

PECKHAM GATEWAY PROJECT ISSUES

(rev D 10th July 2013)

1.0 GENERAL ISSUES

1.1 Conceptual Thinking

First a few general points.

Southwark Council produced a document entitled 'Gateway to Peckham' (undated but roughly mid/late 2011), that combined a statement setting out the economic case for regeneration with observations on costs and delivery.

As an initial mission statement, this report had much to commend it. But we are not aware of anything that has been produced subsequently by Southwark Council that sets out the proposed outcomes of the Gateway project in any detail, nor a detailed strategy for achieving those goals. The intention is clearly to extend the public realm and provide a catalyst for economic regeneration but beyond that there is no more explicit strategy that we are aware of. The Peckham Vision website describes some of this in more detail but this too needs to be made more explicit.

It is therefore somewhat disconcerting in the light of recent events that the focus has moved directly to considerations of land assembly without any intervening discussion on what the project is trying to achieve as a concept and the strategic considerations needed to guide this.

This paper then is a first pass at identifying some of the practical issues that need to be addressed in getting the project off the ground. It does not claim to be exhaustive and mixes matters of fact with issues that are still speculative. We are also aware that some of the issues are in hand or have been discussed with Peckham Vision. It should be seen as a basis for establishing a collaborative framework for Peckham Vision to work with Southwark Council

1.2 Landolt and Brown study

We understand that this has been to hand some months ago. We were initially told this merely dealt with broad concepts and block plans, and as such was probably not terribly relevant to us. We are now told it can't be released into the public domain because it contains sensitive information. This is understandable but at the same time it must be stressed how difficult it is being excluded from such a fundamental document. This secrecy only leads to unfounded speculation and misconceptions. Can it not be published with sensitive parts deleted? Or can we at least be told the broad areas which have to remain concealed if only for the time being?

1.3 Tenancies

The question of which tenancies will be affected is obviously a sensitive one and we would not wish to interfere in preliminary negotiations at this stage. Except as you know, many people approach us anyway for support and guidance. At the least we suggest it would be good all round to be told the broad approach you are adopting, the timescale involved and the criteria you use.

1.4 Process

We know in general terms what the long term timescale is, but we need to dig a bit deeper into the process by which we achieve desired outcomes. What help and support will the Council be offering for tenants who will need to be removed from their current premises? What alternatives if any will be on offer? What happens with tenants who will suffer financial loss as result of these changes? If the Council states it wishes to 'acquire all interests' what exactly does that mean? How will tenants be able to return if they wish?

1.5 Implementation Approach

Will it be undertaken as a 'top-down' master plan to be planned as a single project, or will the approach be light touch and incremental? Will a bottom up concept allow changes as it is rolled out? Can the council change its mind if aspects are seen to be failing?

1.6 Sustainability

This may seem a difficult concept to apply to public spaces but should be at the bedrock of the project. It involves questions of 'ownership', accountability and maintenance. How does the community actually engage with extensions of the public realm? Can sustainable parameters be set for the new market space? Can growing opportunities be incorporated? Will there be management structures that are sufficiently flexible and yet robust enough to deliver a sustainable project in use?

1.7 Gateway to Peckham

This document referred to above is now out of date and contains factual inaccuracies. It is suggested it needs to be revisited and updated where necessary on a more or less regular basis.

1.8 Business Plan

Following on from the arguments set out in 1.7 above, what is the budget for rolling out the project? How much is allocated to capital works, how much to initial programming and revenue spend etc.?

1.9 Timescale and Public Consultation

We are not aware of the current timescale for achieving the programme nor any indication how public consultation will be carried out.

2.0 THE NEW SQUARE

2.1 The first obvious question is what will be its function? Will it be predominantly retail and commercial? How will the design enable positive social and personal interactions? Will activities be permanent installations or will they be temporary? Will they be located under the arches? Will pop-up activities be catered for? Will there be a public debate about this and if so how will the public be allowed or encouraged to engage with this? What about public events for instance? Who will 'own' the newly created public realm and who will manage it? What lessons are being drawn from the creation and uses of Peckham Square? So many questions.

2.2 What is the total area assumed will be included? Initially some of us thought it would just comprise the space between the viaducts extending up to Rye Lane, but the latest unconfirmed information suggests it will now include the 1930s buildings in Blenheim Grove (nos. 2 –10) and Holly Grove (no 2). Is this true and if so what is the justification? We gather part of this is because of the way the separate tenancies interlock beneath the arches but is it also for financial reasons, or for reasons of townscape and architectural integration, or simple expediency?

2.3 In the light of the above, are the other buildings along Blenheim Grove (nos 12 – 16) and Holly Grove (no 4) which are linked to the aforementioned properties being considered for inclusion within the square, or are they to remain? If they are kept what uses are anticipated for them? What are the criteria behind this?

2.4 What sort of townscape opportunities do each of the above suggest for the square? Whether the arches are infilled or not presents very different visual choices and opportunities.

2.5 What will be the impact of the Square on Rye Lane itself, both visually and economically? What will be its architectural relationship? Will there be shared surfaces and an integrated design?

2.6 Is it the case that there will be an 'Ideas Competition' for the Square? What is the latest position?

3.0 THE STATION BUILDING

3.1 It is generally acknowledged that the building itself has been altered, extended, part demolished and generally neglected over the years. This makes it all the more remarkable that the east elevation has survived more or less intact! But what of the rest of the building? Is there a coherent integrated plan for the future uses of the building? A cycle hub and the former retail space for example have been planned and planning permission has been granted. These uses do not appear to have been considered as part of the station development as a whole, and as a result raise issues about their coherent integration in the new square arrangement.

3.2 It is suggested that a physical link will be provided between the Square at the front with a proposed market in Dovedale Court on the West side. Is this a definitive aspect of the project or just a theoretical aspiration? What studies have been undertaken which look at the feasibility of achieving this? How will this impact on the everyday use of the station? A cursory knowledge of the building suggests this may be difficult without major building 'surgery' to the ground floor spaces. We are aware of some designs in the past that have looked at this and all of them seem to reinforce how intractable this issue is. Are various options being considered and actively discussed with Network Rail? What is their response so far and how will this affect the programme?

3.3 The 'Access for All' proposals will probably also be affected by opening up a new way through the building. This in turn will affect our reiterated concern that lift access to the OWR is crucial to its success. If there are conflicts, how will they be resolved?

3.4 At some stage we need to think about the conservationist setting of the station. There have been very fundamental changes over the last 75 years or so. The original access arrangements were removed in the 1930s and the platforms were fundamentally re-arranged in the early 1960s with little consideration if any given to the architectural impact. This means the building now sits very awkwardly between the viaducts on each side. What consideration is being given to re-integrating the building within its new setting?

3.5 There is the issue of the restoration of the OWR and its relationship with the station. Peckham Vision is pursuing this via an HLF grant but there are still unresolved aspects, the most pressing being to secure funding to construct the stair link which will give the OWR immediate access. Whether a contribution to this could be offered through the GLA Gateway grant needs to be explored.

3.6 There are in addition matters such as WC provision for the Old Waiting Room. There are also longer term aspirations to incorporate the New Waiting Room and develop a link with the retail space below. These may be long term concepts but at what stage would it be appropriate to discuss them in the setting of the Gateway project?

3.7 Public WCs. There is a campaign in the community to re-introduce new public WCs into this part of Rye Lane. How will this be taken into account in the Gateway project? Will it be possible to combine these with provision for the OWR?

4.0 DOVEDALE COURT

4.1 This is the name apparently given to the open space between the viaducts to the west of the station building, and will be the setting for a new market. Again, is the market a fixed part of the project or just floated as an idea? Similar questions arise to those regarding the new square. e.g. who will 'own' and manage this new space. Again what sort of market? Food, general retail etc? Will it only affect the tenancies under the north viaduct which have forecourts opening off the Court? What will the impact be on the premises under the southern viaduct and which are open off Blenheim Grove? Is selective opening up of some of these arches directly onto Blenheim Grove being considered? If some arches remain to be let, what will be the Council's policy regarding letting? Will cultural and creative enterprises receive preferential treatment? If so, why?

4.2 What will be the physical impact of all this? The visual and practical interface with the rear of the station is particularly distressing as seen at present. It is suggested this area should be given careful consideration similar to the new square.

5.0 BLENHEIM COURT

5.1 This area lies to the west end of the area, and is the open space between the viaducts before they merge. It is only accessible at present by way of an open archway onto Blenheim Grove and as such not linked to Dovedale Court. The arches are mostly used as artists' studios and it is not clear why they were included in the land assembly strategy in the first place.

6.0 RYE LANE URBAN CONTEXT

6.1 The aim of the Gateway project is to relocate and reinforce this part of the town centre as a new focus for Peckham. But for this to be successful it needs to be well integrated into its wider setting in the centre of Rye Lane, between and including Bournemouth Road and Elm Grove. Much of this area on the east side is still under consideration and awaits the finalisation and adoption of the Area Action Plan. It also differs in that new cultural initiatives and expansion are likely to come from the private sector and timescales are unlikely to be co-ordinated. This is inevitable and not necessarily to be regretted. But there needs to be an overall approach to the shared public realm and links between them all. It is not apparent that this is currently happening.

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