

Camden Together

Belsize Ward Community Strategy Consultation Meeting

Notes of a meeting held on 2 November 2006 at 7.00pm at Hampstead Town Hall

Camden Council councillors and officers present:

Cllr Alexis Rowell
Cllr Arthur Graves (chair)
Cllr Chris Basson
Moira Gibb, Chief Executive
Anna Fawcus, Members Support, Organisational Development

Members of the public present:

Jill Tyrell, Belsize Resident's Association
Beatrice Wober (Belsize CAAC)
Chico Udeh
John Doggart
Hugh Gracey
Sgt Moseley, Metropolitan Police - Belsize Safer Neighbourhoods Team
Ann Wright,
Ed Fordham
Helena Djurkovic (Head of the Belsize Safer Neighbourhoods Team)
Marion Hill (Christians Together in Camden)
Lionel Sacks
F.O.Brown (Jake)
Dudley Miles
Andrew Tugwell
Richard Grant
Alan Melkman
Laura Watkins, Camden New Journal

Comments from members of the audience are in bullet-point format and are the opinions of those individuals.

Cllr Graves welcomed everyone to the meeting which would be in two halves – the first a presentation and discussion on the Community Strategy, the second a presentation and discussion on Climate Change.

This Community Strategy presentation is designed to stimulate discussion. What is the Community Strategy? It is forward looking for the next five years, and our second as a Council. The first was viewed well by the Audit Commission and others. For this one we will focus less on targets and more on strategy. It involves the whole community.

Part 1: Creating a Borough of Opportunity:

Cllr Rowell - How can we create a strong local economy that is adaptive to change? What is our vision so that more young people can acquire the right kind of education?

- We need more in the way of schools in the borough and in Belsize – not enough school places for our children

Cllr Rowell – already plans for a new school on the edge of Belsize which will provide more school placements.

- Young people need more vocational skills in order to get jobs. We need to finance vocational programmes like occupational nurses. This will get kids away from the areas where they are tempted not to work. We need a programme by which kids can turn up one night per week and acquire vocational skills.
- More support and publicity is needed for start-up businesses in Camden. Local businesses are good and sustainable.

Cllr Rowell – Agreed. More than 50% of small businesses do not claim Business Rate Relief.

- Camden is an area that strongly attracts media-creative businesses but we need to promote the borough to other types of small business too. More effort needs to be put in beyond the industries that already exist.
- Where is the nearest college where local people can learn vocational skills like electrical work and carpentry? [AR – Haverstock] Why does the Working Men's College not offer courses or classes for these skills?
- Camden's parking regime is detrimental to small businesses as their customers often get parking tickets. In England's Lane could exceptions not be made for customers who just stop to dash into a shop? Too many PCN's are given out there. Some areas give out a huge number of tickets and some areas are extremely quiet. A focus is needed on genuine areas of congestion.

Cllr Rowell – clamping has been scrapped. On a recent walk outside I saw eight traffic wardens in an hour. Certainly more needs to be done.

- The amount spent on energy in London is in the region of £28 billion per year. Not enough trained people in the field of environmental technology – this would be a wonderful boost to the economy and is a huge area where skilled workers are needed.

Cllr Rowell – agreed. People need to be made aware of what they themselves can do in this field. Specialised workers needed in this field, there is a real economy in environmental technology.

- Is there any possibility of a special incentive for schools to only accept local children? Local children would walk to school and this would reduce traffic.

Cllr Rowell – Camden currently does not have enough schools for children and is looking to increase this.

- It would be more productive to recognise that there is no local strategy in Camden to deal with the high levels of unemployment. We need a strategy that will bridge gaps across the borough.
- Need to re-evaluate the repairs scheme in place for repairing our roads and buildings. The response time and level of service with which the Council repair gates and paving stones etc. is extremely inadequate. We pay too much money for an inadequate level of service in this field. A workforce is needed dedicated to taking care of our streets. This would give local people employment.
- Camden is the least physically appealing borough of all of those in central London. It has fallen behind in terms of quality of environment compared to other boroughs. Streets and communal areas seem run down compared to other areas. Camden needs to clean up in order to attract businesses.

MG – Camden Streets were considered the second cleanest in London in the last survey by Encams (formerly Keep Britain Tidy). Camden did try to change the policy so that schools gave priority to accepting Camden pupils, however this was overturned by an independent adjudicator due to objections from Islington parents.

Cllr Rowell – to sum up “Creating a borough of opportunity” – we need more education for more local people, more vocational education, more attempts to publicise initiatives for businesses, more efforts to make Camden more attractive for businesses, more attention is needed for our streets and houses which would provide local employment, and local people need to be involved in local education and work to reduce traffic.

Part 2: Balancing Growth With Our Environment

Cllr Rowell – how can we grow our economy yet still maintain our quality of life? Are we harming our community and our world?

- More local policing is necessary. Law and order is vital for the economy – young thugs are not welcomed by an ageing population. We need to break up the enclaves of young troublemakers.

Cllr Rowell – we are lucky to have the Head of the Belsize Safer Neighbourhood team here with us tonight.

- Residential and commercial activity is merging across Camden. More and more people are working from home. Camden needs to accommodate this. Public libraries need wi-fi. People that work from home do not need a car, therefore no emissions are released.
- Local coffee shops become the new meeting rooms when the home becomes the office. The concept of the hotdesk needs to be moved to public places like libraries, where people can meet and work together outside of the office.
- It would be a real incentive to work from home and cut down on emissions if Camden were to become a pioneer wi-fi borough.

Cllr Rowell – Excellent idea. For those who are not aware, wi-fi is the concept of a wireless local area network. Laptops can connect to the Internet when in proximity to an access point, and therefore a cable does not need to be attached to a laptop. Public meeting rooms are necessary for this changing working environment – somewhere where people can work undisturbed in a public location and rent a room and a phone if necessary.

- There are downsides to working from home. Less interaction, and working alone isolates people.
- We are allowing individuals to become property developers and this must stop. Recent breaches of planning authorisation include the floor area in a flat being increased by 40%, extensions being built, and a shed was recently knocked down to build a summer house. There is a lack of enforcement when it comes to planning, the Council are too lax.
- There is also not enough sense of community in this area – people migrate and move on. The population is in flux and this does not support housing development when an area is being built up.

Cllr Rowell – most large site developments now have affordable housing built in to them so it is available. Affordable housing constitutes what a teacher or a police officer could afford on their salary.

- As housing developments are built up and knocked down, the consequence of this is that we have to take better care of communal space. In Camden we have marvellous parks and open spaces. More policing is necessary. Integration is needed as a result of our mix of cultures and we need to open up and balance our environment with an ever-increasing population.
- With our current policies we simply cannot sustain a growing population and that is something we must address properly.

Part 3: Building Strong, Healthy and Connected Communities

Cllr Rowell - Safety, education and work are all part of our community. What would encourage you to take a more active role in our community?

- At this time of year the obvious answer is community events like Bonfire Night. It's the only time of the year when everyone comes together. Used to be a real community atmosphere at Primrose Hill. Can we have that back?

Cllr Rowell – We need more events where the community can celebrate itself and people are brought together, like festivals, lighting of the Christmas lights at Belsize village and Belsize lane.

- There are not enough facilities for children. Realistically there are not enough things to do. The play area in the Swiss Cottage centre is £4 per hour and the swimming pool is also costly. These are activities only middle class parents can afford. We need areas and activities for children and young people from poorer families.
- More forums are needed where people can make active decisions that control their lives. Forums are needed for this purpose. Decisions regarding health and education should be made by families. People need to be able to take an active role in these issues.
- 25 years ago in this very hall there was an exhibition for a book written called "*Belsize Park, A Living Suburb*". Ever since then, the community has stuttered to a halt. This meeting tonight was not well publicised, many did not know it was taking place, for example.
- Many thanks for the opportunity to have our say at this meeting. We all have our personal agendas but this is really a start. Meeting was in fact well publicised in Your Camden. Not enough people read Your Camden and similar publications.

Cllr Rowell – we will try to address this – to hold more forums and allow people's views to be heard. Your comments are vital, especially during this time of consultation.

- Health and safety is a huge issue in Camden, especially road safety. The developments at Kings Cross and the pressure for new homes will only serve to increase the pressure on this. Children and parents simply cannot walk to school as it is too dangerous. We need to focus much more on our community health and safety. The environment is hostile, for example at Finchley Road. These basic issues need to be addressed before we can fully look after the community.

Cllr Rowell – our community will never be sustainable until the area is safer for both pedestrians and cyclists. We need separate cycle lanes from pavements and roads. Lack of these basic facilities is unheard of in Northern Europe.

Part 4: A Safe and Vibrant Place at the Heart of a World City

Cllr Rowell - What would help reduce crime and increase peace of mind?
How can we make it easier for people to enjoy Camden's cultural activities?

- We need a "Camden Card" like the "Westminster Card" that offers discounts to theatres and to cultural events. It could be a card for tourists and residents, like in European cities. The Camden Leisure Card is now invalid at many places and has been replaced by the Wellness Card.
- We risk going for the glitzy tourist attractions and we ignore the treasures that are on our doorstep. Locals really need to be made aware of all the cultural activities that are around them.
- Living here is like living in the middle of the Edinburgh festival – so much to do culturally. New residents should be sent a guide to cultural events in Camden when they register in the borough.

Climate Change Presentation

Transport

Cllr Rowell – Car ownership is rising, we are taking more flights. How can we reduce the environmental impact of the transport that we use?

- Richmond have introduced variable parking permits that charge more for 4x4 vehicles and less for small cars.
- Perhaps we could not give permits to cars which have engines over a certain size?

Cllr Rowell – I am confident that this will happen in Camden.

- Parents simply do not want to walk to school in the rain. Mothers with children feel like they are being victimised by not having parking permits for the school run.
- Is it possible to charge people who are driving around Camden who are coming from outside the borough? Makes sense to allow families to drive to their local school.

Cllr Rowell – the clear message here is that we should not be targeting parents with children.

- Camden has very little secure parking for motorbikes.

Cllr Rowell – six stands have recently been installed in England's Lane.

- We need incentives for people not to use cars. The council need to place subsidies on public transport.

- The council need to provide cycle paths and a better bus system. We need to provide real transport alternatives before we begin fining people who use cars.
- This issue is too big for Camden alone. Camden needs to join together with all the other London boroughs, or needs to embark on a national programme to tackle this issue. A pilot project across boroughs needs to be put in place to produce eco-vehicles and to prove that they are a feasible option to the public.
- Is it possible to put in place a Camden Congestion Charge?

Cllr Rowell – There is satellite technology being developed that will be able to target traffic hotspots in this way and track vehicles that will be more effective than a Camden Congestion Charge in the long term.

- Why can Camden not bring back the old Routemaster buses and set up a trolley bus system with overhead cables, in order to preserve energy?

Biodiversity

Cllr Rowell - The North Pole will now disappear whatever we do. This shows how important our actions are. What can we do in Camden to protect our environment and the natural world?

- We need to encourage children to walk to school. We need to make our streets and roads safer.
- We need to introduce the idea of educational campaigns regarding the environment run by schools. In France there are trips to the countryside where children go canoeing and build bonfires to educate them about the natural world. Tours of Hampstead Heath to educate children could be a possibility.
- Planning permission is a big threat to biodiversity, especially when residents pave over their front gardens.

Cllr Rowell – This increases flooding and threatens biodiversity.

- The trees in our local area are under threat of drought. The Council could promote an initiative that would encourage local people to water the trees on their street, perhaps an Adopt-A-Tree initiative where residents and children water and look after their own tree, receive a plaque etc.

Energy

Cllr Rowell – How can we reduce the environmental impact of the energy that we use? What is your view on setting up a Camden Carbon Offset fund? This is the idea that every time someone takes a plane journey they pay into a fund the financial equivalent of the damage to the environment that their plane journey will wreak. We could use the money for biodiversity issues here in

Camden. People don't have a choice - they need to pay for the damage they cause to the environment. We need a system in place where we account for all the energy and carbon that we use.

- People will not like the idea that there will be an environmental tax and they will be simultaneously paying more into environmental schemes such as these.
- Walking to parks and walking to school educates people. Carshares and permits had support. If there is an incentive, people will buy into it. If you offer safer roads and pavements, then people will walk to school. When the permits were taken away for parents parking at school, people felt betrayed.

Energy Efficiency

Cllr Rowell – 60% of the power coming through the National Grid is lost. Homes are incredibly inefficient. What can we do to improve energy efficiency of our housing stock?

- A mental change is needed. Politicians at a local and a national level need to show people how simple it is to cut back on energy losses.
- We need to ensure that the Council's strategy is not simply punitive. We need to reduce the environmental impact caused by energy and we need to make energy safe, clean and easy to get.
- New developments across Camden should be required to install sustainable energy sources.

Cllr Rowell – Cllr Penny Abraham is launching Lights Out In Camden. This sort of strategy will save businesses money, and this will encourage businesses to comply when the incentive is to save money.

- Not sure that businesses would ever leave their lights on overnight. We need to cut taxes so it becomes a profit to save energy. Time is money – give businesses an incentive to save energy and then they will respond.

Cllr Rowell – showing a business how to save money with simple energy-saving tips has the same effect as cutting taxes to be more green.

- Gas Stations are a shocking waste of resources
- A certain company leaves their heating on over Christmas so that they come back to a warm office after the break. They simply do not care that they are wasting money. How much power does Camden have to implement more insulation in buildings as part of planning permission?

Cllr Rowell - How can we provide incentives to people to use solar panels?

- The slate tiles fell off my roof and I would have loved to have been able to put up solar panels, but there was simply no information on this

available so they were replaced with slate panels instead. Lack of information about green alternatives is a real issue.

- There is a restaurant near this Town Hall that uses the outdoor large candle heaters and simply leaves its fuel burning overnight. It is these little things that waste energy.

Cllr Rowell – My suggestion would be that every house has a “green audit” that takes one hour and suggests all the changes you could make at home that would help save the environment. This would leave residents with real information that they can use constructively.

- A green audit could be linked to Council Tax. Your band gets adjusted up or down depending on how environmentally efficient your home is.

Water

Cllr Rowell – Water shortages have occurred over the past two years, and producing clean water for us all is harmful for the environment. How can we be more efficient in our use of water?

- Last year the water we were allowed to use was cut substantially. The media carried a campaign informing us of the environmental damage wasted water can inflict. If this sort of information is made clear to the public and feasible solutions are offered, then people will act.
- Why do we use clean water to clean streets? Why can't we use recycled water for this purpose? Or brooms?
- How can poorer communities action these initiatives? They do not have the same resources.

Cllr Rowell - Hampstead and Belsize produce the most carbon emissions in Camden. Richer communities are the problem here, not the poorer ones.

- Council houses are not very energy efficient at all. How can we improve this?

Cllr Rowell – All the renovation at Chalcots Estate is going into energy efficiency measures.

- What is the actual implication of houses in Belsize Park being energy inefficient?
- We need to embrace the whole community in this issue and not make a division like this between rich and poor. Statements like this will rile people.

Cllr Rowell – Measures are needed to encourage richer communities to be more energy efficient. I am stating a fact that the richer communities fly more and drive more and produce more carbon emissions. We need more than just punitive measures, we need incentives and information.

Recycling

Cllr Rowell - We produce tons of waste each year. We need to find ways to recycle better and smarter. How much more could your household recycle?

- People don't have enough information available. I do not know where to get rid of all the different kinds of plastic, for example.

Cllr Rowell – Tesco's have agreed to join me in campaigning about plastic bag use across Camden. The upcoming Environmental Audit will show us what works now and what will work in the future in terms of recycling.

- How much of taxpayer's money will this environmental audit cost?

Cllr Rowell – I will get back to you with the financial costs involved.

- We need more compost bins across the borough

Cllr Rowell – 4,000 compost bins have been sold in Camden. 16,000 have been sold in Barnet. Camden is not doing enough.

Cllr Graves – We need to link this discussion to the Community Strategy until 2012. Please focus on this.

- Where does Camden's waste go?

Cllr Rowell – to a landfill site in Hertfordshire, or to recycling centres in Crayford and Greenwich.

- Is it possible to burn waste to produce heat in our homes?

Cllr Rowell – Head already produces electricity at the Edmonton incinerator. I hope for a Waste to Gas site to be built in Camden soon.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm. Cllr Graves thanked everyone for their attendance and their contributions.