

BOTH SA36 and SA37 tend to frustrate an improved park, an improved transport nexus and especially, a much-needed and genuine Town Centre

SA 37 – 18–20 Stroud Green Road

THIS is described as a *New town centre frontage onto Stroud Green Road*, however it is really no more than a housing development. It's also described as "an opportunity to create new town centre uses within the Finsbury Park District Centre" but it is hard to see this as other than a residential development alongside Islington's misnamed 'town centre'.

It's hard to know what is meant by, *Town centre uses will be required at ground floor level on the Stroud Green frontage of this site.*

SA 36 – Finsbury Park bowling alley

THE principal feature of this Haringey site is that it sits close to the extreme peripheries of Haringey, Hackney and Islington and far from the centres of those three London boroughs. The site allocation maximizes benefit to one Council at the expense of the local community and especially at the expense of the potential for a genuine 'town centre'.

If this SA36 is sound, it is sound only within artificial confines while it disregards the immediately adjacent areas that have factors of great significance. It is not clear that a major stakeholder (Transport for London) was consulted. Given that this site is **(a)** near one of London's major transport interchanges and **(b)** on the edge of the Borough and **(c)** next to one of north London's largest parks, this site should have been subject to different criteria from say, a similar site in the middle of the Borough.

One of the main reasons for Neighbourhood Forums is to bridge borders and to try to make sense of areas and localities that are currently subject to arbitrary, artificial, administrative boundaries.

Neighbourhood forum: not yet

ALTHOUGH the Finsbury Park Neighbourhood Forum (FPNF) has begun and will cover the area of SA36, the local community is at a disadvantage compared with other areas that already have Forums set up.

When up and running, the nucleus of the FPNF is likely to be one of London's more important transport nodes: Finsbury Park station. It would encompass a significant area that would include all of SA36 and a large margin around —the link below is of the draft area; ignore Crouch End NF (pink) and the area marked Haringay (blue):

The object of the FPNF would be to consider Finsbury Park area as a whole. Because this locality exists at administrative extremes, it has for decades been little regarded. Now and again efforts are made at co-operation, but these have tended not to last long or to be meaningful. At any given time, one Borough or another tends to dominate and a third expresses little interest.

It is this lack of enduring common purpose for the area and the absence of meaningful responsibility that is one of the driving forces for a NF that would bridge the three Borough borders.

The current ambitions for this site are strictly within one Borough. It could be seen as a local plan to maximise one council's tax receipts, with little or no regard for the needs of the wider area as the public may view it.

Finsbury Park is a transport interchange

TOWN planning needs to consider Finsbury Park as a *transport interchange* because this is what the area is primarily about. It's about the *movement* of people. We need statistics of what that movement is going to be and how the arrival of Thameslink would affect it.

Interchanges work best when all modes are close to each other so the time taken transferring between two modes is minimized and optimised.

The biggest use of the rail is *through-traffic* but the bus stations are the *feeders* for commuting locals who live nearby and who support local businesses, on those days when there are no football matches or concerts in the park.

In the artist's impression (below) published about three years ago, part of proposal appears to abolish the East Bus terminus and put all the bus stops onto Seven Sisters Road increasing the walking distance from trains – again making the interchange less, not more, efficient.

Removing the East Bus station would be a big step backwards.

The *cycle park* is an initiative to make Finsbury Park more accessible for local commuters. Using bikes to get to the station reduces kiss-and-ride motorists (who slow traffic at peak times) and is therefore good for pedestrian and traffic flow. The cycle park has gone from the artist's impression.

Cycle routes: why are they not shown? One of the main ones goes down Finsbury Park Road – but that is not considered relevant to the development area.

Removal or placing the cycle park at a greater distance is regressive.

Similarly, for those disabled or otherwise unable to use buses, taxis are very important in their lives. Taxi drop off and pick up has to be as close as possible to the station entrance. It is surprising that the artist impression appears to have deleted the Taxi rank .

Effective /Deliverable? Question 15

IN THE *Haringey Local Development Framework Core Strategy Submission Soundness Self-Assessment*, key question number 15 asks, *Are there any cross-boundary issues that should be addressed and, if so, have they been adequately addressed?*

The answer is couched in sweeping generalities: *LBH works closely with ..., and also works with ...; work together ...*

An oblique reference is made to SA36 and 37, where the document says that,

Other action areas of the borough which require partnership working with neighbouring boroughs include: Finsbury Park and Manor House – with major regeneration projects at Finsbury Park station (in Islington) and at Woodberry Down (in Hackney).

Attempts at cross-border co-operation have been fitful, feeble and fruitless. Co-operation, or partnership is needed but there's no evidence of it being effective or sustainable, in the current absence of a fully set up Neighbourhood Forum and Plan. As a consequence, SA36 and 37 are limited in scope and lack ambition for the area as a whole.

The park

THE park represents the *core amenity* for all three boroughs and is a central consideration in any co-ordinated re-generation scheme.

Any high-rise development on the Rowans site would inevitably have a detrimental impact on the amenity of the park, as it is the only part of the park's perimeter that is directly built up to.

Corridor for permeability

THERE is one aspect that relates to the neighbouring Borough that needs to be addressed. The corridor that might run between or through two large buildings has been said to increase *permeability*.

It has been advanced as a means of improving the view of Finsbury Park from the station (in Islington). However, not only is this not so, the proposed (over-) development of the site would *detract* from the current view.



An artist's impression of the site (c.2013)

1. Many tall, mature trees are currently easily visible over the Rowans building. Replacement buildings of anywhere near the heights proposed (since increased) would obscure the trees from view at ground level from anywhere near the bus station.

However, this assumes that the trees remained.

Despite assurances that any construction work would not take place on the park, due to their closeness to the proposed building site, there is no guarantee that this large stand of trees would not be felled.

2. The width of the corridor would likely be narrow yet this corridor was the subject of misleading depictions and currently, of misleading description. The so-called artist's illustration published by promoters, shows a *Champs-Élysées*-sized avenue (above and next page).

This is a distortion of the likely narrow shopping arcade. The *narrow* angle of view through to the park could only be had by (a) someone standing on or close to the central axis of the shopping arcade and (b) looking directly down it. For the majority of people exiting the station, the gap would be unlikely to be noticed, let alone for the park to be seen.

Access alley drawn as avenue des Champs-Élysées

moving the goal posts: the (retail) corridor—so much vaunted—shown as a wide avenue populated by tiny people making it appear yet wider—planners declined to confirm width

Park made visible!

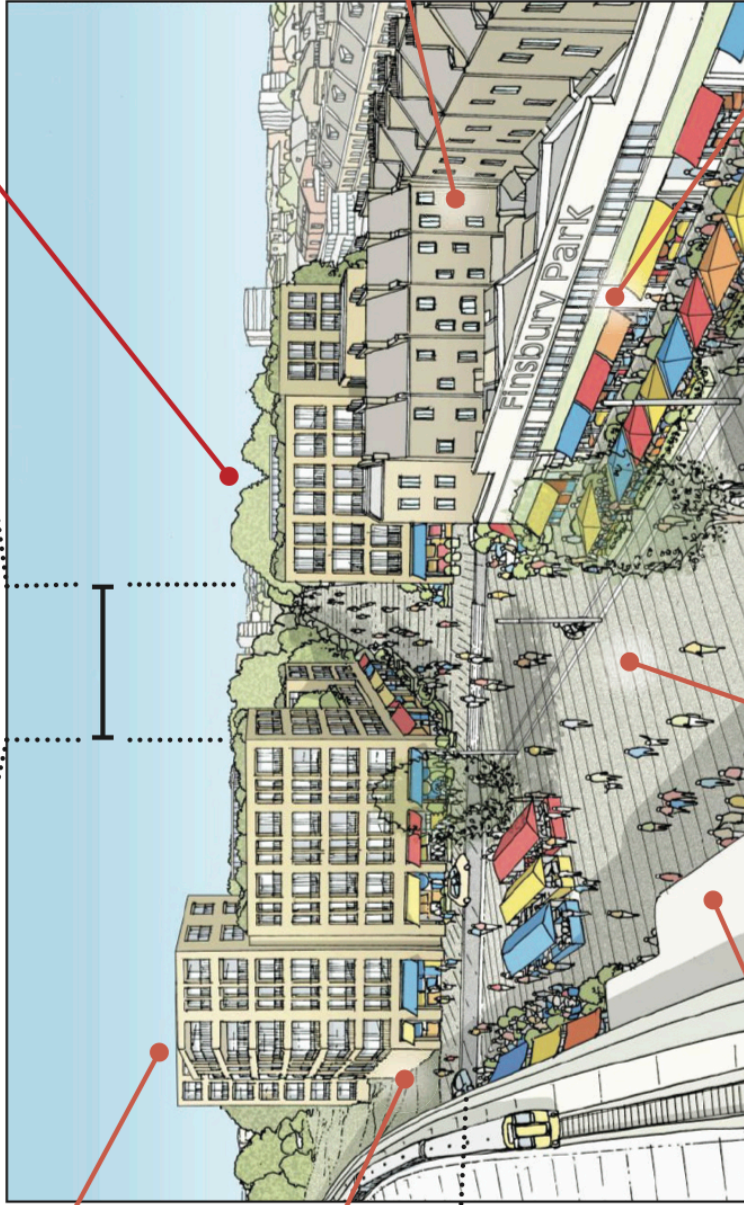
from this height above ground level—and through the 'permeable' cut-through—the tops of the tallest trees are visible. N.B. At the peak of summer, trees in full leaf can just be seen. In practice, the 'park view' would be far more restricted (see text).

Retained:

the triangle of ugly buildings that separates the big transport hub from the main road and continues to frustrate the aim of a real town square

Silver bullet public house

in this extraordinary rendition, the spit-and-sawdust Silver Bullet pub is hard to distinguish from central Paris



UNREALISTIC viewpoint

the distant and elevated perspective makes apartment blocks seem smaller

Seven story blocs

overlooking park — have extra stories been added in order to concede later?

Bicycle park: gone!

Stroud Green Road: now a lane!

this heavily-used road and bus route, becomes a fantastical lane, narrower than the pavement, with one and a half cars visible

Giant canopy: gone!

the artist 'impression' manages to disappear the big steel porch outside the railway station entrance, built in recent years at great expense

Bus station: gone!

perhaps even more surprising than the absent porch by the bus station, is the disappearance of the entire bus station. Is this an artist's hallucination ?!

TfL and the railway station

A LARGE number of residents in large blocks of flats, close to this key transport node, would likely create a constituency of 'nimbys' who would likely object, frustrate or stop further change or improvement in the area. Housing is needed but it needs to be *further away* from this *key transport node*.

The alley / shopping arcade is the sole concession that the area is a major transport interchange. However, it is TfL and the station that ought to have the major influence.

The artist's impression put out by the promoters even airbrushed out the huge porch by the bus station. Indeed, the entire bus station disappeared.

There is already access to the park alongside the bicycle storage facility.

The main difficulty with the proposed development for this site allocation, is that it would frustrate or preclude a superior solution for the area, if it were considered as a whole.

There is little point in the planners talking about permeability to the park unless they address east / west permeability through / over / under the station.

Would SA36:

- 1) remove the play group / garden / playground facility? If so why? To be replaced where? In a south-facing not east facing location?
- 2) make it easier for parents with children to use park benching (and access toilets / nappy change) near this playgroup area?
- 3) stop local supermarkets selling cheap booze to alcoholics?
- 4) take any account of the number of methadone users who use the chemist opposite for their (daily) fixes?
- 5) answer the public safety issues / public fears regarding local stabbings?

Highbury police station has closed for conversion to flats:
Is the 'new' Blackstock Road shop unit an effective replacement?

Footfall

IF Islington and Haringey want more of a sense of place and seamless integration of the commercial Stroud Green Road with commercial Seven Sisters Road and Blackstock Road then the 'key' is *not* footfall to Rowans.

If this were a footfall issue, we would be talking about Arsenal Football Club match day attendances and how pressure on the Tube system could be relieved if there were more things to do and see before and after games.

Retail and commerce

TO MAKE more of a sense of place, the arches under the station need to be opened up to encourage movement (footfall) between the east and west commercial areas.

People travel to **Fonthill Road Fashion Shops** from far and wide (even from south London): how could this vibrancy be used to make the wider area more commercially viable? A rival to Petticoat Lane or Camden Market? Where is the planners' vision?

That part of Blackstock Road, known as Highbury Vale has secondary shopping on both sides of the road, so that should be shown on maps.

Highbury Vale was known once upon time, in retail terms as the local 'Bond Street'. Where is the vision in the plan for Finsbury Park to be regenerated from the south?

What indices/ benchmarks will they be using to demonstrate success? Are any of them based on socio-economic class presumptions or prejudices?

Concerts conflict

THE impression given is that this largely about Haringey getting planning-gain money for flats on the edge of the borough. However, the narrow goal of selling more housing at this point conflicts with Haringey's goal of monetizing the park in the shape of increased concerts. The owners of expensive flats would be the most vociferous in opposing the Council's major events policy.

Finsbury Park has charity shops, Pound stores, pawnshops and Pay-day lenders: what exactly was being sold in the artist's impression market stalls?

A Town Centre concept is not about footfall to Rowans.

The point about the 2,500 objections to more Emirates concerts (never mind Finsbury Park ones) is that many concert-goers arrive/ depart through Finsbury Park station.

Town Centre planning

To present a Town Plan as merely about street frontages misses the point. Town centres are about commercial activity: this means people movement and footfall.

The Finsbury Park area needs to be looked at, not in a linear sense of the main roads only, but in terms of people flows, the existing aspects that promote and those that inhibit these flows.

It is difficult to create a tranquil and bustling space next to a Red Route (Seven Sisters Road)—N.B. Windrush Square in Brixton. Is it animated in the classic way we associate with Italian plazas or is it a joyless open space?

This proposal differs from other proposals for new blocks of flats that are alongside a transport interchange and conforming

with the London Plan, because of two additional factors: **(a)** the three borders (and all that implies) and **(b)** adjacent to a large park. This is the main reason why we flag up this Site Allocation as significantly different and needing special attention.

Red-route alert

TOWN squares have the characteristic of enclosure and for the most part (at ground level) human-scale.

To be human-scale one might argue that you should probably be able to walk across the shortest dimension of a square in, say, less than a minute.

The space occupied by City North/United House and faced by Wells Terrace could be re-configured (under a long term plan) to make a great square unmolested by the red route (and complement the bustle of Fonthill road).

Why did not Islington propose the N4 Library site on Blackstock Road as a Town Square?

The key concept

The key to any concept of 'Town Centre Finsbury Park' is the station and improving East /West permeability.

Opening up Station Place to the Public Park is quite literally a side issue (for reasons discussed elsewhere).

The railway arches under the rail viaduct could be opened up to encourage people movement.

The more people movement there is, the more retail opportunity, the more self-policing surveillance goes on.

The poor management of *Live-Nation*- type events makes the Town Centre unattractive and makes it a no-go area in people's mind for not just concert days but other days too.

Lots of people avoid shopping locally on match days. Let us see the 'dispersal zones' (for 30,000 people) *on the Maps*.

Let us see some benchmarking against the measures Brent Council took in preparation for/response to the Wembley Stadium (not all favourable/progressive).

People-friendly initiatives are taking place: pavements have been widened to assist pedestrians going to/from the Emirates.

Cycle Routes are being taken off the main roads through side streets – but they should be recognised as part of the hierarchy of spaces and uses that contribute to a balanced and well-thought-out town centre. Let us see them *on Maps*.

Successful town squares are often one-street back from a 'red route' thoroughfare (e.g. Christopher Place in relationship to Oxford Street).

Finsbury Park Station is a significant asset on London's transport infrastructure (and currently, a missed opportunity

for more commercial development): how many places in Zone 2 are so well served?

Finsbury Park can support commercial activity. Workplaces, retail and social/leisure activities *should be close to the station*.

Housing

HOUSING could and should be slightly further away so as not to be disturbed by trading. People also work shifts so bedrooms should be further away from noisy railway lines.

The block of flats is promoted at the same time that house-owners in local streets are refused dormer-windows to do loft conversions – an increase of housing density close to the station that would be sustainable (the local area is not a Conservation Area, dormers do not overlook the way high-rise flats do).

Putting denser housing closer to a remote *outer* suburban station might be justified because reduced footfall means there is less scope for commerce.

The Square Mile discourages housing because it becomes an obstacle to commercial redevelopment/ economic activity.

Finsbury Park is so well connected to the transport system it should be a *work destination*: London plc has to use its assets if it is to provide employment and compete locally and globally.

Along the Islington side of Blackstock Road in recent years, the Pickfords Depository and the petrol station sites that once provided employment were converted to housing (and one of them a gated community) and not even work-live units. Unless local children grow up seeing (small-scale) business around them, what ambitions will they have?

Also should we not be encouraging people to work locally and not commute long distances?

Converting Rowans to housing would be another dumbing-down of the area's potential. It should be bustling city-life-driven commerce.

The aspirations for the area across Stroud Green Road looks like a plan by Islington to *reduce* the potential of Finsbury Park.

Housing this close to Finsbury Park is not ideal and the long-term potential for justifiable 'Nimbyism' is a conflict to be avoided.

Overground

ALREADY this stretch of Victoria Tube line is at capacity. How long before the idea of a London Overground branch to Finsbury Park is revisited?

Where would such platforms (not) go? And what objections would these newly arrived flat owners then raise?

Any Finsbury Park Town Plan proposal has to look at the strategic future of Finsbury Park as a major London asset.

Key urban sites (adjacent major transport hubs) should be active revenue generating: not passive housing. *The closer to mass footfall a site is, the more commercial it should be.*

If commuters/ employers/ planners of all three boroughs saw Finsbury Park as a destination, the potential for economic growth would be great because so many people can access the station.

Turning prime sites next to the likes of Finsbury Park into sleepy housing is undesirable and would deny future work opportunities to the local economy.

The proposal would be a seriously regressive step that is not easily reversed and would compromise future progressive ideas. These are half-baked plans. Whether or not planners manage to force them through, this part of the Local Plan will stand as a monument to lack of vision and a textbook case as to how *not* to do town planning.

17th August 2016

Kevin Duffy

