

Draft for comment

THE TEN GROUP

2nd meeting, 29th September 2003, at the Elephant and Castle
on redeveloping a post-war mega scheme

Present:

Craig Anderson, Reading
John Best, Milton Keynes
Peter Bishop, LB Camden
Marc Dorfman, LB Ealing
Paul Evans, LB Southwark
David Hennings, LB Haringey
Chris Horn, Development Project Director, Elephant Links
Richard Simmons, Medway Council
Danny Zammit, LB Redbridge

Apologies:

Chris Donovan, LB Bexley
Phillip Goodwin, LB Croydon

Project review

A 'news round' preceded discussion and raised issues for future consideration:

- Milton Keynes: A lot of high density housing is being planned including a Millennium Village
- Southwark: Elephant and Castle is the most significant project among others – how does it fit into the wider pattern of London?
- Ealing: Growing their Development Unit into a corporate organization that does regeneration as asset management
- Haringey: The two major sites are Heartlands and Upper Lea Valley, which poses the question of how to work with a neighbouring borough
- Camden: Expecting planning application for railway lands at the end of the year. The King's Cross redevelopment reveals that the implications of major projects go way beyond borough boundaries. How do you ensure that you are not closing down opportunities for the future?
- Medway: This is the largest urban local authority in the South East outside London with a population of ¼ million. They need to insert high density housing in areas like Rochester and Chatham – how can they deliver fast enough AND retain quality? Are there the employment opportunities for an increased population?
- Redbridge: There is a huge scheme planned for Ilford town centre, with over a thousand new homes – how do you meet housing targets AND protect the environment? Are they playing the sub-regional game as they should? Has the 30-year vision raised expectations that cannot be fulfilled?
- Reading: They are planning for the redevelopment of the railway station that should link both sides of the town and improve the transport interchange

General conclusions

- The meeting was thought successful and enjoyable. It provided an unusual opportunity to share approaches and checkout ideas. This alone was appreciated as an important outcome. But the discussion period was too short, although the challenge of fitting longer meetings into members' schedules was recognized. ***A short questionnaire is being circulated with this summary to see whether any improvements can be made.***
 - The agreed format for each meeting is an optional tour followed by the discussion session.
 - While the discussion session cannot be extended significantly without causing diary problems for the Group, we suggest trying for a 4.00 discussion session start (and 3.00 optional walkabout) at the 3rd meeting (i.e. adding 30 minutes to discussion). Circulating papers relating to presentation in advance may also help the Group.
 - Paul Evans will be circulating a CD with the Elephant and Castle presentation. He will also circulate Southwark's document on design excellence for feedback from the Group.
 - Marc Dorfman circulated 'Moving to Excellence' - POS/ODPM paper. He would like the Group to provide feedback from a southern perspective to complement views of local authorities in the north.
 - Nicholas Falk has drafted a policy paper for CABE on changes to local taxation aimed at giving local authorities more freedom. This is a response to several ODPM consultation papers, e.g. local government business growth incentive scheme. The Group may find the analysis of interest as it summarises relevant research, and he would like to know if anyone would like to comment on it. Please email him direct if you would like to see a copy – n.falk@urbed.com.
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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF THE 2ND MEETING OF THE TEN GROUP

Briefing

A 'briefing digest' was emailed beforehand, with a number of case studies of relevant approaches, and these covered:

- ***Securing a shared vision:*** the Dutch manage with less abrasive conflict (Richard Best report on public participation to the Foresight's BET Panel). The Kreuzberg (Berlin) case study shows the importance of an agreed set of principles, or charter.
- ***A clear framework for development:*** Hulme and Manchester used design guides rather than a masterplan.
- ***Engaging the community:*** the Manor and Castle Development Trust in Sheffield shows the value of local people taking over and managing assets.
- ***Ongoing maintenance and housing management:*** Byker (Newcastle) showed how community involvement and good design are not enough to create a sustainable community.

Introduction

Chris Horn, Development Project Director, Elephant Links, led an informal walkabout before the meeting and gave a presentation on the Elephant and Castle redevelopment plans. (A CD version of the presentation is being circulated to the Group direct.)

The Elephant and Castle was a post-war GLC development that comprises a huge gyratory, with underpasses, a shopping centre (that never really took off), some large offices, and a number of local authority housing estates. The area has seen a number of improvements funded by SRB; Alexander Fleming House, the former DHSS, has been turned into luxury apartments; and South Bank University has expanded.

The area is well connected to the rest of London, but is doing badly. The routes are 'escape routes rather than routes in'. The development of the 1950s and 60s was very rigid and incapable of reacting, and change has impacted adversely on the local population. The obstacles 'strewn in the path' are more difficult for people here than elsewhere. Crossing the gyratory is difficult and the underpasses are avoided, with leakage of shopping away from the area. To the west there is neglected open space, and to the south the Walworth Road has lost its High Street functions. The Heygate Estate of 1,200 units looks brutal, with high level walkways and garages at street level ('whatever people thought they were doing, they weren't'), and much of the Railway viaduct creates barriers and insecure areas.

The question is how to upgrade an area that was masterplanned on such a grand scale and that has such a high proportion of disadvantaged residents. The Heygate Estate will be demolished and the creation of 1,200 new units, to include private for sale, will be sponsored by the authority with housing associations. The railway arches could contain a range of uses and allow permeability (for example as in Borough Market). The gyratory will be replanned

to take less traffic (taking advantage of the effects of congestion charging), and restore it to pedestrians.

For the redevelopment, LB Southwark initially sought proposals from consortia, which were assessed largely on design grounds. The original vision was that Elephant and Castle was to be part of central London south of the River and should include a great deal of commercial space. Godfrey Bradman's scheme was selected, which buried the roads under a million sq ft of retail. Subsequently Southwark fell out with the developer who proved unwilling to make modifications.

Recently the Council has commissioned a series of studies to draw up a strategic framework using some of the consultants who worked on the scheme. They are now looking to work with developers as partners with shared objectives, and the local authority is trying to make the most of its property assets, and Southwark has sought to 'establish public sector obligations as well as requirements'. Discussion is taking place at London agency level as well as at public and private sector level.

To get the views and reactions of as many as possible (and avoid the self-appointed community representative) they are using opinion research and market survey techniques. Southwark has raised £2 million per year budget for the project team on the argument that the development will eventually pay for it.

Discussion

On this occasion the discussion was around the case study rather than a series of issues. It dealt with some knotty questions:

A How important is it to specify the nature of the place, the land use or the design codes? What is the level of detail?

- The essence of the redeveloped Elephant and Castle is seen as 'something that approximates to a natural city centre' (currently it has no core). Linkages will be defined and uses will follow. The framework, or pattern, will be described, with flexibility that allows for long development cycles.
- How far are buildings and plots designed for a purpose? The redevelopment area is too large for the authority to set out clear land uses. Good town centres evolve and grow. The trick is a good framework.
- 'Feeling as you go is right'. 'Something has to be an organic growth but also grows how you want it to.' A clear urban design framework and progressive rebuilding – a 'Patrick Geddes' approach – is favoured.
- A subtle approach is needed, like the South Bank improvements, which has ended up creating a really popular place.
- You need to nail the clever thinking at the beginning.

- If you have not prescribed uses, how do you sell it to a developer? At Elephant and Castle the release of land will be in about 18 chunks. This must be within a secure framework. Southwark has held back from making statements about goals. At some point elements will have to crystallize into firm things. They will not all crystallize together. But opening land up to the market piecemeal can make it impossible to secure major changes.
- Investors require certainty about what is happening. How do you provide confidence to get early buy in?

B How do you actually forge the vision?

- Southwark has moved from a local forum to using market research.
- Redbridge also has been very careful about producing visions: key principles, design guidance, then action planning route. When there is significant buy-in, they have moved like a rolling programme, consulting at each stage. This is not really a plan, it's a vision. They have goals of certain amounts of various land uses. [There is a debate here]
- How do you avoid people opposing the project because they think they will lose out personally? You need to get them positively involved in improvements.
- A governance system that gives right of veto to a small number of political activists is stupid. What is needed is a systematic sampling of views and giving out of information. We must fight for a proper engagement system backed up with proper area plans and a proper analysis of local authority assets. Activists should be allowed limited involvement in thinking about the plan.
- Long term planning sends out the message that we are taking the issue of engagement seriously and won't allow it to be hijacked.
- We need to find a way of making the democratic principle work.
- Using market research is important to find out how the market interacts with place, e.g. people described how they wanted their homes to be through Hackney's comprehensive estates initiative.
- How do you fund the community engagement/communications process? Southwark has raised £2 million a year arguing that the development will eventually pay.

C How do you maintain political support for a process that uses resources without producing tangible results in a world where the cast of characters changes?

- Southwark is using ordinary processes to do something that up to now has needed a development corporation. The authority need a clever model of linkage with private partners.
- How will all this be glued together? The Byker case study shows it is important that the local authority does not lose interest. The way you behave as a landowner is key.
- More than 'good mannered rules of behaviour' is necessary. Local politicians are not good at being visionary and radical.
- There must be a champion throughout: land ownership, development framework, management of public realm and civic leadership are key.

- Nobody could name a scheme initiated by members rather than officers (though the Manchester Design Guide was! NF). For example, annual elections make decision-making by members impossible (as in Milton Keynes) How do you encourage politicians to move to a consensual approach, that is, what is right for my place, not just for my party?
- ‘Unless you get a mass view in favour of what you’re doing, then you’ve lost the political game.’

D How do you reconcile local concerns with wider issues: the local and the sub-regional?

- What are you designing for – the benefit of local people or of London as a whole? (This is also highlighted by King’s Cross). People need better homes, and a better place to work and live, and if they get this, it will also (incidentally) make this a better part of central London. The Elephant and Castle redevelopment provides the opportunity to look at the whole, join things back up, and manage the whole thing together and for the community.
- If we want mixed uses and higher density, how do we create somewhere that is also pleasant and humane? Density leads to more shopping, which leads to more deliveries. A high proportion of movements in London are servicing London.

Issues for further discussion include:

- ***Leadership:*** How do you create the driving force needed to promote and manage large-scale development projects, e.g. Urban regeneration companies?
- ***Public/private partnership:*** How can a local authority pick the right partners, and maintain a degree of control?
- ***Subregional planning:*** How should the development of major area be linked to the growth of the wider region, and how does the local authority manage its relationships with neighbouring authorities and the regional authorities including transport?
- ***Skills:*** How can authorities resource the process of drawing up the strategic plan/guidelines?