

Question and Answer session between Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum Committee and Dan Pope, Chief Planning Officer, Camden Council and Brian O'Donnell, Strategic Lead, Planning Policy & Implementation, Camden Council

Question KTNF: As we have had no contact with Camden Council planners for the last eighteen months, please could you inform us about Camden's Planning Department's reaction to the current proposals by Murphy to redevelop their site, and do they have a programme for dealing with the application when it is submitted?

Dan: Apologies for not being in touch before now. We are working on a pre-application process with them. We did a seminar a few months ago. They intend to submit in Spring 2021 and it will take 6-9 months to work through – dependent on the size of planning application. Design of buildings and land uses, sustainability, community benefits, affordable housing – we have been working through those issues in last 18 months.

Follow on questions Henry Herzberg: What is the current programme? We were told by Murphy the application would be in by the end of May. When we saw the materials – it looks quite a long way away?

Dan: They maintain they are going to submit. The May deadline is important to them.

HH: Have you any fundamental concerns?

Land uses. When we started the Mayor had a policy on designated industrial sites – needed 65% of plot as a ratio of industrial space. This is an unusual site – not much built floorspace. It is a massive uplift 2-3x the industrial floorspace that currently exists. The Council sees it as an important site for housing too – 750 homes proposed. The London Plan has changed as the 65% no net loss of industry approach has been removed. However, reference to the 65% target remains in the London Plan housing policy.

What comprises 65% industry? There is huge demand for logistics and warehousing but we prefer 'maker' and light industrial space and that's what they're focusing on. Use classes have changed as well and office, R&D and light industry is now in the same use class - Class E - but industry and warehousing remain as classes B2 and B8. We think the R&D can count as industrial floorspace. There is roughly 30,000 sq. m. office and 40,000 sq.m. of industrial space to get to 65%, plus 750 homes. In that there should be 35% affordable and within that 60% social rent and 40% intermediate. We are comfortable with those land uses.

The design is tricky – with viewing corridors and the view from Parliament Hill. To maintain it is why we are getting the form of development we have. To achieve that there is intensive development along the railway line. We are working hard on the design of blocks – breaking them down – and getting the heights right - how to break up the wall of development from Parliament Hill? In the middle, there are the rail sheds – we want to work with the heritage value of those and routes through the site identified in the Kentish Town Planning Framework.

It is expected to be an outline application. [This reflects a change since the meeting.]

Community benefits are important. We are working through the community benefit package - the development needs to contribute towards employment and skills, open space and play, community space, the relationship with City Farm, and the link through to Kentish Town and the Heath line – which is to be cantilevered.

The main elements we are broadly happy with and are working through the detail. The broad structure hasn't changed massively. It is about refining the design.

Niall Monaghan: Is the Car Wash site going to be included in parallel? And there are questions over bulk and massing, height, and scale. Have you the mechanisms to control those?

In outline applications you have parameters of heights of blocks – that is not left to reserved matters. Folgate submitted their screening opinion on Environmental Impact Assessment and are not including the Car Wash site in the development.

KTNF: Where would Camden see the major shortcomings and advantages for the development of the framework area with the new planning laws? it would be helpful to expand on Camden's vision for the framework area: does Camden see it as adding mainly necessary housing and employment space? Or is there an ambition such as “Kentish Town Tech Quarter”?

Dan: There is interest in the Knowledge Quarter (KQ) despite the pandemic (the KQ is centred on King's Cross - one mile radius from the British Library - and wouldn't directly include the Kentish Town site). Companies are prepared to pay necessary rents to be there. Does this site benefit from the success of the KQ? There is a lack of space for start-ups and move on space. Some life science businesses have had to move to Ashford and Cambridge because space is not available in the KQ. Better to move to Kentish Town, as far as Camden is concerned.

Dan: We are concerned about the new planning laws. Last September the new Class E came in which lumps a load of uses into one class. A new Permitted Development right will allow class E to convert to residential. It is a huge threat, particularly outside conservation areas like Kentish Town High Street and Regis Road. We are looking at how we can use Article 4 directions to help control that. There is a transition period for offices – we can maintain our current A4 directions for one more year. With other uses, there will be a year when Class E uses are vulnerable to conversion to residential as it takes 12 months to introduce an Article 4.

Brian: We are looking to introduce Article 4 directions but the government is looking to restrict councils' ability to do that. They are consulting on a new wording in the NPPF. They are saying Article 4s should cover the smallest geographical area possible. We are seeking to cover as much as we can so we may get push back on that. The Secretary of State can modify and revoke Article 4 at any time so in effect they have to be signed off by the Secretary of State.

Dan: The Queen's Speech is expected to include a Planning bill – and this is expected to introduce two areas of land designations - Growth and Protected. There's a lot of work in the application of local plan making and introduction of

design codes alongside the local plan. It will put a lot of pressure on councils to do a lot of work up front. Debates we are now having on Murphy – we will have to resolve those issues producing the local plan. There is a question mark over what it means for Neighbourhood Plans when the Council is doing design codes. There is also talk of a new Infrastructure Levy. The CIL process works well for us. We can set the rates and decide what to spend it on. If it is replaced by a new Infrastructure Levy – that seems a worse option.

Paul Seviour: On the PDR from E to residential, at the moment, shops in the High Street have protections in the Camden Plan. In Kentish Town High Street there will be no change of use from A1 – when it falls below 75%. Some primary shopping frontages are already below 75%. Do you expect retail element to drop even lower?

Dan: The new use class came in last year makes the 75% shop front policy redundant. New E use class puts together retail, cafes, restaurants, health, leisure, office and light industrial into the same use class. Landlords no longer need planning permission to move between these different uses. From 1 August, except for offices, anything in Class E can revert to residential. There is a prior approval process under that with noise, amenity, and other issues, but it is narrow. We cannot take into account the need for residential and cannot look at the impact unless it is in a conservation area. Combined, these are the most significant changes to planning in last 20-30 years. Across Camden people are only realising how significant the changes are. People are contacting the Council and we are having to say these are a consequence of these new rights developers have.

Paul Seviour: On the prior approval – are there minimum space standards?

Brian: Any housing under Permitted Development Rights now have to meet national space standards for light etc. – which was not the case in the past. Potentially it might limit some retail conversions if they can't meet the standards. With any associated works there will have to be a planning application.

Paul: Some shops are narrow and deep in Kentish Town High Street. So it is not a fait accompli.

Niall Monaghan: Have London Councils banded together and put a position paper forward – with slightly different rules for London?

Brian – On Article 4 directions, each council has to make its own. Camden will do that. We have not finalised the area or extent yet.

Paul: There was one application for a hairdressers near the Bull & Gate turned down –that could go ahead with that once new rules are in place.

KTNF: Is Camden Council planning on adopting any aspects of the 15-minute city concept, which is gaining traction in quite a few countries globally? Some studies have found that the shift in city structures implied by the 15-minute city can help build resilience as communities recover from COVID, so it could be relevant to Camden's Renewal Commission.

Dan: We are interested in the 15-minute neighbourhood concept. We realised 10 months ago that paradoxically, the High Street suffered, particularly hospitality, with businesses closed the longest, but, at the same time, the pandemic re-enforced the importance of the High St as a lifeline. The pandemic has accelerated a lot of trends like online retail. It has forced us to look at what the role of centres is in future. Over the last 12 months, we have issued 150 pavement licences; streeteries, road closures, tables, and chairs; strategies for vacant premises and business support. In the next few weeks, we will launch a High Street prospectus which sets out Camden's vision for High Streets. Nine months ago, we did a consultation on Commonplace. We asked the public what they like or dislike about the High Street. People value High Streets for more than just retail. Over 100 years ago they had a more multi-functional role – as a centre of the community, a place for mutual aid and for business. There is a need for near-home working – not just working from home. Could you have satellite office in the High Street? There is a need for affordable workspace. We are looking at doing a Library of Things – allowing people to hire household items for a short time. It fits into the move to a circular economy. We are looking at social value leases on premises. The High Street can have a whole variety of uses - work, hub, voluntary sector – all within easy access of walking and cycling.

KTNF: Does the Council have any plans for current Conservation Areas i.e., extend existing ones, create more and or regulate more carefully?

Dan: We have 39/40 conservation areas which cover half of borough. Our main focus is getting guidance up to date. We are slowly working through them. We do get requests for new areas like the Twentieth Century Society for part of Chalcots Estate – which we are not taking forward. At the moment, we have no plans to create new areas. It links to Permitted Development rights - the right to convert Class E to residential applies in CAs – but there are more strict criteria. CAs do provide protection. Do we need to look at designating more? There are pros and cons to doing that.

KTNF: How does Camden hope to mitigate the introduction of Design Codes?

Dan: We are still grappling with that. The government has published a national design code and guide. We need to see the detail. We did respond to the recent consultation. We are concerned about the level of resource. Camden is a complex borough. The codes work OK with suburban extensions. It works OK, for example, in the Essex Design Guide. Camden is a complex mixture of different styles and it is hard to understand how it would work in practice. Could do it for a site, like Murphy's. But it is tricky to do in practice. Government proposals are that Conservation areas will be a Protected Area so no need for design codes – which are required for Growth areas. It requires us to be specific during the plan making process on scale and massing of an area – and it could be quite contentious. What the parameters will be needs establishing. We usually deal with it at application stage – the proposal would bring it forward to the local plan making stage.

KTNF: Following a recent review, we feel that the scope and ambitions of our Neighbourhood Plan are still relevant. What is the view of the Council? Would Camden see it as advantageous or necessary for the plan to be updated in the new planning environment?

Brian: It is five years in the Autumn since the Kentish Town Plan was adopted. The matters it addresses are still relevant and consistent with the Local Plan and NPPF so it isn't out of date in those terms. Potentially the current and future changes to the planning system are more of an issue and might generate the need for a review. There's a lot of uncertainty. A Planning Bill is in the Queens Speech but it is likely that a lot of the detail will be in secondary legislation and the final wording will be key.

Brian: Any plan from the council or forum has to be in line with national legislation. With national policy you can argue that local circumstances mean you can take a different approach. Camden's Local Plan was adopted in 2017 and we are looking to update it. It is a difficult time as we know change is coming but we don't know what it will be or when it will happen. It would be best to wait and see and take stock when things are clearer, then have another look at whether to update the neighbourhood plan. Camden would be willing to support you through any review. If you decide not to review, then that's OK too – it's your choice.

Judith Leeb: Any news on the Regis Road estate?

Dan: There are no immediate plans. It is different to Murphy's – Regis Road is in ten different land ownerships including Camden Council and a consortium at the Northern end. It is a complex site. The Kentish Town Framework says there must be a comprehensive redevelopment of the site. We need to work with the landowners to make that happen. One of the complexities is that UPS has the single biggest site. It is a mile from central London. There is huge demand. For the council it is good to include UPS in any scheme but from their point of view there is not much incentive to do that. We are looking at it – but there is no planning application imminent.

Judith Leeb: There is worry about the Murphy site – will people live there, rather than the homes being bought by investors? Will people live there or will it be like Kings Cross with too many apartments bought by investors.

Dan: It is a hard thing to control. There is concern in London about new residential marketed abroad. Islington looked at the Buy to Leave phenomenon a while ago. A Camden priority is to make it a family friendly borough. There has been a net loss of people in the 25-45 age group. Family housing is important.

Ian Grant: Any update on the digital pilot from MHCLG, and the possibility of training Neighbourhood Forums in digital planning?

Dan: We have received funding. We are looking at digital site notices – making planning consultations more accessible. We are also helping the government on guidance to improve digital innovation through the planning process. I will check where the project has got to and an interesting thing for us to look at.

Paul Seviour: With regards to affordable housing on Murphy's site at the recent forum, they referred to 35% affordable as a target – it worried people. Anything Camden can do to cement that percentage?

On the GLAs affordable housing programme. They have got a chunk of money. Would Camden procure affordable grant from GLA to 50%. More development set aside to make it affordable – there is less chance of buy to leave.

Dan: Developers forget our target is 50%, because the London Plan is fast track threshold is 35% that has become a threshold that developers aim for. We are doing all we can to secure at least 35%. An example is Camden Goods Yard – after it got permission, it went to 38%. We will have discussions with the GLA as they have grants they have to spend.