



BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL: Brixton and Clapham Report

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Produced by

URBED

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Special thanks to Alex Philips,
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Cathedral Group and Alison Young,
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November 2011

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Report of the Second TEN Group meeting in Brixton and Clapham

The second meeting of the eighth series provided an opportunity to look at the transformation that was taking place in some of Lambeth's town centre, using public private partnerships, and to discuss how to develop social capital in areas suffering from a loss of social cohesion. We are very grateful to our guests Alex Phillips, Development Executive of the Cathedral Group for showing us around their projects in Clapham, and to Alison Young, Divisional Director Planning Regeneration and Enterprise for presenting how Lambeth is tackling regeneration. We also looked briefly at Venn Street in Clapham Old Town, which has been transformed through an imaginative street works scheme.



New apartments adjacent to the new leisure centre on the old leisure centre/depot site

Regeneration in Lambeth

The Borough of Lambeth stretches from the riverside at Vauxhall and Battersea, now the subject of major development schemes, through a number of Victorian commuter suburbs such as Brixton and Clapham to its Southern border with Croydon. Run by a Labour Council, the Borough is building a new image as a 'cooperative Council' in which the local authority seeks to build partnerships with both businesses and the community. Through policies in the Core Strategy aimed at accommodating population growth and maintaining distinctive town centres, the Borough is making the most of its heritage and location.

From a position when the Borough was known for conflict and riots, Lambeth has attracted inward investment, and housing values are now as high as in boroughs such as Camden and Islington. Projects such as Windrush Square have extended earlier efforts to upgrade the environment of Brixton town centre, which now feels



Windrush Square

vibrant and safe most of the time. Retail vacancies are quite low, and attractions such as Brixton Market and the related Brixton Village of eating places, along with clubs and bars draw people from all over London, creating a strong night time economy.

Similarly in Clapham, whose popularity as a place to live stretches back to the early nineteenth century, the main streets are now filled with restaurants spilling out onto the pavements. However it also now a crime hotspot, not helped by the relatively narrow pavements and heavy through traffic. There is also an issue over what should be done with Acre Lane which runs between the two.

In contrast the North of the Borough, which used to be neglected, there is a challenge of managing growth effectively, rebranding former industrial areas, and integrating the new and existing communities. Battersea Power Station is seen as a major new town centre, and prestigious business location, along with 16,000 new homes (3,000 in Lambeth) and 25,000 new jobs. A Business Improvement District is expected to follow the successful prototype in Waterloo and may also be taken up in Streatham, where the long High Road presents a real challenge. At present the famous ice rink is being redeveloped by Tesco's, but will be replaced, and a temporary facility is being set up in Brixton.

Surprisingly there is over 25 hectares of land capable of redevelopment in central Brixton, and the Council is looking at an 'Asset Backed Vehicle' that can make better use of public land for a mix of uses, with 800-1,000 new homes. Success will depend on Town Centre Management in creating safer neighbourhoods and



improving the look of the area, and here good relations with the diverse communities will be vital. There is always a fear that rising values will intensify conflicts that could put investment schemes at risk if the community do not feel they are also benefitting from change, which is why the new management model is so important.

Public Private Partnerships

Two major mixed use schemes on Council property provide a possible model for how local authorities can make the most of their assets, and upgrade run-down areas through an £80 million scheme in which the Council has put in the land in return for state of the art leisure facilities and a share in the value created:

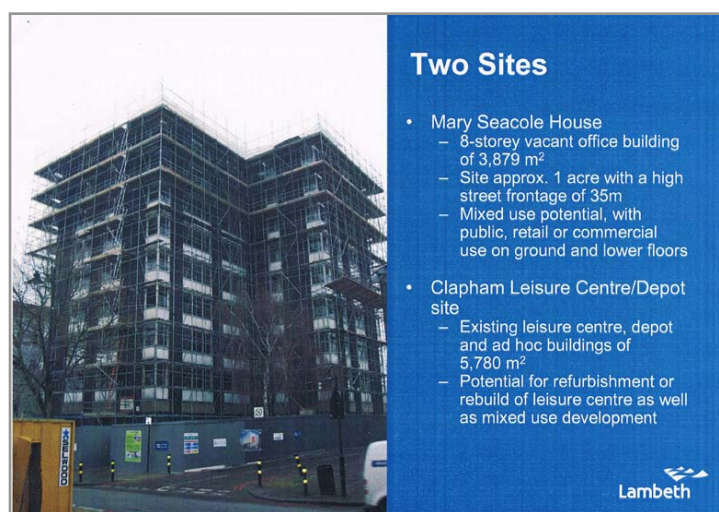
Mary Seacole House was an eight storey vacant office building on a site of one acre, which is being redeveloped as new library and medical centre, with housing above. A stunning open ground floor space for the children's library has been created through imaginative engineering. Above there are 155 flats for sale and 44 for social housing provided through the Notting Hill Housing Trust. Returns were improved by increasing the size from 8 to 11 stories without any loss of quality. The key to success was recovering £46 million early on through the presale of some of the flats and the medical centre. A £12.7 million loan from the HCA under their Kickstart scheme also helped in securing a £35 million loan for the two projects.

Clapham Leisure Centre

was a large and unappealing swimming bath, which has been replaced by a stylish 25m pool and adjoining training pool, with a gym and sports facilities above. On the adjoining site quite high density housing has been used to fund the new leisure facilities. These are being run by a private operator, with a membership at a discount to

those moving into the flats. The finances are also helped by not providing car parking, but instead giving occupants high quality bikes, and a two year membership of a car club. There is a 'green concierge' whose role is to help residents live in a more sustainable way, for example through a CHP scheme that uses the waste heat from powering the complex to heat the water in the baths.

Development over the last few years has become extremely hard to fund, and these schemes would not have been possible without the local authority effectively de-risking them. While Lambeth could have simply sold off the sites to the highest bidder, it would have lost the quality and control that has been achieved by setting up a public private partnership. The Cathedral Group is undertaking other similar projects in places such as Deptford and Bromley, and emphasises the use of imaginative architecture through a close partnership with eleven steps to success.



New leisure centre

Transformation of Venn Street

Close to the centre of Clapham lies Venn Street, one of a number of streets with housing above shops or restaurants that runs off the main road. Here the Council has redesigned a street where cars used to dominate into one that is a pleasure to walk down or eat in, with one of several arts cinemas. The works, which have been done to an exceptionally high standard, only cost £350,000, suggesting the main obstacle is both the vision to see the potential and the will to overcome all the obstacles. In this case this has meant not only careful negotiations with Transport for London, who have a Red Route running by, but also working with the businesses, who often prefer to have cars parking directly outside. An innovation is the use of shared surfaces, but also allowing cars to drive through, but in ways that respect people on the street, like ‘guests at a party’ to quote the Dutch designer Jan Gehl, who has helped transform Copenhagen.



Venn Street before (top) and after (bottom)

Venn Street before (left) and after (right)



Tackling Social Conflict

Lambeth now has an excellent range of award winning regeneration projects, including the new Evelyn Grace Academy in Brixton designed by Zaha Hadid. It also is pioneering an alternative to the Big Society by applying the kind of ‘mutual’ principles that have worked so well at John Lewis. However, these achievements can easily be neutralised by a reputation for lawlessness, such as the August riots, which led to a number of flat sales falling through. While there are residents moving into to be close to work in central London, and enjoy the vibrant town centres, there are also others being squeezed out by rising housing costs, and a loss of traditional jobs, including those provided by small businesses. Undoubtedly there are problems with ‘gang culture’, even if these only involve small minorities.

When the riots took place, Lambeth police concentrated on helping streets with smaller businesses in them (unlike the situation in Dalston, for example) as they realised that if the small businesses lost their shops and had to close they would never reopen. Brixton and Clapham are both on main roads leading out of London, and their condition has an influence on the many who pass by as well as those who live there. Once the buildings had been restored and reused, and accessibility improved, the private residential areas were obvious candidates for gentrification. However, the middle class parents moving in do not always send their children to state schools, and their cars can add to huge problems of congestion that South London already faces.

The government was quick to put money into areas affected by riots, so the scars no longer show. In the smaller centres of Streatham and Norwood Round One of the Outer London Fund is being used to improve shop fronts and make shops more secure. But is this enough in the face of high unemployment and exclusion from education? Discussion focussed on the possible role that community projects can play, for example the transfer of Lillian Bayliss School to a community run sports and culture centre. But there are also difficulties of doing this without being criticised for wasting public resources, and building the trust needed to transfer assets responsibly. There is potentially a huge role to be played by smaller enterprises, both commercial and social, in taking on young people and developing their skills and self-esteem. A lot of work needs to be done to maintain our urban fabric and look after those who cannot care for themselves. Coin Street Community Builders, which is in the North of the Borough, provides one model. But promoting community enterprise requires organisation and staffing at a time when budgets are being cut, and may not be relevant to most situations.

The speed with which troubles can erupt, often prompted by a sense of injustice, such as unfair policing, emphasises the need for approaches that go beyond relying on the market to fill the gaps. Subsequently over dinner a small group heard from a French restaurateur who is engaged in a bid to take over Council land in Brixton for a

community based mixed use scheme. Lambeth has set up a ‘citizens’ commission’ into what services could be delivered collaboratively, for example through tenant managed housing estates, and the government’s cuts are forcing a rethink of traditional services and ways of management.

Next Meeting

The discussions on ‘social capital’ will continue at the next meeting, which will be in Tottenham at the start of February, where the latest round of riots was kicked off. It should allow a deeper discussion of what local authorities can do to tackle the problems of dysfunctional families, and the much wider issue of giving young people a sense of hope and some real opportunities, and changing attitudes and behaviour.

The final meeting of the series will be in early April and it has been suggested that we visit Brighton where there are a number of schemes, including the New England Quarter masterplanned by URBED.

Appendix A - Participants and Apologies

Participants

Tim Cronin, Head of Development Management, Wandsworth Council

Nicholas Falk, Director, URBED

Sue Foster, Executive Director of Housing, Regeneration & Environment, Lambeth Council

Karen Galey, Joint Head of Economic Development, Haringey Council & LB Waltham Forest

Charles Hagan, London Borough of Lambeth

Pat Hayes, Executive Director of Regeneration and Housing, Ealing Council

Tom Jeffrey, Public Sector Interim Manager

Mark Lucas, Head of Inward Investment & Enterprise, Redbridge Council

Alex Philips, Development Executive, Cathedral Group

Stephen Tapper, Assistant Director - Strategic Planning, Regen, Leisure & Culture, LB of Enfield

Anne Wynde, Project Co-ordinator, URBED

Alison Young, Divisional Director Regeneration, Planning & Enterprise, LB Lambeth

Apologies

Tony Antoniou, Director of Regeneration and Economy, London Borough of Croydon

Marc Dorfman, Assistant Director Planning & Regeneration, Haringey Council

John East, Director: Planning and Development Services, LB Newham

David Hennings, Head of Regeneration, Catalyst

Seema Manchanda, Assistant Director Planning Services, Wandsworth Borough Council

Stewart Murray, Chief Planning & Regeneration Officer, Redbridge Council

Daniel Ratchford, Strategic Director of Environment and Leisure, LB Sutton

Darren Richards, Head of Planning and Transportation, LB Sutton

Ed Watson, Assistant Director Planning and Public Protection, Camden Council