



Summary of the first meeting in the fifth series of TEN Swiss Cottage, Camden 31st March 2008

Produced by

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Present

Anne Doherty, Assistant Director Planning, LB of Camden
Sue Foster, Head of Planning and Land Charges, LB of Hackney
Karen Galey, Head of Economic Regeneration, Haringey Council
Pat Hayes, Executive Director of Regeneration and Housing, Ealing Council
Tom Jeffrey, Director of Environment and Leisure, LB Sutton
Mike Jordan, Director of Planning, LB Hounslow
Colin Lovell, Head of Land Use Planning, Transport for London
Mark Lucas, Head of Regeneration, LB Redbridge
Stephen McDonald, Strategic Director of Major Projects, Southwark Council
Seema Manchanda, Head of Physical Regeneration and Development, Newham Council
Shifa Mustafa, Assistant Director of Development, Waltham Forest Council
John Wolfenden, J W Project Services
Nicholas Falk, Founding Director, URBED
Anne Wyatt, Administration Manager, URBED

Apologies

Marc Dorfman, Chief Planning Officer, LB Redbridge
Chris Donovan, Assistant Director (Strategy, Planning & Regeneration), Bexley Council
David Hennings, Director of Strategic Planning, Haringey Council
Brendan Walsh, Director of Regeneration and Community Development, Ealing Council

The first meeting of the fifth series was held in Swiss Cottage, Camden and hosted by member Anne Doherty. We were joined by John Wolfenden who project managed the development and Mike Jordan who was Head of Development Control at Camden when Tom Jeffrey was managing the project in its pre-construction stages. Mike saw through all the planning aspects before his move to LB Hounslow. Our grateful thanks are extended to Anne and her team for a really interesting afternoon. We would also like to thank John for taking the time to give us a tour of the site and answering all our questions.

The theme of the 2008/9 series is how to achieve a greater degree of social inclusion and tackle worklessness in major developments. The discussion focussed around the value of

leisure developments, planning for job creation, engaging with difficult to reach groups such as the workless and training for planners.

Mixed use development of the Swiss Cottage site

The development of a two hectare local authority owned site as a mixed use leisure based scheme creates a useful model for public private partnerships, and for securing high quality design in smaller town centres.

Context The Swiss Cottage site had been owned by Camden Council for decades, having been acquired as a potential Town Hall complex. The site has a number of features including:

- Large area of land in single ownership
- Highly accessible site next to a Jubilee Line underground station and a number of bus routes
- On the edge of both a relatively prosperous area, with very articulate residents and also some local authority tower blocks
- Dominated by heavy passing traffic
- With a temporary building used by the Hampstead Theatre Group, and another theatre used by the Central School of Speech and Drama
- And containing a listed library and swimming pool designed by Sir Basil Spence and a number of other community facilities.

Aims The development of the site started with building a stylish office building (now the subject of redevelopment proposals) in the 1970s. Ten years ago pressure from the Hampstead Theatre Group who had political backing for a state-of-the-art theatre acted as a catalyst for the council to promote a mixed use scheme on the site in order to:

1. Fund better leisure facilities
2. Provide a green 'oasis' away from the traffic
3. Refurbish the grade two listed library and increase its utilisation.

The scheme was highly controversial and there were fears that it would end up serving a different clientele than originally intended. It raised fundamental issues of 'whose space is it' and 'what is valuable about leisure and the arts'?

Management The scheme was project managed by Camden Council but undertaken through a public private partnership, in which the risks were largely taken by a private developer. The process involved:

- Drawing up a brief (initially by the Leisure Department) that balanced financial and planning aims

- Commissioning consultants to appraise the options and advise on a feasible mix (which came down in favour of housing as the best deal for funding the leisure centre)
- Marketing the scheme and selecting Barratts on the basis of both the best scheme and also the best financial offer
- Using the £1.5 million payment to recover the expenses of fees
- Running a competition for the landscape design
- Running the meetings which all had to be documented to overcome criticism
- Managing the library refurbishment directly but transferring the rest of the risks to Barratts

Capital receipts from the site's disposal were used to fund the library renovation and landscaping which cost £15 million. The process was not entirely smooth as it became a political football. Considerable community pressure led to a Judicial Review of the process, and the Council had to keep a 'Chinese wall' between the financial deal and the planning side. The refurbishment of the library proved very difficult, as costs over ran, and there was a considerable architectural rivalry between the various stars. The original masterplanner Terry Farrell was not taken on by Barratts to do the housing, but it was agreed to use his firm on the swimming pool.

A key feature was the commitment by officers over many years to carrying the project through all the hurdles and upsets. This involved managing conflicting pressures and political disputes in what is a particularly sophisticated community. The management task was to 'keep the client side together' that involved government, the private sector and a housing association, and securing all party support for a project that lived through political swings.

Outcomes The scheme has won awards, though the controversy it aroused may have stopped it winning the acclaim it might. Overall it is estimated to have produced £55 million of social outputs. A major issue was always over what the community really wanted. There was a concern that the housing was 'dumbed down' though to most people it is still quite impressive. Achievements included:

- A very high quality public realm, with innovative features like a rose garden, which is intensively used by a wide range of groups, and a sunken football pitch
- A high level of permeability creating busy traffic free routes away from all the noise
- A very successful leisure centre (one of the busiest in London with 14,000 members, and ¾ million users in the first year; the users used to be 18-35 with white males predominating, but there is now a much wider usage)
- A complex mixed use scheme with a health centre on the ground floor and 22 social housing units above the swimming pool

- Utilisation by a range of people with 40% on concessions, but no stigma associated with it being council owned
- Many more people living on the site, including a mix of affordable housing
- A cultural area with a first class theatre, funded by a £10 million Arts Lottery Grant topped up by a £5 million Council contribution

Special features The masterplanning process added value, and enabled an improved scheme to come forward. One of the most interesting aspects was the use of a public private partnership as a financial mechanism to fund superior leisure facilities out of high density high quality housing. The site now covers its running costs. Other notable features include:

- An imaginative leisure centre overlooking the swimming pool or out to open space, and with a climbing wall on one side which creates an interesting façade out of what would have otherwise been a blank wall, and with a café which is largely used by non-swimmers
- A popular leisure facility that brings different groups of people together, and with several cafes catering for different income levels
- Public routes and seating areas that provide common ground
- A library that serves as an active learning centre, with a special children's section
- There is a distinctly European ambience, greatly assisted by the quality of the materials, the absence of clutter and discreet signage throughout

Problems arose over tying down the partners to agreements, but this was still better than giving the site away. There is also a need to be realistic about what benefits can be secured in any situation and not promise too much.

Lessons More community engagement at the start might have helped

- There is a need for multi-disciplinary teams who can commission and manage complex projects
- A scheme of this kind would be much harder to achieve in a falling market
- The divide between the public and private sectors may need to be blurred.

Valuing leisure/cultural developments

The group were impressed by the potential synergy between health and leisure, and in turn the impact this could have on self-esteem and participation. You might even be able to justify some of the cost in terms of the outcomes for health and wellbeing. Key issues were:

- How can local authorities encourage healthier life styles?
- How do you get people into jobs?

A leisure centre such as Swiss Cottage has a catchment area of one and a half to two kilometres or 20 minutes walk. In this case there is no parking, so they are essentially local facilities, and ones that help to diversify smaller shopping centres. Hence their impact is very localised. However it might be possible to set up programmes based on the facilities such as the theatre or the swimming pool which could pull in people who had identified problems, and give them some confidence.

Reaching the workless

It is important to be able to work and to engage workless families so that children do not grow up in a culture where no one goes out to work, and a number of lessons were shared:

- The problems are complex, and research shows there is an interrelationship between personal and institutional factors, with no simple solution, as those who are better qualified or motivated tend to displace those with any kind of problem.
- In Newham the Workplace scheme connects local people and local businesses. This is being achieved through joined up working within the council e.g. improving access to childcare. It has cost £3.8 million but has achieved 600 jobs (which at £6,300 a job sounds quite reasonable).
- Newham run a shared equity schemes for people actively seeking jobs, and is also working with housing cooperatives.
- Haringey has found you need to earn at least £20,000 to make it worth getting off benefit. Hence in London for many people on housing benefit it is simply not worth while.
- You need a structure to support people over the multiple hurdles; for example Redbridge has used work placements and mentoring in bank trading floors to change attitudes.
- It is possible to use demand for large projects, for example the building of the Olympic Games site, to specify the skills needed e.g. security guards, scaffolders, which then provides an incentive for people to acquire the necessary skills.
- Employers can be required to take on people who are ready for work, which provides a further incentive (however this does not tackle the long-term unemployed).
- The Vocational Diploma Curriculum requires many more work placements.

Planning for job creation

From the discussion a number of conclusions emerged:

1. Council services need to be better coordinated at the neighbourhood level
2. It is important to hold on to 'local jobs' (for example in and around town centres)

3. There is also a need to reduce the length of journeys to work and encourage outcommuting (which is the main reason for the congestion on the Underground as numbers of trips have not increased).
4. Major employers need to be 'shared' across the London region
5. Councils should set up 'employment agreements' where they can exert influence
6. There is a need to overcome perceptual problems, including gang culture, and 'turf wars'
7. This means changing transport methodologies to take more account of deprivation, and ensuring that young people understand how to use public transport

Training for planners

Prior to the meeting Marc circulated a draft outline of a module that he and Sue have produced with Westminster University for London planners. Sue presented the idea of a short induction programme for planners dealing with:

- Spatial planning across London
- Recognising and achieving quality
- Dealing with political members.

The general reaction was that the course needed to be shorter (four days was suggested) and could benefit non-planners. Much of the proposed course seemed to be what planners would normally study, and did not really address the aims.

Membership

Tom will be leaving Sutton for Croydon at the end of May. Seema will be leaving Newham for Islington in July. Both hope to continue their membership of TEN at their new authorities.

Berlin report

Printed copies of the write up of the TEN visit to Berlin were handed out at the meeting. Anne will e-mail a PDF of the report through to members and make available on the URBED website. The Group were particularly impressed by the regeneration of public housing, the refurbishment of municipal buildings and the quality of the public realm post development in Berlin.

Future meetings

The next meeting will be held in May at Barking where we will look at the new town centre and learning centre. Jeremy Grint, Head of Spatial Regeneration at Barking has

offered to host the meeting. We will also invite Jennifer Dearing, Corporate Director of Regeneration. We will then break for the summer.

The foreign study tour will take place towards the end of September. The group liked the idea of flying into Belfast, spending the day looking at projects (we would be grateful for any suggestions) before travelling down to Dublin for the evening. We could then spend the next day looking at projects in and around Dublin before flying back to London. One possibility is Adams Town, a new settlement where to date 900 homes have been built, eight miles from Dublin.

The next meeting will be planned for November and the final meeting of the series will be held before the end of the financial year. Possible future meetings may include:

- New River, Islington
- Waltham Forest – Shifa to investigate
- Thames Gateway, Bexley