

Walker Riverside Consultation Feedback Report

Part 1

Extract from

Managing community involvement in the preferred options report - Contribution to the Consultation Feedback Report

A Report by Social Regeneration Consultants

Introduction

This report summarises qualitative feedback on 'Walker Riverside- Decisions' gained from a programme of focus groups and outreach sessions.

Focus groups

There were a series of five Focus Groups aimed at specific interest groups in the Walker Riverside area:

- Businesses (two sessions for businesses located in the area)
- Key workers (people working in the area with community groups and voluntary organisations)
- Community stakeholders (service providers from the voluntary and public sectors)
- Walker Riverside Network (a forum representing community groups mainly to the south of the area)

The **main outcomes** of the Focus Groups were as follows:

Businesses

The main issues were:

- the early production of a '**Promise**' specifically for businesses in the area (along the lines of that produced for residents)
- the City Council to embark on **individual discussions and negotiations** with businesses likely to be directly affected by the options as soon as possible

- the City Council to produce **a range of management and financial mechanisms** aimed at supporting and benefiting businesses affected by the options, including, in particular, details of compensation and relocation
- the City Council to ensure that due emphasis and attention is given to **the futures of businesses in the area** (and to the same degree as they will be given to residents)
- the City Council to move as quickly as possible to **produce final proposals to provide certainty** to businesses in the area
- a regular and **steady flow of information** to be produced during the development of the final proposals, and beyond, so businesses know what is happening
- consideration of the need for **renovation and improvement of existing business buildings** as part of the Area Action Plan as well as new development

In conclusion, businesses were most concerned that there was **regular discussion** with them about their individual circumstances and opportunities, that information was provided as soon as possible about **compensation and relocation arrangements** and that the Council produce a **'Promise'** document for businesses.

Key workers

This Focus Group consisted mainly of representatives from community and voluntary organisations in the area, many of whom had worked in the area for a long time. A total of 26 invitations were sent out and 10 people attended the session.

The main issues raised were:

- the need to **clarify the position on current and future funding** for the community and voluntary sector
- the **involvement of young people** in the development and implementation of the Area Action Plan on an on-going basis
- the clarification of the future of some of the **community buildings** identified in the options
- the need to provide **resources** to the community and voluntary sector to support its role and representation in the planning process

- clarification of how the regeneration process will bring value to the community social and economically (as well as physically), particularly in relationship to **service improvement**

In conclusion, key workers were concerned that the **position of the community and voluntary sector in terms of support and funding is clarified**, that the sector was used as a **vehicle to engage residents** (with appropriate resources) and that the Area Action Plan specifically highlights the **social and economic benefits** that will accrue from physical change, detailing the service improvements that will take place.

Community stakeholders

The Community Stakeholder Focus Group consisted of representatives of public sector service providers in the area, including departments of the City Council. The original list was compiled with input from the City Council, the East End Community Development Alliance, and the Walker Riverside Information Centre. A total of 61 invitations were sent out and **28 people attended the session**.

The main outcomes were:

- the need to ensure **inclusive, on-going and thorough consultation with the community and voluntary sector** in the area throughout the development and implementation of the Area Action Plan, and, as part of this,
- to ensure **specific groups of the community** are targeted, including homeless / vulnerable young people, schools (children and staff / governors), young people generally and asylum seekers and refugees
- the importance of addressing **issues of service delivery** as a major component of the Area Action Plan and covering timescales, co-ordination, service requirements / commitments to change and funding
- the necessity to involve **the community and voluntary sector to support, mediate and manage consultation processes** within neighbourhoods and across the area as a whole

In conclusion, community stakeholders highlighted the need for **comprehensive and on-going consultation** with the community and the community and voluntary sector throughout the Area Action Plan process, to ensure **all sections of the community** are actively engaged in this and that **service delivery** is a major component of the Area Action Plan.

Walker Riverside Network

The Walker & Riverside Community Network is an umbrella group of representatives drawn from a number of individual residents and tenants group and other community groups, such as the Thomas Gaughan Community Centre and Churches Together. It consists of:

- Lancefield Avenue Tenants Association
- Pottery Bank Tenants Association
- Proctor Court Tenants Association
- The Oval Residents Association
- Cambrian Residents Association
- Walker Churches Together
- Wilton Avenue Residents Association
- Thomas Gaughan Community Centre
- Owner Occupiers Group

Ten people attended the session from Cambrian RA, Lancefield Avenue TA, Wilton Avenue RA, Thomas Gaughan Centre, Pottery Bank TA and the Owner Occupiers Group.

The main outcomes of the session were:

- the need to **analyse responses to the options by neighbourhood** in order to differentiate between responses from residents living in a neighbourhood about that neighbourhood, and those from residents who may live in the area but not in the particular neighbourhood they are commenting on
- the need to consider **social and economic issues** (i.e. antisocial behaviour and tenancy enforcement), and ways of addressing them, with as much emphasis and priority as physical issues
- the development of an **on-going and inclusive programme of consultation with and regular information** to residents, community and voluntary organisations, stakeholders and businesses in the area
- NCC to better co-ordinate internally and with partners regeneration, planning and housing in order that **policies and practices are linked**, inform each other and provide a consistent and unified approach
- the need to **review proposals for the Community Focus area**, in particular the pros and cons of centralising service and retail provision as against dispersing it across the neighbourhoods

In conclusion, the Network's primary concerns were that it was clear in the **analysis of the responses** whether residents were commenting on their own or other neighbourhoods, that **social and economic improvements** must be

treated with as high a priority as physical ones, that there should be an **on-going and inclusive programme of consultation** across the area and that the City Council need to **better co-ordinate policies and practices** to provide a consistent and unified approach to the area.

Outreach

In order to consult with sections of the community who might not attend consultation sessions at times they find difficult or in places they are not familiar with, **12 sessions** were held with:

- **young people (4)** – Rathbones Entry to Employment students, Rathbones Childcare students, Walker Wanderers, YMCA Detached Youth Group
- **older people (3)** – Thomas Gaughan Centre Food Co-op x 2, Greater Walker Community Trust Monday Club at Monkchester Community Centre
- **asylum seekers and refugees (2)** – Common Ground, New Neighbours (Sure Start)
- **young parents (2)** – NCH Parents Group, Sure Start Young Parents Group
- **community centre users (1)** – Thomas Gaughan Centre

In addition, **3 sessions were organised by the City Council's Play and Youth (East) section for young people** and facilitated by the Walker Riverside Engagement Manager. These sessions used summaries of the options on flip charts followed by discussion.

The main **outcomes** are set out below

Young people

The **main issues** were:

- early action to address the **lack of facilities for young people** across the area to prove young people are being listened to and action being taken
- positive and on-going **involvement of young people in plans** for the future of the area as a whole and facilities / amenities for young people in particular
- the need to address the **'people' issues** as much as the physical nature of the area, i.e. alcohol and drug abuse, crime and antisocial behaviour
- **measures to make the area feel safer**, including more activities and facilities for young people, management of parks and open spaces, better street lighting and improved relations with the police

- **a greater variety of housing**, including housing specifically for young people, and better management to tackle antisocial behaviour and neighbour disputes
- more and more **appropriate / accessible local job and training opportunities**, including job experience and links to local businesses
- better quality, and a greater range of, **shops** in the area
- improvements to the **public transport system** to provide good services on all routes, affordability and better customer care

In general, the young people involved in the outreach programme were **very concerned about the area**, now and in the future. Most of them expressed a desire to be part of the regeneration process but were also **sceptical about whether this would happen**, whether, in any event, their opinions would be taken into account and whether anything would change anyway. Their other main concerns were the **lack of activities and facilities for young people**, the need to tackle **social and economic issues** (especially those of safety and drug / alcohol abuse), the need for **better and a greater range of housing**, particularly for young people and appropriate and accessible **job and training opportunities**.

Older people

Three sessions were held with older people, involving **21 people in total**. Again, local workers involved with the groups played a significant part in organisation and management of the sessions.

The **main issues** were:

- **a greater variety of housing** is needed, and the mix / tenure / cost must be developed in response to the needs of all sections of the community; refurbishment of existing housing is equally important
- **housing density is important** – there are more problems of antisocial behaviour and crime when the housing is too dense
- **bus services need improving**, especially into the City centre, and within the area if new local centres are going to be developed
- the need for **more activities and facilities for young people**, and improvements to existing, and the development of more, community buildings generally

- **better shopping facilities**, including improvements to existing local centres, like Church Walk, and the development of new ones
- **measures to make the area feel and look safer**, including more police, better street lighting, and more visible street wardens
- **improvements to the environment** to make the area look cleaner and more attractive; the development of local open spaces / play areas which are safe for children, on-site management of open spaces (i.e. park wardens), and opening up access to the river

In conclusion, older people had **very similar concerns to young people and other groups** involved in the outreach programme. Their concerns went far beyond the needs of their particular age group, reflecting **a concern about all aspects of the area** and all sections of the community. In particular, they highlighted the need for **new housing development and improved shopping facilities** in the area to provide for the existing community and to attract new people, **better bus services, provision for young people**, and measures to **improve safety** and to make the area **look more attractive**.

Asylum seekers and refugees

Two sessions were held with asylum seekers and refugees, involving **17 people** in total. Again, the assistance of local workers was essential in organising and running these sessions.

The **main issues** were:

- the need for **more language courses** in the area, with crèche facilities, to meet the strong desire of most asylum seekers and refugees to learn English (which would aid integration as well as benefiting them as individuals)
- the need for **more and better quality job opportunities** in the area (even though asylum seekers themselves cannot work) to reduce the dependence on benefits generally and improve economic prospects for individuals and the area generally
- **increased resources for community and voluntary organisations**, like Common Ground, to continue and expand their work with the community
- the need to promote **greater understanding and tolerance** of asylum seekers and refugees amongst the local community to counter racism and resentment

- **improvement of the Church Walk shopping centre** and generally **improving services** in the area alongside housing improvement
- **opening up the riverside** for local people, **managing new and existing open spaces** and developing **local play areas** for children

In conclusion, asylum seekers and refugees were concerned about their own situation as individuals and families living in uncertainty, but were **also concerned more broadly with the community and the area overall**. In particular, they are concerned about **increasing resources to community and voluntary organisations** which work with local people, **promoting greater understanding of asylum seekers and refugees** (and black and minority ethnic communities generally), **more opportunities to learn English, more local job opportunities** and **improving shopping provision and the environment**.

Young parents

Two sessions were held with young parents, involving **11 people overall**. Local workers again helped organise and run the sessions.

The **main issues** were:

- the retention of the tower block, St Anthony's House, would **detract from the improvement of the area** and its future should be seriously considered
- **the future of schools in the area was an important consideration**; with mixed views about whether to keep the schools as they are or merge them
- the need for a **greater variety of housing in the area**, particularly to meet the needs of young people and larger families, and to attract new people
- **better shopping facilities** and the development of **small, local parks for children**
- **more activities and facilities for young people**, including retaining the Lightfoot Centre and incorporating provision for young people and a pool
- **greater emphasis on tackling racism**, antisocial behaviour, vandalism and encouraging parental control

In conclusion, young parents were concerned about many of the issues raised in outreach sessions with other sections of the community. They felt strongly about the **future of schools in the area** (making it clear that any changes should involve parents and local people generally), identified the need for a **wider variety of housing** developed to modern needs and standards, the **improvement of local shopping facilities**, and the need to vigorously **tackle**

antisocial behaviour, including racism. Their other main concerns were the **tower blocks** (and St Anthony's House in particular), **more activities and facilities for young people** and local, managed **play areas for children**.

Telephone interviews

It was considered important to consult with potential residents to consider how new people might be attracted into the Walker Riverside area. Seven interviews were carried out.

The main **outcomes** (based on the questions asked) follow.

Participants were asked to consider the factors that may influence their return to the area:

- proximity to **family and friends** was the most popular reason followed by,
- the **quality and affordability of the proposed new housing** and the regeneration of the area and its overall **potential for improvement** under these plans

Current perceptions of the Walker Riverside area were discussed with each participant:

- equal emphasis was given to the **dilapidated look** of the area, its **high crime rate** and **lack of facilities and services**
- several references were also made to the **groups of young people hanging around** on the streets and the negative image this gave the area
- a majority of participants considered the **riverside location** of the area to be a great advantage
- **accessibility to the city centre**, a **supportive community** and its **potential for improvement** were also considered positive factors

Participants were asked to consider any specific improvements that would attract them into Walker Riverside:

- improvements to the **overall image** of the area were considered very important by most
- considerable emphasis was given to a **wider choice of housing**, a **better environment**, **improved public transport** and a **wider range of community facilities**
- much emphasis was given to the need to address **security and personal safety issues**
- it was thought that potential new residents were unlikely to consider moving an area with a difficult reputation without the reassurance that special emphasis was being given to issues such as **CCTV**, an increased **police presence**, **better street lighting** and **garaging**

Participants were asked to consider the type of property they would consider in the Walker Riverside area:

- a large majority would prefer to **buy a new house** in the area and the most popular size of house was a property with **three bedrooms**
- both **gardens and garages** were considered very important and there was disappointment that the housing currently being proposed for the area lacked garages or off-road parking
- there was some concern that potential new residents would be less likely than current residents to be **able to rent a new property rather than buy one**

In conclusion, the overall feeling was that the people interviewed were seriously interested in returning to the area. However, it was clear that if this was to happen the image and perception of the area had to be changed through visible and sustainable improvements, physically, socially and economically. In particular, the reputation of the area in terms of crime and antisocial behaviour was highlighted, along with the general appearance and 'feel' of the area, which was described as being 'shabby' and 'deprived'.

There was a strong feeling that Walker Riverside could be a very attractive area for professional people, especially young professionals working in the City. This was felt to be highly desirable for the future of the area but that it was unlikely to happen unless there was substantial change to the physical and economic fabric.