

DRAFT

TEN GROUP

Summary of discussion at the sixth meeting, 24th May 2004, in Ilford

Present:

John Best, Chief Executive, Milton Keynes Council

Paul Clark, Chief Planning Officer, LB Redbridge

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

Marc Dorfman, Director of Regeneration, LB Ealing

Phillip Goodwin, Director of Planning and Development, LB Croydon

Seema Manchanda, Head of Economic Regeneration, LB Haringey

Apologies:

Peter Bishop, Director of Environment, LB Camden

Paul Evans, Strategic Director of Regeneration, LB Southwark

David Hennings, Director of Strategic Planning, LB Haringey

Richard Simmons, Director of Development and Environment, Medway Council

The meeting was preceded by a **walking tour** of Ilford town centre, looking at new housing, plans for further housing and for the new Town Square.

A **briefing pack** was circulated beforehand providing background information on high density housing, sustainable development and tools for sustainability. It included a brief for a CABE research project on housing intensification, a case study of a new suburb in Freiburg, Germany, which demonstrates sustainable development principles, and the scoping paper for a GLA project to produce a Sustainable Suburbs Toolkit.

The meeting began with a **presentation** by Paul Clark, [Principal Chief](#) Planning Officer, and the **discussion session** focused on issues arising. These are summarised below.

Next meeting

The sixth meeting of the Ten Group was the last in the series. At the fourth meeting (in Ealing) members had agreed that they want it to continue, and the sixth meeting confirmed that another series would begin in September, on the same basis. **Chris Donovan has offered to host the first meeting in Bexley on Monday 27th September.** The following meetings (on the last Monday of each second month) might take place in Croydon and Reading. The Group could also choose other locations in which visits could be organised.

Invoices with the proposal for a second series will be issued by URBED (for £1,500 fee, as before). Between 4 and 6 meetings will be planned, depending on the number of members. As one member has been forced to drop out, the group should aim to attract new members.

Please suggest any senior individuals in other likely local authorities (within about one hour's travel of central London). Either pass the details to Esther Caplin, or contact them direct. Peter Stoddart, Director of Environment and Planning, Cambridge City Council, has been suggested.

The 'Fast track action planning programme' is being pursued by Ealing and Haringey. It will report back, possibly to coincide with the September meeting.

NB There will be no meeting on 29th June, which had been previously suggested.

NF/EC June 2004

Progressive Ilford

The walking tour revealed a town centre on the move. One of Ilford's most exciting features is that there are 19 housing schemes planned, all to very high densities. Redbridge is notable for having a high proportion of home ownership, and close families with religious observance, so that having so many new flats is a real departure. The tour also revealed other elements in the strategy for Progressive Ilford including a thriving Asian quarter, which will be on the route of the planned Barking Transit, a planned square outside the Town Hall and proposals to upgrade the transport interchange, which TfL are working on.

Paul Clark explained that Redbridge is very diverse, with a high proportion of many ethnic minority groups who are fairly spread out. People have moved into Ilford from the East End, and then northwards to Gants Hill, and beyond to Essex. Redbridge's population change is eleventh in London.

The Ilford Town Centre Regeneration Study was stimulated by new out-of-town developments and the growth of population in Thames Gateway. What was a Labour initiative is being spread to three other town centres by the present Conservative administration.

Ilford Town Centre

Ilford has been a suburb since before the First World War, and its town centre ward counts as an Enterprise Area as it is one of the most deprived in the country. The shopping centre is of metropolitan importance and was a pioneer of pedestrianisation and town centre management. Redbridge sees itself as a reasonably priced dormitory for London, and Ilford is only a short train journey from both the City and Docklands.

To counter potential threats from other new centres, the Council commissioned consultants to come up with a strategy for the future of the town centre. The strategy has been to secure

5,000 dwellings over 30 years, and to secure housing led regeneration, with very high density schemes. The first 12 storey block involves 1,000 rooms to the hectare. It was originally conceived as an office block, but when this proved unviable, the local authority gave permission for a housing scheme with a very low level of car parking. This is being followed by two 21 storey blocks, while across the railway line by the new bus station a foyer for young homeless people has been built. 1,500 units have already been given permission and 1,000 more are under discussion.

The housing schemes are using a variety of sites, including redeveloping single storey retail premises, redeveloping a town centre Sainsburys, and even redeveloping part of the multi-storey car park of the new edge of centre Sainsburys. Social ownership is generally low in the Borough. However, in the new developments 25 per cent social housing is being provided, in the case of the scheme under construction by Barretts in a separate block.

Suburban renaissance

Gants Hill was a case study in the Civic Trust's suburbs study. The CTRU, who found that there was a lack of social capital as a result of through traffic, which divides it into five parts, and it is also on the boundaries of everyone's responsibilities. There is a very small local population, and hence it is hard to get any local commitment. The Civic Trust recommended a Task Force with early wins. However, the other proposals have not yet happened, and in the meantime the cinema closed down. A planning brief has been issued to develop two sites comprehensively, and permission has been given for one, which will provide 250 new flats. This was actually supported by local residents (though proposals for what Gants Hill is for have aroused local controversy). The Action Area Plan proposes developing each part of the centre for a different role.

However the real issue is how to get TfL to see the wide roles of suburban town centres, particularly those that need regeneration and which are dominated by main roads (50,000 cars a day pass through Gants Hill).

Housing led renaissance

Ilford benefits from already having a good image for education and social services. Private investment has also been encouraged by promotional work by the Borough under the Progressive Ilford banner. Changes in the UDP to favour town centre living by abolishing the requirements for gardens and car parking for non-family units, made apartment blocks financially attractive. The council also limited densities elsewhere. It was the reduction in cost that made the economic difference to bringing small units forward.

Initially councillors were concerned about 'families trapped in high rise blocks', and 'babies falling out of balconies', and thought flats represented an alien way of life. They are worried about the public order implications of a singles lifestyle. There are also concerns about affordable housing not meeting local needs, and overloading local infrastructure.

Almost every scheme includes a medical centre, but they are not letting. The suggestions are that the people who are occupying the new flats include families with children, but this has not been confirmed by an ongoing survey. A fair proportion was sold as Buy to Let. The local authority now is asking for a commuted payment for the social housing content to avoid [cramping housing forcing tenants](#) into tower blocks, so the developer of the 31 storey block is providing £4 million to the local authority. Flats are going for £180k, whereas in Croydon the same location would go for £250k or 300k, which may limit the quality of the architecture.

£1 million was spent on a deep clean and some relandscaping of the town centre, without it being very noticeable. It has been difficult to get the landowners to work collectively. However, the new towers will give the town centre a presence, which it currently lacks because of the meanness of many of the buildings, which are often two storey.

Management of growth

Redbridge Council has used £0.5m from local authority resources over two years for a multi-disciplinary team, which has been multiplied by government grants for £1.2 m for Sustainable Communities under the Growth programme. Members were taken to Birmingham and Reading to convince them. The Council have been encouraged to play a wider role, now they have a strategy so they are better able to lobby with other agencies eg the GLA. However this has not yet resulted in a sustainable funding mechanism.

There could now be an opportunity to rethink how to use the growth opportunity to the full, and what are the implications for local facilities. In particular there is a problem of how to fund the front end costs e.g. transport and the environment. In Milton Keynes English Partnerships provided some initial funding for planning; but subsequently the funds are being used for education and health planning.

Bexley has used an area approach to involve the police and health authorities in Management Boards for specific areas, and for example they have police people working within the authority. This has followed on from joint working, and is very different from traditional planning. A key element has been getting professionals talking to each other at an area level.

There is nothing at present to bind local authorities together at a subregional level, and to help them think creatively about growth corridors. Thames Gateway has benefited from having its own statutory regional plan, and a number of major projects. The original stimulus was dealing with congestion in Central London, and the availability of so many sites. It worked because there was an overwhelming idea of what was possible. The critical point was identifying self-interest, and a commitment to produce a real product in order to attract public investment.

Useful tools identified include:

- visioning events e.g. Progressive Ilford conference; Croydon 2020
- urban design reviews e.g. CABI; Ealing
- study tours e.g. Redbridge to Reading and Birmingham
- new public realm and public art e.g. Croydon
- use of consultants to stimulate long range thinking e.g. Demos in Milton Keynes