



March 2010

Redevelopment of Leegate Centre, Lee Green

I am writing on behalf of the Lee Manor Society about your plans for the redevelopment of Leegate in Lewisham. As you know, the Lee Manor Society has taken a close interest in the shopping centre. We have been involved in several meetings with you, council officers and our local councillors over the years. We have been pressing for a sympathetic redevelopment of the centre, when that happens at some unspecified date in the future.

We have yet to see any detailed proposals for the centre but we feel it is important to register our views at an early stage. We are only too aware from experience with other schemes that it can be difficult to alter preliminary plans once they have been drawn up. We are therefore seeking to register our views before we have reached this stage. We realise that redevelopment will depend on what makes commercial sense and that the long-term viability of the centre depends on its commercial success. But we also believe that community and aesthetic considerations need to be weighed if Leegate is to contribute to a vibrant neighbourhood. We have suffered for many years from a failing shopping centre. Redevelopment will provide an opportunity to re-establish the historic core of the community but this opportunity will be lost if commercial considerations lead to an unsympathetic development. We do not want to get bogged down in too much detail but we have drawn up some general principles that we think should govern redevelopment. They are:

1. Retaining and creating high quality public spaces on the site. We would oppose a development that sacrificed the existing passage from Burnt Ash Road to the square or reduced the size of the square. It is vital to maintain an open site so pedestrian movement between the Leybridge Court flats and Burnt Ash Road is possible. A monolithic redevelopment that forced pedestrians around the perimeter of the site, onto the traffic-choked Eltham Road side, would not be welcome. This does not mean that the passage or the square have to remain in their present situation. There is

an argument for moving the square to the Burnt Ash Road frontage, which is the most lively, and where it might be more heavily used than in its current position on Leyland Road.

2. Ensuring that the scale and mass of any development is appropriate to the site. The existing office buildings rise to a maximum of eight storeys while the flats above the retail rise to five storeys. This is acceptable on a corner site of this nature and might sensibly be increased but we would not want any replacement to be so large as to totally dominate the surrounding areas of mainly low-level housing.
3. Creating opportunities for independent shops, cafes and restaurants alongside any big name High Street retailers. This is vital to retaining the local character of the centre and creating diversity of retailing. This might require the landlord to offer some premises at lower than market rents.
4. Creating a lively ground level street frontage by moving office and secondary uses to higher storeys where possible. The main corner fronting the crossroads is currently offices. This has a deadening effect on the whole centre. Ground floor sites should be reserved for retailing and catering outlets.
5. Examine opportunities for an indoor or outdoor street market to be held on one or more days a week to creating retailing opportunities not provided by the fixed retailers in the centre.
6. Ensure that a mix of catering outlets, cafes, pubs and restaurants add to the vitality of the centre and mean that it attracts evening as well as daytime visitors. A hotel would also create activity outside normal shopping hours.

We fully support the activities of the Lee Green Lives initiative and are represented on the organisation. We believe that the Lee Manor Society's specific interest in maintaining and improving the quality of the built environment mean it is important that we have an independent input into its thinking.

Leegate is vital to the health of the Lee Green crossroads and the surrounding residential areas but it is only one quadrant of four at the crossroads. We believe it is important to take a comprehensive view of the whole area. To this end we drew up a draft design brief for the crossroads in June 2007. This can be viewed on the society website at www.leemanorsociety.org. It outlines our thoughts on how the character and attractiveness of the area surrounding the crossroads can best be maintained and improved. Since its publication we have installed an interpretation panel at the crossroads explaining its history and applied for the listing of the two historic Tigers' Heads pubs.

Charles Batchelor
Chairman