

Council Petitions

Petition presented by Councillor Helen Pollard on behalf of residents of Exchange Square, Bridge House and South Croydon in Fairfield Ward.

“Exchange Square presents an opportunity to bring to life an historic building in a beautiful square with bags of character. Unfortunately the square has suffered neglect and it is frequented by drug users, drinkers and there is regular anti-social behaviour. Residents of the adjoining properties are regularly intimidated by anti-social behaviour from people outside their apartment buildings as well as those who frequently gain illegal access to the internal areas. If the Square was a thriving business/social centre, the people who flock to quiet areas to take drugs/drink etc would not dwell in Exchange Square.

There are indications that the Council's policy of allowing planning consent for homeless and drug rehab centres, as well as bail hostels and methadone dispensing chemists only a few hundred yards from Exchange Square and within Croydon's 'Historic Quarter' is fuelling the problem, hence we request Croydon Council review their planning policies and strategy.

By signing this petition, I ask that Croydon Council works with outside agencies such as the GLA to deliver its commitments in the Croydon Masterplan. This is to find new uses for vacant historic buildings such as the Surrey Street Pumping Station and to encourage community use, bring activity to streets and spaces, and enhance the setting of Old Town's heritage assets. I also ask that Exchange Square is included in the BID-funded policing area.”

Response

The Council works in partnership with a wide range of partners to support vulnerable people in need, to prevent homelessness and help people experiencing chronic substance abuse to access the services they need. We work with Homeless Link, the Police, homeless charities including Crisis, Thames Reach, Nightwatch, and the Croydon Churches Floating Shelter, and Salvation Army on tackling rough sleeping, and providing people with a 'hand up' off the streets. In Croydon, the Safer Streets group also enables people to make the positive changes necessary to lead independent and purposeful lives and create safer, healthier communities. Through effective partnership working, we are able to work creatively with clients to establish individually tailored plans to enable people to get away from their street based lifestyle, for example:

- Moving rough sleepers into accommodation.
- Supporting people who have become street homeless in London, who originate from elsewhere, to return home in a planned and supported way.
- Helping drug and alcohol users to access treatment.
- Supporting people with mental as well as physical health problems to get the medical help they need.
- Stopping anti-social behaviour on the streets of Croydon through partnership work with Croydon Council and the police alongside other enforcement agencies.

Our experience is that this preventative approach helps reduce the level of anti-social behaviour and nuisance in the town centre and around Exchange Square

specifically, and provides the engagement and services that enable people to take positive steps away from a street lifestyle. Where necessary we can also use enforcement measures that can apply specific conditions to a specific individual to prohibit them from engaging in anti-social behaviour; for example, we are able to instruct individuals not to visit specific places at certain times, this approach reaps the most benefits for local communities. We would therefore, encourage residents and businesses to report all incidents as this information helps us to build a better picture of what is going on and to identify the individuals responsible and take enforcement action where required. Once we know who they are they can then be referred into the Safer Streets programme. Residents need to report all incidents of illegal access into their building to the property management company as it is their responsibility to improve the buildings security.

I can confirm that this location does already fall within the BID area so benefits from the additional police that are purchased for the town centre. Croydon Police have always worked closely with the council and other partners to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour across the whole borough though, so even if there weren't additional police funded by the BID there would still be resources targeted to this particular problem.

In terms of planning policy there are no policies specifically relating to Homeless Hostels or Drug Rehabilitation Centres, and they would be considered to be Community facilities and Policy SP5 of the Croydon Local Plan would be relevant. Community Facilities are defined as "Facilities providing for the health and wellbeing, social, educational, spiritual, recreational, leisure and cultural needs of the community". Any application for any of these uses would have to be considered on its merits, and have regard to SP5 which seeks to protect existing community facilities and to encourage a network of community uses that can provide essential public services. Policy SP3.10 which promotes and supports the development of a number of uses including community facilities within Croydon Metropolitan Centre would also be relevant.

Turning to the Old Town Masterplan SPD; this document sets a series of strategic objectives and planning guidance for the Old Town Area. It includes overarching guidance and parameters as well as more specific guidance for component sites and spaces, including the Pumping Station and Exchange Square. The ambitions of the Old Town Masterplan include creation of a "popular, safe, bespoke, attractive and robustly designed destination; frequently visited by residents and visitors" at Exchange Square (para 3.1.2).

The Masterplan seeks to activate the area through introduction of more seating, incidental play space, enhanced hard landscaping, enhanced cycle and pedestrian routes through the Square and encouraging café, shop and cultural arts based uses (OT4). The Masterplan also seeks to find a new cultural or leisure use for the listed Surrey Street Pumping Station to form a prominent cultural destination (para 3.1.3 and OT5). This would further increase footfall into the Square.

The Council is working with the GLA and other stakeholders to achieve these aims. Exchange Square and the Pumping Station are owned privately and are in fact in new ownership since the adoption of the Old Town Masterplan. The Council

supported a bid to the GLA's Regeneration Fund to support our ambitions for the site which was unfortunately not successful. However, the Council will continue to try to engage with the owners of Exchange Square and the Pumping Station to help enable the delivery of projects that would align with the Old Town Masterplan and help regenerate the area.

In addition, the Council is working with the GLA and other partners and stakeholders to bring forward other sites and projects in accordance with the adopted Old Town Masterplan. These include:

- The Council is investing up to £1m in Surrey Street streetscape improvements and has led on Sunday opening of the market
- A planning consent has been granted for a scheme for the Cairo New Road site that accords with the Old Town Masterplan
- The GLA have funded streetscape and building frontage improvements on Church Street and improvements to St John's Memorial Gardens
- The GLA are funding a meanwhile use on the corner of Church Road and Church Street which will bring new businesses to Old Town
- Sustrans have been investing in projects in and around Reeves Corner to improve walking, cycling and public realm as part of their Pocket Places project
- The Council secured funding from the GLA to deliver projects to improve pedestrian connectivity between Old Town and Wandle Park which are currently in delivery and in accordance with the Old Town Masterplan

The Council continues to work with stakeholders to identify funding opportunities for further projects that would assist in delivering the objectives of the Old Town Masterplan.