

Camden Together

Haverstock Ward Community Strategy Consultation Meeting

Notes of a meeting held on 21 November 2006 at 7.00pm at the Charlie Ratchford Centre

Camden Council councillors and officers present:

Cllr Jill Fraser (chair),
Cllr Syed Hoque
Andy Knowles, Assistant Director, Children Schools and Families
Anna Fawcus, Member Supports, Organisational Development

Members of the public present:

Elna Gay, Maitland Park TA
Frances Rollason, Haverstock Safer neighbourhood panels
Dorothy Turner, Maitland Park TA
Claire Glasman, Crossroad's Womens' Centre
Nick Harding, Pedestrian Association
Yasmin Allen
H. Rashid, BSF
Janet Guthrie, former Camden Cllr
Talal Karim, Gospel Oak Partnership
Journalist from the Camden New Journal

Apologies: Suzie Goodman – Community Development Officer, Cllr Roy Shaw

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

Cllr Fraser welcomed everyone to the meeting, which would be in four parts – a discussion on the Community Strategy split into its four sections.

Part 1: Creating a borough of opportunity:

Cllr Fraser - 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? The lack of workers in Camden is a great problem. How can we keep encouraging people to learn skills?

- The rents that Camden place on shops are too high. High rents are deterring people and small businesses from setting up local businesses. Larger businesses can afford the rents, small ones cannot. When shops close there is a perception that it is because the rent is too high.
- The nearby laundrette had to close because there was a recent rent review and Camden raised the rent. A thriving community business

closed down because of this. If Camden does not value community businesses, then who does it value?

- Two shops in the nearby area have been recently auctioned away.

Cllr Fraser – We need to look into the rent review, and offer either a lower business rate or offer help in order for small businesses to meet the high rent rates

- Speciality shops are often taken over by chains
- Does Camden make a record of why businesses close?
- We need to protect established businesses from crime in the local area. The shop next to the former Post Office on Molden Road was driven out of business because of crime caused by local children.
- There are problems regarding people with mental health problems getting into employment. Many people are against the closure of day centres. Camden wish to replace day centres with one-to-one support workers. Camden need to safeguard the day centres as an essential part to patient recovery in order to support people who want to return to work.
- Is it true that Camden are cutting the number of art classes at the Working Men's College?
- This is a government initiative and not a local government one
- We need to keep the established adult classes and not reduce the funding for them, in keeping with Camden's tradition with the arts.

Part 2: Balancing growth with our environment

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

- We need to charge people who do not recycle, like in Barnet.
- Protecting the environment is not just about recycling, it is also about protecting our green spaces.
- Don't board up shops
- 4 local public houses have recently been turned into flats. This drastically increases the number of people who live in the area. Is Camden granting too many licences to convert buildings?

Cllr Fraser – Given the fact that we are dealing with a growing population, should we not be providing houses for them?

- We should concentrate on converting derelict areas before converting other buildings that already serve a purpose.

Cllr Fraser – King's Lynn recently resurrected a law that allows the Council the right to regenerate a derelict building. This needs to be looked into as a

possibility for Camden in the future to deal with the problem of building too many blocks of flats. We need to bring back existing properties.

- I'd rather see derelict buildings brought back as accommodation than as a betting shop.
- New housing in the area needs to be affordable.
- What about tenants who occupy larger flats with children and then the children leave? What incentives exist to encourage tenants to downsize? People sometimes have to wait years to do so.

Cllr Fraser – tenants are offered £1,000 per bedroom to downsize. We need better incentives to encourage this.

- Camden has a great shortage of wheelchair-accessible council housing.

Cllr Fraser – I believe all council housing should have wide doors.

Cllr Hoque – We need a much wider range of options for people with disabilities. We need to accommodate their desires and needs.

- Is there a register of properties that have been renovated to accommodate tenants with disabilities?

Cllr Fraser – I will look into this and report back.

- Some Housing Associations have an appalling record with property maintenance. This needs to be improved.
- The Council needs to stop selling properties on the open market after they become available when tenants die or move away. So much money is spent on converting houses for people with disabilities, Camden should not waste all this money by simply selling the houses on.

- How often are the litter laws enforced? Street cleaning in Camden is excellent, but how often are the litter penalties enforced?

Cllr Fraser – more use of these penalties would make Camden a lot of money.

- Pubs should be penalised for the young people who throw up outside them at night. Sandpits should be provided and Camden should charge pubs who allow youths to do this. Vomit on the streets creates a bad impression of our ward.

- More communal skips are needed. So much could be recycled but it is just dumped. Flytipping collection is very good, but available skips would be really useful, introduced gradually so builders do not just dump rubbish in them.

- People should be able to buy the things others are throwing out – especially in an artistic community like Camden. Artists often buy aluminium and recycled furniture.

Cllr Fraser – the recycling team is very open to suggestions.

Part 3: Building strong, healthy and connected communities

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

- Everything in Camden is slightly offbeat and unusual which is unique to Camden.
- There is to be a reduction in grants being offered to youth services by the current administration – is this true?

Cllr Fraser – there has been a rearrangement of finances, but no budget cut.

- However the amount allocated to youth services is not increasing. Finances have been reallocated and money is being taken away from this most deprived area.
- Do members of Youth Clubs have to pay? If people are made to pay a small fee for these services then they appreciate them so much more. These services need to be seen as a privilege and then youths would treat them better.
- We need to deal with how we treat people in the community. Currently there is too much talk of “us” and “them”. Seeing parts of the community as “trouble spots” only divides a community. We need to get everyone involved and listen to everyone’s opinion despite their background or living situation. Policies should be for all residents, not just for certain areas. This automatically has a direct effect on inclusion of children and older people.

Cllr Hoque – participation in a community is essential, as is feedback.

- However people only participate when an issue directly affects them. 11,000 live in Haverstock, less than 30 are at this meeting. Not enough people knew about it, either.

Cllr Fraser – what sort of distribution network would be more effective to advertise events like these ward meetings?

- Newspaper dispensers. Schools – give them to kids on their way out of class. Supermarkets, churches, doctors’ surgeries.
- All information about community meetings should be distributed at the beginning of the month, to alert people in time.
- Word of mouth, and leaflets. People discuss upcoming events with each other.
- Camden’s website is difficult to navigate – would be useful to have some leaflets and guidelines on how to navigate.
- Noticeboards are extremely valuable, and also secure areas where information will not be tampered with. Junkmail is irritating, but people will take time to read noticeboards. Lots of blocks of flats have unused noticeboards in their lobbies. Often noticeboards outside churches and mosques that could be used.
- Pin notices to trees

Cllr Hoque – What motivates you to attend meetings of this nature?

- Another reason why the community finds it hard to get involved is the matter of time. Meetings aren't held during the day and mothers with young children cannot attend in the evening.
- Free food will always motivate people to attend a meeting
- Meetings should not clash with big football or rugby games
- Residents lose momentum to attend ward meetings in the winter months. Most important issues should be debated from May/June onwards.
- We need to team up ward meeting with community events. Dance classes and social activities would encourage attendance.

Meeting of the Safer Neighbourhood Team at the Charlie Ratchford Centre at 8pm on 5th December.

Cllr Fraser – we could combine this with a Christmas event with mince pies, as suggested, to encourage people to attend?

- The Haverstock policemen will be invited.
- We need to get children in the ward to come too – perhaps we could combine it with their Citizenship classes.
- Is enough being promoted through Camden schools to get young people to engage in Camden panels?

Part 4: A safe and vibrant place at the heart of a world city

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

- By not cutting funding for the Citizen's Advice Buro (CAB) and the Law Centre. Residents desperately need free services like these. They are currently under threat of closure. The thought shouldn't even be entertained. Not everyone can afford a solicitor. The CAB does that work for the people who need it and provides essential information free of charge.
- Would it be possible to bring together legal advice services and social services and a youth centre all under one roof to save money?
- Are there alternatives available for low-cost legal advice?

Cllr Hoque – this is obviously an essential service for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The need to be able to seek assistance easily.

- We need a publicly accessible list of legal and social advice services offered by the council – the who, what, when and where.
- How successful are local safety networks at reducing crime? In some wards this works better than in others. If strategies work well, we need to share information and action with other wards.
- It would be useful to have an evaluation of the Safer Neighbourhood Schemes to evaluate areas where different wards are strong and weak.

Cllr Fraser – it's difficult to get a fair overview of different schemes as services need time to be established in a community. People need to feed in to the services and take ownership.

The meeting ended at 9.00pm. Cllr Fraser thanked everyone for their attendance and their contributions.