

Opening comments

Slade Green Community Forum is a registered charity which aims to help those delivering services etc. to residents of Northend ward explain what they are planning, and to help residents express their views to those delivering services etc.

The views in this response to the consultation on Bexley's draft Growth Strategy have been guided by views of residents expressed at our General Meeting on 19th June 2017 (noting our General Meetings are open to the Public) and at the Consultation Event run by Bexley Council at the Slade Green & Howbury Community Centre, plus views expressed to us directly by residents and analysis of the draft Strategy by our Executive Committee members, who are our Trustees. Our Executive Committee are elected by our members. Some elements of our response also draw on previous consultations and responses to proposals for the area. Forum membership is open to any resident of Northend ward aged 16 or over, Northend ward councillors and any teacher working in a school in Northend ward.

We are extremely concerned about the proposals in the draft Growth Strategy, and by the alarmingly poor consultation on it. We have received feedback from many residents telling us what they have been told by Council Officers – some of it clearly inaccurate ('there is no map of Slade Green in the main document' – Council Officer at Consultation Event in Crayford), whilst in a number of instances two different pieces of information were given out that contradict each other.

As this is our response to the contents of the draft Strategy, we will write separately to the Council regarding our concerns about the consultation process, but note here simply that no publicity about the Consultation Event in Slade Green, which the Council added late to the existing Consultation Events, appears to have been put out by the Council, and that by the time the event took place our volunteers had only managed to publicise the Event to about 40% of the residences in Northend ward.

We do note that the Council officers at the Consultation Event in Slade Green confirmed that at least some of the housing near the Bridge Road bridge was likely to be the subject of compulsory purchase orders. Although the draft Growth Strategy would appear to us to require this, we feel that it is unreasonable that this was not explicitly stated in the draft Growth Strategy.

Given the sponsorship of this process by the Mayor of London, we will also write to him regarding these concerns.

Introduction

We disagree with the draft Growth Strategy and its proposed vision for Slade Green, and with the plans set out for the part of Northend ward covered by the Erith 'Vision'. The proposed solution to housing shortages seems to be to pick on a few communities and concentrate the pain, rather than spread the response to the need more evenly across Bexley. The proposals to change a large part of the centre of Slade Green and (it appears) the areas around Crescent Road Erith from suburban low density to urban high density will

rip the heart out of our community, irrevocably changing its character. Moreover, the proposed vision appears unlikely to be workable, for reasons we set out below.

Your draft Growth Strategy states that the vision for Slade Green will include the renewal of 'areas of low quality housing'. We note that none of the areas of housing in Slade Green, and in particular in the areas of the map shown as H3c or H3d, could in any meaningful sense be considered to be 'low quality'. We note that despite repeated questioning of Council Officers at Consultation Events by various residents, they were unable to name one area of Slade Green that actually has low quality housing. This either means that Bexley Council are simply pretending that the housing is 'low quality' in an attempt to convince people (perhaps including the Mayor of London), that you have successfully identified an area that needs renewal and that could sustain high density housing, when actually you haven't and are simply intent on renewing any housing area that is low density; or it means that your plan is unworkable, as a Growth Strategy dependent on renewing areas of low quality housing where there is no low quality housing to renew will not achieve anything.

Road infrastructure issues

The draft Growth Strategy would substantially increase the population of Slade Green and the eastern part of Erith, an area where at peak times roads are already substantially congested. The current road infrastructure cannot accommodate the increases in road traffic likely to be caused by the 'Vision' in the draft Growth Strategy, and there is no viable solution to that.

Slade Green and the eastern part of Erith are surrounded by either the River Thames and marshland or by the A206. The road routes into and out of the community are limited – Manor Road into Erith and Bridge Road onto the A206 Northend Road being the main route through, plus two more routes only accessed by passing through relatively narrow residential streets – the exit of Howbury Lane onto Thames Road, and the Peareswood Road and Boundary street exits onto the A206 Northend Road. The draft Growth Strategy appears heavily reliant on a massive reduction in car usage by residents as a result of improved public transport schemes. These not only appear ridiculously optimistic, but also do not take into account the large amount of local traffic that is there for business and other purposes and is not generated by the residents themselves.

The draft Growth Strategy appears to suggest that a bypass road that could be built across Crayford Marshes would alleviate these traffic problems, but this simply would not work. The road proposed in the draft Growth Strategy appears to link Ray Lamb Way to the proposed Roxhill development of the Howbury Grange farm into a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI), and therefore relies on permission being given for the SRFI and depends upon either permission from Dartford Council (as it needs a bridge over the River Darent), or for the intervention of the Secretary of State (We are aware that Bexley Council have taken the view that that is practically guaranteed, but with changing rail needs and reductions in the community benefits that were in the previous proposals and were taken into account as balancing community and environmental benefits but are not in the current application, we believe the Council have misjudged this).

Here is why this would in any case not work. The route in the draft Growth Strategy would essentially create a route from Manor Road, onto Ray Lamb Way, around or through the SRFI to the junction of Bob Dunn Way and Thames Road, and onwards along Bob Dunn Way to Junction 1a of the M25. For the moment we put aside our concerns that this proposed road would damage the natural environment and reduce the potential flood protection the marshes provide for our community, and concentrate on the transport issue. We firstly note that such a scheme could have two positive impacts – industrial traffic from the Darent Industrial Estate and from Industrial areas on or close to Manor Road may, through width restrictions, be diverted along this route and away from housing on Manor Road. Secondly, some people who commute to the Darent Industrial Estate from areas of Dartford or from further afield are likely to use this route rather than going through the centre of Slade Green. For this second point, we do not believe the numbers involved are particularly large. However, outweighing this, our major traffic concern is that this proposed new road also creates a new 'shortest route' from the M25 to Erith and beyond, and we do not see how this would do anything other than divert a quantity of cars and vans down Manor Road that would cause traffic problems both for residents there and for anyone from Slade Green trying to get into Erith.

From the point of view of the centre of Slade Green, this scheme would in any case have little impact on our already-congested peak-time roads – most of the traffic removed would be HGVs etc. that do not go through the centre of Slade Green because of current width restrictions. We do believe some relief to local traffic could be created by a road over the railway from the (soon to be built on) former Linpac/Boots land close to the railway footbridge that links Slade Green Road to Peareswood Road. This could cross to Boundary Street (in an area where plans to replace existing tower blocks is at a fairly advanced stage). Potentially such a road could link through to Manor Road and the Darent Industrial Estate without passing the housing on Manor Road, although this would require a re-think about the future land usage around Arthur Street/Boundary Street and careful planning to not negatively impact the new housing on the Linpac/Boots site. A width restriction could then be placed on Manor Road to ensure HGVs etc. use this new route. (We ask that the Council consider this for potential inclusion in any Growth Strategy). However, whilst this would provide an alternate solution for the relief of HGV traffic and a small amount of relief by allowing a different route into and out of Slade Green and eastern Erith, the gain from this would still be insufficient to resolve congestion issues in the centre of Slade Green.

Other Transport Matters

The draft Growth Strategy makes much of the potential Crossrail extension, and Council Officers at the Consultation Events also emphasised this, to the extent of saying that in most part the planned developments in Slade Green were 'needed by Crossrail'. Can you please confirm our belief that this was over-stated. We note that what is stated in the draft Growth Strategy and by Council Officers about the needs of Crossrail contradicts prior conversations between ourselves and Crossrail, which implied that, although they would like station improvements, nothing about the current station actually made it unfit for Crossrail aside from resolving disability access issues between the platforms. Whilst our conversations with Crossrail were a considerable time ago, we are unaware of anything material having

changed in the interim. We are also more than a little concerned that the Council has been so focused on Crossrail that it has failed to see that much of what a Crossrail extension could provide is provided by the new Thameslink service between the Medway Towns and Luton commencing in 2018 (which provides good interchange with Crossrail itself and with Thameslink services to Stevenage, Cambridge and Peterborough), and we question both whether there is now any actual need for the extension of Crossrail, and whether there is any perceived need for this amongst those making decisions about future rail service needs.

We note the plan for some form of Rapid Transit System (presumably a dedicated bus road or tram, although noting possibilities of trolley buses, monorail, light rail such as DLR or DLR itself). This appears to link from Crayford to Slade Green to Erith to Belvedere. We have concerns about how this would pass through our community and its impact on existing housing. However, in principle we believe that this could have a positive impact.

We would ask for some other transport possibilities be considered, either as alternatives or in addition to this.

Firstly, the area would benefit from integration into Dartford and Gravesham's Fasttrack bus network. We understand that this would require some agreement being negotiated between Bexley and the Councils currently responsible for Fasttrack. If the SRFI went ahead, Dartford residents working there would benefit if Fasttrack was extended into the SRFI (on Bexley Borough land), whilst Slade Green residents and residents from elsewhere in Bexley (using public transport connections) could benefit if that route was extended from the SRFI to Slade Green station. The benefits to Bexley residents would be:

- Access via Fasttrack to job opportunities at The Bridge development, Crossways Boulevard and future developments at Ebbsfleet (whilst people already working in those places might switch to Fasttrack, relieving road traffic near Junction 1a of the M25)
- At present, quite a number of Dartford residents travel by car to Slade Green station to take advantage of substantially lower fares to London, and because of where they park, cause congestion in Slade Green (e.g. in Whitehall Lane and roads close to Forest Road). The existence of a Fasttrack route to Slade Green station could alleviate this (and also reduce traffic on Bob Dunn Way and Thames Road)

Secondly, we have been disappointed that the rail service between the north and south of Bexley Borough that was included in the current Southeastern franchise was only ever delivered in part, and yet could help deliver what the draft Growth Strategy highlights in 3.3.2, a weakness in north-south connections in the Borough. Whilst the trains that provide a service running between Abbey Wood, Belvedere, Erith, Slade Green, Crayford, Bexley, Albany Park, Sidcup and New Eltham are useful, they would be much more so if they were run throughout the day rather than only off peak. Not running at peak times means that people commuting between residences in the south of the borough and work in the north of the borough (and vice versa) cannot use the service. We continue to hope that a peak hours service will be run. Alternatively, the idea of a shuttle service could be explored (instead of the current pattern of running along each line to and from Cannon Street). This might even have potential for joining up to shuttle services from elsewhere that are less focused on

central London (perhaps as far as Bromley North via Hither Green and Grove Park). The benefits from one or other of these would be:

- Access to jobs, as previously mentioned
- Relieving pressure on (for instance) the centre of Bexley Village, which causes problems for many residents of the borough, by offering some people moving between the north and south of the borough a public transport alternative.
- Allowing residents elsewhere in the borough public transport access to the new Thameslink and Crossrail services that commence in 2018, whilst avoiding the likelihood of people from elsewhere in the borough driving to (for instance) Slade Green and parking streetside so as to access these new services.

Thirdly, that any redevelopment of the riverside industrial areas along Manor Road for housing includes a substantial improvement to the quality of the cycle route along Manor Road (noting that this poor and rather dangerous cycle path is actually part of one of the national cycle routes – an appalling advertisement for what Bexley Borough is like). Such a path should be connected properly to the centre of Slade Green. At the moment its poor quality and the lack of a decent link to it is a major barrier to local people choosing to cycle to local amenities.

Wider infrastructure issues

We recognise that the draft Growth Strategy identifies a need for improved infrastructure for health, leisure facilities, schooling etc. to enable any growth in housing to work. However, the document has hardly any detail on this front, and a failure to include such detail may result in a failure to deliver. We hope far more work will be done on these requirements before any final Growth Strategy is put in place.

Specific Housing Issues and Concerns

We do not understand the proposals for Crescent Road/Aveley Close/Appold Street/Manor Road shown on the map of Erith on Page 77 and would ask that this be clarified as a matter of urgency. The area is labelled 'H3d' – i.e. Urban High Density, which implies (as 'H3c' is Urban High Density in an area previously low density), that it is already 'Urban High Density' – but this is not the case, the housing there is largely terraced. Further, the 'H3d' area extends to some of the housing behind the opposite side of Manor Road, but at a rather peculiar angle. We would like some clarification on whether this is as intended, and if so, why. For the moment we assume that all of this area should have been labelled H3c.

We note that once the plans move beyond the draft stage, they are likely to be picked up by 'searches' relating to house purchases. Residents who own their properties may as a result find that the value of their property falls (or rises less than it might otherwise have done), and if needing to move for family or work reasons, they may find themselves unable to move. A similar problem may be experienced by Housing Association tenants who wish to swap properties if needing to move for family or work reasons. There is a great deal of concern in the community about this issue.

For the record, we list the roads that are in areas of Northend ward shown in the draft Growth Strategy as moving from being in a low density suburban area of housing to one that is Urban High Density (described in the Growth Strategy as being an area of mainly four to eight storey Mansion Blocks). Appold Street, Aveley Close, Bridge Road (most of), Cedar Road, Craydene Road, Crescent Road, Elm Road, Forest Road, Hazel Drive (a small part), Hazel Road, Howbury Lane, Larkswood Close, Manor Road (areas near Crescent Road), Masefield Close, Moat Lane, Page Crescent (a small part), Peareswood Road (part of), Plantation Road, Slade Gardens, Slade Green Road (railway to Hazel Road), Whitehall Lane, Willow Road. Given the rather circular nature of the area shown (and noting that, as your document states, these are not detailed proposals), we assume and understand that this may just be a rough guide at the draft stage, but that simply means that concern is felt that areas close to the 'circle' may eventually be included too (such as Dale View, the rest of Hazel Drive, Leycroft Gardens, Lincoln Road, the rest of Manor Road and roads close to it, Oak Road, the rest of Page Crescent, Sun Court). Please urgently inform us if we have omitted any roads from this. Although none of this is a detailed proposal, we note that it leaves everyone in these roads more than a little uncertain as to the future of their home.

Although the draft Growth Strategy states that towers of 15 storeys are not considered appropriate for Slade Green, there is some concern that this view might change given that the description of H3c in the draft Strategy includes that possibility. We ask that any future Growth Strategy documents use a different code for each, so they are clearly differentiated.

Residents were told by Council Officers at the Consultation Event in Slade Green that the car parking spaces provided for new developments in Slade Green will be 0.7 spaces per residence. We consider this both woefully inadequate and liable to cause parking to spill over into through roads.

The document makes no mention of compulsory purchases, but what is contained within it would appear to require this at least to some extent (as Council Officers admitted at the Consultation Events). We believe that this should have been included in the document, accompanied by details of what that would entail, instead of allowing people to guess or be mis-informed. We note a number of residents have heard that compulsory purchase results in only 50% of the market value being received, or that people would receive back a half way price between what they paid and current market value. Whilst we have tried to correct this, we ask the Council to swiftly provide all residents in potentially affected areas a true explanation of the process (we would have no objection if you say at the same time – where it is true – that you think compulsory purchase is quite unlikely). In particular, residents of Bridge Road, Forest Road and the end of Craydene Road closest to the Bridge Road bridge, plus any residents of nearby roads that might also be affected should be given support in understanding this as soon as possible, given the confirmation by Council Officers that compulsory purchases were likely sometime within the next ten years.

Regarding Figure 17 on page 47 of the draft Growth Strategy – it purports to show the percentage of industrial land planned for 'managed release' for residential housing. However, we cannot see anything that states whether the light or dark colour is the 'released' part. We believe your intention is that the light colour shows the 'released' percentage. It is also unclear which industrial area falls within which of the pie charts.

Please clarify this. The pie chart next to Slade Green station we assume to be for the whole of Northend ward including the Darenth Industrial estate. We assume but are not 100% certain that much of the land on Manor Road would be released for residential development, but probably none of the land at the Darenth Industrial Estate? The Council Officers at the Consultation Events were unable to give us much guidance on this. Largely we fail to see how the proposed 8000 new residences in Slade Green could possibly be achieved without full release of the industrial land on the Thames side of Manor Road, and in principle would welcome this, if supported by suitable infrastructure, with sufficient affordable homes, and if existing residents in the area are properly consulted.

Open Spaces

The draft Growth Strategy describes the open spaces which will be turned into 'Urban High Density' housing as also being of 'low quality'. We note in particular the community usage of the field on Howbury Lane, and that this area was landscaped and re-designed following consultations with residents by Groundwork. Whilst we would be delighted to see improvements to it, we fail to see how it can be viewed as 'low quality'. We believe it is a much-needed community resource and should not be built on.

Your 'Vision' for Slade Green (2.40) alludes to 'outstanding recreational spaces' for Slade Green, and yet nothing in the draft Growth Strategy seems to give any credence to this, just a substantial reduction in recreational space alongside a large population increase.

Additional Matters relating to areas of Northend ward

We note that the route of the proposed Rapid Transit passes through St Augustine's Church. We hope that you will explicitly confirm that this is unintentional and that this will be rectified in any final document. We note that this has caused some distress for people with loved ones whose ashes are in the Garden of Remembrance at St Augustine's Slade Green.

We note that the school shown on the map on page 81 of Slade Green in 20-30 years time, shown in the area of Rainbow Road, appears to include the Slade Green & Howbury Community Centre. One of your officers confirmed at the Consultation Event in Slade Green that the Community Centre would be handed to the Haberdashers School as they expand in response to the increased population. We strongly oppose this removal of a community resource, which will surely be needed if the population of Slade Green is massively increased through the execution of your Strategy, and are concerned that this was not mentioned anywhere in the text of the draft Growth Strategy. We are also very concerned that this expanded school footprint shows the school boundary running all the way to the Amenity Area between Rainbow Road and Slade Green Road, implying the removal of the residences and retail unit that have just been built there. We hope that you will explicitly confirm that this is unintentional and that this will be rectified in any final document.

We note that the Growth Strategy is inconsistent in its claimed aim of a number of new jobs for Slade Green, sometimes 1000, sometimes 1500. Please clarify this.

Conclusions

We think that it is shameful that Bexley Council appears to be disregarding the interests of its residents in Slade Green, the eastern part of Erith and indeed elsewhere. To create a Growth Strategy that essentially forces people from their homes and dislocates existing communities is morally questionable; to do so whilst ignoring rather substantial barriers to actually successfully executing a plan even more so. The result could be people moved to create a new community in Slade Green that not only has no continuity from the past, but, because of the nature of its location, simply is not viable.