

## **Environmental Scrutiny Committee**

### **Scrutiny Review on Planning and the Environment**

#### **Southwark Planning Network Presentation**

##### **Introduction to the Southwark Planning Network**

The Southwark Planning Network (SPN) is a self-managed informal network of active citizens. Residents and small local businesses from all over the borough are members.

The SPN grew out of a list of local people who took part in the Southwark Core Strategy Public Hearings in 2010. By 2019, over 40 local groups had taken part in our meetings and about 270 individuals engaged in planning activities in their neighbourhoods are on the mailing list.

SPN works towards ensuring participation and democratic accountability in planning in the Borough. We engage with council and voluntary sector structures in Southwark in order to use and create opportunities to influence planning processes and outcomes. We seek to rebalance power relations so that local people can determine and effect positive change in planning processes and outcomes.

We aim to strengthen community organising and campaigning in order to ensure continuity in engaging with and when necessary contesting the planning system with the purpose of transforming it. We understand that the planning processes are often inaccessible and exclusionary. We also understand that planning outcomes have and continue to exacerbate social, spatial and environmental inequalities.

SPN set up its Climate Emergency and Planning sub-group in 2020.

#### **Climate emergency**

SPN is concerned that the Council has not brought forward changes to the proposed New Southwark Plan that address significant changes required by the draft Climate Emergency Strategy and ensure that the Council is on track to achieve its ambition of becoming zero carbon by 2030. This is illustrated in a range of areas.

- a. Including emissions and embodied carbon from construction in net zero targets on developments

The draft Climate Change Strategy (consultation on the proposed Strategy ended on 15 January) proposes action to *“Enforce the inclusion of emissions and embodied carbon from construction in net zero targets on developments. Alongside this, introduce a cap on emissions produced throughout the construction process and building lifecycle”* (p41).

However, there is no reference to embodied carbon or to net zero targets in the NSP. SPN believes that there is scope to require the minimisation of embodied carbon from the construction process through the use of recycled or low carbon construction materials.

**b. Requiring developers to consider options for reusing or repurposing existing buildings before applying for permission for demolition and new build.**

The NSP suggests an energy hierarchy for new development: energy efficient design and construction; low carbon energy supply; on site renewable energy generation and storage.” (p147) Repurposing existing buildings is not mentioned in the NSP – it should be first in the energy hierarchy. This issue was brought up at the Council’s Climate Conference in November 2020 and there appeared to be willingness on the part of the Council to discuss with interested groups an approach to encourage developers to consider refurbishment of buildings before demolition. SPN has not been advised of any further action on this.

**c. Taking a proactive approach to reducing fuel poverty by mapping “fuel poor” areas in the borough and requiring that energy companies meet their obligations**

We believe that achieving the target of making the borough carbon neutral by 200 should involve a climate just transition which prioritises the needs of the most vulnerable in the community. This requires a proactive approach to identifying those in fuel poverty and prioritising measures targeted towards those groups.

Decentralised energy networks are a way of ensuring low-carbon and low cost energy and can contribute to reducing fuel poverty. The NSP proposes to extend the decentralised energy (DE) network based on SELCHP from Bermondsey to cover additional Council properties in OKR and Peckham. Other LAs have more far-reaching policies, such as Islington Council which requires all development to contribute to the development of DE networks, including by connecting to them where there is one in proximity to the development.

**d. Creating traffic free zones and pedestrianised areas**

Traffic free zones and pedestrian areas are a central element in re-thinking cities which allow people to live in a less de-humanising way. For example, the ‘15-minute city’ proposes a city in which all the essential services and products that people need can be accessed by a walk or bike ride of no more than 15 minutes. Neither traffic free zones nor pedestrianised areas are mentioned in the NSP policies.

The Council should continue to develop the public realm for active travel including cycle routes and pedestrianisation.

**e. Prioritising air quality improvement actions that also have a carbon reduction benefit.**

This is a proposal from the draft Climate Change Strategy (p49). There is no mention in the NSP of prioritising air quality improvement actions that have a carbon reduction benefit. The Council should make clear how its proposed air quality improvements relate to the commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

**f. Increasing the number and quality of trees in the borough**

The draft Climate Change Strategy takes a strong position on the increasing the number and quality of trees in the borough and protecting existing trees (p53). The NSP has a much weaker position on the protection of existing trees, with protection only required in the case of ‘significant’ trees (p137). Whilst the NSP’s

encouragement of the replacement of canopy value where trees are lost is welcome, new trees will not have the embodied carbon value of established trees, so there should be a greater focus on tree retention, extending beyond 'significant trees'.

We note that the Council's winter tree planting programme has been set back from October 2020 to February 2021 and will run till April May. Trees planted later in the year have a lower chance of survival. This is an example of the risks of prioritising the replacement of trees over the protection of existing trees.

g. Increasing green space and green corridors across the borough

The draft Climate Change Strategy calls for action to increase green corridors across the borough (p53). The NSP limits its ambition to protecting and improving green corridors and other green and open space (p56). The amount of green and open space is extremely important for healthy lives. The increase in the population and the threat of ongoing impacts of pandemics like Covid-19 make it essential that the NSP provide for increases in green space and green corridors.

h. Resource use, consumption and waste

The draft Climate Change Strategy recognises the need to ensure that local people have access to a supply of good quality food and that local food production, supply and distribution chains are an important part of making this happen (p56). While the NSP mentions food growing in several places, it does not include any mechanisms for providing space for this or for creating local food supply and distribution infrastructure. The NSP should take a proactive approach to identifying areas where there is not good access to fresh produce and suggesting measures to address these deficits.

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