**DRAFT MINUTES OF SHRNF PUBLIC MEETING, 1 JUNE 2021**

Chair: Barry Kidson

Councillors in attendance: Liam Curran (Lewisham) and Andy Simmons (Southwark)

The Chair opened the meeting and asked for comments on agenda Item 1.

**Agenda item 1: Draft SHRNF response to Lewisham Small Sites Consultation**

Jan Morrison addressed Cllr Curran, pointing out that the white strips, that appear on the map close to Sydenham Hill and which go through both Lewisham council estates, are related to the putative 800m from railway station, which is supposed to be either PTAL3[[1]](#footnote-1) or within 800m of Sydenham Hill railway station. In the case of the Sydenham Hill Ridge Area, she stated no account had been taken of the steep hills to be climbed in order to be within 800m of the station. Access to the station from the ridge, within 800m, was by foot only as cycles are not allowed on Rock Hill or Lowcross Wood Lane, and it would be extremely difficult to take a buggy or a wheelchair on either of them. Access by car is via a detour, and continuous use of cars would inevitably increase pollution and congestion. She asked Cllr Curran to address the issue of the topography of the SHRNF area with Lewisham Council.

The Chair asked Cllr Simmons about Southwark’s design guide for small sites development. Cllr Simmonds thought there may be an existing one but that it had not been revised. He advised Southwark Council had a Dulwich Area Plan which tended to address medium and larger sites; eg the Grove Tavern proposed development, about which, he reported, there were ongoing and lively debates.

Cllr Curran advised that Lewisham’s small-sites consultation was part of the development of the Lewisham Local Plan, a requirement under the London Plan, which in turn required Lewisham to find almost 4k (out of 16k) dwellings on small sites. Hence, Lewisham was looking for small sites for appropriate development. He reminded the meeting that a small site had been defined as less than 0.25 hectares (visualised as one third the size of a football pitch).

Jan Morrison asked Cllr Curran if the postponement of Bakerloo line extension would impact the housing target, and enquired whether it was correct that, for the tube extension to proceed, Lewisham would have to state they would accelerate the housing number targets for the area. Councillor Curran replied it was “the other way round”, in that he, in collaboration with the Sydenham Society, had been actively lobbying long-term for the extension. He pointed out that the extension of the tube line necessitated agreement of all the local authorities along any extension, and that Bromley Council’s policy of resistance was the factor causing the delay. He was hoping the weight of government support would ensure the Bakerloo extension was built, which he believed was a “relatively easy win in terms of sustainable transport”, as there was an existing line and sites along the proposed extension, including in Lewisham & Bromley, that could be developed. He stated that there was “nothing stopping the Bell Green situation except money & progress”. He stated that, on the other hand, if the extension were announced, everything would change; it would “be like switching on a light bulb”.

Pat Trembath asked was the London Plan, as applied by Lewisham, not out of date in terms of the post-pandemic demographics of London, especially in terms of assessing residential and commercial need. Cllr Curran responded that the Plan was an ongoing process, which, once it reached an end, began again. He agreed that the unknown consequences for post-pandemic demographics would be important to assess but that it was “above his pay grade” and such decisions would be taken by London and national government.

Monica Mitchell believed London’s housing requirements had diminished in the light of Brexit, and David Begley supported both speakers in relation to changing demographics, adding that the government was considering moving businesses, offices, manufacturing, and people out of London. He felt such profound changes necessitated a complete rethink.

Cllr Simmons replied that Southwark was very much focussed on its own public land and on council-house building, and, so, it was looking for small sites on council estates. In relation to demographics, he stated Southwark was examining school-place requirements, the need for which had dramatically changed in past 20-odd years. Past mistakes, he believed, eg the loss of schools leading to unfulfilled need, should be avoided. In addition, he emphasised there was currently a desperate housing shortage and that every local authority had thousands of families in need of appropriate housing.

Mary McKernan weighed in on this issue, insisting that the London Plan was “fighting an old war”, and that the need now and going into the future was for family houses with gardens and amenity spaces. Targeting small sites on council estates would deprive them of vital common, amenity, and green space. A pause and a post-pandemic rethink were vital in her opinion. She added that Lewisham’s examination of industrial space for accommodation was the kind of thinking required if Lewisham were not to become a “dormitory town”. Also, redundant office blocks could be used for housing purposes.

She also wanted to add her voice to the argument about the importance of taking into account the topography and geology of the Sydenham Hill ridge; an understanding of “why the trees are here” was crucial.

Pat Trembath commented that the lack of infrastructure, eg in terms of schools and GP surgeries, in the SHRNF area, was an urgent issue. It was **AGREED** to discuss this matter at the first meeting of the new SHRNF Committee.

Dave Colling asked the Chair how the SHRNF response on small sites was to be finalised. The Chair confirmed that the SHRNF Committee would finalise the current draft response, after reworking it in the light of all the comments made at this meeting.

John Hedley asked both councillors whether local authorities were looking at redundant office space being converted to residential. Patsy Bramble offered a supplementary to John Hedley’s query, asking was currently empty accommodation being considered for refurbishment as housing.

Cllr Curran said the future availability of most **office-space**, largely privately owned, was difficult to predict. Lewisham had a flexible approach to as and when such sites might become available, which would make targets easier to achieve. In relation to **empty homes**, he responded that Lewisham was very alert to these, having a very low rate of voids in its own housing, and had appointed a dedicated officer to chase up on both empty, privately-owned and housing-association homes. He reported that Lewisham was keen to develop **council estates but** only if appropriate. He felt that, sometimes, Lewisham had been “over enthusiastic” in doing so. He had been part of the opposition to the extra homes on the Hillcrest Estate, which he believed wholly inappropriate, especially in respect of springs etc. The Scotland-based architects for that development, who had never visited the site, had not even realised it was on a hill. He was of the strong opinion that, where inappropriate, such proposals should be opposed. However, he felt it right for Lewisham to seek such sites, but, in reality, he felt few were appropriate.

Cllr Curran stated that good points had been made at this meeting which he hoped would be incorporated into the SHRNF response. He wished to further to accentuate that collaborating with other amenity and civic societies, which some groups had already organised, was important. He emphasised that a coordinated response from SHRNF, with a coherent and well-argued case to inspector, would be crucial.

Patsy Bramble had come across, during research for the campaign against the proposed development of Mais House on Sydenham Hill, a figure of around 2k empty properties in Lewisham. Cllr Curran did not know of such a figure and counselled caution about such numbers, some of which might well be turnover, ie properties empty only temporarily.

The Chair brought the discussion to a close, asking that further comments be submitted to SHRNF in writing in order to achieve Cllr Curran’s recommended outcome of a fully coordinated and coherent response.

**Agenda item 2: Preliminary analysis of response to SHRNF Early Engagement Community Survey**

Initial thoughts/comments on this survey had been distributed to members in advance of the meeting.

David Morrison pointed out that the response had overwhelmingly indicated support for maintaining the SHRNA’s green spaces and broad opposition to development.

Jan Morrison commented on the survey’s lack of engagement with residents of council estates, noting that 67% of housing in the Sydenham Hill Ridge area is social housing. In her personal attempts to involve estates she found a general nervousness in relation to matters of literacy and ability to articulate opinions fully. She emphasised to the meeting the importance of future SHRNF surveys making much greater efforts to involve those living on council estates.

Stephen Weil wished to add that the survey had indicated concerns beyond the natural and built environment, ie the inadequacy of infrastructure on Sydenham Hill; eg lack of accessibility of Sydenham Hill railway station (steep hill from Ridge to station); quality of lighting, play spaces, benches, signs etc. He agreed the results might have been skewed toward a certain type of ownership, and that it would be interesting to learn how a different type of ownership might respond.

Pat Trembath felt strongly that the survey had not canvassed certain important issues, and that the Lewisham SSD consultation had been a “desk-top job”, taking no account of the crucial aspects of a ridge site, such as hydrography (numerous streams) and topography (steep slopes). She was very concerned the area could not cope with the level of development, and that what she saw as a high-handed attitude to building had ignored the fact that developments were proposed down the slope, where water problems had been caused by those higher on the ridge.

Dave Colling did not understand why the survey had been so long and complex. His personal experience of consumer surveys had demonstrated that a more effective response from a wider cross-section of responders was gleaned when fewer, clearer questions and multiple-choice answers were offered. He recommended this approach for future surveys.

As there were no further comments, the Chair asked for any further comments and contributions on this matter to be submitted in writing to the SHRNF Committee. He also wished to emphasise that local-engagement was an ongoing process, particularly in relation to the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

As no other business was raised, the Chair thanked everyone for attending and for their inputs, especially the councillors for their helpful direction to the Forum moving forward, and drew the meeting to a close.

1. Public Transport Access Level. See p6 of Mayor of London/Transport for London guide, *Assessing Transport Connectivity in London*, April 2015; https://content.tfl.gov.uk/connectivity-assessment-guide.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)