

Summary notes from Discussion Session #2: Streets and Open Spaces

These notes are intended to act as a summary of the views and opinions raised at the discussion session on streets and open spaces, held on Thursday 2nd June and which 15 people attended.

What makes a good street?

- The scale of surrounding buildings was felt to be important context for how a street is experienced.
- Variety helps ensure visual interest, and it was felt could be achieved through breaking up big blocks and interesting design.
- Trees are an important feature which contribute to local character, but it was noted that they can cause accessibility challenges.
- Lighting is important, but some questioned whether there was a need for it to be on all night, and innovations such as motion sensor and lighting embedded within pavements were discussed.
- Fewer signs and lampposts would be welcomed by some who felt streets can be somewhat cluttered.
- The management of streets was considered very important.

Management of streets

- Residents should be encouraged to look after and take pride in their streets.
 - There was some discussion about how residents could be incentivised to do this, and the use of digital, including apps and competitions was proposed.
- Most felt that the surrounding streets are generally not as clean and tidy as they would like, and emphasised the importance of good rubbish and litter management, both at a household and neighbourhood level.

Traffic and cars

- A range of opinions were expressed regarding car parking. Most felt that the current situation was satisfactory, but expressed some concern about the potential future impact of development.
 - Parked cars were noted as a particular problem for people trying to cross streets.
- Car clubs would be welcomed.
- 'Rat-running' is something people were concerned about, and hoped would be designed out in the proposed development.
- Speed bumps were considered dangerous by most as it was felt cars simply speed between the bumps anyway.
- Most felt that there should be more pedestrian crossings.
- 'Shared surfaces' were considered problematic from a safety perspective.
- Most but not all would support a 20 mph speed limit.

Current open spaces

- Southwark Park is the space that people seem to use most. Its size and features such as the outdoor gym were referenced as reasons why.
- St James Churchyard was noted as a popular space, but most felt it was used primarily as a cut through.
- The Blue and the picnic benches outside the shops on Jamaica Road were mentioned as other open spaces people believe are regularly used.
- Further afield, Bermondsey Square was considered a space that worked well, primarily because of its active uses with a cinema, bar, art and market.

New open spaces

- Most agreed that more piazza type spaces would be welcomed, which were described as places to sit, meet and be sociable outside.
 - It was suggested that big open spaces should be avoided.
- Keeping people in the area during the evening, particularly people who work at the Biscuit Factory, and creating reasons for people to dwell was something everyone agreed was important.
 - Public realm features such as benches, more places for people to sit, and water features were proposed.
- There should be more 'safe spaces' for school-age children but which are not playgrounds:
 - These should be designed to enable 'passive supervision'.
 - Canada Water Library, and the Four Squares sports pitch were considered good examples of such spaces.

Safety

- Some felt comfortable whatever time of day, but others did not always feel comfortable during the evenings and at night.
 - One participant with teenage children explained she would not let her children go out alone during the evenings.
 - The routes under the railway, especially the St James tunnel, were not liked.
- Safety should be designed into the streets and spaces, for example by ensuring that there are 'eyes on the street'
 - Front doors at street level would be welcomed.

Activation

- Everyone agreed that ground-floor activation of the new streets and open spaces was essential for their success, and it was noted that this is not often done well in new development.
 - However the point was made that there should be a balance, as not everyone wants to sit in or walk past 'noisy spaces'.