

RYE LANE & STATION ACTION GROUP (RLSAG)
11th Meeting 28th October 2009
at Bussey building, 133 Rye Lane, SE15

Minutes of Meeting

Summary

This was the 11th RLSAG meeting on the Group's 5th anniversary. It was very well attended with over 60 present. The work on improving the interior and exterior of the station, and the plans for integrated developments on the east and west side of central Rye Lane meeting were reviewed. The meeting heard that English Heritage had delivered their detailed report on the historic buildings in the town centre supporting the case for the Conservation Area; work was progressing steadily through the Peckham Society and RLSAG with the support of the Council on rehabilitating the station Old Billiard Hall; ideas for using the space were being developed, including creating a public restaurant and café there; and the rail industry now accepted that making the station fully accessible was a priority and plans were now being developed by Southern Rail.

There was little progress though on the ambitious plans for the station square and rear market courtyard. These depended on a positive change in the expectations of the property owners and developers in central Rye Lane, showing confidence in the area by investment. The huge success in 2009 of Frank's Café and the Art Gallery in the multi storey car park showed some of the as-yet untapped potential. The presentations stimulated animated discussion and a strong demand for opportunities for continued dialogue leading to deeper analysis and effective actions. This led to a meeting six weeks later, from which emerged the Peckham Town Centre Forum: see http://www.peckhamvision.org/wiki/Peckham_Town_Centre_Forum

Present

Residents, council officers, Southern Rail, English Heritage, and others with an interest in Peckham town centre. See list at end of minutes.

1. Welcome & Introductions

Eileen Conn, local resident & convenor of RLSAG, welcomed everyone to the 11th RLSAG meeting on its 5th anniversary. It had been set up as a joint initiative between the Bellenden Residents Group and the Council's Peckham Programme. She expressed appreciation of the role of Russell Profitt then Head of the Peckham Programme for his support & encouragement from the start until his departure from the Council at the end of 2008. There had been some successes in the last 5 years, particularly the cleaner state of the station forecourt and Rye Lane, but there was still much to do. This meeting would focus on the work to make the station buildings accessible and bring them into full use, and to make progress with the proposals for integrated developments in the station's external land and in central Rye Lane.

2. Peckham Rye Station buildings interior

2.1 Station history & conservation

Benedict O'Looney, from the Peckham Society, gave an illustrated talk covering:

- **English Heritage's Historic Area Assessment of Central Peckham report** (<http://research.english-heritage.org.uk/report/?14789>); but even while this was being prepared, there had been significant losses of historic buildings in Peckham's centre: the High Street Wilson's Victorian shop front was demolished and re-built (the last original timber shop front in the centre) and the loss of the RACS building on Rye Lane. But now English Heritage's excellent conservation area assessment would be for Southwark's immediate use in drawing up the proposed Conservation Area.
- **progress at Peckham Rye Station on the old billiard hall rehabilitation** arising from the RLSAG work with the Peckham Programme and Community Council assistance. Areas for further investment to help bring more of the historic building back into the public domain would be the Billiard Room floor / electricity project, and the mothballed principal stair, unblocking the bricked up windows to this space on the ground level.
- **several recent examples of exemplary conservation + new build architecture**, setting new circulation / access elements into historic buildings, including Julian Harrap's work with Foster and Partners creating new circulation behind Burlington House at the Royal Academy in Piccadilly and Julian Harrap Architects collaboration with David Chipperfield on the restored Neues Museum in Berlin. The emphasis is that new work should not in any way obliterate the worn, or characterful elements of the listed building and the new investment should be partly used to reveal some of the artistic qualities of the old station.

2.2 Use of the Old Billiard Hall/former Waiting Room

Lettice Drake and Paloma Gormley presented some ideas for using this historic space. They were responsible for the initiation, design and building of Frank's Café, the temporary café on the roof Rye Lane's multi story car park from July to September 2009. They worked with Southwark Council and Hannah Barry with a budget of only £4,500. Its success was overwhelming - attracting people from across London to visit it. The success of Frank's Café highlights the role creative thinking can play in Peckham's future. Their proposals included the following:



Peckham Rye station old waiting room
Illustration © by Lettice Drake
& Paloma Gormley Oct 2009

Significance of the space:

The old waiting room has exciting potential. The space, as with Frank's Café, is unusual and offers a unique opportunity to do something spectacular. Right in the heart of Peckham, between two platforms linking it to the rest of London. Peckham Vision's aims for the room to go back into public use as either a restaurant or community facility are encouraging. The proposal is an attempt to marry sustainable regeneration, conservation and a viable business proposal. The significance of the space, as a gateway to Peckham suggests a use that has its roots in, and represents the existing community, such as an African restaurant serving a simple menu of high quality and affordable food offering a sustainable approach.

- **Collaboration:** The proposal would be to collaborate with a local chef or business. Running as a restaurant in the evenings and a café during the day, serving coffee and snacks to commuters through a hatch to platform 3, the space offers a viable business opportunity. There would also be the potential for the space to function as a venue, for community meetings, live music and events.
- **Access:** They would propose to work alongside the Peckham Society and Peckham Vision to raise funds to continue the conservation work in order to make the room and external stairway fit for public use, creating street level access to the Waiting room independent from the station.
- **Design:** The café and kitchen would be designed to be sensitive to the historic importance of the building and celebrate its heritage. The installation of the café and its kitchen would be reversible and non-invasive. Like Franks the design of the cafe would be informal, warm and welcoming. The space is so beautiful and full of character it would require minimal intervention to make it inhabitable. An open kitchen would retain the integrity of the single large space and add theatricality to the preparation and cooking of food. As with Frank's, good design does not require large investment.
- **Summary:** This proposal would mean this magnificent and forgotten space would open its doors again in a manner that is truly public. It would change people's perception of Peckham. The involvement of local people provides an opportunity for Network Rail and Southern Rail to continue their work with Community Rail Schemes, and to lead the way in supporting innovative, locally rooted development. This space deserves to be used and should play a key and active part in Peckham's future.

2.3 Making the station accessible

Ron Terry, from Howard:Fairbairn:MHK, Southern Rail architects, presented the plans for making the station accessible. These were still provisional and as yet no finance had been agreed. But the need to restructure the station internally to make it accessible was now accepted by the rail industry as a priority, and may be secured within the next five years. The main influences on designing the plans were:

- **The need to provide 'step free access' to all platforms.** This was the leading factor in determining the final layouts. The proposal is to relocate the stairs, the ticket gates and the ticket office, and install a lift to platforms 1&2, and a lift each for platform 3 and platform 4.

- ***A desire to improve station facilities.*** The new stairs and lifts would be accompanied by clearing the existing brick waiting rooms and shelters on all the platforms. These would be replaced with better platform accommodation with glazed screens.
- ***The local aspirations to recreate the original open square in front, and link it to the rear courtyard.*** The proposals provide two options for the ticket gate locations, one which would enable the exterior of the front and rear of the station to be linked by relocating the ticket gates to either side of a new ground floor entrance with one set of gates accessing platforms 1&2, and the other for platforms 3&4.
- ***Two works schemes*** are being developed - a maximum scheme which would re-install a mezzanine level in the ticket hall and 1st floor accommodation between the rear wings creating much more accommodation, and a minimal scheme without that.

Malcolm Woods of English Heritage said that he did not have any particular concerns about the proposals for the station interior which had been presented that evening at the meeting. He said that changes were achievable as long as they were carried out with a degree of care and attention to detail. He also explained that the building's significance would have to be understood better before any decision could be made. He reassured the audience that a document with details of the building's history and development would accompany any application for Listed Building Consent.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- The overall plan project was welcomed as accessibility was urgently needed. Pressure to get the works into the financial timetable needed to be kept up.
- It was welcome that there was an option to enable access from front to rear of the station to link the two spaces, but it was not clear how passengers would navigate separate ticket gates for the two sets of platforms, as they often had to move between the two sets of platforms to catch the first train.
- Some details, for example the siting of the lifts, and the design of the new platform facilities, would need close and early discussion with local groups, in addition to the consultation required for the historic aspects.

3. Peckham Rye Station exterior

Simon Bevan, Interim Head of Planning and Transport, Southwark Council, gave a report on progress on the proposed station square and related improvements in the vicinity:

- The station square project has widespread support and is in the Council area action plan. But what will really make it happen? Unlike the project to bring the station billiard room back into use, the area in front of the station already has a commercial use. If the commercial properties were to be removed it could only be on the basis that it would increase the value of the rest of the space around the station. For this to happen it would require a major change in the level of confidence in the area for an investment decision like this to be made.
- What could provide this confidence? Something happening, ie:
 - If confidence were shown in the area by a major investment such as in the redevelopment of the Bournemouth Road site and the regeneration of the Bussey building (also in the Council area action plan) it may give other land owners and investors confidence to take more bold steps.
 - Bringing more residential population into the centre would provide the footfall and the spending power to allow the centre to develop a new level of service to local people.
 - Opportunities exist in the multi-storey car park and the Aylesham Centre
- These opportunities can be taken while still protecting and enhancing the heritage of Peckham – not least in the fine station building itself.
- However – the centre still needs a clear vision about what its purpose will be and what sort of range of services it will contain going into the future. This is a discussion that needs to continue in the community and with land owners, developers and other investors.

Points raised during discussion

- Need to consider impact of development on congestion along Rye Lane – how will more houses impact on this? Are retail units, restaurants and cafes not enough to attract footfall?
- In many parts of London (eg Bermondsey Spa) housing has proven to be a solid driver of regeneration.
- Could student accommodation be a driver? Link to local institutions and creative community. But what about concerns people may have for student accommodation – people often say they want to see more stable areas and more families moving in.
- Opening up the square will help the regeneration of the area and attracting investment.
- People drive regeneration – when people want to come here the developers will.

- Hair and nail shops, butchers – the council cannot give planning permission for specific shops. In planning terms, a shop is a shop whether it is a hair and nail shop or a butcher. The Council can distinguish between a shop, places that sell services (such as bank or estate agent), a restaurant, a takeaway or bar/pub. It is private individuals and investors who open shops and what they chose to open is a private investment and market decision.
- Given public sector finances, council does not have millions to buy out the land. A more realistic prospect is that private sector develops the land.
- The abolition of the town centre management role has left a vacuum in Council daily coordination on the ground of the key work for revitalising the town centre. This is a retrograde step.

4. Integrated Plans for Central Rye Lane

Michael Carnuccio, Team Leader in Planning Policy, Peckham and Nunhead Area Action Plan (PNAAP), gave a brief account of the PNAAP process, and how it related to the previous items and discussion:

- The PNAAP is the vehicle through which we can look at a lot of complex issues together and understand what impact different courses of action will have on achieving the kind of place people want to see. It will set out a vision for the area over the next 15 years and will set out how development needs to happen to make the best contribution to the area. It will also help focus investment priorities. It covers a wide area – the Peckham Community Council and Nunhead and Peckham Rye Community Council. But the place where most physical change and development will happen will be around Peckham town centre.
- There are a number of sites in the town centre that present real opportunities for change and improvement. In March-May 2009, the Council consulted on a set of options for these sites in an Issues and Options Paper. As well as looking at these sites individually we also started to consider how they can come together – eg. whether we want to see different activities focussed in different areas.
- There are a number of sites around the station which can be looked at together in terms of how they are linked, how they are used and how they can transform the town centre. Through PNAAP we can examine how development on other sites could help deliver the station square – for example by providing space for existing businesses to relocate, helping to raise value of land around the station, encouraging investors into the area, and through collecting ‘Section 106’ money (from approved developments).
- However, part of deciding the way forward (the “preferred options”) might involve trade-offs to get what is most wanted. This will require identifying what the real priorities are for the area. The Council will publish the Preferred Options report for consultation in June 2010 [now Autumn 2010].

Eileen Conn from Peckham Vision and RLSAG, showed a collection of slides from the work of the last two years http://www.peckhamvision.org/wiki/images/c/c4/09.10.28_RLSAG_Transforming.ppt These showed pictures of the restored station old waiting room, impressions of the new station square and rear courtyard, the activities and spaces in the Bussey building and Copeland Courtyard, the Hannah Barry Gallery & Frank’s Café on the multi-storey car park, and the magnificent views from these high roof tops. All these illustrated the immense potential there is in Rye Lane Central. What was needed was an integrated plan for it all in the PNAAP, and to encourage owners and developers to see these opportunities.

Points raised during discussion

- We need to consider what can be done with minimal investment – eg. market stalls behind the station. Short term and long term actions.
- Ben Sassoon has been working with the council on modular awning structures that could be used to create market – but Spacia (Network Rail) has posed a difficulty. David Strevens was responsible for moving this forward, as the Council’s town centre manager. But now this post had been abolished and there was no one in the Council bringing all these things together
- Southwark as land-owner – decisions over letting vacant spaces could have impact on type of place an area is.
- Should look at how art and creative industries can be used as driver for regeneration. Bring artists together to help. There is the SE15 Creative Network.
- Council needs to coordinate with landowners
- Government sets out how S106 works - S106 needs to be spent in the area development occurs and can’t be used to overcome existing problems. Purpose is to overcome impacts of a development.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm, and was followed by animated informal discussion with the aid of the Peckham Vision exhibition, and PNAAP displays, on the ways in which the key sites in central Rye Lane could be encouraged in integrated organic development, so extending and transforming the shape and nature of the town centre. There was a strong desire to be able to continue the dialogue to deepen and widen the discussions. It was

agreed to see how this could be arranged. **NOTE:** 6 weeks later, the first Peckham Town Centre Forum meeting was held to continue the dialogue. See http://www.peckhamvision.org/wiki/Peckham_Town_Centre_Forum

LIST OF ATTENDEES

Residents, workers, businesses

About 45 residents and 4 others attended.

Addresses recorded came from

East Peckham 1,

West Peckham 1,

Rye Lane West 15,

Rye Lane East 5,

Nunhead 9,

Peckham Rye 8,

East Dulwich 5,

Camberwell 1.

About 20 residents sent apologies.

Rail Company

Paul Trevett

Southern Rail

Ron Terry

HFMHK, Southern Rail's architects

Council Officers

Simon Bevan

Head of Planning

Michael Carnuccio

Planning Policy

Nadine James

Community Council Involvement Coordinator

Others

Malcolm Woods

Historic Buildings Advisor, English Heritage

Benedict O'Looney

Architecture adviser, Peckham Society

Paloma Gormley

Designer

Lettice Drake

Designer

Eileen Conn

Peckham Vision & RLSAG