

Save Our Square E17

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Below is an account of the Save Our Square Meeting on Wednesday 5th February.

1. Adrian reported on the status of the plan for the square. Following the 'exhibition' at the end of last year we understood that a Section 73 would be used to simply tweak the original plan and railroad it through. But now it seems that the developers have come under pressure and are back to square one, drawing up a brand new plan with a new architect. They still have no builders. There has also been changes to the economic conditions from when they initially pursued their development of the mall which means opening lots of shops is not the most lucrative thing now. Yes, austerity and low pay suck! This has important implications for the tactics of the campaign because we expect that a new plan will have to have a new consultation process and will have to go through the planning committee. Save Our Square will produce guidance and run workshops on how to scrutinise the council website so nothing slips through without a response, how to respond once a plan is before the council, and also that we start to call for a mass occupation of the assembly hall for when the planning meeting takes place.

Adrian reported that a meeting he had attended on the London Plan noted that the Square development was not included in this Plan. We are not quite sure what this means, we hope it means that there will either be a long delay or the plans will be scrapped completely but we simply can't say.

We therefore expect that new plans be submitted. We expect a new consultation. The meeting agreed that we need everyone to engage with the consultation and reject any new monster development. We will be posting guidelines soon on the best ways to engage to reject the new proposals.

2. The meeting welcomed campaigners from the Love Lea Bridge campaign who congratulated SOS on the victory on saving the trees and reported on the escalating plans in their area - part of the 50+ regeneration schemes in the borough. Through the discussion it became clear that part of the council's approach is to divide up the schemes so each individual one affects a smaller number of people. We have to find a way to bring the campaigns together. It was agreed that the trades council initiate a meeting with the Priory Court campaign who face the loss of vital open space and a community centre and an appeal is made to every land and regeneration campaign in the borough to send representatives. An important part of our strategy is to build the dynamic towards generalising the campaigns to counter the council's attempt to atomise the campaigns.

3. The meeting also discussed the letter from Cllr Simon Miller dated 27 November 2019 (it had been agreed to write to all the councillors, to Stella Creasy and to the developer but only Cllr Miller had replied), in which he tells the campaign about the council's claims it is investing in planting 5,000 trees. But a tree expert in the meeting explained that because the council does not have a plan to water and maintain the trees most of their saplings were dying. We also discussed the need to protect grassed areas from paving over because of the impact this has on air quality and potential flooding. It was agreed to write a response to Cllr Miller and to write articles on these ongoing environmental concerns and to fight for grass, trees, open spaces and genuinely affordable homes to end the homelessness crisis. It was also noted that Cllr Simon Miller claimed to be speaking on behalf of the councillors (we have posted his letter) , and if his words had come to pass we would not be in a situation where Lime

Tree walk is saved and the council has to go back to a new plan.

We had some important discussion on what type of environment we want.

4. We also noted that a driving force behind the developments is Sadiq Khan's London plan which pushes councils to build on public land, to increase density and has no emphasis on solving homelessness, the environment or building council homes.

5. At the previous meeting we agreed to make a financial appeal so that we could potentially seek judicial review on environmental grounds using new legislation. In an indication of the huge support for the campaign £700 has been donated already. We agreed to continue with this appeal so that we are prepared to take that action should it become necessary once the new plan is in process.

6. We also noted that the victory over the trees was the result of a huge number of tactics - mobilising people to the exhibition last November, occupying the square and being prepared to occupy the trees to prevent felling, public communication with now thousands following posts on Facebook and hundreds on our mailing list, standing candidates in the local elections in 2018 who were clearly for trees, space and council homes which made the square a major election issue - and a headache for the councillors!

We need all our supporters to be ready to ; attend any consultation on new monster plans and inundating the council with rejection letters. We need supporters to be ready to turn up on mass to any planning committee when the new plans are discussed- as we did last time. We need people to be ready to defend the land, the space and the area from more massive overdevelopment that has nothing to do with solving the housing crisis and everything to do with privatisation of public space.

7. Watch this space - we are very definitely not gone away!

Nancy Taaffe
Chair of Save Our Square