

THE TEN GROUP
1st meeting – 30th June 2003

Present:

Glyn Bryant, LB Bexley

Anne Doherty, Head of Planning, LB Camden

Marc Dorfman, LB Ealing

Paul Evans, LB Southwark

David Hackforth, Head of Transport and Planning, Milton Keynes

Seema Manchanda, Head of Economic Regeneration, LB Haringey

Bob West, Manager King's Cross Team, LB Camden

Apologies:

John Best, Milton Keynes Council

Peter Bishop, LB Camden

Chris Donovan, LB Bexley

Phillip Goodwin, LB Croydon

David Hennings, LB Haringey

Richard Simmons, Medway Council

Danny Zammit, LB Redbridge

Summary:

The first meeting of The Ten Group was hosted by Camden. It focused on developing major sites, exemplified by King's Cross, and the issues that arise.

A 'briefing digest' of good practice case studies was circulated beforehand. This included: Securing the renaissance of the city centre and Making the city user friendly and legible (both Bristol); Securing quality design in new development (Manchester); Moving towards a Business Improvement District (Paddington); Using a development trust to create community benefits (Southwark – Coin Street); Engaging local people in the planning and development of a strategic site (Southwark – MORE London development); Transport infrastructure and development (Lille and Turin); Business Improvement Districts – lessons from the USA; and checklists on 'Developing the vision' and 'Community engagement'.

Inspired by Turin's approach to development on the back of transport infrastructure and improvements, Camden hopes to follow this up with a visit.

The Group heard a presentation by Bob West on what Camden are doing to manage the process of a large-scale, long-term development, followed by a walkabout. The process was seen as successful, with the walkabout stimulating discussion, and the two-hour facilitated discussion session – 'fascinating action learning' – providing the opportunity to share ideas and common problems, bring issues to the table to find solutions, hear 'good bits of practice and experience', and 'time out to think around planning and go across the breadth of work'.

A summary of the discussion is attached. It covered a range of topics which have been presented under nine headings: Positive marketing; Thinking big and starting small; Getting key stakeholders on board; Creating a positive impact with festivals and cultural events; Achieving developer confidence; Dealing with property cycles; Strategic planning and flexibility; Engaging the community; and Providing a balance of housing.

Three issues emerged for further discussion. These are relevant to long drawn out and large-scale development, and the Group may wish to explore them more, and in greater depth, at the next meeting (in Southwark, focusing on the Elephant and Castle):

1 Combating fatigue in the long drawn out development process

The King's Cross case study shows how long drawn out the process is (15-20 years) – and much longer than funding for regeneration projects, e.g. SRB. This creates fatigue and makes it difficult to sustain partnerships.

2 Linking development to transport infrastructure

Large developments are complicated by the number of different interests and the conflicting priorities of e.g. former nationalised industries. Building confidence in the private sector is difficult and needs to be coordinated with transport infrastructure. Patience and long-termism are needed: how can the private sector take an asset management approach?

3 Counteracting development cycles with flexible use

Within a clear masterplan, a range of uses developed over a period of time make a development easier to finance and easier to build.

A 'newsround' preceded discussion:

- Bexley – 35 acre site in middle of industrial area next Thamesmead; pressure to release land for other uses; issues of community involvement
- Haringey – sites, e.g. large mixed used Wood Green with council, gas, network rail and others as partners; also Tottenham [??] – possible university campus site
- Milton Keynes – new development framework for central MK; about 'generation' (rather than regeneration) and making a city centre; good quality high density; also revisioning the old town of Bletchley – stimulating investment; dereliction and unemployment
- Southwark – classic deprivation issues next to new projects

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Positive marketing:

- It is difficult to overcome history and live down bad image and reputation e.g. King's Cross – the King's Cross Partnership was successful in 'talking up' the area. The press focus on bad news and miss good news stories. Very long projects need to transform people's perspectives – e.g. Peckham (5-8 yrs) has turned the corner but positive reinforcement must be kept up. In Erith the process began 10-15 yrs ago, and the area is moving up bit by bit: perceptions have begun to change. Milton Keynes DC had a clear consistent approach throughout its history and a substantial marketing budget for 'positive marketing', as it was recognized that offices had to be encouraged to locate there.
- But in the pre-developer stage it is mainly the local authority that has to run around and build confidence.
- Positive marketing including clean&safe. Camden has brought together planning and day-to-day management, and SRB funding was used to produce significant improvements on the fringes of the development site.

Thinking big and starting small:

- Creating and maintaining confidence need signs of positive change, and there is always history to live down in terms of the authority's past 'mistakes' (which undermine confidence) or the bad reputation of an area

- Start with natural advantages rather than worst problems; build on strengths rather than weaknesses initially.
- Need to think big: An issue for local authorities is that people relate to you as a service provider and judge you on that. Concentrating on the basics induces a conservative approach. Think big and start small: be prepared to take risks and not be constrained by ‘conventional wisdom’; and go for early wins. In MK they started with a park.
- Facelifts are necessary BUT they have to be scaled down to be cheap and manageable: while the ‘tree and grass’ issue is all very well, maintenance is very costly and needs to be built into the budget. Go for lots of cheap things e.g. £500 for a shop display rather than £15,000 for shopfront projects.

Getting key stakeholders on board:

- There are particular issues for development in the South East because of development pressure and land values. These complexities are in contrast to Milton Keynes, for example, where there was the space for a major sub-regional shopping complex, and the Development Corporation put in infrastructure. Also, in London unlike other cities, redevelopment is not seen as being for Londoners; individual projects, however large (e.g. King’s Cross), are still small in the economy of London.
- There are difficulties in getting the development process going when so much investment is required upfront. Owners and investors are influenced by seeing change. How can people be enabled to see the potential? Thinking ‘big’ has been effective (e.g. in Milton Keynes), and beginning ‘small’, e.g. clean&safe streets give a message of improvement.
- The key is the landowner, and whether there is long-term commitment (not planning, which is reactive). The New Town approach of marketing and ‘starting with a park’ is not relevant e.g. to Haringey where there are fragmented land patterns. A lot of early work is pulling together landowners, many of whom are not very keen. An approach is to threaten CPOs. Confidence is needed within institutions as well as externally.

Creating a positive impact with festivals and cultural events:

- Events encourage self confidence locally but timing is crucial. Festivals and events can have a positive impact because plans exist and there is an ethos of ‘things are going to happen’; but if events are staged before things have started to move, people will ask ‘what for?’.
- Appropriate and positive interim uses (not NCP carparks!) need to be carefully managed. Spitalfields market was an interim but the project to ‘extend the city’ took a nosedive, and the interim project remained successfully. The ‘too successful’ interim use can blight future development.
- How can you create a sense of an area with potential in long periods of 10-15 years? These do not breed economic confidence: it is about horses for courses, e.g. turning a car park into a market may increase footfall but won’t convince a developer to come in.

Achieving developer confidence:

- Good development planning briefs are needed. There is a lack of capacity in local authorities who need to plan for bringing projects on.
- Transport investment is the best way of securing development.
- Rules to guide development rather than precise use prescriptions for a site will give confidence.
- In Milton Keynes confidence was inspired by building something far larger than anyone believed possible – is a degree ofchutzpah needed?

Dealing with property cycles:

- There is a too insular way of looking at things. Everyone does the ‘two-faced’ think of talking up the ‘will happen’ case, and therefore not being able to talk about the ‘not happening’ scenario. Reality has to be injected, so that you don’t need the ‘meanwhile’ project.
- How do you deal with the cyclical nature of things? On the upside you borrow money; on the downside banks don’t release it
- The statutory planning process is not in line with the urban renaissance agenda – it ‘chugs alongside’. Planning is to the side of the development process, and London has ‘tucked in behind’ the development cycle, with c.100 development sites roughly

planned. Need to pace major projects to force an amount of investment. We are now beginning to 'chase the game' a bit. The conventional local authority role has been to level off the peaks and troughs.

- If you can't catch the tide you move to another aspect of regeneration, e.g. people.
- Some things push regeneration through regardless of cycles: the Olympic Bid has put a timetable on regeneration, although it also forces some things onto the back burner.
- For big schemes, its not so much change the cycle as change the geography e.g. Elephant 2 – Southwark is contemplating the redevelopment, and moving incrementally, changing as it goes. Try to bring forward things where a canny developer will work anticyclically and pick up something other don't.

Strategic planning and flexibility:

- Maximum flexibility must be combined with a minimum requirement for mix, which needs to be prescribed. While the commitment to build e.g. 100s sq ft of retail is huge, if there are flexible uses, the commitment doesn't have to be so big.
- The flexibility of the Georgian townhouse form, suitable for either home or office is a model. Get the urban form right to work as a place, but floor plates and building depths need to be flexible. The rules laid down by e.g. Bedford Estate landowners for London squares could apply today. Their great strength was that they were landowner and developer (monolithic landownership); and that they had a long-term interest. Things can happen if a landowner is long term (15 years). But today most landowning companies are in it for the profit.
- Investment in property has not been appealing for a long time, and the yield on property is good even while you do nothing with it. CPO and land tax are needed to deal with the lack of incentive to develop. The time is right to talk about change and CPOs.
- PATIENCE and long-termism are needed. Look at asset management (which local authorities are beginning to do). Forward planning is essential to balance the value view against political imperatives. There is no 'easy tweak'.
- Links e.g. between urban design and transport have to be reinvented. The situation on the Continent is enviable where, as for example in Turin, the authority has kickstarted major redevelopment on the back of transport infrastructure

improvements, linkages and innovations. The consequence of the infrastructure works and an innovative feature has been the appointment of a developer who has got to know the area before producing a masterplan. Transport infrastructure may be the best way of securing development.

Engaging the community:

- There is a real question of who the ‘community’ is in relation to the development site. Community includes all stakeholders and not just residents. The construction phase impacts on the lives of local people, but what is their stake in deciding what goes on site, and who will be living there ultimately?
- King’s Cross Development Forum has been effective: a MORI poll showed that people’s knowledge about KX had quadrupled in 2 years. The Forum enabled people to see other perspectives. Camden brought in local groups to work with planners[??] and benefited from local expertise. In this way they also engaged the opposition. This approach could create an impasse, as residents’ interests are limited on development sites but opposition groups want to ensure nothing happens. Need to see the community not just as residents.
- The point of development must be that it changes a place in line with the local authority desire, which must reflect the community. What can and should be the nature of these projects for surrounding people? There is a cost to development. Who is paying that cost?
- In an area of change a development trust can do something with land, but where there is great pressure on housing the authority isn’t keen on trusts.
- The image of a place is a community benefit – it affects the way they feel.
- There is a ‘fear of construction’ that leads to a perception of pollution, even though for example at King’s Cross there has not been an increase. They try to get contractors to contribute to positive things, and make a good news story of it, for example contractors did work on a local community hall.
- It is important to have good and responsive community relations, which have to be designed in early and which affect the development programme design. The cost to Camden has been about a quarter of a million a year. A senior level decision-making body has taken a roadshow round the wider community in King’s Cross. Camden

have been trying to set up a system whereby other developers coming in have to fit in.

- The ‘sidelong glance’ may work, for example in Ealing the bomb took out a lane for two years where the tram was being planned. The council used this to see what impact it had on other traffic to counter arguments against the tram. They found that reducing the road space had the effect of reducing traffic (as has also been found in King’s Cross as a result of construction work).
- A big shake-up can shake up the rules and you can do something different.

Providing a balance of housing:

- Does the community have a choice in going or staying?
 - Southwark is reconfiguring public housing in the Elephant. How do you work the London market where a significant fraction of housing is not fully publicly owned [?????] King’s Cross aims to decant and rebalance under- or over-crowded housing in the surrounding area on site – a willingness to ‘leaven the bread’.
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