

MEETING NOTES: SOUTHWARK LAND COMMISSION MEETING TWO

Date: 28th March 2023

Time: 09:00 – 12:00

Venue: Peckham Levels, 95A Rye Lane, SE15 4ST

Attendees:

Commission members: Miatta Fahnbulleh (Chair), Cllr James McAsh (co-chair), Anna Minton, Mark Brearley, Peter Elliot, Henrietta Moore, Chris Brown, Janine Rowe, Jonathan Sedgwick, Akwesi Osei, Anood Al-Samerai, Tim Borrie, Cedric Whillby, Dolly Oladini, Shade Abdul, Chris Brown (online; for the first hour), Henrietta Moore (online; for the first hour)

Advisor: Neil McInroy (online)

Project team - Daniel Partridge, Chris Paddock, Malavika Krishnan (PRD), Holly Lewis (We Made That), Phillip Villars (PMV Planning)

Council representatives – Joseph Brown, Danny Edwards, Alix Macfarlane
Cllr Kieron Williams (introductory speech)

Apologies: Stephen Gaskell (Southwark council)

1. WELCOME AND RE-CAP ON ACTIONS

The chair set the aim of the meeting and did a re-cap on actions noted from SLC meeting one, followed by roundtable introductions of attendees.

Cllr Kieron Williams, Leader of Southwark Council gave a welcome address and opened the session. An overview of the aims and ambitions of Southwark 2030 were discussed with some of the key positives and challenges that came from the Southwark 2030 conversations. The key points from Cllr Williams are summarised as follows:

Positive aspects:

- Passion for green spaces, public and physical spaces were mentioned as a positive aspect of the borough.
- 3,000 New council homes are being built or in construction phase and the firmness of the council on social and affordable housing policies.
- The borough has fantastic green spaces which were being amplified through programs like the Great Estates Program. Burgess Park was mentioned as a successful example.
- New transport links – train stations across the borough are being transformed as a community asset.
- Economy – improvements in employment opportunities.

Challenges:

- The continued rise in construction costs which results in the need for securing money to build enough council homes in council land.
- Improved use of school sites
- Council land ownership was mentioned as facing challenges which might result in the need to sell out in the future.

- Cllr Williams also reiterated the importance of having other landowners present in the room from organisations such as faith, NHS, TFL. The need for creating better partnerships with other landowners was mentioned as a priority to allow for more sites for affordable homes, genuine democratic community spaces, improved green and blue spaces.
- Identifying big priorities but also recommendations that are practical and achievable was mentioned as a hope for the outcomes of the land commission. Long term thinking is needed to address some of the challenges at the borough but also the national level and to address the broken land system in the country.

Cllr. Williams ended the session introduction with a thank you note to commissioners for their time and effort.

The Chair opened the floor for questions to Cllr. Williams. The questions raised were on the themes of priorities for the land commission, the ways in which recommendations can be taken forward and implemented, addressing issues on inequalities and gentrification, vacant homes and Airbnb usage rates and allowing for more local voice in the processes.

The response from Cllr Williams is summarised below in the following points:

- Recommendations should be practical and doable and not end with great ideas.
- Need to think better ways to implement changes taking advantage of the substantial capital program that council has.
- Think about actions for the future.
- The importance of involving partnerships.
- The challenges around inequalities in the borough and thinking about ways of closing the gaps will be a starting point for the commission.
- Recommendations should reflect clear land uses that are most beneficial for the community and society.
- The borough has access to many things (such as parks, hospitals, town centres) but acknowledging the importance of thinking through some of the weaknesses.
- Commitment from the council to develop a much stronger neighbourhood centric development model.
- Ensuring that less heard voices are heard and listened to.
- Securing sub-market housing for social renting, spaces for community uses through partnerships with key landowners like faith organisations to create opportunities for VCS and other charity organisations to have affordable spaces to operate.
- There are too many vacant homes. Airbnb usage is a real challenge.

The Chair summarised the discussion by setting out clear ambitions for the recommendations including clear priorities for the commission, adding value to the national debate and national policies, a strong push is needed on implementation and follow through of the recommendations and involving community voice in the process. Chair ended the session by thanking Cllr Williams for his time and clear responses.

Comfort and coffee break.

2. EXTENDED WORK PLAN PRESENTED BY CLLR JAMES MCASH, CO-CHAIR OF THE SESSION.

Cllr McAsh presented an updated proposal for the extension of the SLC sessions and community stakeholder engagement as put forward in the preceding meeting (SLC One).

The proposed program change is outlined as follows:

- **SLC board meeting and engagement dates** (As known at present and subject to change)
- **First SLC meeting:**
Tuesday 28 February 2023
- *Before second meeting:*
Four community engagement workshops held across the borough
- **Second SLC meeting:**
Tuesday 28 March 2023
- *Before third meeting:*
Further stakeholder group engagement, for example landowners and political groups
- **Third SLC meeting:**
Tuesday 25 April 2023 – initial recommendations to be agreed
- *Before fourth meeting:*
Community engagement on initial recommendations
- **Fourth SLC meeting:**
Late May or early June 2023 – final main meeting, recommendations to be agreed at this session
- *Following fourth SLC meeting:*
Recommendations will go to Southwark Council Cabinet
- **Possible Fifth SLC meeting:**
September or October 2023 – review meeting to reflect on recommendations and implementation plans as well as to reflect on the long-term needs for / role of a SLC based on the outcomes from the sessions prior.

The commission members welcomed the proposal to extend the program and consensus was achieved on the proposed program outline subject to diarising the dates based on availability and other obligations.

Commission member Anood Al-Samerai put forth the need for commission members to have more in-depth conversations and proposed sub-groups to function as focus groups to take on priorities.

It was also suggested by some members of the commission to involve wider call for evidence to allow for more structured observations from community and not limit the engagement to workshops.

3. LESSONS LEARNED FROM LIVERPOOL'S LAND COMMISSION

Via Teams, Neil McInroy reflected on practical issues and challenges experienced in Liverpool, with a focus on lessons learned from overcoming barriers in the Liverpool Land Commission.

SLC members to reflect on these messages and to start to reflect on the SLC's own opportunities to act.

The key points from Neil's presentation are summarised below.

- Neil echoed the challenges with English Planning Law and applauded Southwark’s initiative to set up the land commission.
- The two commissions have obvious differences, with the Liverpool Commission comprised of the city region, which comprised of six local authorities. It was an independent commission and spoke to the Mayor of Liverpool.
- The commission comprised of 13 members from different walks of life ranging from social entrepreneurs, campaigners etc.
- The focus was on public and socially owned land, and also looked at historical injustices linked to the slave trade and commodification of land. Historical frame allowed for the commission to explore deep rooted issues of land.
- The commission looked at ownership and stewardship of land as two core principles.
- Democratisation of planning processes was also mentioned as a major priority in order to allow for the citizens of Liverpool to have a much bigger say in planning structures.
- The main recommendations from the Liverpool Commission were:
 - a) A new framework or mindset of culture to think differently about land.
 - b) Four pathways of change namely, community ownership and management; public ownership of land that marks out socio-economic benefits; private ownership to transition to a more publicly or community ownership; extending the frameworks in place from Section 106 and using it to provide more socio-economic-environmental benefits in case of private ownership.
 - c) Citizens’ Observatory to have more democratisation of planning structures.
 - d) Permanency of the commission
- The recommendations were submitted to the Mayor’s office in Liverpool.
- The process was mentioned as an iterative one and will take time to evolve and solidify.
- It was also noted that the commission was precise on the scope of the work to be about “land” as it is a land commission and had differentiated itself from housing or regeneration commission. It was about land first and foremost.

The chair opened the session to take questions from commission members. Cllr James McAsh noted that the Liverpool Commission is an important precedent for Southwark to learn from rather than trying to re-invent the wheel from scratch.

The questions focussed on the follow up on recommendations made, addressing inequalities and fair distribution of land, working around traditional planning systems, lobbying for change in the English Planning Law, barrier of legal systems and the key changes the Southwark commission should be lobbying for.

Neil McInroy’s response is summarised as follows:

- It is possible to penetrate deeper to find practical recommendations and actions given the fact that the council is part of the process.
- He acknowledged that a lot of the recommendations have not been taken forward.
- It was noted that the planning system is often not conscious of historical legacies and in his view inept in its approaches. There are also challenges with councils being underfunded, and the developer community sticking to tried and tested process.
- The Liverpool Commission gave a lot of prominence to community land trusts and issues of reparations towards excluded and minority communities, however what has been achieved is still minimum.
- It was noted that “Our Land” is a markup of the injustices done and pathways for change.

- A Citizen's Assembly and permanency of the Land Commission were mentioned as steps that could democratise planning.
- The commission started with community wealth building and using ownership / stewardship of land as a precursor; and narrow it down to the fundamental challenge of land.
- It was reflected that the Liverpool Commission should have engaged with council and local authorities much earlier and invested more time on this.

The Chair ended the discussion by noting the key points from the discussion as land stewardship/ ownership, providing pathways for change, citizen stewardship of the planning process and confronting the barriers to change up front.

4. FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY ORGANISATION ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Holly Lewis, Director, We Made That provided an overview of the feedback from community engagement workshops and discussed key messages coming through.

Following this, Dan Partridge, Director, PRD provided an update on feedback from the engagement workshop with Southwark Youth Parliament.

The commission members reflected on the feedback on engagement and the following points were highlighted during the discussion.

- The workshops should have had more representation from BAME communities (ideally), and preference for future engagement is to reach more targeted audiences, especially less heard voices.
- It was noted that the Commission cannot address some of the inequalities directly such as housing affordability or gentrification but needs to be a bridge to shape and address these concerns through changes in land use. The genesis of the conversation should be about land.
- There was also consensus on proactive management to ensure that the unintended consequences of some of the recommendations does not lead to more gentrification in the borough.
- The Commission should focus on enhancing the capacity of communities to understand and reflect better on planning decisions made.
- There were also points made about local letting policies but conscious of the fact that they should not become instruments to make the mistakes of the past. Examples of policies in Bermondsey that would today be considered by many as racist were noted.

The Chair summarised the discussion as the need for diversity of representation in engagement, tools to address and prevent gentrification as an unintended consequence and to identify some quick wins.

Holly Lewis noted that focused engagement of less-heard voices was the initial plan proposed for the engagement and this was later changed to capture more a wider audience and place-based conversations. She also welcomed the notion of having future engagements to address these concerns.

5. LEARNING FROM PRECEDENTS

Due to time constraints, this agenda point was decided to be taken up in the next SLC session.

6. EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ACT

The members of the Commission and other participants were divided into two smaller groups to:

- Reflect on a shorter version of the longlist draft principles from the last session and to collectively debate; and
- Start to develop the longlist of emerging recommendations and opportunities to act.

The Chair defined the discussion to be within the framework of three 'buckets': Land use; process and policies, and tools.

7. CLOSING COMMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

The chair closed the meeting by acknowledging the progress made in the session, especially on developing the principles and starting the long list of recommendations.

The following points were provided as summary:

- The notion of introducing a working group to work on the recommendation was proposed to crystallise this ahead of the next meeting. A shared working document will be prepared to work on the recommendations and add more inputs from the members.
- Process and programme to be extended as discussed with more community engagement built in.
- Important lessons learned from community engagement feedback however there is always a possibility to improve.
- Success in the next meeting will be to understand what is stretching but possible and practical and to innovate around it. More conversations with stakeholders and partners will take place ahead of the next session.

Sub-groups were proposed to address two aspects:

1. On refining principles
2. Power mapping key partners and community groups

The session ended at 12: 15pm.

Further actions:

- Extend the process and diarise SLC 4; and potentially SLC 5
- Extend community engagement, decisions to be made on the approach and focus.
- Opportunities to be made for SLC Members to be engaged on a 121 basis.
- Sub-groups to be formed by the commission members on refining principles and power mapping key stakeholders to engage early on a need basis, based on the 1-2-1 conversations with co-chair.
- Refine and add to the long list of recommendations under the framework of land use, process, policies, and tools.

Further actions for PRD/WMT:

- Draft and share working document to be shared with members to work collaboratively on the long list of recommendations.
- Formulate and propose approaches on community engagement.
- Summarise findings from internal and external stakeholder engagement.
- Share information on sites to be discussed in the next meeting.
- Provide support with sub-groups if required.
- PRD to liaise with council to program and diarise SLC 4 (and potentially 5) and finalise arrangements for SLC 3.

Further Actions to follow up from Council:

- Arrange 1-2-1 conversations with the co-chair and members of commission.
- Overview of the sample sites to be discussed in the next session.
- Discuss some of the practical barriers as well as opportunities for landing recommendations.