

**Wards Corner regeneration, Seven Sisters
Review of public consultation in 2007 for GL Hearn by The Consultation
Institute
April 2012**

Overall conclusion

The Consultation Institute's overall conclusion is that the 2007/8 consultation was structured and delivered in a professional manner. Whilst there are one or two areas where the consultation could have been better, on balance the applicant has demonstrated good practice throughout.

Background and methodology

The Consultation Institute (TCI) was asked by GL Hearn to review the public consultation that was carried out over summer 2007 prior to the submission of the planning application. We have also looked briefly at earlier, relevant consultation and post application consultation, research and engagement activity, although we have not made a detailed assessment of them.

TCI's review was carried out by Mike Bartram, an Associate of the Institute, in April 2012. The review was based on a meeting with Nick Jones, Strategic Communications Director of GL Hearn Limited on 20 April and a study of the planning documents available on the wardscornerregeneration.co.uk website, in particular:

- Consultation Statement Part 1
- Consultation Statement Part 2
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Planning Statement

In addition, TCI looked at the following documents:

- Consultation on the regeneration of Wards Corner 2003 to present
- Consultation summary on the regeneration of Wards Corner 2003 to November 2008
- Consultation responses on LB Haringey website

The review took the form of a critical appraisal of the following points:

- Objectives and questions
- Quality and comprehensiveness of information
- Effective targeting of publicity
- Response rate
- Changes made to scheme
- Analysis and reporting
- Criticisms of, and complaints about, the consultation
- Duration of consultation
- Adherence to Government Code of Practice on Consultation and the Consultation Institute's *Consultation Charter*

We have neither sought to evaluate whether the scheme is a 'good' scheme, nor to take a view on the scope of the consultation, simply on its delivery.

Objectives

The Consultation Statement sets out clear objectives for the consultation. This is good practice.

The following principles appear to have been adhered to during the consultation, and this is consistent with good practice:

- Communicate and inform early:
 - there has been public information about the development of the site stretching back to 2003 and a multi-stage consultation
 - stakeholders were made aware of the scheme during earlier phases of the project's development
- Consult widely and deeply:
 - 10,000 local households were mailed
 - Consultation information was hand delivered to every business on site
 - face-to-face discussions were offered to stakeholders
 - staffed exhibitions were held
- Work to ensure all those who wish to take part are able to:
 - reasonable efforts appear to have been made to alert market traders to the consultation
 - North London Business were present at the exhibition
 - interpreters were available on request
- Report back the outcome of any consultation activities to the community in a timely manner:
 - full report widely and promptly circulated
- Consider the feedback and seek to amend where appropriate and feasible:
 - a number of significant amendments are testament to this
- Communicate the final scheme so everyone is in no doubt of how the plans have progressed:
 - regular newsletters

We are less clear about how well the remaining principles have been adhered to:

- Set out the programme, the constraints, when and how people can engage and what the anticipated outcomes may be:
 - there were a number of significant constraints on the site – a clear explanation of these at an early stage could have done much to put the proposals and options in context and help to manage the expectations of consultees
- Communicate how the proposals have been influenced by the programme, and where they have not, why not:
 - the content of consultation responses and changes made to the scheme are helpfully set out, but more could have been done to explain the 'fate' of the comments that the project team were unable to accommodate

It is possible that more could have been done to draw attention to the impact of the proposals on the market at an early stage. It is noted that a number of meetings were held with the representatives of market traders during the summer and autumn of 2008, leading to significant changes to the scheme.

Careful monitoring of the consultation against these objectives would have helped to ensure that the objectives were met in all respects, rather than in most.

Questions

It is important that consultation questions are relevant to the consultation objectives, neutral (non-leading) and clear (as far as possible giving rise to unambiguous responses) and that they provide an opportunity for consultees to say what they wish. We have no problem with the consultation questions which, in a number of respects, represent good practice:

- Mixture of open and closed questions
- Inclusion of options for 'voting' (which we know from opinion research is valued by consultees), on the specific issue of public space
- Opportunity on the questionnaire to request a response

We have not taken a view as to the scope of the consultation and hence the scope of the questions.

Quality and comprehensiveness of information

For consultees to be able to engage properly with the consultation topic and offer informed responses to the questions they need to be given clear, accurate, comprehensive, unbiased and timely information.

We welcome the following elements of the information provision, each of which represents good practice:

- Use of accessible language and avoidance of jargon
- Widespread use of photos, satellite photos, artists' impressions and models making the consultation accessible to people with limited English or who find reading and writing difficult
- The transparent approach to publishing critical comments and telling everyone 'what happens next'
- Availability of exhibition boards on the project website, facilitating participation from those unable to attend

While we appreciate that staff were on hand to answer technical questions at meetings and exhibitions, we would have liked to have seen more detailed background information made available at the time of the consultation for those who wanted to read up more and familiarise themselves with the evidence base for statements made about the proposals in the consultation.

The distinction between the three public space options could have been brought out more clearly.

Response rate

Exhibitions were held at appropriate times and places, and were relatively well-attended. We believe that an on-street presence, coupled with the accessible approach to providing information described above, is one of the best ways of running an inclusive consultation.

Considering the apparently effective targeting of residents and businesses over a very 'local' issue, the number of completed questionnaires (around 1%) is on the low side; particularly few being received from the website. Although there were facilities available to complete a questionnaire at the exhibition, perhaps more could have been done to convert attendance into responses.

Changes made to scheme

It is not unusual for a scheme to emerge almost unchanged from a consultation. While this does not of itself prove that consultation has been ineffective, changes of substance made to a scheme may be regarded as a reasonable indication of an effective exercise.

We welcome the fact that several changes were made to the proposed scheme, and that these were clearly reported. As we have already noted, we feel that more could have been done to explain how these changes emerged from the consultation responses and the 'fate' of the large number of comments received to the open questions.

Analysis and reporting

For a scheme of this size we consider the level of analysis to be appropriate. Many otherwise professionally delivered consultations let themselves down when it comes to feeding back to the public what they have said and the changes that have been made to proposals. We welcome the approach to feedback in this consultation, in particular:

- The proactive and inclusive approach of feeding back to everyone through a newsletter
- The transparency of approach, with negative and critical comments included alongside more positive ones

We would like to have seen more reference to what stakeholders had said.

Criticisms and complaints

It is common for opponents of a proposal to criticise the consultation exercise. Letters of objection sent subsequently to LB Haringey criticise the process for being top-down 'consultation' rather than 'community participation' and for focusing on marginal issues, but there are few specific criticisms. We note that the successful legal challenge to the granting of planning application did not relate to the consultation, but the lack of documentation about equality impacts available to the planning committee when it made its decision.

Duration of consultation

It is generally accepted that consultation programmes of three months duration represent good practice, not least because of the opportunity they provide stakeholder organisations to consult their members on responses.

Although the initial consultation period falls well short of this, the consultation was an iterative, multi-staged process and as such appeared to offer ample time for everyone concerned to have their say.

The Consultation Institute's *Consultation Charter*

The Consultation Institute's *Consultation Charter* contains seven best practice principles:

- Integrity
- Visibility
- Accessibility
- Transparency
- Disclosure
- Fair Interpretation
- Publication

We are happy that these principles were adhered to in this consultation.

In respect of transparency, more could have been done (as we observed earlier) to publicise the fact that stakeholder responses were available.