

BATTERSEA SOCIETY PLANNING COMMITTEE

PLANNING BRIEF FOR THE NINE ELMS AREA

A Note by David Lewis

THE CONTEXT

The context for redevelopment of the Nine Elms area has four major aspects:

the policies in the **Mayor's London Plan**, or to be precise in the Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP) – the report on the Examination in Public of FALP is imminent and is expected to lead to formal adoption of the revised Plan early next year, in broadly the form the Mayor proposed. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the London Plan in this note are to the Plan as amended by the draft of FALP

the **borough council's planning policies** – the Wandsworth Unitary Development Plan continues in force but, insofar as it is not compatible with the London Plan, is superseded by that, while the Wandsworth Local Development Framework now in preparation has to be in broad conformity with the London Plan

the **Covent Garden Market** Authority is in the middle of a two-year feasibility study for redevelopment, during which it intends to reach agreement with the planning authorities about the most appropriate form of redevelopment

the developers, Treasury Holdings, are drawing up new plans for **Battersea Power Station** and have invited views from the community on uses for the site – it seems likely the responses will give first priority to providing employment.

The London Plan

Vauxhall/Nine Elms/Battersea is one of 28 areas identified in the London Plan as *Opportunity Areas*. It was originally regarded as comprising the Power Station and Covent Garden Market sites, the land to the east between the borough boundary and the river, and the Vauxhall interchange in the borough of Lambeth. It is now regarded as comprising all the land between the river, Queenstown Road/Silverthorne Road and the borough boundary. The table shows the London Plan's overall objectives for this area.

	size of area	indicative employment capacity	minimum homes
original London Plan	78 ha	7.6k 2001-2016	1.5k 2001-2016
current plan	195 ha	8k 2001-2026	3.5k 2001-2026*

** Of the increased number of homes, 200 are contributed by a reassessment of what can be achieved up to 2016 within the area originally defined.*

It is not clear how the figures in the table compare with the employment and housing already in the area, whether they represent net additions to what is there already, or how much of the development indicated will already have occurred between 2001 and now.

The London Plan's general policies for Opportunity Areas are reproduced as Annex A. The Mayor's approach to this Opportunity Area is strongly influenced by the fact that it lies within the area designated in the London Plan as the Central Activities Zone (CAZ). To be precise, that applies only to the area as originally defined; but the boundary of the CAZ is to be refined before being incorporated in the Development Plan Documents produced by boroughs (policy 5G.1). This Opportunity Area is also closely linked with areas to the north in the London Development Agency's thinking – as part of the London South Central Area stretching along the river bank to beyond Tower Bridge. The London Plan's policies on strategic priorities for the CAZ and on predominantly local activities in the CAZ are reproduced as Annex B. There are also policies (policies 5G.3 and 5G.4) on offices and retailing in the CAZ.

As in most other Opportunity Areas, planning of the Vauxhall/Nine Elms Battersea area has not proceeded rapidly. Annex C contains the section on key issues, infrastructure issues and status at April 2006 from the relevant Annex to the Sub-Regional Development Framework for Central London produced by the Mayor in May 2006 ('Central London' here includes the whole of the borough of Wandsworth).

Wandsworth's Core Strategy

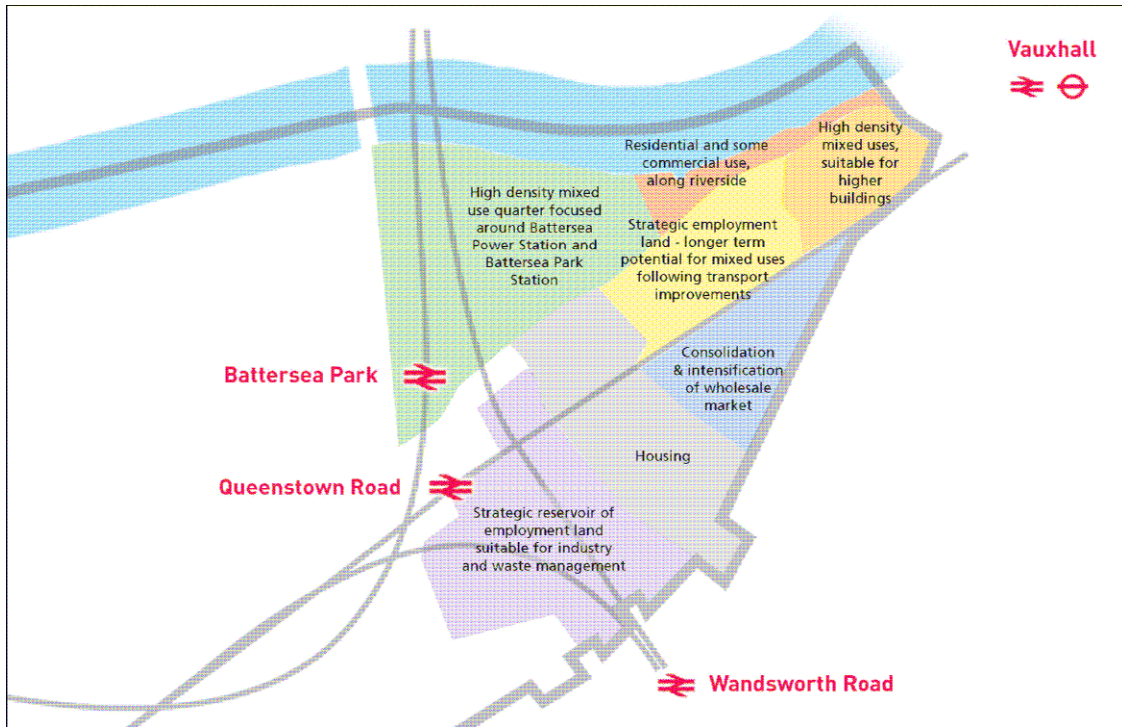
Wandsworth's proposed policy PL 7 for the Nine Elms area is reproduced in Annex D. In putting forward its Preferred Option the borough council is required to set out Alternative Options which have been considered and rejected. These are also reproduced in Annex D.

Figure 4.5 in the draft Core Strategy Preferred Options, reproduced on the next page, divides the Opportunity Area into 7 sections, each characterised by different activities.

Redevelopment of Covent Garden Market

The aim of redeveloping Covent Garden Market is to improve its facilities and viability by converting part of its site to other uses. An extract from the most recent annual report of the Covent Garden Market Authority is at Annex E.

It does not reveal which parts of the site are being considered for conversion to other uses. However, it can be assumed they are the parts which are most readily accessible: the area north of the railway fronting onto Battersea Park Road and the area behind Market Towers at Vauxhall.



Battersea Power Station

The existing planning permissions for the Power Station site cover leisure uses, exhibition space, ancillary retail, housing and two hotels. A questionnaire now produced by Treasury Holdings asks people to rank the following uses [list to be inserted], according to what they would like to see on the site.

ISSUES

Housing

Housing has recently been the highest-value use for almost any site. 'Mixed use' often seems to be a euphemism for a housing development in which other uses are only minimal or transitory. 'Affordable' is now defined as 'housing designed to meet the needs of households whose incomes are not sufficient to allow them to access decent and appropriate housing in their borough' and comprising 'social housing, intermediate housing and in some cases low-cost market housing' (London Plan policy 3A.6). Social rented housing and intermediate housing in the form of shared ownership, normally require the participation of a registered social landlord.

The Mayor's strategic target for affordable housing is that 50% of new housing should be affordable and, within that, the Londonwide objective of 70% social housing and 30% intermediate provision. Borough councils are required to set their own overall target for affordable housing provision in their area, based on an assessment of all housing needs and a realistic assessment of supply, and taking into account the Mayor's strategic target and the promotion of mixed and balanced communities (London Plan policy 3A.7). It is left to boroughs, when negotiating on individual private residential

and mixed-use schemes, to seek the maximum reasonable amount of affordable housing, applying targets flexibly.

The Opportunity Area already includes:

- public housing in the Patmore and Savona estates
- Chelsea Wharf and The Bridge
- strips of older housing along Queenstown Road
- the current Barratts development on the site of John Milton school
- another private development close to that
- Elm Quay and Riverside Court in Nine Elms Lane

*Do we believe more housing should be permitted in this area?
If so, of what types? and where?*

The borough council's justification for not seeking any affordable housing in Parkview's scheme was that the area had a very high proportion of public housing and it was desirable to achieve a more balanced situation. With increasing provision of private housing that argument is now less compelling. Wandsworth's target for the proportion of affordable housing in new developments is 33%.

Hotels

A Portuguese chain is constructing a four-star hotel at Chelsea Wharf.

The Sub-Regional Development Framework for Central London (table 1E.1) identifies this Opportunity Area as a primary location for new visitor accommodation, and specifically for budget, four-star and lifestyle hotels.

*Do we believe hotels would be a desirable use?
If so, on which sites?*

Retailing

Except around Battersea Park station, there is virtually no retailing in the Opportunity Area.

Although the borough council wanted to prevent retail development at Battersea Power Station, the amount of retail space permitted as ancillary to other uses in the Parkview scheme would have made Battersea Power Station a major retail centre. Indeed, the London Plan (paragraph 3.230i) brackets it with Brent Cross and the new White City development as centres which 'should provide exemplars of modern, sustainable retail provision and enhance the quality and competitiveness of London's retail offer'. In reality this would be an inappropriate site for comparison shopping, given its relatively poor accessibility by public transport. Wandsworth already has a uniquely dispersed pattern of five town centres, and significant retail development at the Power Station would be likely to damage Clapham Junction.

Is it agreed that significant retail development in the Nine Elms area would be undesirable?

Should we press for a local shopping centre to be established at a central location within the area?

Leisure

There are large bars in the blocks on the Effra site at Vauxhall, plus the insalubrious Podium club in the Market Towers block. There are a couple of pubs and restaurants near Battersea Park station, plus the Battersea Barge on the riverbank. There will be a health club in the new hotel at Chelsea Wharf. However, attempts to attract large-scale leisure uses to the Power Station site have been a complete failure.

Would it be desirable to attract a large-scale leisure use to this area? Is there any realistic prospect of that?

What is the potential for bars and restaurants, possibly serving a Londonwide market, especially if located on the river bank?

Community facilities

What needs are there, or will there be, for community facilities in this area, such as medical centres, crèches and schools?

Would such facilities best be located in a local centre or spread through the area?

Employment

Covent Garden Market, Royal Mail and other logistics firms provide significant employment for local people. The borough council has resisted proposals to convert such sites to housing, except on the riverside. The London Plan, on the other hand, is seeking to change the nature of the area:

...the historic Strategic Employment Location designation covering much of the Area should be reviewed. Though there is evidence of demand, which in other parts of London would justify retention of industrial type uses, in this CAZ Opportunity Area retention of such an extensive area in low density, low value uses conflicts with wider strategic objectives for CAZ. The SIL should be rationalised through management of existing industrial type uses, retaining capacity for those which are of particular importance to CAZ and capable of operating more intensively, such as wholesale market and waste management provision. This will enable development of other, higher density, higher value uses to fully realise the potential of the Area including greater employment opportunities (paragraph 5.142).

Covent Garden Market is secure for the foreseeable future, and appears to be increasing the labour content of its activities by focusing on catering supplies.

Do we agree that provision of employment should be a high priority?

Is there scope for other industries in the area, besides Covent Garden Market, to operate more intensively?

What other sources of employment could be attracted to the area?

Riverside uses

It can be assumed that all new development along the riverside will incorporate the Thames Path.

The area currently contains two wharves handling aggregates (which are protected under the London Plan), a major waste transfer station and a Thames Water pumping station which will be a key site for construction of the Thames Tideway Tunnel (intended to prevent overflows of sewage under storm conditions).

Other utilities

A large site is occupied by the gas industry, with no indication that it would be able or willing to relinquish it.

There is significant railway use in the west of the area.

Transport improvements

It is assumed the borough council will require the developers of the Power Station to contribute to the cost of modest improvements to Queenstown Road and Battersea Park Road. There is no obvious scope for any further road construction. It has been suggested that Thessaly Road should be reopened at Battersea Park Road either for buses or for all traffic.

Battersea Park and Queenstown Road stations will continue to provide key transport links for the area. However, Parkview's scheme for Battersea Park station is probably no longer relevant, if only because it would conflict with Network Rail's proposals (in its draft Route Utilisation Strategy) to accommodate 10-coach suburban trains. There is no foreseeable prospect of a shuttle service to the Power Station from Victoria, for which there was provision in the Parkview scheme.

The only transport improvement mentioned in the Sub-Regional Development Framework is Crossrail 2; but its route and timing are so uncertain that it can be disregarded for the present purpose.

Curiously there is no mention of the East London Line Extension, which will provide new links to Wandsworth Road station, just beyond the southern edge of the area. However, the South London Line service from Victoria to London Bridge via Battersea Park and Wandsworth Road may then be withdrawn, possibly largely cancelling out the benefits.

Nor is there any mention of the City Corporation's proposal for a tram line from Shoreditch to Battersea. This would bring considerable benefit to the area, but it is difficult to assess its chances of success.

What transport improvements would make the biggest contribution to the future of the Nine Elms area?

Does the Society have a view about reopening Thessaly Road?

Tall buildings

A 50-storey residential tower is under construction on the Effra site at Vauxhall, where there is already a cluster of tall buildings.

The London Plan says 'good quality tall buildings in appropriate parts of the area will help reduce its perceived isolation, clearly signposting its transformation as an Opportunity Area' (paragraph 5.141). This seems to point to encouraging tall buildings in the western and southern parts of the area. However, Wandsworth's draft Core Strategy selects the area nearest Vauxhall as 'suitable for higher buildings'.

In which part of the area, if any, would we like to see tall buildings (more than 20 storeys)?

Should we oppose tall buildings in the immediate vicinity of the Power Station, on the ground that they would diminish its scale and impressiveness?

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David Lewis
Chair: The Battersea Society Planning Committee