

Camden Together

St Pancras and Somers Town Ward Community Strategy Consultation Meeting

Notes of a meeting held on 15 November 2006 at 6.30pm at Godwin & Crowndale Community Hall

Camden Council councillors and officers present:

Cllr Anna Stewart (Chair),
Cllr Roger Robinson
Cllr Nurul Islam. Dionne Greenaway
Yvette Stanley, Assistant Director: Partnership, Strategy & Commissioning
Mike Brown, Executive Officer
Maxine Jervis, Neighbourhood Partnerships
Rita Waligo, Neighbourhood Partnerships

Members of the public present:

Sally	Warren	Plot 10 Community Play Project
Justin	Francii	EUTRA
Ann	Stannard	Plot 10 CPP & Ossulston TA
John	Rowlinson	Jubilee Centre
Susan	Gorrie	Curnock Street TRA
Ann	Beatty	SPH Housing
R	McMahon	Coopers Lane TRA
P	Keilty	Camden New Journal
Paul	Anderson	Agar Grove TMO
Miranda	Martin	Chumley TRA
Jo	Williams	Training Link
F	Evans	Ossulston TRA

Approx. 2-3 others attended without leaving their names.

Welcome and Introduction

Councillor Robinson addressed routine housekeeping matters. Councillor Anna Stewart introduced herself as chair of the meeting and introduced her fellow St Pancras and Sowerstown Ward councillors, Cllr Roger Robinson and Cllr Nurul Islam. The Chair stated that the councillors' role was to listen to the views of local residents and outlined the proposed structure of the meeting. This was to take the four main aims of the community strategy and seek views on how they could best be achieved.

Each person present was asked to introduce themselves to the meeting, stating their name and who or what they represented if appropriate. Yvette Stanley, Assistant Director in Children, Schools and Families introduced herself as a member of Camden Council's Senior Leadership Group and an

adviser to the meeting and Paul Kielty introduced himself as attending on behalf of the Camden New Journal.

Presentation

Councillor Stewart outlined the background to the community strategy and introduced the four main aims of the Council's vision for 2012. She explained that local authorities are legally required to lead the development of a community strategy with key partners. The first strategy covered 2001 to 2006.

Councillor Stewart explained that the Camden Together document was purposefully designed to be debated within the local community and to gain the views of local people to feed into the final strategy.

Open discussion:

1. Creating a borough of opportunity

This section discussed the need to promote local business, employment, skills and training within the ward and began by Cllr Stewart pointing out the specific questions that residents were being requested to ask themselves in the consultation booklet Camden Together.

- Kings Cross development was stated to be resulting in the closing down of specifically local businesses and shops and their replacement by shops and businesses owned by large companies, such as mobile telephone shops. It was felt that these large companies do not generally employ or recruit local people so there was a need to promote local businesses. These would lend vitality to the area and could cater for the wide variety of people, including young and old and ethnic communities in the area.
- High market rents, even for Council owned premises, were cited as a major problem for local businesses, especially when the high start up costs were also taken into account. It was asked whether rents could be held down in certain areas, and could planning regulations be used to do this. A system of 'stepped' rents was also suggested as a way of aiding struggling local businesses. These rents could, for instance, be dependent on turnover.
- The delivery problems experienced by local businesses, which meant that there was a need for a better balance in terms of parking restrictions on loading were cited as another problem. Also that there were not much room or facilities for small local businesses to meet their training needs within Camden. It was asked whether the Council could not help more in this regard and whether European funding could be sought, possibly in the form of a 'sustainability pot'. It was also stressed by one contributor that the availability of jobs was more

important than training, as someone could be in training for years without being able to get a job.

- The first phase of the CTRL was not believed to have produced many jobs for local people. There was a low percentage of local workers involved in the construction works, possibly due to a reliance on cheaper, East European labour. The meeting wanted to know whether there were any apprenticeship schemes for local people under the CTRL, and whether the Council could link up with the companies involved to promote these.
- Yvette Stanley and Cllr Stewart pointed out that the Council were working with CTRL on job promotion in the regeneration projects and that it was also being done through Section 106 agreements. But it was acknowledged that there was a need for the Council to push this issue, especially in the next phase. One representative indicated that clear notification beforehand of what jobs would be available and of what skills was needed to ensure that the jobs that were supposed to go to local people do go to them.
- The Tramlink – there was deep concern about the re-emergence of the possibility of the Tramlink cutting through Somerstown. It was felt that the wishes of local people were now being disregarded after a previous promise from the mayor, and that the GLA were going behind their backs. It was felt that this called into question the whole point of consulting local people in general.

2. Balancing growth with our environment

Cllr Stewart began the discussion by drawing attention to the questions residents might like to ask themselves listed in the consultation booklet, asking them to think about how the Council could achieve the right balance, bearing in mind that these were sometimes in conflict.

- Housing - the discussion began by agreeing that there did not seem to be enough about housing in the consultation document, particularly in relation to density, overcrowding and provision. It was felt, for instance, that Right to Buy properties were being sold on and rented out to students who were a transient population, resulting in families losing out in terms of suitable sized housing and the community consequently being broken up. It was suggested that clauses forbidding a change of use from family sized units to multiple occupation should be incorporated in the leases for RTB properties. It was agreed that the Council should be campaigning to secure these types of restrictions on RTB.
- This loss of housing stock and the problems it was causing are not referred to in the document. There was also a concern that the environment seldom seems to include 'people' and that it was people who should be considered all the way through. The size of

housing units was important in this regard, as the division of family sized accommodation into 'shoe box' units would not result in a sustainable community. So too was the need to prevent estates from being divided up by the transfer of blocks from one estate to another, as this also caused divisions within the community.

- Even in the case of new housing there were perceived to be problems. Was anything being done to promote environmentally friendly housing? For instance, are new buildings required to provide insulated roofs or butts for water storage? These were small practical things that should be required of new housing. There was a concern that large companies were taking over properties and that these types of pressures on the cohesion of the community need to be counteracted by the Council.
- Most new housing was going up on brown field sites, i.e. in the least desirable areas (e.g. near the railway lines), on small sites with little room to build larger units. One contributor felt that many of these factors were beyond local control, either due to government legislation or more global factors and that the Council itself was encouraging families who wanted larger accommodation, or a garden for their children, to move to other parts of the country.
- The 65 acres of the Kings Cross development was said to represent a perfect opportunity to provide more housing, but it was felt that not enough was going to be supplied and that the developers were not being sufficiently encouraged to do more.

On other issues relating to the environment:

- It was proposed that low cost initiatives, such as home monitoring devices, are very important and should be promoted by the Council. These enabled people to monitor the amount of power they use and are an incentive to householders and children to reduce it.
- Agreement that the Council should consider schemes like those of Richmond for making differential parking charges on vehicles with high fuel consumption.
- Though, citing other Local Authorities schemes for the surreptitious monitoring of how much household waste is being disposed of, with a view to charging for it, it was felt that Camden's green policies should not be coercive or invasive and constraining. As the only way forward was to go with what people themselves wanted.
- The use of personal green bags for recycling was described as a moderate success, which had to be followed through. Recycling schemes for estates should be rolled out across the borough, though it was recognised that there are some difficulties about what schemes to use. There were also problems, such as the recycling bins attracting

more refuse etc than they could cope with, leading to overflowing sites. Information was needed on who decides what estates get which type of recycling scheme. There was also a need to work from the bottom up on recycling matters – educating children about it for instance.

- The Council should make it a condition of planning permission that new developments be required to have energy conservation measures like solar panels.
- Businesses should be encouraged to 'go green' and should be given incentives by the Council for doing so.

3. Building strong, healthy and connected communities.

Cllr Stewart went through the questions that residents were to ask themselves in this section of the Camden Together booklet.

- It was agreed that there was a need to get more young people involved in the community and that schools should take a lead in this. It was also felt that there was a need for more education about drugs. Youth forums were regarded as very important and so too was the Council's support for them.
- Access to legal advice was regarded as crucial. Both the Law Centre and the Citizens Advice Bureau had recently lost grants. Having taken away the grants from these organisations it was up to the Council to ensure that there was continued access to legal advice for the residents of Camden. As it was felt that you cannot have a just society if there is little or no access to advice and redress.
- Adequate funding for the voluntary sector in general was regarded as 'a sore point'. Some organisations, such as Jubilee, face an uncertain future in the short term as well as the long term. There was therefore a need to look ahead not just to 2012 but to the shorter term as well. The focus needed to be on areas with the most need and should take into account the extremes of wealth within Camden. It was regarded as difficult for small local groups to get funding from the Council and other sources and there was a need for developers to provide local facilities. As well as providing aid and advice to small groups it was felt that the Council should be acting as an intermediary for those groups.
- It was felt that local agreements had been rushed through, sometimes undermining neighbourhood initiatives. There was also a closed oligarchy of providers to meet what were the sometimes similar but also diverse needs of the community and these were often distorted by the bureaucratic mode of provision. There was a need for cross-linking between different providers to determine what provision was actually needed.
- Community based initiatives were regarded as very important. It was felt that the money being spent would go further than with large

organisations. The Council should therefore resist government demands for bigger and bigger projects and applications.

- In regard to health care it was felt that prevention was better than cure. One aspect of this was thought to be the Health Authorities over reliance on prescribing drugs. Community based Healthy Living shows should be encouraged, more work of this type should be done for the elderly and schools should provide more health education and activities for children. It was also agreed that GP waiting times were a problem, as were the difficulties accessing GP services and the push towards privatisation of health services.

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

Cllr Stewart introduced this subject by again looking at the relevant questions in Camden Together.

- The promotion of local festivals was thought to be important for social cohesion. They were regarded as the most effective means of promoting community cohesion and that crime was not generally a problem at these events. These and other initiatives like 'Camden in bloom' for instance should be encouraged and funded by the Council.
- It was felt that the clearing up of the drugs market in Camden Town was being done for the sake of businesses and that dealing would be pushed onto the estates. Because businesses were more concerned about soft drugs and the drug tourism that Camden Town attracts there was less emphasis on the hard drugs that affect the estates more. This emphasis was reflected in the booklet etc, as there was not much reference to the residents around areas like Camden Lock and Chalk Farm etc.
- Street parties were regarded as a great way of pleasing both old and new residents. It was felt that the Council should have a 'bit of faith' in local people and not so much in the 'experts' from the Council. Local peoples' role in organising these should be respected and the Council and other organisations should be there to help them out and not take over or take credit for them, as the Police had claimed on one recent occasion.
- On crime it was believed that, in order to have a safer community you have to begin with a safe block on a safe estate, and that meant restricting access and closed gates if necessary. The Council seemed to be opposed to this and there was also a need to provide funds for it to happen.
- On anti-social behaviour it was felt that there was a greater need for restorative justice, to which both sides could have some input. Yvette Stanley indicated that there were some schemes of this type being tried out in primary schools and among teenagers. But it was pointed

out that you don't see many teenagers painting out graffiti or mending windows and that more of these types of restorative activities were needed. ASBO's themselves needed to be linked in with other schemes such as drug treatment. Cllr Stewart agreed and pointed out that this was very much the case already.

- It was agreed that there was a need to spot trouble early, but it was felt that this should be done without resorting to 'spying'. The local community should be given some authority and means to act in these situations. A community based police should be getting to know those that were at risk of committing anti-social acts before they could cause problems. One problem was that Youth workers and the like are generally not part of the community itself and the Council need to give some thought to the fact that there is too much reliance on what are '9 to 5' officers. The work of Silla Carron at Clarence Way was cited as a good example to follow.
- It was asked whether there were any plans for holding a youth parliament in Camden. It was agreed that the forthcoming Youth Council next year was to be welcomed but it was asked whether children in the 5 – 13 year age group for example would be part of this. Yvette Stanley pointed out that although children of this age group were not participants there were school councils in all schools in Camden. There was also a question as to whether the younger and older age groups should not in any case be kept separate.

The Chair thanked everybody for attending and contributing to the meeting. The Councillors urged people to continue to feed in their comments before the consultation deadline on 30 November and to attend the special sustainability meeting on Saturday 18th November at the Town Hall if they wished.

The meeting ended at approximately 8.50 pm.