

Environment Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Environment Scrutiny Commission held on Tuesday 15 March 2022 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Margy Newens (Chair)
Councillor Adele Morris
Councillor Tom Flynn
Councillor Leo Pollak

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Catherine Rose, Cabinet Member for Transport, Parks and Sport,

OFFICER SUPPORT: Juliet Seymour, Planning Policy Manager
Julie Timbrell, Project Manager, Scrutiny

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors Leanne Werner, Graham Neale and James Coldwell sent apologies.

Cooptee Jon Bootland tried to contribute virtually but was not officially in attendance.

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

There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATION

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The full Minutes of meeting held in 29 November 2021 were agreed as an accurate

record.

5. AIR QUALITY SCRUTINY REVIEW UPDATE

The chair introduced this item by referring to the briefing note, prepared by officers, which was enclosed with the agenda and outlined progress with responding to Recommendation 8 of the second Air Quality scrutiny review report, which integrated outstanding recommendations from the first Air Quality scrutiny review report. The chair explained that these recommendations all focused on ways to reduce traffic, and emissions from traffic, other than by LTNs.

The chair introduced Councillor Catherine Rose, Cabinet Member for Transport, Parks and Sport, and invited members to discuss the initial recommendation and briefing response with the cabinet lead. The following points were made:

- Members brought up the principle in the recommendation of charging less for use of equivalent bicycle kerbside use; presently six bikes using the equivalent of one car space would be collectively charged more than one car. The cabinet member responded that there is process to procure and consult on increased provision and charging, however she agreed this is a good point, as a bicycle can serve six households rather than one car. This was reinforced by other members, who commented that there seem to be false incentives to drive in the council's charging practices. There was a follow up comment by a member that provision of cycle hangers does incur a cost as this means procuring additional infrastructure. Another member suggested that the setting cycle charging at right price point ought to guide decision making.
- Members commented that while there is much improved capacity for cycling parking, there is still not enough. It was suggested that the planned kerbside / CPZ consultation could be used to find out what people want and get a realistic estimate of need, and reallocate funds. The cabinet lead said the consultation will out a hierarchy of priorities. The importance of reprioritising the kerbside to walking and cycling was part of the Movement Plan.
- The issue of using car size to set a parking price was raised and if DVLA data could be used to set a category of weight. A member pointed out someone could have a small old car with higher emissions, but someone with an expensive, large, low emissions car and would pay less, even though the impact on the highway and emission of particulates from brake and tyre dust is significant. The member said that other boroughs are have taken this up. The cabinet member said she is mindful of this issue and added that there is the Road User Charging and ULEZ consultation that can

also look at the broader impacts in emissions.

- The cabinet member was asked about greening and rewilding and making best use of funds and programmes. The cabinet lead said the highways programme is picking up improving tree cover and rewilding, with different approaches to tree planting depending on south or north borough.

6. PLANNING BRIEFING: UPDATE ON URBAN GREENING FACTOR AND EARLY REVIEW OF THE SOUTHWARK PLAN

Juliet Seymour, Planning policy manager, attended virtually. She gave a summary of the paper, enclosed with the agenda, and then took questions.

The connection was poor and questioning could not be completed so a follow up email question and response exchange is included as well.

The following points were made in the discussion:

- Members commented that the council can have good policies in place, such as UGF, but there is a performance failure if developers do not deliver against these, and instead give cash to the council for the Green Building Fund, or another pot, particularly when it is as yet unclear what this fund will be delivering.
- A member asked if developers will be engaged to meet the UGF baseline factor. The officer responded that a recent review of implementation found most developers are doing it and achieving the required factor, but a couple did not as their sites had a poor existing habitat. She added there will be a further focus and training on this.
- Commission members commented that it is concerning that the UGF is not being applied to Brownfield sites as the UGF is aimed at achieving biodiversity net gains, regardless of start point, furthermore this is not just for human enrichment but also for nature as an entity.
- Members commented that biodiversity net gain is a complex issue and asked how much specialism and training the council is investing in this. The officer agreed and said that the council is employing specialists to assist with this.
- The officer told the commission that that the UGF will be considered in the Early Review of the Southwark Plan, along with topics including Air Quality and Embodied Carbon.
- Members asked how the Southwark Plan and planned Early Review will expand the present focus on allotment and also provide for vertical farming, which members indicated there is demand for. Officers said that there is

potential to look at ‘meanwhile uses’ when looking at expanding food growing. Allotments are protected in planning policy.

RESOLVED

- It was agreed that a letter summarising the discussion on UGF will be sent to cabinet with a recommendation that there is follow up on the UGF factor on all allocated sites.
- The Energy report will include a deadline for completion of Early Review by February 2023.

Additional questions and answers via email:

Question: It is good to see the selection of applications in your paper where the UGF has been calculated and is compliant with the London Plan. Meanwhile, could you please advise how often developers have been asked to revise their applications due to an insufficient UGF in the original application? It would be good to have a feel for whether we are only seeing the UGF on compliant applications and ignoring it on others that are non-compliant, or whether all applications are revised to meet the UGF required by the London Plan.

Officers will always push applicants to increase the UGF score of a proposed major development; even more so if it does not meet the minimum UGF scores for the proposed land use (residential – 0.4 score /commercial – 0.3 score). The multiple benefits of urban greening are well understood and under-provision is treated as a major issue, as the policy requirement in London Plan Policy G5 is clear and there is in depth guidance on the how to approach provision. Southwark Plan policy P59 also sets out our clear urban greening objectives.

To improve provision, officers meet the applicant’s team and review the public realm and landscaping design, terraces and roof tops, and site and building layout to identify opportunities in provision, alongside an assessment of other policy requirements: e.g. servicing, land use, drainage, cycle parking, and amenity space (private/communal). Officers find that opportunities can arise from the reconfiguration of site layout, changes in massing and through a thorough critique of the public realm.

Officers do not ignore non-complaint schemes and will push them as hard as they can through both the pre-application process when schemes are more high-level and again once submitted. The GLA also provides a second ‘push’ for greater UGF provision on Major referable schemes through the Stage 1 referral process and through a ‘backstop opportunity’ at Stage 2. Officers of the GLA and the council regularly discuss ways to try and improve schemes as they proceed through the planning process.

The challenge some schemes can have result from issues arising from either attempting to comply with other policy such as replacing all existing commercial

floor-space or small site area. For example, some mixed use schemes propose 'full site coverage' to deliver workspace and onsite servicing which is always our starting position for servicing. These approaches can result in limited public realm opportunities, with the ground floor/grade level having to work really hard to achieve all policy requirements. Opportunities for greening on roof spaces can be contested with the provision of amenity space (usually a good opportunity for some greening/planting that is always requested by officers), solar panels, lift plant, heat pump plant, etc. As such officers are balancing multiple policy objectives, but will always seek to secure new open space and urban greening. As London Plan Policy G5 is applicable to all major development, UGF scores will be applicable to any type of site where the proposed scheme meets the threshold for major development.

We will be monitoring all schemes in the future about whether they are meeting the London Plan UGF.

7. ENERGY SCRUTINY REVIEW

RESOLVED

The report was agreed with the following changes:

Add additional recommendations on:

- developing a technical pathfinder to deliver council New Homes to Passivhaus standards.
- promoting the continuation of rooftop building scheme for council New Homes
- Early Review of the Southwark Plan be completed February 2023

Amend recommendations:

- Expand the role of the dedicated Community Energy officer beyond schools to also work on Community Buildings and with TMOs on Housing Estates.
- Change the recommendation referring to Energy Sparks and RAFT to read 'We would encourage council officers to engage with Energy Sparks and RAFT, and any other relevant organisations with a specialist practice in energy reduction and retrofit'.

Jon Bootland's comments in the report circulated to the Commission by email will

be picked up in the amendments. If there is anything else substantive a new meeting will be called.