

Regeneration Committee site visit to Smithfield market, 3 February 2015 Summary

Attendees

Assembly Members	Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman), Navin Shah AM (Deputy Chair), Murad Qureshi AM	
Assembly staff	Richard Derecki, Jo Sloman, Lisa Lam, Adam Wildman, Martha Mingay, Laura Murray, Alex Henson	
Visiting	Bruce Hunt Greg Williams Paul Beckett Simon McGinn Robert Wilson Mike Johnson Peter Cannon John Absalom	Office of the City Remembrancer Head of Media Policy and Performance Director, Department of the Built Environment Manager CPAT, City Surveyors Superintendent of Smithfield Market Office of the City Remembrancer Corporate Affairs Officer Deputy Chairman, Smithfield Market Tenants Association

Purpose of visit

The Committee visited Smithfield Market to receive a briefing on how the development of the Smithfield could support regeneration in the surrounding area. Members received a presentation on the City of London's plans for the Smithfield/Farringdon area. Members visited the Farringdon area by coach, before receiving a guided tour of Smithfield Market from the Market Superintendent, to learn about the operation of the meat market and the views of the Tenants' Association on plans for redevelopment of the General Market Building on West Smithfield.

The City of London

The City of London Corporation explained the wider context of the area in which the Smithfield site is located.

The importance of the Smithfield site will increase once Crossrail and the Thameslink upgrade are finished. These two major rail routes will interchange at Farringdon station just two minutes' walk from the Smithfield site, which will lead to footfall in the market increasing dramatically and stronger development pressure as the demand for bars, cafes, shops, and other amenities grows. Furthermore, £625 million is being invested in new Tube access points across the City, affecting both Farringdon and Barbican stations. The City of London Corporation reflected that this infrastructure investment has yet to be reflected in local development, given the fact that General Market site still remains closed.

Various pressures on the City and its infrastructure are impacting the planning decisions of the Corporation. These include a high level of projected employment growth by 2033 and an ongoing competition between office and residential space.

The Corporation outlined its aims to meet office space targets whilst managing the competing demands of need for transport infrastructure, alongside a need for improved utilities (e.g. electricity and WiFi), and environmental improvements which respect the view protection areas and conservation areas in place.

Smithfield Market

Background

The Smithfield Market complex, designed by Sir Horace Jones, contains several buildings constructed between 1868 and 1898. The existing meat market operates in the Central Market area. The operational East and West Market buildings originally designed and constructed in 1868 were refurbished between 1996 and 1999 for meat trading purposes and are Grade II* Listed. The original Poultry Market building was gutted by a fire in 1958 and rebuilt in 1962 and is Grade II Listed.

The General Market building closed for meat trading purposes in 1999 and has remained vacant since. The Annexe Market building closed for meat trading purposes in the late 1980s and has remained vacant since then.

Proposals for the Smithfield site

Owners of the General market, Henderson Global, proposed to transform the site into a place where people could enjoy working, with open spaces and an atrium containing shopping and cafeteria facilities on the ground floor. The City of London told the Committee that the developer's proposals reflected the outcome of a previous planning inquiry, reducing the scale of development and retaining most of the external character of the existing buildings. The scheme was supported by the City Corporation, English Heritage and CABI but the developer's planning application to convert the western building was rejected by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles. The City of London Corporation told the Committee that Henderson Global was disappointed in the decision to withhold planning permission. The Tenants' Association told Members that they were in favour of the scheme Henderson proposed.

There was a backlash from some local residents and others who were concerned for the protection of the market, who ran a 'Save Smithfield' campaign. The Corporation of the City of London told Members that there have never been plans to change the operational market, noting that the Corporation of the City of London had invested in upgrading the meat markets to match EU standards and to ensure the market's survival.

Some environmental factors constrain the freedom to develop the Smithfield site, including the risk of flooding below ground. The recent Thameslink flooding has heightened these concerns. The Smithfield site also lies within an area with protected views of St Paul's Cathedral, so any development of the site would have height restrictions.

The future of the market is still being debated and it is unclear what further proposals will be made to regenerate the site. The City of London Corporation observed that Henderson Global may choose to retain the empty property, which will benefit from rising land values as a result of the new Crossrail Farringdon East station, and increasing demand for offices, housing and retail in Central London.

Members heard that the Museum of London has considered moving to the Smithfield site. However, the Museum of London has not officially made any plans to do so.