

## are Power to the people

10 March 2011 | By Simon Creasey

Community groups in London's Elephant & Castle have been awarded 'third developer status'

Last week, London's Southwark council took the groundbreaking step of granting 'third developer status' to the local community in the £1.5bn regeneration of the Elephant & Castle district.

The unprecedented move, which sees the establishment of a 'tripartite decision-making process', could change the consultation process for regeneration projects in London.

Elephant Links Partnership Board, which represents the interests of the local community, will take an equal role with Southwark Council and developer Southwark Land Regeneration in revising the masterplan. It will have access to all information relating to the project.

Southwark's ratification document, issued last week, states: 'The council will put in place a genuine tripartite structure which ensures that residents have the opportunity and time to contribute to the negotiating and decision-making processes.'

'The council wishes to see arrangements that will ensure a genuine dialogue, which go beyond the mere submission of proposals, and the collection of consultation responses, before then moving to decision-making without further dialogue with the community.'

Elephant Links has been working with the council's ratification committee to hammer out the definition of the community's involvement.

Richard Lee, director of the Community Forum, a group which is part of Elephant Links, says: 'I am delighted that the council has respected our rights as a third developer. We have always respected the fact that the council, as statutory landowner, has the final decision.'

However Lee and other community representatives have voiced concerns about the wording of some sections of the document and the delay in taking the decision. And the council has not yet made the community's involvement after the masterplanning process clear.

Lee says: 'This is very positive for us on the whole, but we've been there before. This process cannot be sustained if the community has to keep on insisting at every stage.'

'Every stage seems to take longer than we'd like. We're already way behind schedule on the masterplan and we regret that this couldn't have been done three months ago. There's still a worry as to whether or not they mean it this time. At the moment this is a paper policy.'

"Let's get on with it," is the message.'

Anne Keane, chairman of Elephant Links and member of the Community Forum, says: 'We've made progress and we feel that the ratification committee has listened to and implemented our suggestions for a change. It is not entirely to the satisfaction of the community but at least it's a way forward.'

### Dissenting voices

Despite the generally upbeat mood, there still may be stormy times ahead. The environmental group Friends of

the Earth has already written to Southwark Council expressing its fears that temporary housing may be built on open land.

Friends of the Earth spokesman Paul Da Silva says that the group is concerned that the borough, which is already deficient in open space could see even more greenery taken away.

'We have been tracking this situation very carefully,' explains Da Silva. 'We will be looking to the developers and the regeneration people to ensure that loss of space is not permanent and is remedied in the final plans. We are keen to see a sensitive form of regeneration take place rather than the old-fashioned approach.'

Another factor is the involvement of local businesses operating from the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre that feel they have been left in the dark throughout the consultation process and who face an uncertain future.

They claim that their present landlord, [UK Land](#), and future landlord, SLR, have failed to inform them about developments and there are rumblings that they may mobilise themselves to object about their lack of involvement.

One tenant, who is in the first year of a 15-year lease, expresses common concern: 'This is a worrying time for all shopkeepers in the centre and we will be keeping an eye on the progress of the scheme. We are genuinely concerned about the future.'

#### • **Elephant Links Partnership Board: the 'third developer'**

Elephant Links Partnership Board was created by Southwark Council through £25m of Single Regeneration Budget funding. It was established to represent the local community during the prolonged consultation process.

Elephant Links is made up of local councillors, representatives from local schools, business consortia, employment services and members of Quality of Life and Environment and the Elephant & Castle Community Forum.

Development Executive Team is a subgroup of Elephant Links and will represent the board in tripartite steering group meetings with Southwark Council and Southwark Land Regeneration (SLR).

SRB funding has recently been freed up, allowing the board to appoint technical advisers. They will examine all aspects of the development and report back to the Development Executive Team which, in turn, will report to Elephant Links.

An integral figure who ensures the smooth running of the board is Anne Keane. As chairwoman, she is charged with keeping control of proceedings at the meetings, which invariably become heated as the emotions of local residents and businesses run high.

'It can get very lively,' says Fred Manson, director of regeneration at Southwark Council. He adds that Elephant Links Partnership Board's meetings are often held in the calming surroundings of the local Buddhist centre.

On a Monday evening in February, around 40 people are feasting on a communal dish of chicken and rice in the lengthening shadows of the Elephant & Castle shopping centre.

Once official proceedings begin there is not a spare seat in the house. The Community Forum lines up on one side and local councillors and interested parties on the other in a spaghetti western-style stand-off.

Despite the obvious seating division, the unanimous agreement between residents and other interests is that the most important factor in the process is the effect of the development on the community.

It is not entirely to the satisfaction of the community but at least it's a way forward

Anne Keane, Elephant Links Partnership Board

#### **Heated debate**

The evening starts rather sedately with civilised, well thought-out arguments delivered in an even-handed, democratic way. Whenever tempers fray, Keane is quick to quell them and ensure that the meeting remains focused.

As the evening unfolds, one issue that continues to rear its head is that of racial representation. One-third of the population of the Elephant & Castle area is black, but there is only one black board member.

The composition of members is a sticking point for some of the board deputies who originate from ethnic backgrounds. They claim that the Elephant Links Partnership Board does not meet racial guidelines, which is an integral part of SRB funding.

This lack of representation will cause even more problems if – as is being discussed – the board becomes incorporated, which it intends to do in the next few months. If the racial make-up remains the same, the Community Forum believes that the newly formed company will not comply with equal opportunities guidance, which could cause further friction.

### **Rehousing issues**

Another issue that continues to surface during proceedings is the 'decanting' of local residents throughout the development process. About 3,000 people will be affected by the scheme and there is widespread concern about the arrangements that will be made to house them.

'There is now a new word for decanting – it's called "relocation",' explains Keane when the matter is discussed. 'It sounds a lot better because decanting means losing something.'

Noticeable by its absence from the meeting is developer SLR. A seat on the board is available for a representative of the company but because SLR's status was only confirmed in January, it was considered inappropriate for the company to take it up before then. Manson believes it will be there at the next meeting.

He adds: 'In June 1998, we conducted a survey among local residents asking them if they wanted to see a major change at Elephant & Castle. A resounding 94% said yes.'

'One thing that has kept us together throughout this long process is that what we have at the moment isn't very good. The shopping centre is miserable, transport links are not very good and the housing also isn't very good,' he says.

'We need to ensure that what we build is not out of date in 20 years' time. We do not want any more hanging baskets, and no more painting the building!'

### **• Elephant & Castle Community Forum: the voice of the people**

The Community Forum has five voting members on Elephant Links Partnership Board. It represents 100 local groups, including housing associations and businesses.

A vacant unit on the lower ground floor of the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre forms the bustling hub of the Community Forum's operations. The office – its walls plastered with photographs and news cuttings about the proposed regeneration – is home to three full-time staff and other temporary workers, all of whom are supervised by forum director Richard Lee.

After several years' involvement in community development work, Richard Lee – whose subtle Black Country twang gives away his West Midlands roots – took up the post of director two years ago and began spearheading the local communities' involvement in the consultation process.

The Community Forum was created in September 1999 after the council received the SRB funding. Before this, there was an Elephant & Castle residents' regeneration group, which was more of an action group but without any formal structure.

'If the community wanted to have an influence on the development then it needed to have a more structured role,

which is where the Community Forum came in,' explains Lee.

He is pleased with the way things have unfolded so far and says that the forum is a vital cog in the wheels of the Elephant Links Partnership Board, boasting a quarter of the board's voting members.

### **Inc pending?**

One of the most pressing issues the forum is currently wrestling with is the board's deliberation over whether or not to opt for incorporation.

The issue was discussed at the March meeting of the board and a motion was tentatively agreed upon. The forum is fully behind the move to incorporate and will be voting in favour of enforcing the motion when it goes before the board in its finished form.

Lee believes that incorporation is essential to the board's future success. 'At the moment we have no independence and work on quite a limited structure. Until the partnership board has its own identity, it won't be able to accept responsibility for its staff – incorporation will help us to achieve this,' explains Lee.

Forum member and Elephant Links chair Anne Keane, confirms: 'We feel that the way forward is incorporation and we have to take the others along with us. The key factor is that this will enable us to seek further funding – such as European money – for the sustainability of the community's development.'

Keane also empathises with the concerns of Friends of the Earth in relation to the building of temporary housing on open land.

'We are reluctant to let go of our open spaces. We want to lose as little **Green** space as possible and in some cases none at all.'

The forum is also tackling another contentious issue: the lack of representation of the black community on the Elephant Links Partnership Board. The forum is a multi-cultural organisation and one of the integral figures within it is project officer Giorgia Sharpe (above).

She is tasked with keeping the community up to date with developments throughout the consultation process and to this end she produces quarterly newsletters translated into Spanish, Somali and Bengali – a good illustration of the vast array of ethnic backgrounds the forum represents.

Lee explains: 'The Community Forum agrees with the equal representation issue. We want to see a much greater black representation at board level. In the last few months we have been putting proposals forward to rectify this but nothing has changed so far.'

Keane, a resident of Elephant & Castle for 35 years, has been actively involved in fighting for the rights of the local community throughout the last three decades and she says that she is delighted with the proposed regeneration.

### **• Community v developer**

Communities have scuppered several London regeneration projects because they felt that their voices were not being heard. One of the most famous examples is Coin Street on the South Bank. Property developer Greycoat proposed a Richard Rogers-designed office development in the early 1980s, but this was rejected by the Greater London Council in the face of opposition from the local community action group. The community then formed Coin Street Community Builders (CSCB), which ploughed ahead with a scheme of its own to develop the Oxo Tower and the surrounding area. CSCB persuaded the GLC to lend it the money to buy the land and secured bank funding to build the scheme, which comprised 9,300 sq m (100,000 sq ft) of offices and workshops together with 80 flats. The area is now a hive of activity and has brightened up a once-depressed landscape. Another project blighted by the wrath of the local community was the £440m redevelopment of the Ethelred Estate in Vauxhall, south London. The joint venture between Wimpey and St

George aimed to create 3,600 homes in a new mixed-tenure, high-density housing project. In September 2000, a vote by tenants gave the scheme a huge thumbs-down after they complained about their lack of involvement. Residents' campaign group Save the Ethelred Estate said it had been left out in the cold during negotiations. Richard Lee director of the Elephant & Castle Community Forum believes that it is vital for the community there to be involved to prevent the conflicts of the past.

## • Southwark Land Regeneration: winning developer must listen to the community

The partnership formed by Godfrey Bradman's European Land and Frogmore Estates was confirmed as the selected developer for the £1.5bn Southwark Land Regeneration project in January. SLR's assistant project director for the Elephant & Castle development, Eve Fawcett, attributes the success of the consortium bid to its successful incorporation of Elephant Links Partnership Board's guiding principles in putting together its proposed scheme. She says that SLR is keen to involve the local community at all levels of negotiation and is happy for them to be involved in the tripartite discussions because the firm values their input. 'This is a very detailed and complex process of consultation that has now reached the economic and social masterplanning phase,' says Fawcett. As well as hosting discussions with the Community Forum and Elephant Links, SLR is embarking on a wider process of consultation with a range of local groups, including ethnic minorities, schools, young people and the elderly. Part of this process is to allay any fears they may have about the development and how it will affect them. Fawcett acknowledges that one of the main factors driving the extensive consultation process is to avoid the fate some of its peers met in previous projects. SLR, advised by Catella, does not want to have its project derailed on the basis that it failed to heed the voice of the local community. 'Another layer of consultation is estates-based,' adds Fawcett. 'The first thing we intend to do is to set up meetings with all of the tenants and housing associations concerned. We will be working independently with each one. Then we produce newsletters for each estate and host drop-in centres where local residents can ask questions and have them answered.'

Catella is lead consultant to Southwark Land Regeneration.

## • Elephant lumbers on

**1998** Survey of local residents reveals 94% are in favour of a 'major redevelopment' of the Elephant & Castle district

**1999** £25m of Single Regeneration Budget funding is secured for the project

**April 1999** More than 20 bids are received from developers hoping to win the contract to redevelop the area

**May 2000** Bids are reduced to a shortlist of three: London Amsterdam Countryside (LAC), Southwark Land Regeneration (SLR) and a joint venture of Land Securities and St George's. The three consortia present radically different proposals

**June 2000** Council's ratification committee selects SLR as preferred developer with LAC appointed as reserve partner

**January 2001** SLR confirmed as developer by council's ratification committee

**March 2001** Masterplanning process for development begins

**September 2001** Provisional deadline for planning application