

Somers Town Plan: summary and recommendations

Camden Blueprint Project

September 30th 2011

Camden Community Empowerment Network (CamdenCEN) is a network that brings together and supports the voluntary and community sector in planning and strategic decision making within the borough of Camden.

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Following a seminar about the Localism Bill hosted by Voluntary Action Camden (VAC) in March 2011 a number of attendees expressed an interest in setting up planning projects in their neighbourhoods. In response VAC is now working with some of those groups to explore how neighbourhood planning could work in Camden. The project is called Camden Blueprint. We will be trying out 'how to do things', learning, and sharing the findings.

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Somers Town Plan: recommendations

The first Somers Town planning event took place on September 30th at Somers Town community Centre. The aim of the event was to define the neighbourhood, identify local priorities and debate the type of forum that should lead a planning project.

These recommendations are based on the information gathered at the event and are intended only as a means to get started. The emerging forum will need to be open and able to change as more people get involved.

Neighbourhood boundaries:

North: Oakley Square south side, Crowndale Road – Pancras Road.

South: Euston Road.

West: Eversholt Street.

East: Midland Road.

With possible additions that could be decided at a first forum meeting: Euston Station, Amptill Estate (west) and St Pancras Station (east).

Neighbourhood forum:

1 ward councillor (or 3 rotating); 13 residents; Somerstown Community Centre; New Horizon Youth Centre; Age UK; 1 voluntary sector health rep; 1 faith rep; 1 voluntary sector BME rep; 2 local businesses; British Library; Francis Crick Institute; Origin Housing; Safer Neighbourhoods Team or police; schools rep.

Total 27

Rationale: the boundaries are based on the most commonly identified streets. The two stations mentioned above serve as shopping areas for some residents and give access to safe cash point machines. Whilst Eversholt Street was seen as a natural western boundary approximately 40% of participants felt that Amptill Estate should be included in the neighbourhood.

The forum recommendations are based on the most frequently identified members. Resident members should reflect geographical area and include Somali and Bangladeshi residents, older people and young people. With the high emphasis participants placed on community safety it would also make sense to involve a resident who is a member of the local Safer Neighbourhood Panel. A couple of business members were suggested: one from Chalton Street and a local

coffee shop owner. It was felt that they were people who would get involved so would be a good place to start with engaging local business.

In addition to the above recommendations Camden Central Community Umbrella was cited as a good example of inclusive and cooperative working in the area. This should be explored for guidance.

Advisers and co-optees: the results of the forum workshops point to the same approach recommended after a similar planning event in Bloomsbury. A database should be started with essential advisers like borough planning officers. For the time being VAC can develop that database to service the two projects.

Bank of resources: the drop-in nature of the event made it difficult to spend any time promoting this idea. A few offers were made, including design skills and leafleting. This can be picked up and developed through future activities.

Outreach work: this is essential over the coming months for the forum to reflect the local population. Bangladeshi and Somali residents, local mosque, churches etc. Outreach work could also be progressed through working groups.

Working groups: to involve more people, explore local priorities more thoroughly and guide the development of the forum. A planning and development group and a governance and management group would be a good start. But other groups related to the priorities could also be set up (see section on working groups).



Somers Town Plan: priorities

Participants were asked to list their top three priorities for the neighbourhood. The intention was to establish why people were interested in developing a neighbourhood plan. It should also be noted that in discussions leading up to this event the planning process was identified as being important for bringing people together and contributing as much to desired outcomes as a plan would.

The event consisted of two targeted workshops and one open session. The targeted workshops meant that some priorities received additional weight from these groups. For example children's activities and services, and community safety and lack of shops accumulated disproportionate points from parents of under 5s and older people respectively.

Taking that into consideration the most popular themes that emerged were:

- 1. Jobs and training.**
- 2. Safe and clean environment.**
- 3. Housing and services.**

Priorities were frequently linked by participants. It was felt that more jobs would address anti-social behaviour, more local shops would create jobs and serve community needs, any new development should be linked directly to creating local jobs and training etc.



Discussion about priorities revealed more complexity than the lists of priorities suggest. For example 'community safety' covered a range of issues from road traffic to street lighting to street crime, whilst housing priorities included supply and quality but also related to services and wider public realm. Issues surrounding healthy living and wellbeing embrace both areas of concern. We have gathered the priorities in to broad themes which could form the basis for working groups to develop more tangible planning priorities. At the same time the groups could expand their membership and involve more of the community in the planning project.



Working groups

The working groups are suggested initially as a way to progress the project without having to repeat the workshop activities. There is a large residential population in Somers Town. Informal groups carrying out varied, interesting activities may have a better chance of engaging people than repeating the same workshops. The event on 30th September gathered enough information to get started. Suggested working groups are:

Planning and development: to focus on development pressures and other plans affecting the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood planning groups will need to understand how the planning framework for the borough affects their area and how to work with it. In Camden a place shaping process is also underway. Place shaping plans provide a more strategic vision than neighbourhood plans.

They cover a bigger area that is likely to experience development and change. Somers Town is included in the Kings Cross place shaping plan so this is an opportunity to develop a complementary approach where neighbourhood planning contributes to the bigger vision and vice versa.

Governance and management: to develop the neighbourhood forum.

During the workshops some participants suggested that Camden Central Community Umbrella / the single regeneration budget (SRB) partnership board had been a successful representative forum in the area. It was also large, but still managed to reach consensus and get things done. A governance and management group could explore this model for a smaller area and work to establish the planning forum or group.

Themed groups: groups that can start to develop planning priorities. In addition to the themes that emerged at the event there are other groups that could initiate activities e.g. the young people's project at Somerstown Community Centre, the healthy living project at the Francis Crick Institute.

Outreach: to BME communities and other hidden voices in the area.



Suggested next steps:

**An informal report back meeting / drop in to set up
working groups**

**Young people's work to establish priorities, ideas
about the neighbourhood and how young people
want to be involved in the longer term**

Agree an outreach work strategy and actions

The workshop transcripts from the event are available on our website at:
www.camdencen.org.uk/meetings.htm#STown

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