

**Summary of the second meeting in the third series of TEN at
BedZed, in Hackbridge, Sutton on 19.1.06**

Present

Paul Clark, Chief Planning Officer, LB Redbridge
Chris Donovan, Assistant Director (Strategy, Planning and Regeneration) Bexley Council
Marc Dorfman, Head of Regeneration, Ealing Council
Paul Evans, Strategic Director of Regeneration, Southwark Council
Tom Jeffrey, Director of Environment and Leisure, LB Sutton
Paul Martin, Chief Executive, LB Sutton

Nicholas Falk, URBED
Esther Caplin, URBED

Apologies

John Best, Chief Executive, Milton Keynes Council
Peter Bishop, Director of Culture and Environment Camden Council
David Hennings, Director of Strategic Planning, Haringey Council
John Herman, Divisional Director, Regeneration and Development, LB Newham
Phillip Goodwin, Director of Planning and Development, Croydon Council
Shifa Mustafa, Assistant Director of Planning, Haringey Council

The second meeting in the third TEN series took place at BedZed at Hackbridge in Sutton, the pioneering housing scheme, and discussion concentrated on how Sutton, a leader in promoting sustainability, could stay ahead of the game, particularly as far as dealing with traffic is concerned.

Briefing was circulated in advance including a Profile of Sutton and a case study on BedZed from CABE's Building For Life website. The Mayor's first Review of the London Plan has recognised that London's suburbs are facing a crisis and the relevant section was included in the briefing, with seven propositions that are drawn from URBED's work for the GLA, *Tomorrow's Suburbs: Tools for Making London's Suburbs More Sustainable*. The introduction and toolkit for the section 'Promoting alternatives to the car' from this report were attached, along with an introduction to a forthcoming special edition of *Built Environment* on sustainable suburbs that Nicholas Falk is editing. Finally, a case study on Lille – 'Investing in a modern integrated public transport system' – shows what that city has achieved (and serves as an introduction to TEN's forthcoming visit to Lille).

The meeting began with a walk round BedZed with a member of BioRegional as guide. We were able to inspect roof gardens and interiors (of the show house), and we concluded in the Clubhouse where our discussion took place.

Tom Jeffrey began with an illustrated presentation covering Sutton's national environmental and sustainable credentials over the past 20 years. He talked about car use and alternatives, employment sites and patterns, and the issue of housing development including resistance to it and related possible impacts, such as loss of employment sites.

Discussion ranged over development sites, and their relationship to transport, funding, and tools to implement sustainable patterns of development including how to sell the benefits of intensification to both the community and politicians.

Finally the date was agreed for the next meeting – Thursday 23rd March in North East London (Haringey), and the day visit to Lille was proposed for a Friday in June. Members will be asked to put forward available dates.

A summary of conclusions follows.

TEN is grateful to Sutton Council for its hospitality.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE SUBURBS

BedZed: a state of the art scheme?

BedZed looks much better, even on a grey day, than the pictures suggest. Its mix of uses, with offices on the North side and housing on the South, and high density (80 to the acre), give it a distinctive identity. Features like the air cowls which serve as heat exchanges on the roof, the oak cladding on the walls, and the little gardens appealed to the group. However while the scheme is able to keep its heating bills down, thanks to super-insulation, and a heavy structure, other features, like the Combined Heat and Power plant have not worked out as planned, and is only now used for providing hot water and space heating.

The layout of the open space was also disappointingly suburban, but the scheme contrasted beautifully with the nearby Barratts scheme, and lifted the spirit in a generally rather depressing area on the edge of the massive St Helier estate, and looking out to power lines and former gravel pits. The Sustainable Urban Drainage system works well, though is not really economic at the scale it is, and right next to the main sewers.

Occupancy is one third privately owned, one third affordable and one third social housing. The first two are intermixed while the social housing is two separate blocks,

although these were not distinguishable by differences in design, for example. The site is well-maintained, though problems have included inducting new residents, providing rapid response maintenance, and accommodating visitors' cars

The state of Sutton

Sutton has been consistently in the forefront of the game in London in promoting sustainability, and in measures such as recycling – 30% and growing. For example it has the biggest waste management site, serving four London boroughs. Sustainability is a major political plank for the Lib Dem Council who have been in power for the past 20 years. Good relationships between residents, politicians and council officers allow things to happen, and, for example, Sutton is using planning gain funds to carry out further environmental improvements. However there are huge contrasts between, say, Cheam and Hackbridge, and the borough is the fifth most polarised in the country in terms of income levels, but without any government funds to narrow the gaps.

The borough has changed fundamentally over the last 50 years, as people use cars for trips they would previously have done on foot. Ironically it is the richer areas that are least satisfied. Streets and pavements are generally choked with cars, and transport is the number one concern of residents in this hugely car-dependent borough. Cars and car parking have a vast effect on the environment, dominating the street scene with queues of traffic and parking in front gardens. Alternatives to the car have been pursued, such as hoppla buses. The extension to Croydon's Tramlink into Sutton has fallen off the agenda with only a link to Crystal Palace for the Olympics remaining.

Pressures to build more housing and at higher densities are strongly resisted by residents who fear a loss of character, and being 'swamped' by people moving in from outside. People feel unsafe, even though crime is lower than say Southwark. The idea of cycling is seen as a joke, given the relatively narrow and over-crowded roads. The biggest development by far is going to be a new hospital in the South of the Borough. With little or no development land, pressures on the remaining industrial sites, and no government funding of any scale,

Paul Martin, Chief Executive, and Tom Jeffrey, Director of Environment and Leisure, therefore looked to the group for some fresh ideas.

Masterplans and development briefs

The solution to London's housing crisis may come from mobilising many smaller sites, rather than relying on large projects alone. One possible opportunity is to intensify development around railway stations and town centres, and in fact a major mixed use scheme is being submitted for Sutton Station. The idea was raised of using some of the Metropolitan Open Space around Hackbridge and other stations, to create the kind of scheme that has happened at Barn Elms, where an ecological centre has been paid for by luxury apartments. The difficulties include 'selling the benefits', guaranteeing quality, and compensating for any loss of open space.

In Erith masterplans have secured a better quality of housing development and a failing shopping centre has been upgraded. This is because Bexley Council has been tough on both densities and quality. However, in Greenford in Ealing, after some positive consultations, council proposals have been rejected when local residents began to fear that new housing in a traditional white working class area would change the mix. Positive planning should take a comprehensive look at areas such as Hackbridge, and public ownership of land, as in the case of BedZed, should enable Sutton to continue to play a leading role.

Transport corridors and arcs of opportunity

The transport problems are made worse by the narrow South London streets, with many people driving through the borough on their way to work. Much of the employment is now on the periphery, with more people commuting into Surrey than commuting out. Women going out to work, more people working from home and in shared spaces, has made traffic levels high at all times and days of the week. Yet the Experian Mosaic map shows, there are lots of railway lines running through the borough and densities in the built up areas are actually quite high. As a consequence of the traffic, walking feels unsafe and unpleasant, and is made worse where lighting levels are poor, and the environment looks uncared for.

Changes in behaviour require incentives in a 'slice of London', which might need to cover a sub region. But the initiative needs to start in a place like Sutton, with its track record for environmental innovation. The fact that 50% of Sutton's employees come to work by public transport could persuade others to change their habits. The success of the Congestion Zone is due to the simultaneous restriction on car usage and the improvements to the bus services, and a 'credible alternative' to using the car is vital to securing political support.

Quality deals

With a 'poverty of aspirations' as in Redbridge, intensification needs to be 'sold' in terms of meeting local needs, for example retirement homes to enable households to downsize in Ilford. Money is a vital lubricant of change, as in Milton Keynes, where a charge on new housing is to be ploughed back into local infrastructure improvements. Sutton might promote some kind of 'Smarter Growth' or Quality Deal, in which additional housing would be allowed, with a tariff of perhaps 10% of the value going into a kind of community chest, which could be used to fund improvements that local people wanted. Business Improvement Districts offer another possibility (including ones on industrial estates).

A way forward

Sutton, like a number of outer boroughs, has huge potential for reducing its ecological footprint, but zero resources. Suburban is not just about character or location, but can be

a state of mind which tends to be defensive. In Barnet the mantra is apparently ‘regeneration, protection, enhancement’, and something similar is needed to generate positive action. The group therefore liked the idea of a set of principles or charter to secure a more sustainable pattern of development, a higher quality of new housing, and some benefits for the existing community. The framework in URBED’s *Tomorrow’s Suburbs* toolkit can be used to assess progress, as Sutton has done, but new ways of working are required to use the tools to good effect. In responding to the Mayor and developers, boroughs need to marshal the arguments and devise briefs that respond to both local concerns, and global objectives. Future meetings, including the idea of one with Network Rail, should help in developing a united front.

Future TEN Programme

URBED will contact meeting hosts to discuss themes and format in advance.

23 March 2006	North East London Theme: poverty/housing; transport links for people Site visit: New River Village
June	Lille Day visit Theme: transport/housing
July	Meeting with TfL and Network Rail – Ben Plowden Theme: Intergrated transport and better interchanges outside of Central London Venue: Camden? Tbc <i>Though not discussed at the meeting, Nicholas Falk is having discussions with Network Rail, following up a proposal he has submitted to the LDA with the support of Bexley and Southwark, and in conjunction with Transport 2000. Members of the group are welcome to see the proposals.</i>
September	Newcastle/Gateshead Day visit Theme: subregional planning and funding infrastructure [CORE cities; Northern Way]
October	Optional visit to TURIN <i>Marc Dorfman circulated brochures on the Slow Food festival in Turin. He is getting information on hotels and travel.</i>

The Dorfman Challenge

In addition to the programme outlined below, MD is aiming to put up £5-6,000 for group members to come and give a ‘masterclass’ to planners in his department. Members will bring staff from their own planning departments to take part. The discussion will be

around what members are doing, and what skills they want. MD invited other members of TEN to follow suite. The funds would be used for fees, facilitation, administration etc.

Membership

Marc will be leaving Ealing shortly to take over from Paul Clark in Redbridge. Paul is sadly leaving TEN, and we wish him well in his new role as Planning Inspector.

Marc has proposed that Brendan Walsh, Director of Business Development at Ealing (so titled as his role includes asset management) will be the new Ealing member.

John Herman's work in Newham is now totally bound up with the Olympics and he is unable to continue attending TEN meetings. In his place the Interim Head of Regeneration and Development – John Tunney – has been proposed as member from Newham.

Unless any existing member has an objection against either name, we will formally invite them on board. Please come back with any objection or other suggestions for new members by return.

Nicholas Falk

Esther Caplin

January 2006