

Camden Together

Hampstead Town Ward Community Strategy Consultation Meeting

Notes of a meeting held on 13 November 2006 at 7.00pm at the Royal School Hampstead

Camden Councillors present:

Cllr Kirsty Roberts
Cllr Mike Greene
Cllr Chris Knight

Members of the public present:

29 local residents

Councillor Kirsty Roberts opened the meeting by introducing herself, the Executive Officer, and her fellow Hampstead Town councillors. She explained that the Community Strategy is to be produced in partnership with members of the Local Strategic Partnership: Police, NHS, and voluntary sector. This meeting was an opportunity for the community in Hampstead Town ward to make suggestions for council priorities for the period to 2012.

Discussion on the theme of a Strong Local Economy

Cllr Roberts asked for suggestions to improve the skills, education, and economy of the area. Residents said that a good command of English was important for people living in Hampstead, as were skills of numeracy and literacy. Poverty does exist in Hampstead, and devoting resources to basic skills and English would also aid integration of people from other countries in local life. Cllr Greene asked the meeting whether language training should be aimed at school-age children or adults. A resident suggested that young adults should be the primary focus of language skills.

In response to a question, Cllr Greene explained that voluntary sector organisations were helping Somali and Bengali residents in the south of the borough. The meeting acknowledged the value of outreach work by the voluntary sector, and asked to what level the training reached. Another resident explained that weekend, Saturday, and after-school classes were run, mostly reliant on charities.

Several residents said that education must be a spending priority for the council, and Cllr Roberts summarized discussion as promoting English to non-English speakers important for integration and sense of community.

By contrast, a resident suggested that Camden should also listen to the views of the different cultures in the borough and let those communities decide for themselves what they need so they acquire ownership of the services — joint solutions required.

A resident suggested that Camden Council should seek to appoint more people that live in Camden. It was noted that many council officers live outside the borough due to cost and it was suggested that the council should do more to help key workers live locally. Cllr Roberts summarized this discussion as building partnerships with the various communities in the borough.

Discussion: Housing

A resident suggested that Camden should identify key workers and provide housing to keep them within the borough. Cllr Greene explained that new developments in Camden produce Section 106 money that is used to produce social housing, ideally comprising 50% of any development. Camden is promoting key worker rented housing for new developments.

In response to a suggestion that empty houses should be requisitioned, Cllr Greene described the EDMO scheme, where private properties empty for more than six months can be used by the Council for 7 years. However, Cllr Greene pointed out that the physical condition of the property might be a financial disincentive. He added that he was surprised that high property values in the ward did not promote sales or development of empty properties.

Regarding housing for low income residents: for example those living in the poorest wards north of Kings Cross, the Kings Cross redevelopment would provide more low cost housing, and Cllr Greene was keen to improve regeneration and support for local businesses around Euston Station.

Discussion: Local Businesses

The meeting commented that large chain stores were creating a generic form of high street and local businesses were being squeezed out. Camden should offer preferential treatment to encourage local businesses.

A representative of 'Save Our Green' welcomed this opportunity to discuss the Community Strategy, and to refocus on the towns and communities in this part of the borough, e.g. Camden Town, Kentish Town, and Hampstead. She felt the differing needs of each area should be addressed by a differentiated strategic approach to encourage a mix of shops best suited to the community. For example more specialist shops (organic butchers?) in Hampstead, and different shops for Queens Crescent.

Cllr Greene pointed out that London Borough of Camden was the largest commercial landlord in the borough, owning Heath Street in Hampstead, for example. Camden could influence rent but not business rates. The borough has to manage the conflict of building the kind of retail community local people want, against its fiduciary duty to the council tax payers of the borough.

The meeting then discussed setting up a local business forum, chaired by a local councillor, to promote partnership between commerce and the borough.

The local forum would aim to influence landlords to let to the type of shops local people wanted. Cllr Greene commented that local forums seldom focussed on ways of saving money.

A resident replied that residents had previously advised against expensive consultations on the Boulevard Project, a job that could be on the agenda of a local business forum. An alternative suggestion was a return to a parish structure; another comment was that Camden aggressive parking enforcement policy deterring shoppers from parking near local shops.

Discussion: Balancing growth with concern for the environment

Cllr Roberts asked the meeting for their suggestions on sustainability: what are the priorities for the environment? Cllr Greene said that Camden's population would to grow dramatically, based on increased migration to the UK, London, and Central London in particular. By 2016 an extra 16000 homes would be needed in the borough.

Residents said land was finite, how can population continue to grow. If more houses were allowed to be built, population would of course increase, but are there other factors? Cllr Knight said that arising from the Section 106 agreement on the Kings Cross development, 1750 new homes would be built as part of the development. This will have an electoral impact. For example, Hampstead Town ward currently has 8000 electors; population increase will move the total to 12000 per ward, the St Giles development is an example.

A resident argued that quality of life is reduced by population growth. Cllr Greene said that the current transport infrastructure was creaking, and would not be able to cope with future demand. Cllr Greene observed that it should be possible to balance development with care for the environment through technical innovation.

A resident commented that Government had not mentioned solar panels for generating electricity; people should be encouraged to reduce carbon emissions in this way and it should be incorporated into Camden's environment policy.

She went on to say that Camden was not really a community – it had been destroyed by 'super-boroughs' format. Local forums were required; the Local Strategic Partnership could not work without local forums.

Another resident said Camden must ensure that the needs of young people are met by new developments, and Cllr Roberts asked how such developments could be sustainable.

Responding to a question, Cllr Greene said that Camden has a strict policy of no building on Metropolitan Open Land. A resident replied that more social housing needed to be built, and Cllr Greene said that limited land was available in Hampstead, few brownfield sites. There are more opportunities in Swiss Cottage or Camden Town. Housing is Camden's number one priority.

Another resident said the housing needs of the over-65s must be addressed. Many are living in poor quality housing. TfL should be asked for new indicator boards for bus times on bus shelters. He said he had applied for planning permission to install solar tubes on his property and was frustrated by the bureaucracy in the way of easy installation. Cllr Greene replied that the government regulates planning rules for such things. Cllr Greene described two proposals he had in mind: encouraging more people to walk by providing walking guides as street furniture, and simplifying bus routes to north/south and east/west, with colour coded plans like the tube map. He said electric vehicles should receive more investment and innovation. More investment will boost innovation and improve the technology, in the same way that mobile phone technology has dramatically changed and improved.

A resident complained about the poor quality of pavements in the ward; another observed that there should be room for a protected cycle lane on Rosslyn Hill, separate from traffic.

A resident said more confidence is needed in the planning process, and enforcement. Planning permissions appear to be granted inappropriately, and there is an inconsistent standard of enforcement. Camden needs to improve the quality of the commercial property it owns, and the Community Strategy should be amended to include the council's role as a commercial landlord. Camden should put more pressure on businesses to be 'green'. A resident said space heaters outside restaurants should be banned.

Discussion: Healthy communities

Cllr Roberts asked for the meetings views on improving the health of Hampstead's communities. A resident praised Camden's playground provision for small children, but more was needed for those over 6 years old, and teenagers. Cllr Roberts explained that discussion on this theme would feed into LSP discussions with the NHS.

Residents expressed concern about the shortcomings of the Royal Free Hospital, in particular cleanliness and security. Sgt Pepper replied that crime in the Royal Free had gone down since a special constable had been deployed there. Pedestrian access to the hospital was poor, as was parking. In response to a question. Cllr Roberts said that Camden could raise such issues with the NHS through the LSP.

A resident said cuts were being made to the funding for the voluntary sector and this would particularly affect the Somali community, as well as organisations like Age Concern and Citizen's Advice Bureau. Such voluntary organisations provide a sense of community and local communities support after-school clubs. Cllr Greene responded to assert that no cuts have been made to the voluntary sector budget. He said many voluntary organisations in the past had built on the grant from Camden and produced a value to the community greater than the grant suggested. However, it appeared some voluntary organisations had become complacent, and the review of funding

was to encourage more efficiency from existing groups, and provide the opportunity for new groups to take on the roles currently provided by less efficient organisations. Voluntary organisations should be transparent in their operation and provide value for money to residents. Residents expressed concern about funding for organisations such as the Law Centre and Age Concern. Responding to a question, Cllr Greene explained that Camden's voluntary sector budget was approximately £10 million, and the council was considering dividing the money by service area, moving funds between service areas to meet current need. Cllr Roberts summarised by suggesting that service users could be asked to sit on panels that decide how money should be allocated. A resident suggested that close co-operation between Camden and the voluntary sector would be fruitful. Cllr Knight pointed out that some of Camden's youth groups had not filed accounts for their grants, and a change in grant aid should be based on demand.

Discussion: Community safety and perception of crime

Cllr Roberts asked Sgt Steve Pepper to tell the meeting about Hampstead's Safer Neighbourhood Team, and he explained that the team aimed to listen closely to residents' concerns and respond accordingly to local residents' priorities.

A resident asked about cover on transport in the ward, and was there sufficient co-ordination between British Transport Police and the Neighbourhood Team. Are there enough officers on trains? A resident said there was a perception that police clocked off at night, but another said that he knew that early hours of the morning are patrolled. He was concerned about the safety of Hampstead and Belsize tube stations.

Another resident commented that perpetrators and victims of crime are often young, and a resident observed that Hampstead High Street was rowdy on weekend nights. Cllr Greene responded to this by saying that the Safer Neighbourhood Team had identified Hampstead High Street. Cllr Roberts floated the idea of private security for street patrols, and a resident said the community street wardens and Metropolitan Police were preferred.

A resident suggested that growth in the Safer Neighbourhood team would increase success in crime prevention or reduction. Another suggested that Camden's street wardens could be converted to PCSOs.

Several residents have observed the need for more venues for young people in Hampstead, where they are away from the risk of becoming victims of crime. Cllr Greene observed that young people have always been attracted to Hampstead to socialize, and that it should instead be encouraged. He observed that no curfews exist on the continent and it appears to be successful. PC Thomas Whelan said there are often problems with alcohol for young people, and it is better to provide somewhere for young people to go rather than they find their way into the criminal justice system. Cllr Roberts asked whether joint working with police may help, and why are youth facilities are underused.

A resident suggested that planning rules cause problems by limiting what can be done. Another suggested that more adults in the area to 'keep an eye on' the young people might help, but the area needed an 'open' feeling, and a nucleus of places for young people. Cllr Greene observed that 'Tinseltown' opened until late, served alcohol, and had no problems. As soon as it served only milkshakes, the problems began. Sgt Steve Pepper said he was disappointed at the reaction of residents to the Gail's Bakery event that featured music, and was well managed. A resident suggested that youth centres should stay open until 1 or 2am to reduce crime and be there for vulnerable young people who had domestic problems. Another said young people's views should be sought.

The meeting went on to discuss the role that schools might have in youth provision, bringing different youth groups together, and provide discos etc. There was a feeling that Bloomsbury has attracted a lot of attention from Camden Council, and West Hampstead residents now feel they lack council support. Sports facilities were suggested as creating bonds within communities, and clubhouses for teams were needed. Camden's business community are looking to the council to help with advice on business development, direct help.

Councillor Kirsty Roberts thanked everyone for attending and reminded residents that they could use the cards on their chairs to make written contributions, or send comments in by email. The final report on the Community Strategy process would be in February. The meeting closed at 9.25pm