

NINE ELMS ON THE SOUTH BANK

PUBLIC REALM DESIGN GUIDE -- DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT BY THE LONDON FORUM OF AMENITY AND CIVIC SOCIETIES

This response is submitted on behalf of the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies, the co-ordinating body for some 100 local amenity and civic societies, with around 50,000 individual members, in the area covered by the Greater London Authority.

We endorse the importance of the public realm as a vital component in the redevelopment of the Nine Elms area. We recognise the contribution a Design Guide can make in ensuring coherence within and between the different character areas in this Opportunity Area, and we are in general agreement with the way it has been constructed. We hope that developers and their professional teams will follow it in producing designs for the individual parts of Nine Elms.

We particularly welcome the attention given to art in the public realm, surface water attenuation, encouragement of active lifestyles, accessibility and microclimate. We also welcome the attention given to establishing links with adjacent areas and enabling their residents to benefit from the facilities and opportunities opened up by the redevelopment of Nine Elms. There are at the same time some significant gaps and shortcomings in the content of this Design Guide and we refer to these below.

It is apparently not the intention that Lambeth and Wandsworth will adopt the final version of this Public Realm Design Guide as a Supplementary Planning Document (1.1.3.2). We suggest they reconsider that. If this document is not adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document it is not clear what status it will have.

Valuable as it is in its own right we are concerned that production of this draft document has served to highlight, and done nothing to resolve, several key issues about the public realm of Nine Elms which urgently need to be solved:

the future shape of Vauxhall Cross

the future form of Nine Elms Lane

the design of the Linear Park

the provision for cyclists and pedestrians respectively in the corridor between Chelsea Bridge and Vauxhall Bridge

We realise that **Vauxhall Cross** is a subject of separate studies with separate consultations. The London Forum has submitted its views on the plan for that area and also on proposals for Cycle Superhighway 5. Vauxhall Cross is also an essential element in the overall public realm of Nine Elms. At the moment the diagrams in this draft show the Island Site in the centre of Vauxhall Cross as a green space. It would be very gratifying if that were to be the case; it would also provide a convincing continuation of the Linear Park. But the assumption hitherto is that the Island Site will be occupied by two tall towers. We trust that the general guidance provided in this document will be applied equally to the public realm in Vauxhall Cross, and that the decisions still to be taken on Vauxhall Cross will retain the present efficient and user-friendly public transport interchange.

We realise **Nine Elms Lane** is also the subject of a separate study. However, this draft implies that it is too narrow, at least in long stretches, to meet the stated objectives for it. The diagrams of 'Typical street sections' on pages 88-9 of this draft show a 'Main street' as having a carriageway width of 14m, with 8m of that taken up by a bus lane in each direction. This would not leave room for separate cycle lanes. The only possible solutions would seem to be either to designate lanes in Nine Elms Lane to be used by both buses and cyclists or to reduce the width of the pavement on each side (say to 2m). The diagrams in the latest consultation document on

Vauxhall Cross show Nine Elms Lane as not having either a bus lane or a cycle lane at the point where it meets Wandsworth Road.

The **Linear Park** was originally conceived as running from Lambeth Palace to Battersea Power Station and then connecting to Battersea Park. The only plausible section of this so far illustrated is from One Nine Elms to the main entrance of Covent Garden Market, although there is some uncertainty about the form it will take in the vicinity of the United States Embassy. It is not clear how it will continue northwards as green space, unless via the green space shown (possibly erroneously?) on the Island Site; the continuation westwards has been defined on the Power Station site but does not as yet look convincing. We note, and welcome, the intended arrangements for managing the Linear Park. It is not clear whether those arrangements will also cover the 'plazas' at either end of the central section of the Linear Park, or how 'parklike' these plazas will be. We hope the 'separate high level design and management strategy' for the Linear Park will resolve these issues satisfactorily.

There is however a wider issue about the intention to require **cyclists and pedestrians** to share the same route at various points. We are aware of considerable concern by pedestrians at the speed of many cyclists and the lack of experience of many others. Notably the draft presents the Thames Path as a route for pedestrians but then, without a hint of irony, goes on to discuss its role as a route for cyclists. We understand the legal instruments which created some existing sections of the Thames Path allow use by pedestrians but not by cyclists; if so that restriction ought to be enforced. What we urge Transport for London and the Strategy Group to do is undertake a general review of the provision for cyclists and pedestrians in the corridor between Chelsea Bridge and Vauxhall Bridge (and the Pimlico Bridge as well, if and when that is built). They should do this against the background of the very much larger numbers of pedestrians and cyclists who will be using this corridor in future, because of increased population and because of likely changes in lifestyles. The aim of the review should be to establish simple and practicable arrangements which will enable cyclists and pedestrians to each travel safely and pleasantly through Nine Elms, whether to and from work or for leisure.

In other respects there are several notable gaps in this draft guidance:

provision and design of bus shelters, which will be a prominent feature in the streetscape. We assume a shelter will be provided to protect passengers at each bus stop in Nine Elms. The only reference we can find to their design is in the context of ensuring that advertisements on them do not create lurking places for criminals

advertisement control. We have not been able to find any other reference in the draft to advertisements. It seems to follow from the ambitions for the quality of the area that there should not be large or prominent advertising hoardings

cycle racks, including those for hire bikes, need to be recognised as an element in the streetscape, and the issues relating to them considered

the river as a positive element in the public realm which can be capitalised on

air quality in the public realm, the most notable gap. The draft makes only passing references to air pollution, primarily in relation to the construction period

The Nine Elms South Bank Public Realm Working Group played an important part in producing this draft guidance. Its membership included landowners and 'key stakeholders' (1.2.1.1.) but not so far as we are aware any representative of the local community. It's surprising that the body overseeing production of a strategy for the public realm should not include anyone to represent the public's point of view. The present consultation on this draft has been of a very token nature. If the Working Group is to have a continuing role we urge strongly that there should be one or more representatives on it from the local community.

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