

NORWOOD ACTION GROUP - PUBLIC MEETING 13 MARCH 2014

LOCALISM – NEXT STEPS

Graham Pycock, NAG Treasurer and Localism spokesman

- 1) The public meeting held on the 9th September in the Chatsworth Baptist Church Hall and called jointly by NAG and the Norwood Forum (NF), was attended by over 200 people. Objections to the planning application for housing at Tulse Hill in Avenue Park Road were endorsed by the meeting together with opposition to “intensification” and tall buildings as proposed in the draft local plan. The meeting also agreed to the setting up of a “Neighbourhood Planning Forum” under the Localism Act to give Norwood people a real say in future planning and developments. The meeting was told that Lambeth Council was developing an alternative to Neighbourhood Planning Forums which would be quicker and less bureaucratic than the statutory route.
- 2) NAG has an action plan for taking “localism” forward and progress has been monitored on the council’s “localism lite” version. The cabinet has agreed a policy that local areas can create a “Co-operative Local Investment Plan” or “CLIP”. This would be funded by 25% of the “Local Infrastructure Levy”. This is the levy on developers based on the value of the development, which can be spent by the council on roads, schools etc. This matches the 25% available by law to a Neighbourhood Planning Forum when it is set up. The arrangements and powers for the council’s alternative body have not yet been published. Should the council “localism lite” model be developed and promoted by the council, then this will be examined and put to a public meeting for consideration.
- 3) The Lambeth Council cabinet has approved on the 10th February the designation of the South Bank and Waterloo Neighbourhood Forum under the Localism Act. This is an unusual proposal as it is employer-led and straddles both Lambeth and Southwark. Essentially the forum is now official and the members can commence producing their local plan with the assistance of council officers. Nationally, there are now neighbourhood plans already voted on and in place and some local authorities have adopted a policy of encouraging local people to set up neighbourhood forums.
- 4) The meeting is invited to scrutinise and comment on the proposals below which are the next steps to creating a West Norwood Neighbourhood Planning Forum. The meeting will also be asked at the end formally to agree or not to these proposals. There are four matters to determine. Firstly there are some principles of conduct,

which it is felt should guide the process. Secondly it is suggested that the area to be designated will correspond to the three wards of Knights Hill, Thurlow Park and Gipsy Hill. Thirdly an outline is proposed of a constitution. Fourthly an initial “shopping list” of possible issues is suggested. This tentative list contains some possible issues/sites which might merit local debate, so as to develop items for eventual inclusion in a Neighbourhood Plan. Finally, there will be a vote on whether these proposals should be worked up with the council and submitted with a request to designate a West Norwood Neighbourhood Planning Forum.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

- PROCEED BY CONSENSUS
- WIDEN PARTICIPATION
- INFORMED DECISIONS FOLLOWING SUITABLE ADVICE
- ALL THE TALENTS – ALL PARTY
- WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO NORWOOD PEOPLE
- A DUTY OF CANDOUR

DESIGNATION OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

Norwood is a town centre which has an identity and is regarded by the council as distinct. There is a Norwood Masterplan which is used as the working guidance on planning matters. This contains detailed policies which are within the three local government wards of Knights Hill, Thurlow Park and Gipsy Hill. The population is about 30,000. West Norwood is classified as a “district centre” according to the London plan. There was in existence for ten years a council-defined Area Committee of the nine councillors from these wards which was part of the council’s constitution. This was the “Norwood Area Committee”. The Lambeth wards next door (Streatham Wells, Streatham Hill and Tulse Hill) fitted into the Streatham and Brixton area committees. There has been no suggestion that wards in Bromley or Croydon should link with West Norwood. It should be noted however that cross-boundary liaison between the boroughs is frequently an important issue which a Norwood planning forum should allow for.

There are community groups which have long operated on the basis of West Norwood, of which Norwood Action Group is an obvious example. The Norwood Forum represents a continuity of local voluntary activity over several years and fits into a network of forums across the borough corresponding to town centres. West Norwood is a community which easily identifies itself as such. The area is distinctive with landmarks and features such as St Luke’s Church and West Norwood Cemetery. The West Norwood

train station is more or less at the centre of the area and it is this train station which gave the area its name (before the station it was known as Lower Norwood). The ribbon development of shops along the High Street and Norwood Road runs north – south through the middle. This follows the valley of the Effra River (now underground) in which the town sits, with hills sloping down to the Norwood Road axis. West Norwood is an area which has administrative, community and geographical identity. It is proposed that the West Norwood Neighbourhood Planning Forum should comprise the three wards of Knights Hill, Thurlow Park and Gipsy Hill.

CONSTITUTION FOR “QUALIFYING BODY STATUS”

Under the 2011 Localism Act, the neighbourhood planning forum must comprise at least 21 people and must include at least one person living in the area, one working in the area and one councillor. More significantly it must reflect the “inclusivity, diversity and character of the area”. As with designation of the actual geographical area, this qualifying body status must be approved by Lambeth Council. There is already in existence a list of people interested in joining the planning forum and it is unlikely that finding the necessary 21 would be difficult. The requirement for broad representation and the principle of widening participation however is critical and it may be important to create ex-officio places for local groups. In any case it would be logical to include representatives from both NAG and NF. The emergent planning forum is probably too big to carry out specific tasks but not broad enough for full accountability to Norwood people.

To combine effective working with as wide an involvement as possible it is proposed to adopt an executive and assembly model. The original meeting in September 2013 can be interpreted as giving a mandate to set up a planning forum. The meeting was actually a joint enterprise of both NAG and NF. The large turnout was achieved by their joint efforts. It is suggested that such a combined meeting with its broad representation should provide an assembly to give oversight of the planning forum. Approval would be needed from this NAG/NF assembly for key decisions and proposals. Given the open membership of the two groups this assembly is also a means by which any Norwood citizen can get involved and hold the planning forum to account. In any case NAG or Norwood Forum can raise planning forum issues in their routine meetings. The assembly would be convened at least once each year and would be chaired by the NAG and NF chairman alternately. There is thus an assembly chairman independent of the planning forum.

There is a great deal of work to be done in producing a neighbourhood plan. There are several stages leading up to a local referendum. In practice there are several planning and development issues and particular sites in Norwood which need consensus solutions to complex problems. Help is at hand in that once the council has approved the designated area and the

forum becomes a qualified body, then the “duty to support” applies and advice and assistance becomes available from council officers. Given the technical complexity of developing a comprehensive plan and the unique circumstances of different sites, a division of labour is essential. People who are suitably interested, informed and skilful should tackle relevant tasks. It is proposed therefore that the planning forum itself is essentially an executive body with an elected chairman and deputy and officers elected for specific tasks. Thus the forum gets the work done and the NAG/NF assembly has oversight and holds the planning forum to account.

SHOPPING LIST OF ISSUES

- AVENUE PARK ROAD: objecting to unsatisfactory applications and devising a local planning brief.
- PLANNING WATCH: Monitoring planning applications and posting alerts to possible problems.
- LAMBETH LOCAL PLAN: Supporting NAG objections and monitoring progress.
- NORWOOD HIGH STREET: Highlighting neglect and proposing suitable development planning policy.
- BIG YELLOW VACANT SITE: Overturning KIBA status and proposing suitable use.
- IDENTIFY ALL THE ISSUES ON THE FULL SHOPPING LIST

5TH March 2014