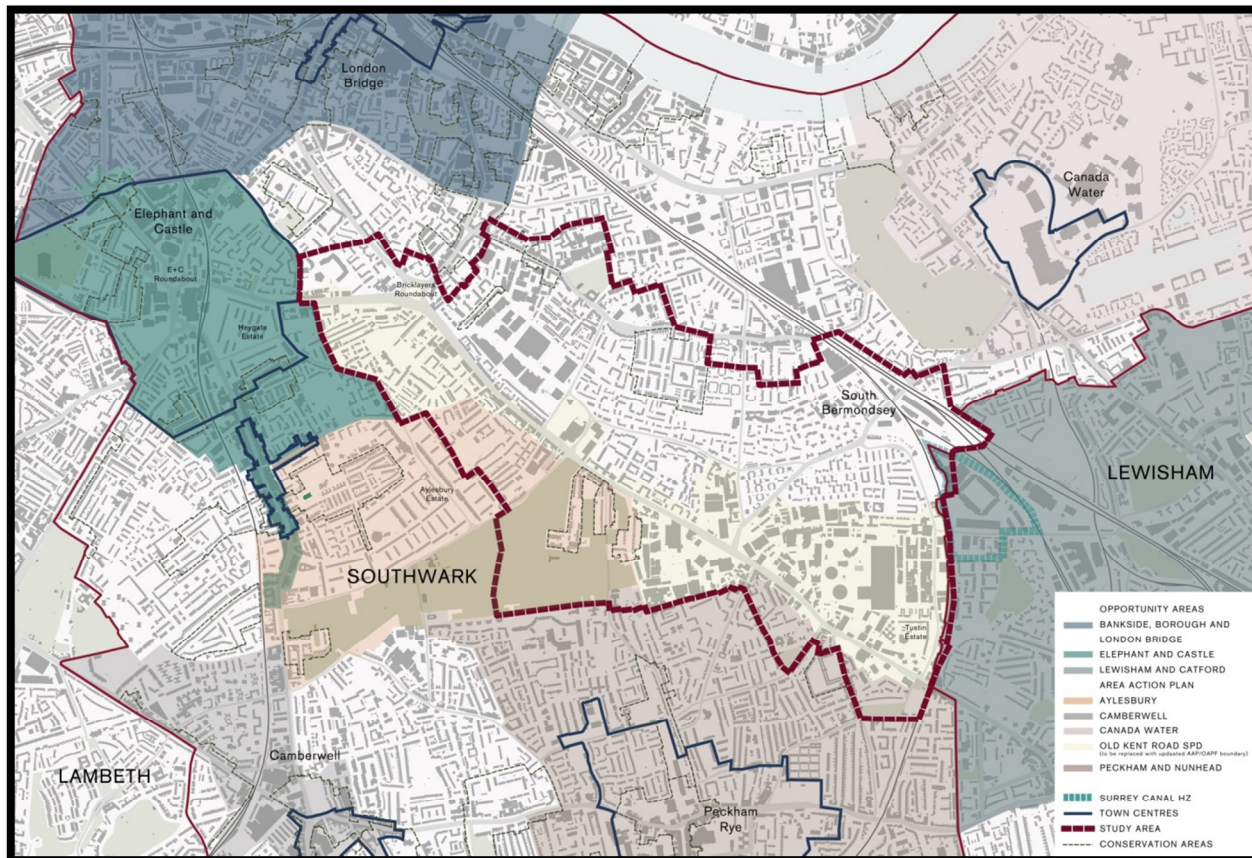


Note of the third Old Kent Road Community Forum meeting

Thursday 21st May 2015, New Covenant Church

MAP OF THE AREA



What you said about the meeting

Fifty three Old Kent Road people attended the community forum meeting, made up of local residents, people working locally, and people from community groups and faith groups.

- “I very much enjoyed the presentations and meeting people from the area.”
- “I liked the presentations from people working in the Old Kent Road, especially the artist studio guy, more of this please.”
- “Great fun, much appreciated, important for local people to get involved.”
- “What wasn’t covered but should have been – “the impact of these industrial units on residents.”
- “Again, not enough time for questions.”



What we know about businesses

The meeting heard an overview by the Greater London Authority of what local businesses there are within the Old Kent Road area. We learnt that there are 750 businesses in the Old Kent Road area employing 9,500 people. There are 3 main reasons for businesses to want to locate in the area;

- closeness to customers,
- proximity to central London, and
- public transport links.



We also found out that:

- 23% of the people working locally work in stand alone warehouses,
- 22% in industrial estates,
- 17% in dense industrial, e.g. refurbishing first world war battleship pistons,
- 1% in open industrial land,
- 2% in railway arches,
- 12% in high street shops and cafes
- 7% in retail parks
- 3% in business centres, and
- 13% in community uses in residential areas.

Another interesting fact we learnt was that there is only 1 vacant business unit, which indicates a lot of demand for these types of units in this area. We also learnt that some of the businesses here have been here for many decades, reaching back to the beginning of the twentieth century, so having therefore survived wars and bombing, vast economic and social changes in London, and the modernisation of society in all areas of life. We were left with an impression that industry, of some form or another, will be here for another hundred or more years.

Presentations from local businesses

Mark Brearley of Kaymet talked about the vital importance of planning policies making it possible for small and medium sized industries to continue to thrive in the area. Kaymet make aluminium trays, trolleys and hotplates. Kaymet sells to Harrods in London, as well as to places in Tokyo and New York.

Next up was William Austin from Southwark Studios, which provides workspace for art studios. An overview of the space layout where the company occupies was given and potential threats it could face once housing developers move in.

Finally James Glancy talked about how his company designs seasonal decorations and urban art projects for retail and leisure destinations ranging from Regents Street to St David's and Brent Cross.

In summary we learnt about the vitality of local industry, and we heard directly from owners of local industry a plea for support for them when planning policies are developed into the future.

Small groups' discussion

We split up into smaller groups for the last bit of the meeting, and these notes summarise the points in common across all of these smaller groups.

By far the most numerous point being made was about the desirability of keeping significant amounts of industry and workshop uses into the future. Because otherwise the Old Kent Road could become a "sterile" place just like many other places in the country, with one person saying "just like Lewisham town centre", which they saw as being too much about housing developments.

The difficulties of having noisy industry adjoining residential was understood, but we were told that a new development in Camden (Travis Perkins on Royal College Street) shows how design can overcome this problem. Another reason to keep industrial uses as well as other uses is the benefit to the businesses themselves of the location, and of the "made in London" brand (as opposed to say, "made somewhere along the M25"). Creative and artist workshop uses were suggested as the way forward as they cause less noise and traffic.

A number of different people suggested a meeting space for local businesses should be developed; as the interaction that already happens between businesses is seen as a benefit, and is due to the concentration of businesses in one area. This interaction could be facilitated by a "shared space to meet each other" that should include "a business support service".

There was quite a lot of support for more information about the types of new jobs that would benefit local communities the most, a study of some kind was being called for.

One discussion was about the effect of the market on development of land, where increasing land use values mean developers will be interested in buying and building on land; but only as long as they are allowed to build profitable uses. This is a view about how holding back the tide of change is impossible in the long run, therefore less industry should be accepted and should be planned for. A completely different set of views was about how the council should protect what is valued at the moment and so turn the tide against the loss of “mixed use” areas. This idea is given some evidential support by the low level of vacancies amongst industrial uses at present, which the GLA reported earlier in the meeting. Some of these uses however, we were told, are underuses of the space, meaning low ratios of jobs and output by the square metres of space being used up.

We were told that the area doesn't always make it easy for business uses, with many local businesses finding it very difficult to find parking for their staff and customers, or to have loading and unloading of deliveries carried out easily.

There were a lot of comments too about retail businesses, which will be carried on at the 1st July community forum, where we focus down on retail and the future of retail.

