



SOMERS TOWN

Neighbourhood Plan

Residents' Housing and Open Space Survey Findings

August – October 2014.



Somers Town Residents' Housing and Open Space Survey

The purpose of the survey is to establish evidence to support policies for the Somers Town Neighbourhood Plan.

Planning workshops and activities over the past two years have established clear priorities for writing most of the Neighbourhood Plan policies. However, for housing and open space the priorities of local residents have been less clear, largely because of the consultation outcomes and development intentions of the Council's Community Investment Programme (CIP).

This survey has therefore tried to gather more detail from Somers Town residents, particularly in relation to the understanding of 'affordable' housing offered by the CIP development and clarity about open space: how local people use it and the type of spaces they think the area needs in the future. The 'key messages' and supporting evidence collated below will be used as to further develop Neighbourhood Plan policies and projects.

The survey was carried out by residents and local groups and distributed via Somers Town Community Centre and online using Survey Monkey.

There are 182 complete surveys:

- 35% respondents live in close proximity to proposed CIP sites (Coopers Lane, Monica Shaw Court, Charrington Street, etc).
- 52% respondents live fairly close to the sites (Ossulston Street, Chalton Street, etc).
- 14% respondents live nearer the boundaries of the neighbourhood (Eversholt Street, Amphill Estate, Doric Way, Oakley Square, etc).

Key messages for the Somers Town Neighbourhood Plan (STNP):

- **Sustainable community centred development:** residents do not want their community destabilised and gentrified by an influx of market properties.
- **An environment that supports physical and mental wellbeing:** green spaces and trees, and other initiatives that improve air quality are priorities. Disruption and pollution from construction is seen as detrimental to health. Tall and high density building is viewed as creating an unhealthy microclimate.
- **Housing development should focus on reuse and refurbishment e.g. above shops, empty buildings, and any new building on existing development sites i.e. Edith Neville School site and within mixed use development at Drummond Crescent and St Pancras Hospital, and appropriate infill space:** specifically the Neighbourhood Plan could aim to house young people and older people. This could help to alleviate overcrowding and enable extended families to stay in the same area. The survey shows need for large family homes but also reveals reluctance to have these built within the neighbourhood.
- **Maximum building height should be 6 storeys in keeping with the estates in the neighbourhood:** some building heights e.g. along some of Chalton Street, could be increased to create new flats.
- **Intelligent approach to design:** maximising use of space, sensitivity to heritage and built form, high quality appropriate building materials / finishes are important.
- **Housing policies and management:** residents identify current policies and management arrangements as additional concerns in the survey. The Neighbourhood Plan policies and projects can address alternatives like allocation zoning, Community Land Trusts, etc.
- **Open spaces to support a mix of activity:** children's play, exercise and relaxation are the most frequently cited uses of open space. The Concept B suggestion for enhancing the existing characteristics of green spaces is popular: active central community space; Purchase Street park; St Pancras Gardens. These along with small community garden type spaces across the neighbourhood could be connected as a green chain eventually linking up with Camley Street Neighbourhood Forum's greening initiatives.
- **Accessible routes and spaces:** survey responses from older and disabled residents present a strong case for better accessibility and more seating and resting places throughout the neighbourhood.
- **Dog control:** designated dog areas and dog free zones both score highly in the survey. This could be considered in open space design on a case by case basis along with a general policy for dealing with dog fouling on streets and estates.

Survey responses

1. Views on Image A (CIP concept) and Image B (STNF¹ lower impact concept).

The comments on these images are detailed but can be grouped in to 6 prevalent themes: Like; Don't like; Quality of life; Building heights; Gentrification; School site.

Image A: 161 responses.

101 people do not like this concept:

- 28% highlight negative impact on health and quality of life: loss of useable green space; pollution; disruption; stress.
- 26% object to tall buildings.
- 10% raise issues relating to gentrification, especially development of expensive housing rather than meeting needs of existing community.
- 4% believe that housing should be developed on the school site to pay for redevelopment.

51 people like this concept:

- 15% like the community facilities on Purchase Street.
- 11% like the new housing overlooking the square because people can watch their children.
- 11% like the concept because they need larger housing.
- 11% like the outdoor gym.
- 9% like the school and children's centre.

Image B: 159 responses.

152 people prefer a lower impact option B, 3 people dislike and 4 people state a preference for A:

- 22% object to the tall building, and want no building on that site or reduction to 6 storeys.

¹ Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum

- 12.5% agree that housing should be developed on the school site to generate the school building costs and save open space.
- 10.5% highlight quality of life impacts: less disruption than A but people are still clearly sick of construction work in the neighbourhood; enthusiasm for the 3 distinct green spaces and keeping Plot 10 on the central site.
- 4% note the perceived reduction of market housing or its removal to the edge of the neighbourhood favourably.

2. Understanding how affordable housing is delivered generally and is likely to be through the CIP.

Of 179 respondents:

- 35% are aware that affordable housing is generally delivered as a small percentage of houses for sale.
- 64% were not aware of this.

Of 176 respondents:

- 11% are aware that the CIP could result in 75% of the total housing built being full market price homes.
- 88.5% were not aware of this.

3. Residents' housing need: 135 responses.

46 state a housing need:

- 65% state overcrowding with half of those wanting a larger family home to house extended families. A couple of people also state that they needed housing but not at the expense of the neighbourhood.
- 20% need starter type homes for young people.
- 11% need homes suitable for the elderly or disabled.

27 respondents have no housing need and a further 62 commented on perceived need in the area. The comments largely reflect the statistics above².

4. Sites for new housing in Somers Town: 194 responses.³

- 32% agree with converting upper floors e.g. above shops. 13% people identify Chalton Street and Eversholt Street.
- 25.5% agree with building on top of existing buildings, over car parks, and places where open space and trees are not interfered with. The new school, police depot and Euston Station are among suggestions. There is some consensus on 6 storey height limits within neighbourhood boundary.
- 18% agree there are under-used or empty spaces that could be built on. Suggestions include empty shops, pubs, Drummond Crescent depot site.

46 raise other policy priorities:

- 36% control of building heights and densities.
- 21% good / appropriate design.
- 20% protect and improve the environment (air quality, greening, micro-climate).
- 20% housing policy and housing management that works for residents.
- 9% better security.

5. There should be no new housing in Somers Town: 135 responses.

- 3.5% do not agree with with this statement.
- 49% agree Somers Town already has a high density of housing in a small area.

² A selection of comments from the whole survey that reflect the most common themes are compiled at the end of this report.

³ People were asked to tick all that applied.

- 34% agree there are places nearby more appropriate for new housing. Suggestions include King Cross and Euston development areas.
- 18 additional comments include criticism of high volume of new student accommodation in the surrounding area and suggestions to maximise existing development opportunity for affordable housing in Kings Cross and Euston.

6. How open space is currently used in Somers Town: 521 responses.⁴

- 20.5% children's play.
- 19.5% exercise.
- 18% sitting quietly and relaxing.
- 11% general health benefits of trees and greenery.
- 10.5% sports.
- 9.5% social / community events.
- 4.5% dog walking.
- 3% gardening.
- 2% don't use open space (notably due to mobility / access issues).
- 1.5% who list other uses have been included in above totals where appropriate e.g. walking to exercise. One respondent describes using open space to get some sun as 'a holiday for poor people'.

7. The type of space respondents think Somers Town needs: 554 responses.

- 18.5% supervised spaces for children.
- 16.5% sports pitches.
- 12.5% quiet spaces with seating.

⁴ People were asked to make 3 choices each for 6 and 7.

- 12% dog free spaces (combined with the support for designated dog areas this suggests dog control should be a high priority for design of open space).
- 11% public spaces with grass and trees.
- 10% designated dog areas.
- 9.5% private gardens for residents.
- 3% green and brown rooftops for health and biodiversity.
- 3% shared space with local schools.
- 2% make other suggestions, notably more spaces for the elderly and that are accessible for people with disabilities.

8. Sample of comments relating to common themes.

Benefitting the existing community:

“Ask what people in the community want first because you don’t live here and we do.”

“Local residents do not support more lengthy building works for housing that is not going to benefit the community.”

“Any new housing needs to be for those living in the area. Either up or down-sizing or starting out.”

“What is the point of housing where investors not residents benefit?”

“All available Council land should only be used for socially useful functions e.g. schools, social housing etc. To sell it off to developers to build luxury pads for absentee landlords, to exploit the chronic housing shortage in central London, is a travesty of the Council’s social remit.”

Environment and health:

“We could do with biodiverse rooftops because of pollution so leave our green space alone. Leave Purchase Street alone.”

“Air quality must be addressed. More trees are needed and I understand that pavemnets exist that can absorb CO2.”

“Somers Town is already a very highly densely populated area with little outdoor space. Most residents do not have gardens and rely on open spaces on Polygon Road and Purchase Street for their children to play and for adults to relax. Space is important to mental and physical well-being and by taking away space, and adding people to the area, the council will be increasing stress levels of the people living here.”

Facilities and spaces:

“Plot 10 is ideal where it is at present. To use path behind is a good idea and to include St Aloyisious is ideal because it’s close to their school.”

“I believe in more housing but I still want access to open space and facilities for children.”

“The school refurbishment should be funded by having flats built on top of the school, as has been the case with other schools in the area. Under no circumstances is it acceptable to build on the last bit of green space in such a built up area.”

“ Need to aim towards bigger and more open and public space. Still think the school needs to suck it up and have housing above to make best use of space for all.”

DT. VAC. October 2014.

