

Draft

TEN GROUP

Summary of the fifth meeting, 29th March 2004, in Wood Green, March 29 2004

Present:

Chris Donovan, Assistant Director (Strategy, Planning and Regeneration), LB Bexley

Marc Dorfman, Director of Regeneration, LB Ealing

David Hennings, Director of Strategic Planning, LB Haringey

Apologies:

Craig Anderson, Director of Environment, Reading Borough Council

John Best, Chief Executive, Milton Keynes Council

Peter Bishop, Director of Environment, LB Camden

Paul Clark, Chief Planning Officer LB Redbridge

Paul Evans, Strategic Director of Regeneration, LB Southwark

Phillip Goodwin, Director of Planning and Development, LB Croydon

Richard Simmons, Director of Development and Environment, Medway Council

Seema Manchanda, Head of Economic Regeneration at Haringey took part in discussion and lead a site visit around Haringey Heartlands.

The focus of this meeting was to have been on making projects happen, with the case study of Haringey Heartlands, but because of last minute cancellations, we concentrated instead on the other topic of developing capacity among young staff. The following notes are intended to provide an impression of the issues facing Haringey, and to suggest how the Group can work together to make faster progress on developing major opportunity sites.

The dilemma of Haringey Heartlands

Haringey Heartlands is a strip of industrial land between the old Great Northern Railway and the shopping centre of Wood Green, covering 36 acres in all. It includes the highly successful Chocolate Factory, with its 260 creative businesses, one of the largest theatre schools in London, a relatively modern industrial estate, and a former gas works with two large gas holders still in use. There are also some railway sidings, and the other side of the railway lies Alexandra Park, where housing development is already underway on land owned by Thames Water.

The opportunities were identified as long ago as 1990, and Haringey prepared a draft Development Framework last year to promote a comprehensive scheme. The site is identified in the London Plan as having a potential for 1000 new homes and 1,500 new jobs, and the Richard Rogers Partnership has been developing a masterplan for the area on behalf of SecondSite and the rail utility companies. Haringey only own a part of the land, land values and development costs are high, and there is a major issue of how proactive they, and the London Development Agency should be. Over the past ten years, Wood Green has gone through a resurgence, with a major cinema complex opposite the underground station, environmental improvements along the High Road, the upgrading of Shopping City, following the Council's sale of the its interest to a property company, and a general upgrading of the environment for pedestrians and bus users. With the St George Berkeley Group developing high value apartments the other side of the railway line, and with the potential to relocate Travellers from a key site, and to redevelop or reuse a Primary School that faces on to an attractive green, the opportunities for privately led development have improved, which raises the important issue of whether a single developer should be sought, or whether better results could be achieved through incremental development within an agreed development framework or masterplan.

Developing capacity among young staff

Haringey, like Bexley, and perhaps some of the other members, has organised itself so that major projects, such as Haringey Heartlands, are dealt with by a multi-disciplinary group, in this case within the Chief Executive's Department. The skills required to deal with projects of this kind (and Tottenham Hale and the Lea Valley present even more demanding problems) include:

- Leadership
- Project management
- Risk management
- Negotiation
- Managing expert teams
- Delivery vehicles/joint ventures
- Funding vehicles
- Marketing.

These are not the kinds of skills typically taught on planning courses, and can probably only best be learned through sharing and building up experience. While London Boroughs differ in their recruitment problems (and Bexley, for example, has managed to cope in part because it offers attractive places to live with good schools nearby, as well as offering good pay and satisfying work), some common problems were identified, including:

- The low status of planners and planning as a profession, and its image as being all ‘development control’
- The cyclical nature of the development industry, which affects demand, while training takes a long time to respond
- The difficulty of differentiating ‘strategic planning’ and major development schemes from the bulk of the work that local authorities undertake, and hence of creating a positive culture
- The lack of support provided to encourage existing staff to develop their skills (and not just their knowledge of the latest circular or appeal decision)
- The huge gap between the work involved in processing the mass of planning applications, and the work required in bringing about an urban renaissance
- The challenge that Government will try to diminish the role of local authorities even further, by building up regional capacity (one of the recommendations of the Barker Review), and by giving up on local democracy, as being too costly and negative.

Bridging the gaps

What can the Ten Group do to make progress easier? A number of ideas were reiterated including:

1. Organising ‘master classes’ on topics of Group members’ choice (e.g. David Hennings would welcome a session giving a state-of-the art overview of planning)
2. A day-long conference might be run in conjunction with a conference organiser like Landor Publications or the TCPA

3. A residential conference for senior staff and/or councillors which might make use of a venue like Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Park
4. Bidding to run part or all of the Centre of Excellence that the LDA is supposed to be setting up for London
5. Setting up its own internal training and development scheme to bring on young planners, and to apply a version of the Fast Track approach that applies in the Civil Service.

Those present agreed that what mattered most was to actually do something, not talk about it, and so Haringey and Ealing are going to start the **Ten Group's Fast Track Action Learning Programme**, to test out a process that can then be applied more widely. The basic principles agreed include:

1. The 'host' authority will identify a specific issue or area where help is needed to come up with a short report recommending the way forward. They will draw up a brief setting out the context, the issues where advice is sought, and the information and briefing material already available, together with an initial list of contacts. The issue should not be too complex, but will require a range of skills including:
 - a. Economic analysis
 - b. Urban design
 - c. Consultation with stakeholders.
2. Other authorities will make promising young staff available for a period of up to four days each, and will ask those interested to write up brief biographies setting out not just their skills and experience, but what they want to learn or practice. A decision will need to be made on the numbers to form a team, but it is expected that two or three people will work on each issue or project offered by a host member.
3. The team will work over a period of up to 8 weeks, of which at least two days should be spent assessing the chosen site, and working within the host department, which means that a desk and phone need to be made available, along with ideally access to computing facilities.
4. The team(s) will be invited to present their report in the form of a Powerpoint presentation to a meeting of the Ten Group, and will receive feedback in the

form of a positive 'critique'. They will also be asked to write a short report (under four pages) to the host authority, with a copy to the Ten Group members, on what they found regarding the way the department was managed, drawing on their previous experience.

5. The process should ideally be monitored, and all the participants might be given access to the briefing papers provided for the Ten Group meetings, so that they have some further inspiration to draw on.

The precise arrangements for the pilot will be developed by Marc Dorfman and Seema Manchanda. However, other members may wish to see the draft brief to help the Group develop the approach that could then be replicated more widely.

Nicholas Falk

March 2004