

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 15 April 2013 at 7.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Catherine Bowman (Chair)
Councillor Dan Garfield (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Neil Coyle
Councillor Toby Eckersley
Councillor Gavin Edwards
Councillor David Hubber
Councillor Lorraine Lauder MBE
Councillor Paul Noblet
Councillor David Noakes
Councillor The Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole
Councillor Mark Williams

ALSO PRESENT: Patrick Blunt, Business Extra
Jeremy Leach, The Walworth Society

OFFICER SUPPORT: Shelley Burke, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Norman Coombe, Legal Services
Tim Cutts, Team Leader Planning Policy
Barbara-Ann Overwater, Senior Planning Policy Officer
Peter Roberts, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

2.1 There were no late items of business.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings of the committee held on 4 February and 11 March 2013 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

5. BUSINESS MIX ON WALWORTH RD

5.1 Jeremy Leach, Chair of the Walworth Society, and a colleague addressed the committee and circulated a written submission. He highlighted the issue of anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of certain types of business, adding that the Youth Council had attended the Walworth Community Council and drawn attention to this. His colleague emphasised that gaming and betting shops did not go out of business in the same way as other local shops and therefore had a long term impact on an area.

5.2 A member of the committee suggested that Mr Leach be co-opted onto the committee in order to participate in the scrutiny review. The chair and vice-chair formally agreed to this proposal.

RESOLVED:

That Jeremy Leach, Chair of the Walworth Society, be co-opted onto the committee for the duration of the scrutiny review of the business mix on Walworth Road.

5.3 The committee noted the map showing the current business mix on the Walworth Road and felt that it would be useful to show food outlets on the map. Some members felt that it would be interesting to know whether residents shopped locally.

5.4 A member commented that the regeneration of the Heygate, Aylesbury and Elephant and Castle would dramatically change the Walworth Road in as little as two years. He also commented that a lot of street drinking took place outside gaming shops but that he had experienced difficulties in objecting to planning applications for such businesses. The member felt that other boroughs such as Newham and Hackney, took a different approach and that Southwark needed to seek out best practice.

5.5 Members were concerned at the proliferation of pay-day loan shops. The representatives from the Walworth Society suggested that a shop-front could be given to a credit union. They also reported the existence of a homework shop.

- 5.6 Councillor David Noakes drew attention to the recommendations of the scrutiny review of unemployment, undertaken by the former Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee. These covered the importance of the public realm, how to create a night-time environment and the theming of high streets. Mr Leach responded that the improvement of Walworth Road as a public realm had been a fantastic success but that there was a problem around the Gateway Estate. He agreed that the cultural diversity of the Walworth Road could be made more of.
- 5.7 A member was concerned that pop-up shops in portacabins did not improve the appearance of the area. Mr Leach indicated that the developer had been invited to the next Walworth Society meeting. The member wondered about the ownership of the retail premises on the Walworth Road and whether it would be useful to get a clear picture of this. He asked whether the regeneration of the Elephant and Castle shopping centre was a threat or an opportunity for the Walworth Road. Jeremy Leach believed that it could be an opportunity but that Walworth Road needed to attract people from the Elephant and Castle. He also commented that the developer Lendlease was planning an independent shopping street to the East of Walworth Road, which would have an additional impact.
- 5.8 Patrick Blunt of Business Extra, established on the Walworth Road since 2003, addressed the committee. He stressed the tremendous diversity of the area which included not just Walworth Road but also East Street, Pullens Yard and other shopping areas. Mr Blunt explained that Business Extra regularly counted footfall along Walworth Road, which was highest around Morrisons supermarket and lowest around the Jamaican bakery. In October of last year there were some 180 business premises along the Walworth Road, including offices, with a relatively low vacancy rate. Recently, sales had started to fall off.
- 5.9 In response to questions, Mr Blunt stated that there was a concentration of betting shops in the middle of the Walworth Road, which might lead to a fall in the quality of the shopping area. He also commented on the loss of shoppers from the Heygate estate and emphasised the key role of East Street in drawing shoppers to the area. The vice-chair stressed the importance of understanding the impact of the regeneration of the Aylesbury Estate which would lead to a higher population and growth in demand. A member of the committee added that a variety of shops and special events were needed to draw shoppers back to East Street. Another member suggested that consultation would help to determine what people would like to see around the market and commented that there seemed to be a demand for pop-up shops.
- 5.10 In response to further questions, Mr Blunt explained that there was little confidence in starting up new businesses, not helped by the increase in

business rates on the Walworth Road, higher energy costs and rent increases. At the same time, relatively few businesses were available for changing hands. Mr Blunt also reported that the local business association was not well attended, perhaps because many owners of businesses no longer lived locally, and that rateable values were not high enough to support a business improvement district.

- 5.11 Tim Cutts, Team Leader Planning Policy, and Barbara-Ann Overwater, Senior Planning Policy Officer presented a briefing to the committee. They clarified that the A2 use class covered a range of uses which included betting shops. It was difficult to restrict just one use within a class. Members asked whether issuing an Article 4 Planning Direction would be a practical option. The officers explained that this was a long process involving consultation, precise boundary definition and possibly compensation for loss of permitted development rights. It might be more helpful for betting shops to be allocated their own use class. The chair wondered if it would be a positive move to support Hackney's proposal for betting shops to have a separate use class and whether, in addition, it could be useful for Southwark to explore an Article 4 Direction. Officers explained that Southwark had supported a specific use class for betting shops in response to previous government consultations but that this had not been taken up.
- 5.12 A member asked whether it would be possible to introduce a hierarchy of preferred uses if retail was not possible, for instance to say that if A1 was not possible then the next preferences would be for A3, de-use and only then A2. Officers indicated that this could be explored but might be difficult to justify to a planning inspector. Members also asked whether other boroughs had different approaches towards betting shops that Southwark could follow.
- 5.13 In response to questions about the speed with which the council was able to respond to what local communities might want, officers explained the extent of consultation required in respect of supplementary planning documents and area action plans. They also emphasised the innovative policies introduced into the Elephant and Castle Supplementary Planning Document, including around hot food takeaways and affordable retail space.
- 5.14 The committee agreed to continue the review at its next meeting and to request the following:
- an amended map of Walworth Road including the position of food outlets
 - any information on ownership of premises (particularly the extent of council ownership)

- a briefing note on Article 4 Directions (including legal comments)
- a briefing note on the council's saturation policy in licensing
- any officer views in respect of implementing a hierarchy of uses
- how to pick up on best practice in other authorities and officer views in respect of supporting the Hackney campaign
- any views that can be provided by SASBU, Metropolitan Police and Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panels as to whether they think problems are caused in the areas around betting shops etc
- any problems the CAB has encountered in respect of pay-day loan shops in Southwark

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm