill, Crofton, Shenley, Oswyth, Linnell & Gairloch Roads.

- **Education & Leisure**

The evidence given by the Youth Manager to the Scrutiny Committee graphically illustrated the main problem Camberwell suffers from with its young people of school age. A large proportion of school pupils do not attend Southwark Schools as they attend schools in Lambeth, Westminster, Lewisham and elsewhere, and they have hitherto been invisible to the Council's educational and particularly after school services. This is similar to the procedures governing Southwark residents undergoing medical treatment in hospitals outside the Borough and necessary aftercare services, and any consequent deaths being registered in those boroughs with the attendant bereavement services.

The Southwark MORI poll in 2006 produced the lowest satisfaction levels of Young People across whole of Borough for Camberwell being a good place to live at 50%. In other words 50% of all young people living in Camberwell do not consider it a good place to live. These figures take on a sharper relief when you consider that Camberwell has the highest proportion of the younger male population across the Borough especially in the 0-14 year old group, and overall 20% of Camberwell's population is aged between 0-15 years old.

So what do young people want in order to improve their life experience of Camberwell? This can be divined in the Southwark Community Safety Research report of 2006 that states when young people in Camberwell were questioned about improvements 41% wanted more/better youth clubs and leisure facilities. This really underscores the need for a 21st century leisure centre at the heart of Camberwell. It also supports the role of community halls on the major housing estates, like the Lettsom & the Glebe, that are expanding the usage of their halls to encompass a variety of youth activities. This work needs to be encouraged and built upon.

In addition this need is supported by evidence from employment and health statistics for Camberwell. Camberwell has a higher proportion of people unemployed than the rest of the Borough – 7%, a higher job seeker claimant rate and a higher proportion of residents receiving Total Income Support – 12%. Indeed, parts of Camberwell are in the top 20% of most deprived areas in the UK. The Standardised Mortality Rate is significantly higher in Camberwell than the rest of Southwark. A sixth of all residents in Camberwell claim to have a long-term illness. Camberwell also has highest proportion of people aged 75 years and older – 4.9%. All this together graphically highlights the health needs for modern leisure facilities.

- **Social Services**

Street drinking has always been a number one concern of local residents in Camberwell. Although the Police, Council, medical authorities and other agencies have been involved in trying to reduce the visible presence of such streets drinkers (who have multiple dependencies) through Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, ASBOs, wet centre, street drinking ban, etc the problem still persists. Street drinkers continue to linger on Coldharbour Lane swapping medications and drinking cheap alcohol, which is very intimidating for passers-by. All agencies really need to redouble their efforts to ensure what measures have been put in place are implemented and monitored effectively.

This issue is also related to the huge concern of local residents over the physical number of drug & alcohol and youth & ex-offender projects & half-way houses based in Camberwell. There is an urgent need to physically disperse the projects & houses around the Borough and south London more generally and to increase the amount of outreach work to keep the various clients of services in their own localities. This would then have a visible impact on the physical numbers of drinkers on our streets.

- **Environment & Crime**

Camberwell's Town centre appears rundown and shoddy given the fact it is highly polluted as a major transport intersection in south London. In the Council's own MORI poll local people wanted better maintenance of buildings and the local environment as their main improvement plus less vandalism and graffiti.

The general public realm in Camberwell needs a sprucing up. In particular there are historical reasons why Camberwell pavements look dirty and scruffy. This is twofold first, the insufficient cleaning attention required for such a busy junction and town centre, and second the replacement in previous years of inappropriate paving slabs that indelibly mark, scar and dirty very quickly. There is also an over-abundance of traffic signs that are both a blot on the landscape and a hindrance to pedestrians especially those with disabilities and parents with buggies.

It is a sad inescapable fact that Camberwell is the major crime hotspot in Southwark according to all official indicators and statistics. The reasons for this are varied but principally because of its physical location between Brixton and Peckham, as a major transport intersection particularly at the end of the school day, the street presence of multi-dependant addicts and the dominance of large, densely packed antiquated housing estates. Drugs and their trade are an everyday occurrence of Camberwell life.

In the Southwark MORI poll the main concerns of local residents in relation to crime were people hanging around the streets, drug abuse/dealing and disturbances by youth. Camberwell also hosts the greatest concentration of calls to the Police regarding alcohol misuse. The Southwark Community Safety Research report 2006 states that Camberwell residents perceptions were that crime levels were increasing, with guns infiltrating the area and knife crime commonplace with related concerns about gang warfare.

A related issue is the locking up of ball courts on housing estates. Currently there is no or little provision for the locking of such courts. What provision exists is usually a member of the local T&RA taking it upon themselves to lock up but this can and does present risks. Most ball courts are left unattended which means that they are used in the evenings for nefarious activities of all description, usually to the detriment and disturbance of local residents. What is required is for the Community Wardens service to be given charge to lock up the gates at particular times. This will have both the necessary power of enforcement and compliance.

- **Transport**

On the walkabout undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee it was obvious that traffic is both the main physical feature and intrusion in Camberwell. It is calculated that over 1 million people travel through Camberwell on a normal workday. This volume of traffic causes a major imposition in the twin Centre at the busy crossroads of the Denmark Hill, Camberwell New Road, Camberwell Road and Camberwell Church Street junction.

The physical layout of this junction is not conducive either to the steady flow of traffic or to the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. There is a high footfall in Camberwell given that passengers have to change buses by crossing the roads that intersect at the junction. What is needed is a complete re-designing of the area to make it more pedestrian friendly similar to the scheme that was implemented along Walworth Road.

What Camberwell desperately needs is a major transport interchange station along the lines of Vauxhall but on a smaller scale. This should be a combined facility that links road with rail. This would then take the major headache of busses queuing up blocking the Town Centre away. It would also increase the possibility of having a Tube extension down to Camberwell.

ITEM 1

Outside of the Town centre there is the specific issue of improved transport links along Southampton Way as the growth in the number of residents due to the building of blocks of flats along Peckham Grove/Southampton Way has increased transport demand sharply. This should involve an additional bus route to be routed down Southampton Way.

In addition with the railway station at Denmark Hill it maybe possible for a new entrance frontage to be constructed along Windsor Walk which will improve access for travellers (both able and disabled) and outpatients & visitors to the Hospitals. This proposal relates to the Hospitals' own development plans for their sites.