

Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission held on Monday 18 July 2022 at 7.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Margy Newens (Chair)
Councillor Ketzia Harper
Councillor Emily Hickson
Councillor Sarah King
Councillor Reginald Popoola
Councillor David Watson

**OTHER MEMBERS
PRESENT:**

OFFICER Tom Buttrick, Team Leader, Planning Policy Team
SUPPORT: Julie Timbrell, Project Manager, scrutiny

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor Graham Neale sent apologies.

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

There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2022 were noted.

5. PEDDLEMYWHEELS

Alper Muduroglu, MD of Peddle My Wheels, presented the Southwark's OurBike scheme by showing a [video](#).

Southwark OurBike scheme is part of a London Community Cargo Bike Share Scheme. The council subsidises Southwark's offer via the High Street Recovery Scheme Fund. The bikes are based in East Dulwich, on Lordship Lane, where they are hosted by two local business who take responsibility for charging up the bikes and in return get branding. The scheme costs are funded through fees and subsidised by the council.

The scheme allows local businesses and residents to use their smartphone to reserve, lock and unlock an electric cargo bike to hire it by the hour. This gives people a sustainable, car free and affordable option when moving cargo around. The council is subsidising the cost of use so the first two hours per day are free and then £3 p/hr.

Anyone wishing to use the scheme will get a free on boarding session, which includes how to unlock and lock the bike, and up to two hours of cargo bike riding training to help get them confident when using the bike.

The most popular uses so far are for shopping, trips to the recycling centre, taking pets to the park, the school run, moving sports equipment and trips to the allotment. The scheme can be accessed through: OurBike.co.uk

About 25% of people use the Cargo Bikes regularly- often trades people (electricians, personal trainers , dog walkers) whereas residents often are more one off. OurBike are continuing to leave introductory slots open for the end of the year and anticipate 100 members – they now have 70 members . Peddle My Wheels estimate the carbon saved and are adding a tool to ask what people would have used as alternative transport.

The chair invited questions and the following points were made:

- Members asked how much it would cost to extend the scheme and the MD explained that Southwark does own the equipment. There are associated running costs (maintenance, app licences etc). The training session is approximately £60 per session for 5 people.
- The users of the scheme are generally cyclists - though not cargo bike users .They sign up on the website so Peddle My Wheels have demographic data that can be shared. The barrier is often the cost of owning an electric Cargo Bike. Hiring can be a gateway to buying and there has been a growth in sales.
- A barrier to access can be knowing that they exist; so seeing children and dogs being carried out in the neighbourhood is a marketing tool. Peddle My Wheels also do events in schools to promote the Cargo Bikes , and more events might help Peddle My Wheels understand other barrier. Members suggested Car Free day as a promotional opportunity and Maltby Street Market.
- The scheme is aimed at both resident and business use.
- The risk of stealing was discussed. The Peddle My Wheels MD said that various

options of lockers and locks were considered, with different pros and cons. The bikes are branded, linked to the host, and come with bespoke insurance, which means they can so can replaced, if needed. The local business hosts keep an eye on the bikes and they are located in the community. To date this arrangement has worked.

- Members asked if Cargo Bikes are economically sustainable without a subsidy and Peddle My Wheels said that no company is offering this commercially yet, and the cost would be equivalent to a zip van. The schemes long term viability does therefore depend somewhat on the transports systems push and pulls. The scheme subsidy allows use for free for the first two hours then £3 per 2 hour session. This presently
- costs the council around £5,000 a year . Peddle My Wheels is also looking for other partners to fund.
- Cargo Bikes have not been used for high street delivery, on the whole. Peddle My Wheels had a scheme in Lambeth that was a shop and drop model . When this did not get used it was targeted at local pharmacies who then did use it for delivery of local prescriptions, however this was a free service with targeted support. Pharmacies are a good fit as usually a pharmacy would deliver after closing with a car. In Lambeth Peddle My Wheel offered bike and cyclists. Following this an approach was made to pharmacies on North End Road, however this did not lead to a viable scheme . The pull factor in Lambeth was the free delivery.
- Members asked if there had been consideration of targeting community and business groups , particularly for food delivery, as there are some that use cars. There is good usage by Hive (Lambeth) and they do food deliver. The Peddle My Wheels MD said one factor was having local knowledge of local community and business groups, which may not be on his radar. Peddle My Wheels said that promotion to local business and communities by the council would be helpful.
- Commission members asked how to scale up and the Peddle My Wheels said that
- Cargo Bikes are seeing a huge upsurge in demand, up around 400%, often to families with young children to transport. Members commented that there is a lot of traffic transporting children to Independent schools. The low hanging fruit is parents. Peddle My Wheels said the Cargo Bikes are replacing car runs to schools. The hire schemes promote cargo bikes to families and make them accessible, as frequently people are unfamiliar with how to use and maintain. He added that cargo bike use is contagious amongst parents and families.
- Commission members suggested nursery or school hosting a Cargo Bike and the Peddle My Wheels MD agreed this could be a good idea, as although journeys usually originate at home families can go on trips.

6. STREAMLINING RENEWABLE ENERGY PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The chair introduced the item by explaining this is part of a mini review. Tom Buttrick, a Team Leader from the council's Planning Policy Team, was then invited to present the briefing that was circulated with the supplemental agenda, on streamlining domestic renewable energy planning applications.

The following points were made in the subsequent discussion:

- The officer lead advised that the council offers a pre-application advice service for applications for domestic renewable energy, heat pumps and insulation applications, which is now free of charge. There is also improved guidance on the planning division website. Officers will provide phone and email advice to applicants seeking pre-application advice. The officer undertook to provide clarification on how long this has been available free of charge.
- There was a recent soft launch of 'Find Out If You Need Planning Permission' service, which is a digital tool on the planning division website. It has also launched in Lambeth and Buckinghamshire
- The commission heard that officers have recently focused on improving the initial application process for renewable energy systems, however there is an intention to look at this in the round, and the officer drew members attention to further work set out under point 26 in the report; particularly work with the council's Climate Change Team. He advised that there is an updated climate emergency action plan going to cabinet next week.
- Members commented that they had received feedback from residents saying it is difficult to apply for solar panels to be installed, and yet this is something the council want residents to do. The officer acknowledged feedback received from councillors and that officers have been taking account of this. Members asked if more formal feedback from residents on the application process has been sought, and data collated on the number of people applying for a 'lawful development certificate'. In response the officer said this type of feedback had not yet been sought from applicants, however it could well be a useful exercise, but would require officer capacity. He estimated that there are about 50 applications per year that could include renewables, and the service could potentially contact neighbouring boroughs to ask for comparable figures. He added that the recent changes made to the planning process are designed to make it easier to make an application for renewable energy installations, and that the 'Find Out If You Need Planning Permission' service has undergone user testing.
- Members sought clarification that the 'Find Out If You Need Planning Permission' service and planning advice service are able to identify if an applicant needs to apply planning permission or if this is permitted development for a renewable energy installation, and the officer responded that taken together they would. Members asked why the outcome would be either 'planning permission required' or a recommendation to apply for a 'permitted development certificate', given the cost. The officer explained this was to provide assurance that the development was lawful, for example if a property was to be sold and the seller needed confirmation

- The officer was asked if advice was mainly given to owner-occupiers, or more widely and the officer responded that the Planning Team have given advice to the New Homes team regarding solar installation - particularly in regard to the Green Homes Fund.
- A member asked why eight weeks is given as the timescale to provide a Lawful Development Certificate and if the council would want to shorten it. The officer explained that eight weeks is the maximum allowed. He added that on occasions there does need be a statutory 21 day consultation period when Planning Permission is required. Objections can be noise from air source heat pumps, so advice can be to install a cover. For solar panels, there can be issues if the application site is a heritage asset, and it may be that alternative roof slopes or locations for panels have a lesser impact on the heritage building. The commission discussed introducing a commitment to process applications as quickly as possible.
- Members asked if ending the fee for pre-application advice for renewable energy and insulation has proved value for money, and the officer said it that the data could identify how well this is used. The council's rational for eliminating the fee is that there is a climate emergency so this is not a 'business as usual' scenario but about removing barriers to the installation of renewables. The fees from householder applications are also a small amount given most planning revenue is from higher fees from large developments. Planning application fees have recently been increased on a sliding scale. The council has received government funding for the development of digital tools that seek to improve planning services including a tool 'Find Out if You Need Planning Permission, which is pending a formal launch. The officer indicated that the council could look more at the wider issue of fees.
- A member suggested looking at installation that might stem from Solar Together, through the GLA initiative. The officer said while he could look into installations that arise from Solar Together, this would not be captured in existing Planning Division data.
- The officer was asked about planning enquiries and permissions for external wall insulation given the evidence received in the previous Energy scrutiny review that was conducted last year (2021) on the importance of taking a 'Fabric First' approach prior to installing renewable energy. A member asked if it was possible to ascertain how many applications have been turned down because of heritage concerns, for either renewable energy or external insulation. The officer commented that there is a balancing act between heritage and the installation of retrofit measures and renewable energy, and the team seek to sensitively enable the delivery of measures to improve the environmental impact of buildings, including renewable energy, in applications. The officer emphasised that the Planning Policy team are a very keen and environmentally aware team, who will be consulting on

further changes to planning policy and guidance that will tackle climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- The officer remarked that this is a very opportune time to look at planning policy as the recently adopted Southwark Plan is being reviewed in line with the declaration of the 2030 net zero borough target to tackle the Climate Emergency. He went on to comment that the previous item on Cargo Bikes suggested that more could be done through planning policy to enable shared Cargo Bike schemes, similar to the promotion of EV car clubs, to complement the high cycling standards in the Southwark Plan.
- The commission discussed the options for producing a report given the opportunity to influence will be this autumn. The project manager advised that there was no need to wait until the end of the administrative year and it would be possible to complete this review at the next meeting, however there were certain additional pieces of information arising from this session that could be useful to inform the report.
- Commission members discussed including a recommendation to shorten the timescales for processing renewable energy planning applications, ensuring potential officer capacity required to deliver this, and the role cabinet has in responding to scrutiny recommendations and deciding if they are feasible.

RESOLVED

This review will be wrapped up at the next meeting.

Officers will supply the following information:

Planning applications

- How many domestic renewable and applications has LBS processed over the last five years?
- What application types were they (householder, council housing, social housing etc.?)
- What types of domestic renewables did they apply for?
- How many were approved, refused, appealed, upheld, and overturned? What were the reasons
- Where the permissions implemented?
- Do we have any data on the implementation of domestic renewables under Permitted Development that did not apply for consent?
- How many planning enforcement cases have, we had on domestic renewables? What were the reasons for enforcement and outcomes?
- How many external insulation applications have we received, approved, refused and why?

- How do neighbouring boroughs compare to these numbers? (Lambeth, Lewisham, Hackney, etc.)
- What policy or process streamlining to support the deployment of domestic renewables have these neighbouring boroughs implemented?
- User research into the experience applicants have had with their planning applications for domestic renewables to identify where improvements to the service can be made
- How do we improve clarity for residents on the process and services so it is easy as possible
- Service review to consider changes to planning services: commitment to determine application quicker than 8 weeks, reducing and/or simplifying fees
- Provide an update planning division website with new guidance

Pre-application service

- When did the free of charge pre-application service for domestic renewables and insulation commence?
- How many free of charge pre-applications has the division processed and is currently processed?
- How has this service been publicised to residents?
- How much money has this saved?
- How much officer time has it taken to deliver.

'Find out If You Need Planning Permission (FOIYNPP)' digital tool

- When is the 'Find Out If You Need Planning Permission (FOIYNPP)' digital tool service 'fully' launching? (currently 1 August) – Link to tool: <https://editor.planx.uk/southwark/find-out-if-you-need-planning-permission/preview>
- What domestic renewables and other environmental measures (e.g. external insulation) does FOIYNPP tool cover
- What communication to promote the tool to our residents is taking place for the launch?

Other

- How do we balance competing policy objectives: climate emergency vs heritage protection

7. WORK PROGRAMME

The commission discussed the Sustainable Freight review and agreed that it was absolutely right to ensure that the council addressed movement of its own goods

as a priority. Members also agreed it would also be useful to understand more about the other sources of freight that move around the borough; particularly larger businesses such as supermarkets, home delivery specialists and commercial freight, which supplies the high street.

Members undertook to consider the community engagement part of the commission's remit further.

RESOLVED

A briefing will be requested providing data and mapping on the source and destination of freight moving around the borough (e.g. what proportion is Amazon home delivery, supermarket shopping, commercial freight to business).