More Croydonisation of Bromley?

Westmoreland Road Car Park development (Opportunity Site K)

Public consultation exhibition 8th to 15th July in Library Gardens by the Central Library

Developers – Cathedral Group
Co-developer and landowner – Bromley Council

Being also Chair of the Friends of the Town Parks I was shocked to see this exhibition in a hideous storage container plonked in our own Library Gardens. Normally the Friends are consulted by Parks department but, in this case, the Gardens were apparently commandeered by the Town Centre Development team ultimately responsible for this development without offering this courtesy. There are many concerns arising from this exhibition not least for those residents who will have this massive development in their back yards.

Tony Banfield Chair of BCS

THE CONSULTATION EXHIBITION

On show and online are just six scribbled PR sketches and two block models. From these the public are invited to decide “I like it / I’m not sure / I don’t like it” with no detailed drawings to examine. The developers stress that these are only early stage illustrations and the designs will be refined once public comments are collated. However, no further consultation on the refinements is planned before a final planning application is submitted in September which the developers and co-developers hope will be approved by the Development Control Committee.

The tick box consultation ends 15th July. If you miss the exhibition the same information is available on the website www.thisisbromleysouthcentral.com and comments can be submitted via feedback@thisisbromelybromleysouthcentral.com by the 20th July direct to:

Arlene van Bosch, Development Executive. Cathedral Group plc, St Thomas’s Street, London SE1 9RY

In view of the minimal information presented it is essential to ask questions and we hope this newsletter is useful. The exhibition staff, led by Arlene van Bosch, are very helpful and you can take photos of the model if you wish. Below are some of the aspects which may be of concern.

THE DEVELOPMENT comprises a 100 bed hotel, a 9 screen cinema complex, 200 new dwellings in a curious ‘boot’ shaped tower block, 8 restaurants and a reconfigured car park.

COMMENT: the existing Westmoreland Road Car Park is a pretty hideous throwback to the 60’s and would not be missed provided adequate replacement parking is provided. A hotel is welcome and would be a great asset to the town. Apart from that we have serious concerns about the following:

- the apparent scale and height of the development and its impact on the adjacent and surrounding residential areas, parks and views from the conservation area.
• the consequential closure of the Empire Cinema in the Upper High Street and the impact of that on the economy and life of Bromley North.

• the inadequacy of car parking provision and inevitable pressure and restrictions on local street parking.

• Lack of integration into the townscape

• It seems extraordinary that so little consultation time has been allowed by the Council given the enormity of the development and its many implications.

**ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT:**

**Scale** : The residential element is contained in a massive ‘boot’ shaped tower block about 2.5 times taller than the adjacent RBS and Churchill buildings and well above that of the tower blocks adjacent to the station on the other side of the High Street.

*left: drawing taken from photo of the block model on exhibition*

*Right : diagram traced off from Cathedral’s Illustration available under the counter at the exhibition*

*Below :Existing car park in black line – new development in dotted line – both the same height*

The back wall of the element behind the two storey houses in Newbury Road is said to be the same height as the (already too big) existing car park which is equivalent to seven stories. However the car park is angled away from Newbury Road and only impacts upon four properties at this full height. The proposed building on the other hand, runs the entire length of Newbury Road in a curtain wall at this full height. The ‘toe’ and lowest part of the ‘boot’ tower which also backs onto Newbury Road is equivalent to ten stories high! *(See also above)*

The new residents of the ‘boot’ will enjoy and pay a high premium for the privilege of their penthouse views to the benefit of the developer and co-developer. Whether regarded as a ‘thing of beauty’ or ‘eyesore’, there is no doubt the tower will dominate the Shortlands Valley and its extensive residential
communities who will have to live with it. The residents of Ravensbourne Road will face the full width of it. They and those in adjacent Roads will be most seriously affected.

**The Cinema story:** The assumption that the Empire Cinema in the Upper High Street would close goes back to the first round of the Council’s draft Area Action Plan in 2005 when the site, then the Odeon, and the adjacent Hill car park were earmarked as development “Opportunity Site D”. It was later revealed there were negations between the Odeon, the Council and Sainsburys. Site D, however, was abandoned in the later versions of the draft AAP but the Site K cinema provision was kept in. The Odeon Group had merged with UCI which owned what is now the Beckenham Odeon. The merged group was deemed by government to be a monopoly and the Group were ordered to sell off cinemas and having already intended to dump the Bromley Odeon it was sold off to the newly formed Empire Group who bought, in good faith, with the intention of investing in Bromley by extending from 4 to 7 screens and eventually to 9 and without knowledge of the cinema intentions for Site K.

The Empire Group told the Inspector at the AAP public hearing in 2010 that at no time did the Council ever discuss the future of Empire or even alert them of the Council’s own proposals for a rival multiplex at Bromley South. Once aware of this proposal the Empire group were forced to abandon their expansion proposals and stated they will close if the proposal proceeds.

The official line from the Cathedral Group is that the cinema element of their development is a requirement of Bromley Council not theirs and they would never intentionally wish to harm an existing business. Arlene van Bosch suggested that other leisure facilities could be considered if the Council required it. We are told that Cathedral like the Council have also not discussed the implications of the development with the Empire Group or the Odeon Group regarding the possible impact on the viability of the Beckenham Odeon. We have recommended they do this.

The loss of the Empire and the footfall it brings will be a major blow to the economy of the Upper High Street and Bromley North at a time when the Council has secured a £4.5m grant and is seeking a further grant from the Mayor Of London for the regeneration of the Bromley North area as, ironically, “a thriving and dynamic entertainment area” (Council vision statement).

**Car Parking** : We learned from our questioning the existing 581 car parking space will be reduced to 400 with 100 of those spaces reserved for new residents. The remaining 300 will have to serve both the existing public needs as well as the users of the 100 bed hotel and the 9 screen cinema. Clearly this reduced capacity and increased demand must have an impact on local streets as well as generating increased traffic circulation around the town with motorists seeking alternative parking when this car park is full.

**The Design concept** of the development in its present form is inward looking and self contained. In town planning terms it is very poorly conceived and not helped by being located behind RBS and Churchill building with High Street access only via the uninviting existing alley which isolates the development from the general townscape.

**CONCLUSION** : The proposals seem to confirm our view stated at the AAP public hearing that the target figures for the amount of development on Opportunity Sites when translated into physical reality are unreasonable. The form and content of the development appear to be based upon on maximising financial returns for the co-developers rather than doing what is best for the town or what is appropriate in this location.

Yes, let’s have a mixed development here with a hotel but in a development of sensible proportions and a leisure provision which actually does “extend the range” as the AAP promised and causes no harm to the Bromley North economy.
This development will be there for the next 100 years or so and we owe it to ourselves and future generations to get it right. Whatever conclusion you reach we do urge you to be aware, involved, question and comment while the chance is there.

Other News

AGM

Our AGM on 2nd June was well attended and we were pleased to welcome along representatives of other local residents’ groups. Tony Burton, Director of the Civic Voice was our guest speaker who told us of the work of the Civic Voice which had risen from the ashes of the defunct Civic Trust because of the concerns of groups like ours that there would otherwise be no national body representing the work of amenity societies. Tony had been in direct contact with ministers negotiating changes to the emerging planning reforms and defending heritage. He flagged up the chaotic Localism Bill and confirmed that the impetus to set up neighbourhood groups was in the service of promoting growth rather than planning control. There will be more on this subject in future newsletter since we are all still learning.

Sadly for us but happily for her, Rita Shipley has retired as treasurer and is looking forward to the birth of a new baby. We extend to her and Glen all our good wishes and many thanks to Rita for setting up and managing our finances so well. Many thanks to our faithful committee member, Davina Misroch, for offering her services. Davina was duly elected as the new Treasurer.

Sadly, too, Doug Black has had to give up as Secretary. On behalf of us all I want to thank him for the immense contribution he has made to the Society and the benefit we have had of his expertise as former Conservation officer in Bromley particularly in helping to formulate our responses to the exhausting Area Action Plan consultations. Thankfully Doug has agreed to remain as a consultant. We are very grateful to Rob Bristow for stepping into the breach on the night. Rob has been part of the committee for several years and his expertise as a planner in another London Borough has been and will continue to be invaluable to us.

Festival of Sport / Civic Day

On Sunday 25th June was official Civic Day as set up by Civic Voice. However we decided to celebrate on the 26th and share a stall with the friends of the Parks as par of the Council’s Festival of Sport, organised by Mytime and the Town Centre Management team. We had a prime location outside Marks & Spencer’s. Our joint theme was HERITAGE WALKS – GOOD FOR THE BODY AND THE SOUL !

It was an opportunity to give our comprehensive photo exhibition about old Bromley an airing which attracted much interest and, to support the theme of the day, we produced 50 packs of four self guided walks around the town centre conservation area. These went like hot cakes ! Fortunately Rymans was open and were able to print another 25 packs for us which just saw us through the day.

The walks leaflet are three fold double sided A4.
Walk 1 covers Market Square and the Upper High Street
Walk 2 covers Church Road, martin’s Hill, The Millpond and Church House & Library Gardens
Walk 3 covers North South East and West Streets Tweedy and Widmore Roads  and Bromley College and College Green
Walk 4 is Queens Garden and the Palace Park

These were produced in a rush but after a little cleaning up all members will receive copies soon.
Free day Passes to National Trust and English Heritage properties for our members

These passes are a perk of our membership of Civic Voice. For security reasons you will receive details of how to apply in a separate email if you are on our email list.

Website

We’re aware that our website is well out of date. However this is being taken in hand.

Heritage stuff

HSBC bank has been under wraps for a couple of months but is now revealed freshly painted and partly restored. The building dates from 1887 and exemplifies the Civic Pride that characterised local traders in the late 19th C. As the old photo shows the building was called Town Hall Buildings because it stood opposite and was designed to complement the Town Hall which was demolished in 1930. The developer was David Harris of Covell & Harris, local butchers, grown rich supplying the new developments in Bickley, Chislehurst and Shortlands. The Initials DWH can still be seen in carved brick high up and he occupied the corner shop and let out the other three.

Mr Harris employed architect Arthur Williams who came up with this amazing fantasy, with gothic spires, griffins and trefoils set in what is essentially an Arts & Crafts design. A typical A&C feature is the inclusion of Jacobean decoration under the bay windows repeated again at the nearby Bell Hotel and in Tweedy Road on the old School of Art and Science. There are also details taken from buildings in the low countries which arise because the architects of the A&C movement were harking back to the late 17th c when English architecture, e.g. that of Christopher Wren, was strongly influenced by Flemish architecture. The building is Grade II Listed and part of the National Heritage.

Shorty after Town Hall Buildings, Mr Harris built the Grand Hall and more commonly known as the ‘New Theatre’ where now stands BHS AND employing the same architect. He proudly boasted of having introduced professional theatre to Bromley and what he established lives on in the Churchill Theatre.

HAVE A GOOD SUMMER!

www.bromleycivicsociety.org.uk