

Report on Friends of Queen's Market attendance at the Core Strategy Examination, September 2011

The threat is in the small print in Newham Council's new planning strategy - it labels the market a 'strategic site' for housing for 'mixed use' development. There isn't room for both the market and housing on the site so this would mean pulling down the existing market.

The Core Strategy is the long-term planning policy for the borough yet almost nobody is aware of it, FoQM found out about it from a tip-off.



Newham Council turned up on 28th September at their palatial waterside Building 1000 Dockside Road (built with £111 million of Newham council taxpayers money) to answer critics of their Core Strategy for Green Street and Queen's Market.

An independent Government Inspector was there: he heard arguments and will write a report at the end, saying who he thinks is in the right. One of our members who attended reported as follows: "The process is not designed for people to participate in the Core Strategy. The inspector comes to it with the 'assumption' that the local authority's plan is 'sound'. It's difficult to make arguments that are planning arguments. This is discrimination against ordinary person with basic views and evidence. We really need a lawyer to argue the points. Inspector doesn't seem to challenge the council's evidence".

FoQM requested official note taking, but this was not allowed. The inspector's notes were the only record, to himself. Friends of Queen's Market are compiling their own notes.

The council planners varied from being quite hostile to criticism to quite amenable. The inspector was clearly

irritated by the council at some points. The main planner had a technique of spouting, when under fire, she would blurt out large amounts of waffle and technical jargon.

At the end one of our supporters Lucy said: "we were pleased that we had attended the hearings, but there should be far more people doing this; there is something wrong with the system. The simple fact is that if people are not here, then the inspector is not going to tackle a subject fully. So it's not democratic, it's a random process of scrutiny of the plans".

During the first session the inspector said, **"clearly somewhere like Queen's Market is a character asset"**

Retail / employment session:

The Council wanted to add large 'ordinary' retail stores to Green Street but the Inspector was not convinced where these stores would go. The Inspector said to the council 'what are you seeking here? Tesco?' The council planner said, 'yes floor space is constrained. Need more Tesco. The Council called the 'strategic site of Queen's Market' a site for 'mixed-use' development, including retail stores.

Inspector said: "My initial take on it is [Queen's Market] working brilliantly, why change it? Why provide something different that's clearly thriving? Went on Thursday, it was packed, busiest shopping centre I've seen for a long time. If this is the aspiration, where are the larger units going to go?"

Queen's Market / Newham session:

FoQM insisted that traders and visitors could sit in the room as hearings were taking place and not in the overflow room. There were over twenty Queen's Market supporters and traders (– a big hand to the traders who left their businesses to come along and support us!)

All through this session the Council representatives were positive about the market saying 'we do appreciate the market' etc. But all their other comments showed they want development on the market site which would entail its demolition.

The council said: "regeneration of the market through new uses, shops, houses, to ensure the market is successful... " "need new configuration" and "current configuration does not give flexibility" and said they needed "better use of market space"

The Inspector said locals seemed concerned that they will lose existing shops.

FoQM, asked “What reassurances can the traders be given for their future livelihoods”. Council said, “we can’t comment on the design of any future development [on Queen’s Market] and what it would mean to the shops”

Inspector: ‘that does not give residents much reassurance about where new units might go’

Council ‘we want to reinforce the market – there’s no hidden agenda. Want a stronger market, centerpiece of any development, of town centre ‘offer’ as a whole. We’re trying to set down parameters. We recognize its worth. We do give protection by wanting good design’. Council said: ‘we have no sinister intention’.

Inspector said, ‘can’t imagine getting more floor space unless you have retail on the first floor, this would change the character.’

When the importance of the fresh affordable food on offer at the market was highlighted, the Council said their ‘plans make no provision for affordable food’

Council said it’s not about the cost of keeping it going, it’s about good design and improving the street scene, saying as well that the pub could be knocked down. But the Inspector said ‘they shouldn’t replace the pub if it’s part of the communal facilities.’

Inspector asked whether the council had considered the impact of making the site a ‘strategic site’. They talked about relocation whilst development was taking place and had worries about the disruption. There were references to Canning Town and the demise of Rathbone Market.

The Inspector said ‘the [Queen’s Market] building’s old and unsightly, but that hasn’t affected the vitality and viability of the market’

Council said they’d talked to people at the community forum who said it was ‘unsightly’. FoQM mentioned they had attended a Green Street Community Forum meeting where only 4 local people were in attendance.

Newham Council withdrew their written claim that there are ‘structural integrity’ issues with the building as this was proved

wrong and misleading. The Council mentioned the market's financial viability was not the key driver of changing the market.

FoQM argued that any new housing was more suited for the West Ham site but the council said they could put housing on any site they wished, "with 35,000 people on the waiting list, we have to" (perhaps they forgot that their previous plan for massive tower blocks, entailed the demolition and rebuilding of a market hall and surroundings but offered local people on the housing waiting list a mere 22 extra homes!)