

## **RESPONSE OF SOMERS TOWN NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM TO CONSULTATION ON 'A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS'**

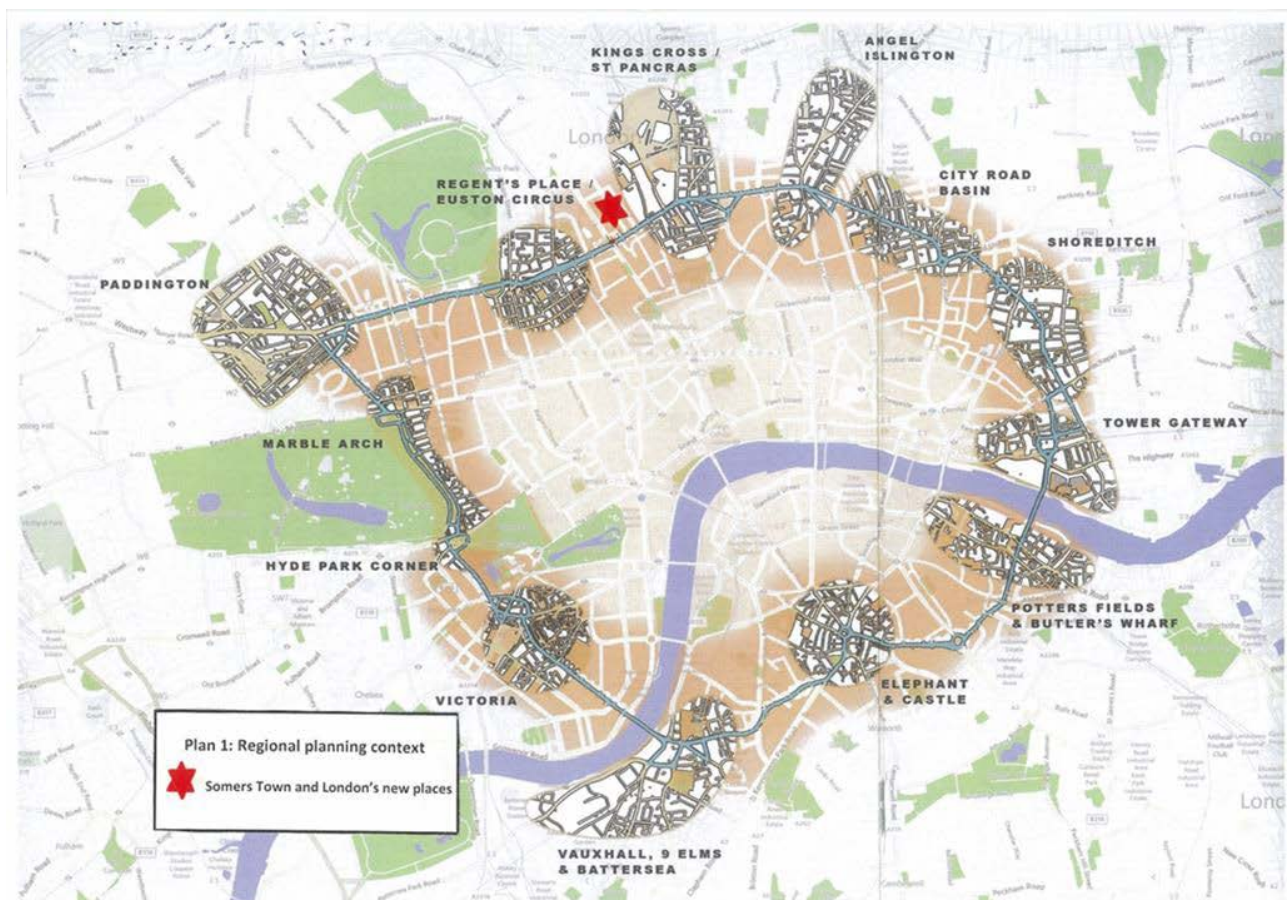
### **Introduction**

Somers Town lies between two Opportunity / Growth Areas: Euston and King's Cross. It has a high proportion of Council and HA tenants, and significant Bangladeshi and African communities. It is relatively deprived, with low levels of economic activity, poor health and low life expectancy. Central Somers Town is designated in the Borough Plan (Policy CS4) as an Area of More Limited Change. It is not expected to see major development itself, but instead will benefit from development in the two Growth Areas, such as "jobs and training , the provision of open space and other community facilities where there are local deficiencies".

The Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum (STNF) was constituted in 2013 to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the area. In line with adopted PolicyCS4 and key to the Plan is a community vision to help themselves out of disadvantage: "We want a framework for sustainable community development, so the existing Somers Town community can stay and get a slice of the action." In accordance with Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, the Plan proposal has now been submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LB Camden).

On housing, the Forum broadly supports the Response submitted by the **London Tenants Federation** to 'A City for all Londoners'.

Regional Planning context ( See paras 2.2.1 – 4 of the submitted Neighbourhood Plan)



As Plan 1 indicates, Somers Town is one of a series of neighbourhoods alternating between major Opportunity Areas along the inner city ring road between inner and central London. It's critical location at the interface of Inner London and the Central Business District accounts for much of the drama at the heart of the Neighbourhood Plan.

London is a special case. It has by far the highest land and rental values in the country. As the central business district expands, the adjoining inner city areas change through investment, speculation and gentrification. This results in dramatic changes in land use and population in the traditionally low rent areas of unskilled or basic employment and immigrants. This is already happening in Shoreditch, Spitalfields, and Bermondsey between the new places on Plan 1. In Elephant and Castle, large housing estates are being demolished and redeveloped to create the new place. There is a grave risk there will be no place left for nurses, teachers, car mechanics and other necessary workers who own no land or buildings. Instead of being able to stay, they are "squeezed out", and face long, expensive and exhausting journeys in to and from work.

A Gold Belt to match the Green Belt: advantage imported and disadvantage exported. Half empty tower blocks – apartments held as an investment not a home! This can seem attractive to Local Authorities, who are statutorily required to provide services to their population, but may not have the budget to do so. Their assets, land and buildings will have increased in value. The temptation for private and public sector landlords to realise this value will be irresistible. Moreover with the arrival of a wealthy, healthy, fully employed, well-educated population, (few of whom are likely to use existing local services, shops etc) both the budgetary and the regeneration record of such authorities will improve and private sector investment secured from around the world. A problem is not resolved by simply exporting it elsewhere. LB Newham was recently canvassing counterpart authorities in Lancashire and the West Midlands along these lines.

Along with Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea, LB Camden is the preferred location for the "uber wealthy". London is already showing alarming signs of imbalance and social polarisation. The vision for the Somers Town Neighbourhood Plan does not accept this as inevitable. The Neighbourhood has evolved organically over the last 30 years, and this has contributed to community cohesion : the enhancement of which is a major objective of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Following considerable local participation over the 5 years of Plan preparation, it is our opinion that the conventional means of providing affordable housing on the back of luxury flat development has failed. Indeed the very definition of "affordable" in places like Somers Town borders on the cruel and insulting. Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum would like the Mayor to take a different approach to inner city regeneration, sustainable community development, and processes and vehicles for delivery of genuinely affordable social rented housing, eg by exploring the kind of "fresh ideas for housing" set out in the Lyon Housing Review 2014. There is a strong prima facie case for discounting to ensure such a housing component is provided in all future development / redevelopment of public sector owned land and buildings.

#### Submitted Plan aspirations for sustainable community development and genuinely affordable housing

- All new housing to be built and occupied as a home and not as an investment.
- Prioritise new one and two bed units, e.g. opportunities for young people and downsizing by elderly residents.
- Allocation should prioritise existing young people - sons and daughters, concealed households and the elderly in the Neighbourhood, who wish to stay, look after each other, and, in so doing, reduce pressure on health and social care services, use local schools, shops,

- etc. and thus secure a sustainable community development.
- The use of Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) to deliver homes e.g. Local Authority / Community Land Trust or equity stake in private development.
  - Tying rent and transfer costs of affordable housing to the average household income in the Neighbourhood.
  - Housing development to be subject to an agreement that it remains as affordable housing for people with a local connection in perpetuity.
  - The use of planning gain receipts to fund acquisition of existing private stock to provide social rented homes, given the limited development sites within the Neighbourhood.
  - Investigating potential for policies on affordable housing where developers pay less for publicly owned sites.
  - The price discounted to allow building 50% genuinely affordable housing on them.

On the Environment, we welcome the commitment to natural capital accounting to understand the value of our green infrastructure. Open spaces, including private open space on our housing estates, are under threat in our area. We need to find ways to protect existing green spaces (the Forum would like to see local green spaces protected) and to ensure that estate intensification is done in such a way that the quantity of open space is maintained as the quality is enhanced.

In the Euston Area, we consider HS2 will have a negative impact on the environment in the coming decades. The likely impact on air quality, traffic, noise and open space (to name but a few) deserves special consideration. The construction of Crossrail 2 is also likely to have a negative impact on our area. In previous centuries, the railways displaced thousands of people from Somers Town, creating slums. In the twenty-first century we would like to see HS2, Crossrail 2, Network Rail and other major developers compelled to provide independently audited evidence that they have minimised the impact of their developments on the existing community and ensured that residents are properly protected from and compensated for the disruption we are likely to face.