

Review of the Bellenden Renewal Scheme

Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee

March 2005



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Executive Summary

Southwark Council's Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee reviewed the implementation of the Bellenden Renewal Scheme, a 10 year scheme which targeted £12.42million of funding towards improvements in housing, social and environmental concerns in the area. The purpose of the scrutiny was to recommend considerations for future renewal schemes and to recommend further work needed in relation to the remaining years of the Bellenden Renewal scheme, due for completion in 2007. Executive's recent 'in-principle' agreement to the declaration of two new renewal areas, in East Peckham and Nunhead, added weight to the importance of the scrutiny.

The sub-committee relied primarily on information and evidence submitted by council officers and residents and traders in the Bellenden renewal area, and also carried out a site visit of the renewal area. The Bellenden Residents' Group played a key role in directing the sub-committee's attention to aspects of the scheme that it believed deserved consideration.

The overall conclusion reached by the sub-committee was that the Bellenden Renewal scheme has had a very beneficial impact on the Bellenden area, and was generally perceived positively by residents and traders. However there were still areas where improvements were needed. The key failing was poor general communication with residents and traders; other issues included the role of local community groups in renewal schemes, problems with building works, inadequate staffing, and the importance of managing the expectations of those affected by the renewal scheme.

The sub-committee's recommendations to the Executive are set out at paragraph 157 of this report.

Introduction

1. In July 1997, Southwark Council declared the Bellenden area of Peckham, London, a renewal area in accordance with Section 89 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. At the time of the declaration there were 3324 dwellings in the area, of which 78% were privately owned, 84% were either unfit or not in reasonable repair, and 37% of households were dependent on means tested benefits¹. A lengthy neighbourhood assessment had determined that Bellenden² had unsatisfactory living conditions which could be dealt with most effectively by declaring the area a renewal area.
2. A 10-year strategy was agreed for the Bellenden renewal area, with £12.42 million secured for investment towards improvements in housing, social and environmental conditions in partnership with local stakeholders and residents. A number of strategic objectives were set; these covered housing, environment, employment, economic regeneration, community development, crime, health and financial targets.
3. Actions to improve the renewal area have ranged from physical improvements to bring homes up to a standard fit for human habitation, to environmental improvements for shopping areas, green spaces and traffic management.
4. Funding towards these improvements came from individual renovation grants, energy efficiency grants, group repair, grants for housings in multiple occupation and environmental works. However, the introduction of the Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Renewal) 2002, and the removal of specific government subsidies for private housing renewal created an era of uncertainty. This in turn affected the priorities and funding arrangements for the area and caused a great deal of confusion and frustration for the residents and traders in the Bellenden Renewal area.
5. In 2001/02, halfway through its 10-year life, the council reviewed the scheme in order to assess the progress of the scheme against the original objectives, identify lessons to be learned, and identify the way forward for the future of the regeneration area. The review document, titled the *Bellenden mid-term review and forward strategy 1997-2004*, is yet to be published.
6. The scrutiny undertaken by the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee about the Bellenden Renewal Area was not aimed at duplicating work carried out by the review, but at investigating claims put forward by the Bellenden Residents' Group³ that some aspects of the renewal scheme had been inadequate. This was

¹ 'Southwark Council Peckham Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment Declaration Report', Psec Health & Housing Consultancy, July 1997.

² The western boundary for the Bellenden Area follows the railway line from East Dulwich Station to Peckham Rye Stations, with the Peckham Rye Station forming the boundary at the northern end of the Renewal Area.

³ The sub-committee was initially approached by Ms Eileen Conn, coordinator of the Bellenden Residents' Group.

considered to be an important issue, particularly considering the statement in the draft Bellenden mid-term review document that:

*“The success or failure of the renewal area will come down to whether individual residents, when the scheme is completed feel that significant improvements have been carried out and that their lives, the lives of their families and people in their communities, are better now than they were before the scheme started”.*⁴

7. The sub-committee focused on the following for the scrutiny:
 - communication and consultation with the local community
 - management, organisation and quality of the work
 - relative value for money on different aspects of the scheme.

Each of these aspects will be addressed in turn during this scrutiny report.

8. Further, in an environment with increasing emphasis on ensuring that all properties, regardless of their tenure, are brought up to a decent standard⁵, it is likely that renewal areas will become more common. It was considered timely to undertake a scrutiny which would advise on the lessons to be learnt from the Bellenden experience so that these could be incorporated into the preparation for any future renewal schemes. Indeed, at the time that this report was being prepared, the London Borough of Southwark gave in-principle agreement to the declaration of new renewal areas in East Peckham and Nunhead⁶.
9. This report therefore:
 - a) gives an overall view of the Bellenden Renewal Scheme
 - b) identifies considerations for future renewal schemes
 - c) recommends further work that is needed in relation to the Bellenden Renewal Scheme.

Scrutiny Method

10. The Bellenden Renewal Scheme scrutiny was carried out by the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee. Membership of the sub-committee at the time of the scrutiny was:
 - Councillor Stephen Flannery (Chair)
 - Councillor Alfred Banya (Vice Chair)
 - Councillor Jane Salmon
 - Councillor Lorraine Lauder
 - Councillor Tayo Situ
 - Councillor Neil Watson
 - Al-Issa Munu – Co-opted tenant representative

⁴ Draft Bellenden Mid-Term Review Document, page 12.

⁵ In its 2000 spending review, the government made a commitment to bring all public sector homes up to a decent standard by 2010. A 'decent home' would meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing, is in a reasonable state of repair, has reasonably modern facilities and services and provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

⁶ 'In principle agreement for approving two renewal areas', Executive report, 8 February 2005.

- Lionel Wright – Co-opted tenant representative⁷
 - Althea Smith – Co-opted tenant representative⁸
 - Dave Clark – Co-opted leaseholder representative
11. The sub-committee met on three occasions to discuss the Bellenden Renewal Scheme. These public meetings were held on the evenings of 10 November 2004, 7 December 2004 and 25 January 2005, and a substantial proportion of each meeting was devoted to the scrutiny. Evidence and information was received from officers involved in the renewal and from residents and traders in the Bellenden Renewal area, as well as from the Peckham Voluntary Sector Forum (PVSF) and Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations (SAVO).
 12. The sub-committee also collected information and evidence by visiting the Bellenden Renewal area⁹. The visit took place on Saturday 4 December 2004 and was led by the Senior Renewal Officer, Roger Young. It gave members the opportunity to see first hand the changes that had occurred in the area and to talk informally to some of the local residents and traders about their views and experiences. Ms Eileen Conn, from the Bellenden Residents' Group, also attended the site visit and provided her perspective on the changes.
 13. Submissions were invited from residents and traders in the area about their experience of the scheme. Advertisements were placed in '*Southwark News*', and the Bellenden Residents' Group also advertised the scrutiny locally throughout the renewal area, and distributed leaflets to approximately 1,200 residents and traders in the area. Information about the scrutiny was also distributed at the September 2004 Nunhead and Peckham Rye Community Council meeting, encouraging people to get involved.
 14. Twenty-six written submissions were received during the scrutiny process, and these have been attached as Appendix 1. Each public scrutiny meeting was attended by between twenty and thirty people. The sub-committee acknowledges that there was a relatively low response rate from the public. Regardless of this, those people who put their views forward assisted the sub-committee greatly in identifying some of the challenges that need to be addressed both during the remaining life of the Bellenden Renewal scheme, and for any future schemes of this nature.

⁷ Full member until December 2004, after this point was a reserve.

⁸ Full member from December 2004.

⁹ The tour route included Choumert Road, Bellenden Road, Alpha Street, McDermott Road, McDermott Grove Gardens, Wingfield Street and Maxted Road.

General opinion of the scheme as a whole

15. At the conclusion of the scrutiny process, the sub-committee agreed that overall the Bellenden Renewal Scheme has had a very positive impact on the Bellenden area to date. This view was formed on evidence considered during the course of the scrutiny. This section highlights some of the scheme's successes.
16. The sub-committee received evidence demonstrating that the Bellenden Renewal Scheme had significantly improved the look of the area. Properties, and entire streets, and many public areas are looking much brighter and revitalised. Shop fronts, many situated along Bellenden Road, have been revamped and a number of new businesses have moved into the area. New public artworks have appeared – from redesigning the perimeter fencing around Bellenden School to the placement of bollards along Bellenden Road. There has also been some limited success in bringing empty homes and shops back into use.
17. It is not just the look of the area which has improved as a result of the scheme. The sub-committee were informed that by 2002, 564 properties had been made fit for human habitation or brought up to a standard of reasonable repair. As submission 21 comments:

“the most important invisible work went on transforming local housing – installing central heating, indoor WCs etc”.

18. Improvements to the standard of living are crucial for improving the health of the area.
19. Many improvements could not have been achieved without the private investment into the area. The scheme has encouraged private homeowners and housing associations to invest in improving the standard of living in the borough. It was pleasing to hear that all of the housing associations with properties in the Bellenden area agreed that they would participate in any group repair schemes where their properties were involved, and that they would pay the full cost of works.
20. The sub-committee **recommends** that this cross-tenure approach be built on, particularly if the council is to have any success in meeting government initiatives such as the Decent Homes Standard.
21. Officers utilised a variety of innovative consultation techniques to encourage local residents and businesses to participate in the scheme and to put forward their views about how the Bellenden area could be improved. This included hosting barbeques on estates to a fair on Goose Green and the ‘Planning for Real’¹⁰ initiative. Officers’ approach to the consultation can only be commended, and future renewal schemes should look to follow a similar model for encouraging participation.
22. Decision-making was taken to a local street level. Residents of the streets undergoing group repair designed the specification of their home environment –

¹⁰ This initiative was a consultation technique aimed at generating ideas about what improvements residents would like to see in an area. It involved the placement of suggestion cards on a scale model of the Bellenden area.

from the types of windows on their house, to the design and materials for their garden walls and the pavements. This brought residents of all tenures – owner-occupiers, Council tenants, housing association and private tenants - together to take collective decisions. This served to encourage a greater sense of community ownership and responsibility for the on-going maintenance of the area.

23. There has also been evidence of increased community development and safety. The sub-committee heard how the renewal scheme has served to give the area of 'Bellenden' its own identity. New neighbourhood watch groups were formed. The Bellenden Residents' Group was formed in 2002 by residents because of the Renewal Scheme and other matters affecting the local area. There is improved security through the provision of door entry systems and use of CCTV. Local artists were involved in designing public artworks for their own community area, and the McDermott Grove Garden has been identified as a key success in community bonding.
24. Agenda 21 was also a key consideration of the scheme, and the sub-committee has been told of the piloting of various energy efficiency measures. Examples include mini combined heat/power units, installing solar panels and rainwater harvesting. Double-glazed windows were a popular initiative. By 2002, 574 properties had benefited from energy efficiency measures – not only benefiting the environment, but also creating financial savings for the properties involved.
25. Positive feedback has been received on the perception of the Bellenden area, both from people living in the area, and from those outside the area. Submission 11 stated:

“On the whole we have loved living here and have converted many of our friends to thinking that Peckham is not the violent, dangerous place it is made out to be”.

26. In evidence to the sub-committee on the 25th January 2005, officers referred to a 23rd January Sunday Times article about people choosing to relocate from Brixton to Peckham because it was perceived to have a better community spirit. This is also reflected in the increased value of houses in the Bellenden area, with one estate agent estimating that a 20-25% increase could be gained for houses where the whole street had been “done up”¹¹.
27. Overall, the majority of submissions received by the sub-committee are complimentary of what the scheme has done for the area. Submission 13 provides one example:

“We have watched with delight as the whole area has benefited immensely from this scheme, and are enjoying the legacy of this initiative. Namely new businesses, more varied shopping opportunities, safer streets and a vibrant neighbourhood pride. Our surroundings are much more pleasing to look at and be in, and our Anthony Gormley bollards are the envy of friends from north London!”.

11 Draft Bellenden mid-term review document, page 117.

28. The sub-committee is aware that the Bellenden Renewal Scheme has had many successes and officers, residents and traders deserve to be commended on these achievements. However, there have also been failures in the implementation of the scheme. These issues will be discussed next along with recommendations for ways in which these can be addressed in future renewal schemes.

Considerations for future renewal schemes

29. The Bellenden Residents' Group raised a number of concerns during the pre-scrutiny process. These centred around communication, building works and the achievement of value for money. This section looks at whether these concerns were founded and discusses other issues that became evident during the scrutiny process. Recommendations are made as to ways in which these issues could be addressed in future renewal schemes.

Communication

30. While the sub-committee commended officers earlier in the report on their consultation approach, serious concerns have been raised about the communication with residents during the scheme.

Communication directly with residents

31. The sub-committee heard from both residents and officers about how there had been regular communication with residents in the early part of the scheme. Seven 'Area News' newsletters were produced between Autumn 1997 and Spring 2000. Officers presented the sub-committee with some examples of other information that was circulated to residents about various aspects of the scheme – for example, leaflets which promoted the 'Stay Healthy 2000' day, and invited residents to a public meeting to help decide the future of Choumert Market in 2000.
32. By contrast, the sub-committee was not impressed to hear that general communication with residents and traders effectively stopped from 2000 onwards, with the exception of one newsletter in 2003. The draft Bellenden mid-term review document states that there should be at least an annual newsletter to renewal areas, and acknowledges that this has not been happening:

“The failure of communications over the last two years is recognised and this is an area where the need to improve performance is fully accepted” (page 54).

33. It is extremely disappointing therefore that while officers recognised this failure during the review process in 2001/02 little appeared to have been done to improve communications in the time that has lapsed since. A local newsletter has still not been distributed to residents. Even the Bellenden mid-term review document itself – the text for which was approved by Executive in September 2003 – has still not been produced in its final version and distributed to residents. The communications strategy has obviously failed in the renewal area, and no steps appear to have been taken to rectify this.
34. The primary reasons identified by officers for the poor communication were the council's communications policy coupled with changes to the communications structure and personnel. New communication policies in 2002 introduced strict guidelines for council documents to ensure that publications were consistent and easily identified as being produced by the council. This impacted on the resources needed to produce information for the renewal area.

35. Councillor Andy Simmons, in his evidence to the sub-committee on the 7 December 2004, added that officers had struggled to get clear guidance as to how much of the renewal budget could be used for the provision and dissemination of information. He identified a further problem in ensuring that the information was actually delivered to every resident and suggested that cold-calling of properties to determine if they had received the information could identify problems which could then be taking up with the delivery agents.
36. The sub-committee invited the Housing Department to bring their communications manager to the meeting on the 25th January 2005 to discuss the communication problem further, with particular focus on whether there was flexibility in the communications policy to produce low-cost information for renewal areas. The sub-committee was extremely disappointed that this invitation was not taken up.
37. The council's corporate communications manager has subsequently commented that there are issues with the production of local information and this is currently under review. The review work seems focused around better coordination of publications across the council, with key issues relating to the form in which information is distributed to local residents and problems with ensuring delivery. However, what the communications team are looking into does not appear to address the issue of ensuring that relevant local information is made available to *renewal* areas in a cost-effective and timely manner.
38. It is imperative that any communications policy is flexible enough to meet the needs of a renewal area, by enabling information to be distributed regularly in a cost-effective manner. This is an area which needs to be resolved before work starts in any new renewal area. Good communication with residents is critical in building and maintaining good relations and trust and ensuring success. Feelings of isolation and frustration, as the sub-committee have heard from residents, do not contribute to success in a renewal area.
39. Further, in a political environment directed towards modernising services, the sub-committee considered it surprising that the council's website was not employed as an information-sharing tool. This could have provided general information for people who wanted to understand more about the scheme in general, addressing queries such as the purpose of the scheme, who can be involved, whether new projects could be funded and what is planned for the next year. For those people who do not have access to a computer, this information could be displayed locally on notice boards, in shops or community centres.
40. There have been many media and academic articles commenting on the Bellenden renewal area. While this publicity has a very important role in promoting the area, some residents and traders felt aggrieved that this was the only means by which they were receiving information about what was going on in their own area. This is very damaging to the way residents of the area view the scheme. Regular communication will address this problem in future schemes.
41. The sub-committee **recommends** that Executive seek assurances that the council's communications strategy is flexible enough to allow a regular flow of information to all residents in a renewal area. It further **recommends** that a communications

strategy be formally agreed for any future renewal schemes, and that this is made clear to people within the renewal area.

Information provision for new residents

42. A related issue that requires consideration is how to ensure that new residents to the area are made aware of the scheme going on around them, and know who to contact should they wish to become involved.
43. There is evidence that some new residents were approached directly by the renewal team for involvement in the scheme. Submission 13 states

“we moved into the Bellenden Area in August 1999 when the Renewal Project was already underway...In 2001 we were offered a chance to participate in the Scheme as one of a couple of houses in our street who had missed the original opportunity.”

44. It appears that new residents on those streets not involved in face-lift and group repair would not necessarily know anything about the scheme going on around them. The Bellenden experience suggests that the lack of communication with residents in the wider renewal area led to a high level of disenchantment with the scheme. It is the view of the sub-committee that the regular newsletter could be a mechanism for minimising this risk.

The Bellenden Advisory Board

45. A Bellenden Advisory Board¹², consisting of fifteen elected local residents and stakeholders, was established in 1999 to discuss the progression of projects that would improve the public areas. This Board ceased to operate in 2002. Three issues were identified with the arrangements for the Board: (a) confusion over the basis on which the Board was elected, (b) confusion over the role that the Board played in the renewal scheme and (c) the transfer of the Board's role to the Council's wider consultative structure.

The role of the Board

46. The Bellenden Residents' Group was concerned that little was known about the operation of the Board or the experiences of members on it. There appears to have been a general misunderstanding that the board members could be approached as a point of contact with the council, and difficulty in being able to make contact with the board members exacerbated the frustrations experienced from the poor communications.
47. Publicity evidenced by the sub-committee¹³ indicated that the Board was to meet regularly with the council to discuss how money would be spent on improving the public areas (anything from new paving stones and streetlights to planting trees and public art projects). However, Roger Young explained that the role that the Board

¹² The Advisory Board was originally called the 'Management Board'.

¹³ For example, Issue 6, Area News, July 1999, page 5. This was published prior to the Board's establishment.

took on was to advise the council on how consultation should occur over specific public projects.

48. The evidence submitted to the sub-committee confirms that the Board was never intended as a point of contact between residents, traders and the council. However, the confusion over the Board's role was not helped by the fact that neither terms of reference nor constitution was formally agreed for the Board.
49. The sub-committee itself must acknowledge that whilst it has taken evidence from officers about the role of the Advisory Board, it is still confused about its role. The Board's constitution was requested to assist in clarification, but at the time the report was written, this has not been provided. Officers have subsequently advised that although the Board did discuss a draft constitution, it decided not to ratify this as it did not want a formal terms of reference.

Replacement of the Board

50. The sub-committee heard how the role of the Bellenden Advisory Board was transferred to the council's new community council structure, introduced in 2003. It was presumed that the Nunhead and Peckham Rye Community Council would be able to adequately take over the role of the Board. The Bellenden Residents' Group raised concerns with the sub-committee about the Board's role being transferred back under the council's own structure, rather than as a free-standing independent community group.
51. There is evidence that this transfer can work in some cases. For example, Bermondsey Spa was successfully incorporated into the remit of the Bermondsey Community Council. Unfortunately, it appears that the Bellenden situation was not so successful. The sub-committee is not in a position to determine the reasons why this failed, but suggests that officers need to look at the reasons for this and to ensure that this is fully understood where similar situations arise in future renewal schemes.
52. In light of the confusions and concerns around the role of the Bellenden Advisory Board and its subsequent replacement into the wider consultative structure, the sub-committee **recommends** that where forums involving residents are set up as part of a renewal scheme:
 - a) Terms of reference and/or constitution must be agreed. This must set out the remit, governance and decision-making arrangements for the board;
 - b) The role and function of the forum and its membership must be clearly communicated to those who live and work in the renewal area;
 - c) In situations where the forum is absorbed into another structure, it is important to ensure that the replacement body is able to take over its functions;
 - d) Any changes to the structure and operations of the forum must be clearly communicated to those who live and work in the renewal area.

Liaison with the Council

“I welcome the invitation to comment on the Bellenden Renewal scheme as I have been wondering where to direct some issues I have wanted to make”
(Submission 12).

53. As noted earlier in this report, there appeared to have been a misunderstanding that the role of the Advisory Board members was to serve as a point of contact with the council. Many residents and traders were not aware of whom to approach about their concerns, particularly in the last few years of the scheme once the general communication stopped.
54. In stating this however, it must be noted that this is not the case for everyone. There appears to have been general agreement that those streets and organisations/groups who were directly involved in a project within the scheme had very good communication with the council during the life of their specific project. Further, for the first few years of the scheme, the Renewal Team had an office in Bellenden Road through which people could get direct access to the council.
55. Limited staffing resources appears to be a major contributing factor to the poor links with the council. The sub-committee heard how the number of officers working on the renewal scheme varied at any time, depending on the use of part time consultants, the employment of the Clerk of Works, and which officers from other departments were involved e.g. Highways or Traffic staff. However the fact remained that there were not enough permanent full time staff members on the renewal team to respond to the needs of the scheme.
56. What was clear from the scrutiny process was that there is a real need for renewal schemes to have a point of liaison between the residents and traders, and the council. This issue is made slightly more complicated given that officers informed the sub-committee that one of the lessons they had learnt during the scheme was that residents and traders were not satisfied working through a consultant to get to the council¹⁴, particularly where the issue involved concerns about building works.
57. The sub-committee suggests that a person situated within the community, for example within the structure of a community organisation, may best fill this liaison role between the community and the council. There would need to be a clearly agreed remit for this ‘independent community development worker’, and this person would be funded by the council.
58. The sub-committee **recommends** that an independent community development worker is employed in future renewal schemes to act as a liaison between the residents and traders and the renewal team for the duration of future renewal schemes.

¹⁴ Source: Minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting, 10 November 2004.

Community development

59. There are numerous examples of community projects that have been carried out under the Bellenden Renewal Scheme. These are documented in the draft Bellenden mid-term review document and acknowledged in the submissions received by the sub-committee:

“I think that the renewal scheme has been very successful at not just physically uplifting the area but also strengthening the community”
(submission 8).

60. However, concerns were raised during the scrutiny about the under-use of voluntary and community organisations such as the Bellenden Residents’ Group.
61. The need for improved community development and involvement remains a theme for both renewal and regeneration schemes borough-wide. This report looks at the community development aspect of the scheme, which the sub-committee considered not as advanced as the community involvement side.

Note: The sub-committee has made a distinction between people being actively involved in their community (e.g. via community councils and other forums), as opposed to the development side whereby the residents are actively involved in taking decisions about their area.

Voluntary and Community Organisations

62. The Bellenden Residents’ Group felt very strongly that they were a resource that had been under-utilised for the dissemination of information and consultation during the scheme. They contended that they formed themselves as part of a need to fill a vacuum created by the lack of information and community development work and had initiated community development with its community network and work with the Peckham Programme on issues relating to the Peckham Town Centre. As a voluntary residents’ group stimulating and supporting many other residents to become active citizens, they emphasised the importance of their work and expressed disappointment that this was not recognised and supported by the renewal team.
63. The sub-committee heard from officers that there were a number of groups who were already obtaining funding from the council for their community development work in the area. Thirty-one of the 40 voluntary groups operating within the Bellenden area, excluding the eight Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, had received funding totalling £816,146 by 2001/2. The sub-committee acknowledged that the community development work of these organisations would not necessarily specifically target the renewal area, nonetheless they were contributing to community development both in and around the Bellenden Renewal Area.
64. Officers explained to the sub-committee that the Bellenden Residents’ Group did not meet the criteria for funding through the renewal scheme. Advice had been given that local voluntary sector groups, including the Bellenden Residents’ Group, could

make bids directly to the Greater Peckham Alliance¹⁵ and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for financial support in regards of projects requiring revenue support. However, funding was targeted at hard to reach groups and this may present difficulty for generic residents groups wishing to access funding.

65. The sub-committee heard from officers that the council's Community Involvement Development Unit (CIDU) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Officers were responsible for the overarching community development work. The Renewal Team's resourcing for community development projects was limited, and funding was directed towards specific project-based development work within the area. Renewal scheme funding can only be available for the duration of a scheme, and it is important that community development work can be supported on an ongoing basis.
66. The sub-committee is not in a position to judge whether or not the Bellenden Residents' Group should be eligible for funding, but would suggest that they be encouraged to approach CIDU and the Neighbourhood Renewal Officers to discuss further the value of what they can offer the community and how this could be supported.
67. Further, the sub-committee **recommends** that consideration be given to the role of residents' groups in future renewal schemes.

Co-ordination of community involvement

68. Presentations given to the sub-committee by Ms Krystina Stimakovits, from the Peckham Voluntary Sector Forum (PVSF), and Mr Gregg Hutchings, from Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations (SAVO), emphasised the importance and benefit to both the council and the community of improved community involvement. Ms Stimakovits outlined how this required a long-term strategic view of the area, a framework, a dynamic inclusive and responsive approach to engagement, and an interactive communications strategy. A greater sharing of resources and control would bring about greater resources and sustainability, and the McDermott Gardens initiative was provided as case in point.
69. Ms Stimakovits contended that the council needed to make better use of the neighbourhood based voluntary organisations as a tool for providing support to the council and the community. To do this Ms Stimakovits argued that the council should provide resources for such organisations to train local people as facilitators, and to provide resources for local people to enable them to develop their own communications and community forums to work between the council and the community. This is distinct from and additional to the work of bodies such as SAVO and PVSF to provide the more limited basic organisational support through current capacity building. The sub-committee acknowledges that this is an important aspect of community development work and suggests that the Council/CIDU considers the support needs for local residents in the light of the experience in the Bellenden Renewal Area.
70. Ms Stimakovits further identified that a key problem to overcome in renewal schemes was the perception that the council was in the power position, particularly

¹⁵ The Greater Peckham Alliance closed in March 2004.

given that the scheme involved the distribution of council money and that greater openness and willingness to discuss and reach consensus over decision making criteria was needed to develop trust and better partnership working.

71. Mr Gregg Hutchings' presentation discussed initiatives in Southwark to increase community involvement and partnership working arrangements between the council and the community. These included active citizenship, civil pioneer status, the Southwark Alliance, and the Southwark Compact. The Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations was working with Southwark in developing the partnership arrangements.
72. The sub-committee notes that the council is actively supporting these initiatives. However, in the opinion of the sub-committee, some of these are initiatives are not being progressed quickly enough. Southwark Compact's seven guidelines¹⁶ are a case in point.
73. The sub-committee therefore **recommends** that Executive should ensure that:
 - a) learning from the Bellenden Renewal Scheme should be incorporated in the Southwark Compact guidelines for consultation;
 - b) the seven Southwark Compact guidelines are progressed with urgency;
 - c) support is given to enable SAVO, PVSF and other interested groups to be involved in the development of the guidelines so that these are as robust and considered as possible;
 - d) future renewal schemes should give consideration to ways in which community development initiatives can be encouraged.

Building Works

74. The sub-committee also explored concerns around the management, organisation and quality of building works carried out in the Bellenden Renewal area.
75. A number of the submissions received by the sub-committee spoke of experiences with building works carried out on their properties. This impacted on people's perception of the scheme. Some examples of the problems encountered and the effect this has are given below:

"...The quality of the work could be shoddy...The painting of my front windows were so bad, e.g. no undercoat/primer just painted straight on to the wood that I asked the team to come back and redo it. They claimed to have done this whilst I was out at work and now 18 months down the line my window frames are very rotten and the culprit was, no primer causing the paint to lift and let water in" (submission 8).

"It appears that this renovation process has run anything but smoothly resulting in a very stressful and unnecessary experience for Ms. [X]"¹⁷ who

¹⁶ The seven sets of guidelines being developed under the Southwark Compact relate to partnership working, resourcing, working with community organisations, supporting the diverse population of Southwark, consultation, volunteering, and premises.

¹⁷ Name removed for anonymity.

has also noted a serious deterioration of her health over this period' (submission 25).

76. However, the sub-committee evidenced that the “bad experiences” were in the minority. Submission 13 notes:

“On the whole the work was carried out well, on time and with as little disruption as possible. I understand completely that building work is vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather and delivery of materials etc, and considering this, and the scale of this phase of the project, we had very few complaints. The work got a bit careless at the end, when it came to the snagging list, and was hurried and shoddy. We had to re do the finishing touches ourselves. But I think that was always going to be the case.”

77. During discussion around the issues of work quality, Roger Young explained that surveys had indicated only a relatively low level of dissatisfaction with the works carried out, and that 95% satisfaction rate had been received. On the other hand, the Bellenden Residents’ Group contended that some people ended up completing the satisfaction forms just to put an end to their whole experience. The sub-committee acknowledges this alternative view, but does not believe this claim is substantiated from the evidence received.

78. In an effort to put the actual number of complaints into perspective, the sub-committee asked officers to provide information about the number of formal¹⁸ complaints that had been received. The information provided is below:

Nature of Complaints	Number of Complaints
Group repair	6
Face-lifts ¹⁹	1
Home maintenance	2
Renewal area study	2
Shop front	8
Promotion of new business	1
Play area	1
Site clean up	1
Rye passage	2
Choumert market	1
Bollards	2
Group repair - small roads	6
Group repair - Amott Road wanting scheme	1
Renovation grant	5
Newsletter	1
Traffic	3
Art	1
Lack of money for scheme	4
Fencing	1
Wooden platform	1
Bellenden road	1

¹⁸ The sub-committee defined this as including both verbal and written complaints.

¹⁹ Officers have advised that other complaints about face-lift schemes were day-to-day complaints resolved by the contractor and not formally recorded. These are therefore not included in the figures above.

Hanging basket	1
Intercom	2
Street wanting group repair	5
Maxden court	1
TOTAL	60

79. The volume of complaints, and the number of submissions received by the sub-committee concerning bad works, needs to be put in perspective. There are over 3000 properties in the Bellenden Renewal Area, and officers reported that nearly a third of these experienced some sort of works. The sub-committee would never be fully able to appreciate the extent of the frustration and stress for those people who had, or are having, very bad experiences with building works.
80. The sub-committee received evidence about the arrangements in place to ensure works are completed satisfactorily. Following the practical completion of works, the property owner completes a form sent out by the consultants about the works. Twelve months after the completion, a further 'Final Completion' form is sent out to ensure that the works are still satisfactory. A 'Satisfaction Form' is also sent out after this stage which is designed to assess the overall impression of the scheme; from the standard of the works, to the standard of the contractors and consultants, and whether any complaints had been dealt with effectively.
81. Officers further explained that residents had been canvassed on their views on the quality of works and the key priorities identified were: quicker outcomes, reductions in the number of snags, improvement in health and safety of the works, and reduction in cost. This information had been used to inform council decisions on future contracting arrangements, for example, in the consideration of partnering schemes.
82. During the scrutiny concerns were also raised about the cost to the council of multiple repeats of works as a result of poor quality and performance. The sub-committee would like to assure residents that there is no extra financial cost to the council for this. Where the contractors are still on site, the contractors are asked to rectify the problem. Where council inspection deems that the work is not up to standard, payment is held until the works are completed. Information about the performance of the contractor is also used for the maintenance of the council's Approved Contractor list, so there is a further incentive for the contractors to perform up to standard.
83. The Bellenden Residents' Group raised concerns about the complex chains of communication in getting problems with works addressed. They contended that the tenant or property-owner did not feel as if they were a client amongst the various layers of agencies involved (council, consultants, contractors and sub-contractors).
84. In their evidence on the 10 November 2004, officers informed the sub-committee that they had learnt that where residents have concerns with their building works, they have a preference to discuss these directly with the council. Under the agreement with the consultants, the council is not able to take action without discussing the issue with the consultant. This protracted process has an impact on the already low level of staffing resources. It is reassuring that the renewal team are

taking steps to improve customer care and to reduce their workload by sending the consultants around weekly to properties undergoing works to discuss any concerns directly.

85. It is evident that the council has already accepted that there have been problems with building works. To address this, the council is moving into an era of partnering contracts. By building up a relationship with one key partner over a set period of time, the expectation is that renewal areas will be advantaged; with financial incentives for works to be completed first time, and less incentives for short-cuts to be taken. Whether or not this process sees an improvement in the level of communication between residents/traders and the council has yet to be determined.
86. The sub-committee **recommends** that a scrutiny review be carried out in 12 months to assess whether partnering contracts are achieving satisfaction in building works in renewal areas.

Design specifications

87. Earlier, mention was made of the initiative of the renewal scheme to enable decisions about properties to be taken at the local level. Officers assisted in this process; for example for some group repair schemes, officers arranging for advice and guidance on design specifications for aspects such as the materials and style of the garden walls, and pavements in the area.
88. However the sub-committee observed that this may not always lead to the best, most sustainable outcome. For example, during the site visit, the sub-committee was alerted to the fact that the materials used for the fencing along Relf Road had moss growing out of the concrete where the design was such that water collected on the wall rather than ran off. Further, some submissions have commented on how the paving stones chosen in some areas are not practical for users of wheelchairs or mobility scooters²⁰.
89. The sub-committee **recommends** that any guidance given to residents and traders within a renewal area about design specifications at least meets the minimum standards and considers issues with access and sustainability.

Value for money

Expenditure Figures

90. The sub-committee found it extremely difficult to obtain financial information in a format that was easily digestible. Figures in the table below were not received in this format until two days before the final draft of the report was sent to Members.
91. The Bellenden Residents' Group expressed frustration during the scrutiny process that financial information they had requested several times previously had not been forthcoming. They contended that such information was necessary in order to judge whether various aspects of the scheme had achieved value for money.

²⁰ For example, submission numbers 2 and 11.

92. With some difficulty, the sub-committee eventually obtained some financial information. The information provided is presented in the table below:

TYPE OF WORKS		£ EXPENDITURE (1998 to February 2005)
Public Spaces		
Nigel, Relf, Anstey, Choumert Grove streetlighting and paving scheme		144,809.14
Choumert Car Park CCTV & lighting		33,719.67
Trees around Bellenden area		2,150.15
Bellenden Road street-lighting, paving and bollards		21,812.74
Goose Green Environmental Improvements		97,366.40
Choumert Market Scheme		187,266.56
Peckham Rye - Gateway		26,565.57
Traffic Management		
Bellenden traffic scheme – Phase 1		382,883.44
Community Projects		
McDermott Community Garden		235,178.13
Other community schemes including Lido, Goose Green, Marsden Wildlife Centre.		259,980.52
Council Housing Estates		423,071.22
Building Repairs²¹		
Location	Total properties	Total Grant (£)
Nutbrook Street facelift scheme	65	268155.00
Maxted Road facelift scheme	60	250392.00
Bellenden Road facelift scheme	36	140,135.13

93. Information on the shop-front scheme, support to businesses, and management and administration costs was either not provided or provided in a format that was largely unusable. Officers explained that management costs cannot be provided as it relates to a set percentage of the tendered contract price.
94. In the absence of complete financial information, the sub-committee was unable to assess value for money between different aspects of the scheme. In any case, the sub-committee's main focus was on the 'people' aspect of the renewal scheme - an actual assessment of value for money is better left to the mid-term review.
95. It would be ideal for there to be greater transparency on the spending for various categories within the schemes. Financial information can be provided without identifying individual contributions. However, given concerns over the level of staffing, it may be that it is not practical to provide this information on a frequent basis, but to provide public accountability it should be provided at least annually.

²¹ The information displayed for building repairs includes owner-occupiers, council and housing association properties. The figures do not include contributions from individuals nor from housing associations.

96. However, the sub-committee will address some of the issues raised during the scrutiny which relate to value for money, below.

Face-lift versus Group Repair

97. Evidence submitted to the sub-committee contended that visual comparisons of the facelift and group repair schemes demonstrated that the facelift had equal visual impact at a relatively lower cost than group repair. As such, witnesses suggested a comparison of the relative unit costs of the more expensive group repair scheme, with a combination of street facelifts and more selective individual renovation grants.
98. The sub-committee noted that the two schemes are not directly comparable even though visually the outcomes may be very similar. Officers explained that face-lift schemes are designed as a relatively inexpensive, cost-effective way to visually improve the appearance of a property by focusing on the front e.g. cleaning the bricks at the front of the property and replacing the garden walls.
99. On the other hand, group repair schemes do not limit works to the front of the property. For instance, works may be carried out on the front, back, roof and guttering of the property. So while visual examination of the front of the property may show very little difference from those properties involved in a face-lift scheme, the purpose and costs of these two schemes are different. The group repair scheme could be justified in terms of the focus on improving the conditions of properties.

Ecological Impact

100. The Bellenden Residents' Group drew attention to the way in which the Scheme had resulted in the paving over of many previously unpaved front gardens. In the light of recent experiences of the effect of the concreting over of land in urban areas contributing to flooding, this is not an advisable development. The sub-committee **recommends** that the Council ensures that residents in future schemes and more generally should be positively encouraged to retain the soil.

Costing the contribution of volunteers

101. A further issue identified during the scrutiny process was that often the voluntary contributions of residents are not costed in renewal schemes. In the Bellenden scheme significant and valuable contributions were made by local artists, for example. The question was therefore raised as to whether some sort of quantifiable value was placed on the contributions made by volunteers to projects in the Bellenden area.
102. Officers told the sub-committee that there been no recording of the number of hours people had spent on a project, nor had criteria been set for what would be included in the figures (such as travel time, meeting time).
103. The sub-committee suggests information relating to voluntary contributions should be recorded for future schemes, with agreed criteria set as to what is included in these figures, as this would enable a better analysis on the total cost of the scheme

and the voluntary contribution of residents to this. In future this information could be required to assess value for money.

Staffing

104. Issues with staffing levels were briefly discussed earlier in the report. A further point on this issue is that the sub-committee does not consider the staffing levels sufficient to deal with the complexity and amount of work involved in the scheme.
105. While the actual number of council staff working on the scheme at any one point may fluctuate, it is evident that there has been a need for greater staffing resources to be allocated to the Bellenden Renewal Scheme. This issue has also been picked up in the draft Bellenden mid-term review document which states that under the government's renewal area guidance, renewal areas of over 3,000 properties should have a minimum of six permanent members of staff²².
106. The review document also discusses some of the limitations from the lack of staffing resources, adding that the

“expectations of residents for support and assistance from the renewal team is considerable and the failure of the team to be able to provide specialist community development assistance along with practical issues like newsletters every few months as requested by residents is attributable to this gap in staffing resources.”²³

107. The level of staffing resources made available to a renewal area is an issue which urgently needs to be addressed by the council, especially before work starts in any future renewal areas. The staffing level for the Bellenden Renewal Scheme was not appropriate.
108. The sub-committee **recommends** that Executive should be realistic in considering whether staffing resources made available to future renewal scheme will be adequate.

Management of Expectations

109. A theme that became evident during the scrutiny is the need to manage expectations. While the approach to consultation on the scheme was generally innovative and successful, it may have served to heighten the expectations of residents in the area. The scheme's funding was finite and there was never an intention for every property and every street to be involved in the renewal.
110. There are numerous examples throughout the submissions received by the sub-committee demonstrating discontent and misunderstanding about the scheme:

“we feel like the poor relatives” (submission 3);

²² Page 103, draft Bellenden Mid-term review document.

²³ Page 104, draft Bellenden Mid-term review document.

“we feel cheated and forgotten and very unhappy” (submission 16);
“I feel like the council has grandly promised benefits, participation, consultation and communication which has just not happened” (submission 19);
“I hope the scheme continues until the entire area is completely improved” (submission 11).

111. Officers did try and ensure that aspects of the scheme’s limitations were relayed to residents in the area:

“The Council is not planning to use Group repair in every road in the renewal Area because the resources required to do this will not be made available and even if they were the Council actually wants to encourage private investment. The Council is aiming to provide leadership by tackling some of the poorer properties in terms of conditions...it is in everybody’s interest to understand that there is no plan to Group Repair the whole renewal area” (Area News, issue 6, July 1999, page 2).

112. The sub-committee did not explore this issue to any great degree during the scrutiny process. However, it remains an issue that should be borne in mind for future renewal schemes. While some degree of enthusiasm is required to ensure there is public support for a scheme, it is important that the expectations for what the scheme can do for any particular individual remain realistic given the political and funding environments in which it is operated.

113. The sub-committee **recommends** that future schemes should ensure that there is clarity from the beginning of the scheme about the priorities and criteria for renewal in the area and that these are clearly communicated to the residents.

Setting of Funding Priorities

114. Legislative and policy changes during the life of the scheme can also have implications for the management and perception of a renewal scheme, as has been evidenced in the Bellenden Renewal Scheme.

115. At the time the Bellenden Renewal Area was declared, the council received a 60% subsidy from the government for works carried out to the private housing stock in the renewal area, and 50% for environmental improvement works. The ring-fencing of this funding meant that it could only be spent on private sector properties. However, the government removed this ring-fencing and included it all in the general allocation of finance given to the council. With competing demands, it became more difficult for the renewal team to prioritise work on private sector housing.

116. The replacement of the *Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996* with the *Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Renewal) 2002* gave local authorities the power to develop a genuinely local housing renewal policy. The new legislation repealed the existing housing grants legislation, and ended the renovation grants

system. The only grant that was not affected was the Disabled Facilities Grant.²⁴ The council needed to develop its own policy, and the government made it clear that local authorities should be maximising the amount of owners' contribution to any assistance given by council for housing repairs.

117. The council's new private housing renewal policy was agreed in July 2003 following consultation. Direct financial assistance from the council was targeted at vulnerable households i.e. those who were over 60 years old and on low incomes or who had a disability. The policy reduced the level of grant aid available for individual schemes²⁵, but supplemented this aid with loan schemes. The council policy also increased the emphasis on the provision of housing maintenance advice to both vulnerable and non-vulnerable households to prevent properties from sliding into major disrepair and unfit.

118. The future of group repair schemes remained uncertain pending the completion of the Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment. On 8 February 2005 Executive agreed to a new 'Street Renewal Scheme' in replacement of group repair.

119. Unfortunately, while these policy changes may ultimately be in the best interest of the borough as a whole, they do create uncertainty about which projects will be funded. In the submission to the sub-committee on the 7 December 2004 the Bellenden Residents' Group contended that:

"these promises led to people rearranging their lives to accommodate them, taking out loans and remortgaging, preparing for work which never happened, not hearing adequately what was happening, or suffering financial loss"

120. A case in point is the author of submission 9B who had believed that he would be getting help with publicising the opening of his shop on Bellenden Road, but a few weeks prior to the shop's opening, he found out that this was no longer available. This had a negative effect on his business:

"This left me with no ability to provide any of the publicity, due to the fact that having been taken in by the hype, I had not budgeted for them".

121. Policy changes during the life of the scheme could have contributed to this type of experience and this may have been further compounded by less than satisfactory communication between the renewal team and such businesses. In response to the particular situation highlighted above, officers explained that because of policy change, money previously earmarked for 'promotion work' was instead to be used for promoting disabled facilities grants, grants for people over the age of sixty, and for Southwark loans.

122. The sub-committee **recommends** that, in considering policy changes to funding for private housing renewal, the Executive is satisfied that it has assessed and understood the implications for the 'people' side of the renewal schemes that are already in progress.

²⁴ 'Review of Housing Renewal Policy', report to Southwark Council's Executive Committee, 8 February 2005.

²⁵ Under the revised policy, renovation grants were replaced with the 'Southwark Small Works Grant'.

Annual funding priorities

123. Further, the fact that funding priorities within a renewal scheme are agreed annually can have consequences for projects which are already under development. For example, during the site visit the sub-committee heard how officers had undertaken negotiations with residents and traders over the improvements needed to Choumert Market²⁶. By the time agreement had been reached they were in a new financial year and the amount of funding for Choumert Market had been reduced. As a result the negotiation process had to be restarted. Wasted efforts such as this must be frustrating to all parties.
124. Without the assurance of funding beyond the current financial year, there is the added problem of the limitations for the projects which could get funded. Some streets were unable to meet the criteria for group repair because the street length was such that the works could not be carried out to both sides of the street in one financial year, and funding could not be guaranteed for its completion the following year.
125. The sub-committee recognises that funding priorities do change from year to year. However, in project managing the scheme, it is important for officers to be upfront with residents and traders about the risks to a project and to factor in that consultation, agreement, and start of works needs to be done within the financial year to guarantee the funding.

Repayment issues

126. A further point noted by the sub-committee was that there was some confusion over repayment for building works. Submission 13 illustrates this point:

“we have still not had a breakdown of the costs incurred to us, and therefore a bill to pay...we would like to know the total so that we can budget it into our running costs”.

127. The repayment method also varied according to the circumstances for the individual involved.
128. The sub-committee also heard from officers how individual circumstances changed between the time that the financial arrangements for works were agreed and the completion of the works, leaving the property owner unable to pay the remaining 90% of their agreed contribution. The officer presentation to the sub-committee commented that in future schemes it would be important to obtain more of the funding upfront.
129. To address these issues, the sub-committee **recommends** that Executive ask officers to examine the wording in the legal documents agreed between the council and the home-owner to ensure that it is clear when the repayment is due. Clarity is also needed in establishing a consistent and fair means by which repayment can be made.

²⁶ Situated on the Peckham Rye end of Choumert Road.

Considerations for the Bellenden Renewal Scheme

130. While the last section focused on looking at lessons and experiences that need to be considered for future renewal schemes, there are issues that still need to be addressed in the Bellenden Renewal Scheme.

Communication

Bellenden Mid-Term Review Document

131. The Bellenden mid-term review document has still not been released in its final form to residents in the renewal area. This review was completed in 2002, and the text was agreed by Executive in September 2003. Regardless of the reasons, the sub-committee firmly believes that the delay is not acceptable. Officers were not able to provide the sub-committee with a date for when the mid-term review document will be published.

132. The sub-committee **recommends** that the Bellenden mid-term review document is finalised and distributed without any further delay.

133. Publication of this document will also serve to inform people about the intentions for the remainder of the scheme, as it includes the action plan agreed by Executive in July 2003 about the targets and priorities for the remainder of the scheme. This will partly serve to address concerns raised in submissions about what is intended for the remainder of the scheme. However, it needs to be clearly communicated to residents and traders that schemes that have already been agreed for future years are dependent on funding availability, and are not guaranteed.

134. A further comment on this point is that the figures and information contained in the mid-term review document are now out of date. While the review information itself should not be updated, it may be ideal for the Renewal Team to look at ensuring that more up to date information does get distributed to residents and traders in the area in the near future. The sub-committee will not make a formal recommendation on this point as it recognises that this may not be practical due to the low staffing levels.

Provision of regular information

135. This report has already discussed how the renewal team has failed to provide regular information to the Bellenden Renewal area. This served to undermine the efforts made in community development during the earlier stages of the scheme, and has caused some residents to become very disillusioned with the scheme.

136. The action plan for Bellenden, agreed by Executive in September 2003, sets a new target for the renewal scheme in relation to its communication. This target states that two newsletters should be produced per year.

137. The sub-committee therefore **asks** Executive to ensure that a newsletter is sent out to everyone in the Bellenden Renewal area by the end of the 2004/05 municipal

year, and every six months thereafter, in accordance with the action plan agreed in the Bellenden mid-term review document.

Communication with the council

138. Also discussed earlier was how there was a general frustration from people who were having difficulties with getting a response to their issues and queries about the scheme, including resolution to complaints about building works. It is important that all the outstanding cases for the Bellenden Renewal scheme are resolved with some urgency.
139. The report discussed the possibility of having a person situated in the community who could act as liaison between the residents, traders and the council. The sub-committee acknowledges that the Bellenden Renewal scheme is reaching the end of its ten-year duration, and that the available funds may be limited. Therefore it may not be feasible to employ such a person for the Bellenden Renewal scheme.
140. However the sub-committee would **recommend** that Executive considers whether there are funds available for this purpose during the remainder of the scheme, or considers alternative arrangements to progress outstanding cases and concerns about the scheme.

Exit Strategy

141. The Bellenden Residents' Group made a valuable point in reminding the sub-committee that the residents and traders in the area "*are going to be living here in Bellenden long after the Renewal Team leaves the area*"²⁷. Along with this was a plea to ensure that the residents and traders be fully involved in the development of the scheme's exit strategy and given support as active citizens to participate. The sub-committee recommends that the Bellenden Residents' Group be actively involved in developing the exit strategy.

Relationship with Lane West and surrounding areas

142. While this falls outside its specific remit, the sub-committee is reporting on its understanding of issues of the relationship between Lane West and surrounding areas.
143. Bellenden does not exist in isolation. The Bellenden Renewal Area lies in the wards of The Lane and South Camberwell. It also lies in southern half of The Lane West Priority Neighbourhood in terms of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy²⁸.
144. The Bellenden Residents' Group contended that the council equated Bellenden with the whole of Lane West, and therefore assumes that the renewal scheme has satisfied all the neighbourhood needs, including supporting community development. This has made it ineligible for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding with no access to funding for community development support.

²⁷ Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting, 7 December 2004.

²⁸ Source: Draft Bellenden mid-term review document, page 71.

145. The Peckham Programme is responsible for community development in Lane West, as well as in the other priority neighbourhoods such as East Peckham and Nunhead. Funding for this work comes from Southwark Alliance, but the greatest proportion of the funding is directed to East Peckham and Nunhead rather than Lane West.²⁹ The sub-committee heard from officers that this is because East Peckham and Nunhead have been identified as having the greatest community development needs at this time. However, the Bellenden Residents' Group told the sub-committee that they had been informed that this is because East Peckham and Nunhead had not previously had any regeneration or renewal schemes whereas Lane West had the renewal scheme.
146. In light of this, the sub-committee **recommends** that Executive seek to review the funding support available to East Peckham, Nunhead and Lane West, to determine whether this funding is being appropriately directed between these three priority neighbourhoods.
147. Consideration also needs to be given as to how to better integrate Bellenden into the surrounding communities. In particular, whether or not future renewal work should look at Bellenden and Lane West as an integrated unit for the purposes of community development and cohesion in their strategic direction and development.

McDermott Garden

148. A further issue raised during the scrutiny process was uncertainty surrounding the future of McDermott Garden. The sub-committee heard how this initiative had become very much a local community resource; developed and maintained by residents in the area and used by a diverse range of community groups for events. Residents had established a 'Friends of McDermott Garden' trust to look after the interests of the garden.
149. The site was classified under the Unitary Development Plan as borough open land. It was fronted by 2 prefabricated buildings, one of which was privately owned and the other owned by the council. The council building had been put forward for auction, and the sub-committee heard from a number of residents who were very concerned about the future of the garden, and whether the money from the sale of the building would be directed back into the garden.
150. It is evident that McDermott Garden is very much a valued community resource. The Renewal Team have recognised this in their draft Bellenden mid-term review document, and the action plan sets a new target (agreed by Executive in September 2003) to obtain long term funding for McDermott Road Garden by July 2007³⁰.
151. Whilst the sub-committee is not in a position to make any formal recommendations as to the garden's future and the use of the proceeds from the sale of the pre-fabricated building, it would strongly urge Executive to ensure that the renewal team is supported in meeting the target of obtaining long term funding.

²⁹ East Peckham and Nunhead have been allocated £0.5million each year, over three years, to spend on social renewal projects.

³⁰ Source: Draft Bellenden mid-term review document, page 116.

152. The sub-committee does **recommend**, however, that any decision on the future of McDermott Garden are not taken without consultation with the McDermott Gardens Trust, and that the final outcome of any decisions is communicated to all residents in the area.

Traffic Consultation in the Bellenden Area

153. The sub-committee received representations from people who were concerned about the impact of traffic calming measures and proposed road closures in the Bellenden Renewal Area. The key issue was whether the outcome of consultation reflected the public views as voiced during the consultation process. The Bellenden Residents' Group contended that the Renewal Scheme initiative in supporting residents to come up with ideas for consulting the wider community was commendable, but there was inadequate attention paid to the community aspects on a very sensitive topic.

154. In his evidence to the sub-committee³¹, Councillor Andy Simmons explained that the traffic proposals had created a strong divide in the Bellenden renewal area. This has had a detrimental effect on community relations, and it was evident to the sub-committee that this was still a very contentious and heated issue.

155. The sub-committee is not in a position to judge the merit of the traffic proposals. However, some sort of resolution to this issue needs to be found.

156. Traffic considerations fall under the remit of community councils, and the sub-committee therefore **recommends** that the Nunhead and Peckham Rye Community Council look to take up this issue with the aim of finding some middle ground.

³¹ Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting, 7 December 2004.

Summary of Recommendations

157. The following tables summarises the recommendations identified by the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee during its scrutiny of the Bellenden Renewal Scheme. The first table lists the recommendations and suggestions for future renewal schemes in general; the second table lists those specifically related to the Bellenden Renewal Scheme.

Table 1: Recommendations and suggestions of the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee for future renewal schemes

	ISSUE [paragraph reference]	RECOMMENDATION OR SUGGESTION
1	Communication with residents and traders [41]	The sub-committee recommends that Executive seek assurances that the council's communications strategy is flexible enough to allow a regular flow of information to all residents in a renewal area. It further recommends that a communications strategy be formally agreed for any future renewal schemes, and that this is made clear to people within the renewal area.
2	The role of resident advisory boards [52]	In light of the confusions and concerns around the role of the Bellenden Advisory Board and its subsequent replacement into the wider consultative structure, the sub-committee recommends that where forums involving residents are set up as part of a renewal scheme: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Terms of reference and/or constitution must be agreed. This must set out the remit, governance and decision-making arrangements for the board; b) The role and function of the forum and its membership must be clearly communicated to those who live and work in the renewal area; c) In situations where the forum is absorbed into another structure, it is important to ensure that the replacement body is able to take over its functions; d) Any changes to the structure and operations of the forum must be clearly communicated to those who live and work in the renewal area.
3	Liaison with the council [57, 58]	The sub-committee recommends that an independent community development worker is employed in future renewal schemes to act as a liaison between the residents and traders and the renewal team for the duration of future renewal schemes.
4	Role of residents' groups [66,67]	The sub-committee suggests that the Bellenden Residents' Group be encouraged to approach the Community Involvement Development Unit and the

		<p>Neighbourhood Renewal Officers to discuss further the value of what they can offer the community and how this could be supported.</p> <p>The sub-committee recommends that consideration be given to the role of residents' groups in future renewal schemes.</p>
5	Community development [73]	<p>The sub-committee recommends that Executive should ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) learning from the Bellenden Renewal Scheme should be incorporated in the Southwark Compact guidelines for consultation; b) the seven Southwark Compact guidelines are progressed with urgency; c) support is given to enable SAVO, PVSF and other interested groups to be involved in the development of the guidelines so that these are as robust and considered as possible; d) future renewal schemes should give consideration to ways in which community development initiatives can be encouraged.
6	Quality of building works [86]	<p>The sub-committee recommends that a scrutiny review be carried out in 12 months to assess whether partnering contracts are achieving satisfaction in building works in renewal areas.</p>
7	Design specification guidance [89]	<p>The sub-committee recommends that any guidance given to residents and traders within a renewal area about design specifications at least meets the minimum standards and considers issues with access and sustainability.</p>
8	Environmental impact considerations [100]	<p>The sub-committee recommends the Council ensures that residents in future schemes and more generally should be positively encouraged to retain the soil.</p>
9	Costing of voluntary contributions [103]	<p>The sub-committee suggests information relating to voluntary contributions should be recorded for future schemes, with agreed criteria set as to what is included in these figures, as this would enable a better analysis on the total cost of the scheme and the voluntary contribution of residents to this. In future this information could be required to assess value for money.</p>
10	Adequacy of staffing resources [108]	<p>The sub-committee recommends that Executive should be realistic in considering whether staffing resources made available to future renewal scheme will be adequate.</p>
11	Clarity of funding priorities and criteria [113]	<p>The sub-committee recommends that future schemes should ensure that there is clarity from the beginning of the scheme about the priorities and criteria for renewal in the area and that these are</p>

		clearly communicated to the residents.
12	Assessment of the human impact of policy changes [122]	The sub-committee recommends that, in considering policy changes to funding for private housing renewal, the Executive is satisfied that it has assessed and understood the implications for the 'people' side of the renewal schemes that are already in progress.
13	Management of expectations [125]	The sub-committee recognises that funding priorities do change from year to year. However, in project managing the scheme, it is important for officers to be upfront with residents and traders about the risks to a project and to factor in that consultation, agreement, and start of works needs to be done within the financial year to guarantee the funding.
14	Repayment schemes [129]	The sub-committee recommends that Executive ask officers to examine the wording in the legal documents agreed between the council and the home-owner to ensure that it is clear when the repayment is due. Clarity is also needed in establishing a consistent and fair means by which repayment can be made.

Table 2: Recommendations and suggestions of the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee about the Bellenden Renewal Scheme

	ISSUE [paragraph reference]	RECOMMENDATION OR SUGGESTION
15	Publication of the Bellenden mid-term review document [132, 134]	The sub-committee recommends that the Bellenden mid-term review document is finalised and distributed without any further delay. The sub-committee suggests that, given that the figures in the review document are now out of date, the Renewal Team should consider distributing up to date information to residents and traders in the area in the near future.
16	Communication with residents and traders [137]	The sub-committee asks Executive to ensure that a newsletter is sent out to everyone in the Bellenden Renewal area by the end of the 2004/05 municipal year, and every six months thereafter, in accordance with the action plan agreed in the Bellenden mid-term review document.
17	Liaison representative for the Bellenden Scheme [140]	The sub-committee recommends that Executive considers whether there are funds available for having a person situated in the community who could act as liaison between the residents, traders and the council during the remainder of the Bellenden Renewal Scheme, or considers alternative arrangements to progress outstanding cases and concerns about the scheme.

18	Relationship with Lane West and surrounding areas [146, 147]	<p>The sub-committee recommends that Executive seek to review the funding support available to East Peckham, Nunhead and Lane West, to determine whether this funding is being appropriately directed between these three priority neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Consideration also needs to be given as to how to better integrate Bellenden into the surrounding communities. In particular, whether or not future renewal work should look at Bellenden and Lane West as an integrated unit for the purposes of community development and cohesion in their strategic direction and development.</p>
19	Future of McDermott Garden [151,152]	<p>The sub-committee would strongly urge Executive to ensure that the renewal team is supported in meeting the target of obtaining long term funding for McDermott Garden.</p> <p>The sub-committee recommends that any decisions on the future of McDermott Garden are not taken without consultation with the McDermott Gardens Trust, and that the final outcome of any decision is communicated to all residents in the area.</p>
20	Traffic schemes in the Bellenden Area [156]	<p>The sub-committee recommends that the Nunhead and Peckham Rye Community Council look to take up the issue of discontent with the traffic schemes in the Bellenden area with the aim of finding some middle ground.</p>

Conclusion

158. The 2004/05 Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee spent three months considering evidence about the implementation of the Bellenden Renewal Scheme. Overall, it formed the view that the scheme has had a very positive impact on the Bellenden area, and officers should be commended for the achievements to date.
159. However the sub-committee also identified a number of shortcomings with the scheme. The key failing was very poor general communication with residents and traders in recent years - from which stemmed feelings of confusion and frustration about the scheme. Better communication may serve to address many of the other issues highlighted by the sub-committee in paragraph 157 of this report.
160. The sub-committee trusts that the scrutiny process and recommendations arising from it will go some way to reassuring people in the Bellenden area that their views have been listened to. It hopes that the Executive will seriously consider the recommendations and ensure that the concerns highlighted are addressed, to the benefit both of those living in the Bellenden Renewal Area and of anybody affected by any future renewal schemes undertaken in the London Borough of Southwark.

Acknowledgements

161. The sub-committee would like to thank everybody who took part in the Bellenden Renewal Scheme Scrutiny:

- Ms Eileen Conn, Co-ordinator of the Bellenden Residents Group
- Officers from the Housing Department, particularly Rachel Sharpe (Head of Housing Strategy and Regeneration), Roger Young (Senior Renewal Officer) and Sharon Miller (Renewal Officer)
- Ms Krystina Stimakovits, Peckham Voluntary Sector Forum
- Mr Gregg Hutchings, Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations
- All those who made the time and effort to provide their views on the scheme – by either attending the meetings, making a submission or providing their views during the site visit. Those who signed the attendance sheets or sent in submissions were:

A. Augustine, Jacqueline Baker, Colin and Fiona Barber, Matthew Bloxidge, Joan Brown, Leigh Bruen, Michael Bukola, P. Byrne, Amynta Cardwell, Donald Cole, Clare Colvin, Robert Digby, D. Dolye, Delia Dunford-Swirles, Cameron Eccles, Margaret Friel, Denise Fulgoni, Jonathan Gaventa, Carmen Goodwin, John Gorsuch, Madeleine Green, Carole Hancock, Liz Hoggard, Keith Hoy, Mark Jonathan, Sonia Kidson, M. King, Jonathon Lane, Callis Lawson, H Leach, Claude Le Guyader, R Luishiust, Sara Martin, Mary Maurice-Jones, Richard Mellany, Andy McDieer, Simon McDonald, Chris Moyler, D. Murphy, John O'Grady, Gareth Owen, Nayan Patel, Kay Pinnoell, Sarah Pollard, G. Ptok, Dave Rowe, Eduardo Sant'Anna, Councillor Andy Simmons, Anna Simpson, Sylvia Smith, Caroline Staunton, Loraine Suter, Ruth Sutton, Catherine Sydney, Liem Tumulty, Steve Walsh, S. Warren, Jo White, Robert White, Julia Whitehead, Russell Wilson, Caroline and Marcus Wookey, Liz Wright, and Justin York.

APPENDIX A:

Submissions Received

APPENDIX B:

Officer Response to Submissions

APPENDIX C:

Presentation from Housing Officers, November 2004

APPENDIX D:

Presentation from Bellenden Residents Group, December 2004

APPENDIX E:

**Presentation from Peckham Voluntary Sector Forum, December
2004**

APPENDIX F:

**Presentation from Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations,
December 2004**