

## **Note for Council Health and Care Scrutiny Commission's Report**

The draft report needs to set its recommendations in the context of the town centre need for public toilets, rather than the specific redevelopments happening at the station. It might be best to give the drafters of the report the information about how the developments fit into the wider picture so that they can do the editing themselves. The draft note below gives the relevant information.

Eileen Conn, 27 April 2024

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The Scrutiny Committee draft report 'Access to Toilets' includes a section on 'Toilet Cold Spots'. This includes reference to the lack of toilets at Peckham Rye Station and makes recommendations for action to remedy this. This is very welcome.

The issues however are town centre wide and the station issues need to be seen in the context of the town centre as well as in the redevelopment work at the station.

This brief note summarises the situation and suggests the action that might be useful to highlight.

### **Redevelopment at the station**

There are two separate redevelopment projects at the station. These are:

- **New square in front.** This is a Council project. Work started in 2019 and is scheduled to be completed in 2026. It will result in new retail spaces in the commercial buildings in front of the station and a new square in front of the Victorian listed station building. The planning permission granted in 2016 for the whole project included new public toilets to be created in the arches adjacent to the new square.
- **Step free access to the station platforms.** This is a Network Rail project. It has been in preparation since 2019. Planning permission was granted in 2023, and final approval from the Government for the expenditure is expected within the next 18 months. Work might start by 2027 and be completed by 2030. The interior of the station will be remodelled with new staircases and lifts to each of the 4 platforms, with toilets provided on each of the 4 platforms for rail travellers and others with free passes for the stations.

### **Aylesham Centre redevelopment**

This is a commercial development in the north of the town centre for mixed housing and commercial uses. It is a development site in the Southwark Plan, and Berkeley Homes the developer is currently preparing and consulting on their forthcoming planning application. Their aim is to submit in 2024, start work on the development in 2025 and complete the development by 2034. This may be an over optimistic timescale.

The Southwark Plan requires public toilet provision in town centres. A community request to the Council about the plans for public toilets in the new station square produced this Council response: "In line with planning policy for large town centre schemes, new public toilets will be provided as part of the new Aylesham Shopping Centre redevelopment." Indications are that this will be in a new Morrison's in the development, but if so this is likely to be in the late 2020s at the earliest.

## **Peckham town centre is a 'toilet cold spot'**

### **Long term plans are welcome**

The developments mentioned above are all very welcome. At the moment the only toilets accessible are on one station platform available only to rail passengers and inaccessible by anyone with physical disabilities even with a free access pass. The developments would make all the platform toilets accessible to all rail travellers and town centre users with free access passes for the railways. But this will not be available until 2030 at the earliest.

The new public toilets in the Council project, for the new public square in front of the station, will be accessible to all who use the town centre and not just rail travellers. But they will not be available until probably 2026 at the earliest, and no designs have yet been made available to the public for consultation and local discussion.

The timeline for the Aylesham redevelopment is not yet clear but any new public toilets there will not be available for some years.

The new additional and accessible toilets inside and in front of the station, means that in 6-7 years time there should finally be appropriate provision in that very busy central Rye Lane part of the town centre. But, even when that all comes to fruition, it is too far away from other parts of the town centre to be adequate.

The new public toilets that should be provided in the Aylesham redevelopment will also be very appropriate and welcome. But they are not yet committed and not likely to be available for several years. And they are at one end of the town centre and too far away from other parts to be adequate.

### **Shorter term requirements**

Peckham town centre is not compact. Pedestrians have to walk long distances in their visits. It stretches from Peckham Library and Peckham High Street, on the long Rye Lane to Peckham Rye. Even when the new toilet provision outlined above is in place it will still not be adequate to meet the needs of the busy town centre with thousands of visitors every day.

To complement the important longer term new public toilet provisions, and to meet the urgent needs for some much earlier improvements, the solution is to establish an effective well-functioning community toilet scheme with the local businesses and other operators in the town centre. The Council is a significant partner in the developments at the station, and the Aylesham redevelopment and several other town centre developments bringing thousands more new visitors to the town centre. It is well placed to take the lead in convening a town centre working group, of all those with an interest and contribution to make, to develop such a scheme and implement a plan of action. It must be done as a collaborative venture with those who wish to be involved.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The town centre is very definitely a toilet cold spot. While the long term plans for new toilet provision inside and outside the station and in the Aylesham redevelopment are very welcome and essential for the long term, action needs and can be taken now to develop a Community Toilet Scheme for Peckham town centre.

The Scrutiny report might therefore welcome the Council plans for the new provision of public toilets coming from the three major redevelopment projects, and add that something needs to be done now to make public toilet provision available sooner and more widely in the town centre.

This could lead to a recommendation that the Council this year convene a meeting of all those with an interest in the well-being of the town centre and all its users. Age UK London and Loos for Southwark would be willing to work with the Council for this. The meeting could usefully report on the three different projects with plans for the new public toilets provision – on their design, operation and timescale. From that meeting a working group of volunteers could be recruited from local businesses and local residents to work with the Council to develop a community toilet scheme. There would be a positive response from the town centre operators and local residents if the Council can do this in a collaborative way.