

Challenges

2.1 There are a number of serious, interlinked challenges that need to be addressed in order to achieve the vision. Addressing these challenges will enable Vauxhall to contribute fully to the Borough's economic vitality and fulfil the Borough's role as part of the central London economy.

Economic Challenges

2.2 **The structure of the local economy.** Vauxhall's 'micro economy' reflects London wide trends which the GLA suggest are evidenced by declining employment opportunities in utilities, manufacturing, construction, wholesale, transport and communications and public administration, (source GLA Economics, Working Paper 38, November 2009). The past ten years have seen a major decline in demand for office space in Vauxhall. Office headquarter functions have departed as the buildings have become obsolete in terms of specification and image. Light industries which were a feature of Vauxhall have retreated, reducing further the economic activity of the area, although these uses continue to be reflected in the designation of a small part of the Vauxhall area as key industrial business area (KIBA). Although the OAPF advocates a residential led approach, the provision of at least 8,000 jobs represents a significant increase in employment in the local area it will not be secured unless vacant and outdated buildings are replaced with mixed use development where job creation is one of the primary objectives. Employment floorspace within mixed use developments will need to be flexible and capable of adaptation to a variety of business needs than currently exists.

2.3 New residential development will need to support a growing culture of home working, including ensuring the capacity for internet and digital media. Vauxhall is well placed to capture this growing new market. Its proximity to central London is a significant advantage that the Council is determined to maximise upon.

2.4 **Unemployment.** Unemployment and income deprivation is high in the area surrounding the SPD boundary. Even though Lambeth has a high proportion of skilled residents compared to other inner London locations, there are many local people who are excluded from the opportunities of central London and few employment opportunities are to be found within the immediate area. Providing employment and training opportunities must be a feature of all development in the Vauxhall area.

2.5 **Stimulate economic activity.** The area must work harder and smarter to generate a wide range of economic benefits for local people. There is an imperative need for this part of the borough to exploit its undoubted potential to deliver economic benefits to the wider community within Lambeth. It

is uniquely placed to do so and has underperformed in this role in the recent past. As a borough, Lambeth has struggled to contribute proportionately to London's continued growth. This has given rise to negative external perceptions of the borough. New development in Vauxhall provides a significant opportunity to overcome this.

2.6 **Deliver balanced retail provision.** Retail provision in the Vauxhall area is poor. Small and affordable retail units suitable for independent retail businesses are rare. Retail units within newly built developments are competing for what is at present limited market demand from national multiples, leading to extended periods of vacancy of new ground floor retail units which are situated away from main pedestrian flows. Traditional planning policy struggles to provide an appropriate response to this problem. Overtime, the increase in catchment will enable successful letting of property, in the short and potentially medium term, empty retail units create a visual marker which reflect a weakness in the local economy.

2.7 **Safe-guard night time economy** Vauxhall has a thriving predominantly Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) night time economy, centred upon the railway arches at Vauxhall Cross which gives character and energy to the area. Regarded as London's freshest destination by the media, Vauxhall is highlighted as being a rival to the evening economy of Soho. This character and variety is to be encouraged but the challenge will be to decide to how this feature of local life will co-exist with the re-developed district centre and a dramatically increased residential population.

Social Challenges

2.8 **Design out crime and antisocial behaviour.** The Vauxhall area registers high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. Many of these crimes are 'youth on youth' or linked to the thriving night time economy which draws in thousands of visitors over weekends. Poor connectivity and insufficient lighting of walkways exacerbate the problem. It is expected development will contribute to tackle this issue by adhering to designing out crime principles.

2.9 **Tackle social deprivation.** Vauxhall, and its neighbouring communities in North Lambeth, suffer from high levels of social deprivation, with five super-output areas in the 10% of most deprived in England. This measure demonstrates housing barriers including affordability, homelessness and overcrowding as well as distances to essential social services. The area around Black Prince Road and Fitzalan Street, including Lambeth Walk, Whitgift Estate and parts of the Ethelred Estate feature in the 10% most deprived areas of England as regards poor health. There is a need to ensure that



Figure 2.1. Empty shop units

as well as making plans for physical development, the wellbeing of existing and new communities is considered in future development.

2.10 Deliver affordable housing. The area defined by the SPD boundary lacks sufficient affordable housing and there is not the mix of tenure necessary to encourage blended communities and progression to owner-occupation. The pre-dominance of one bedroom flats has exacerbated overcrowding and lack of alternative social housing has impacted on efforts to decant tenants to release under-occupied properties. There are dangers that the area could become over-dominated by investor buy-to-let schemes where residents may lack any social commitment to the life of the area. Public funding regimes, high services charges and the availability or otherwise of grant support for affordable homes, all present challenges to the ambition to achieve a mixed community. A further consideration is the physical configuration of sites in Vauxhall which lend themselves for the most part to high density living. Development will need to be well designed to meet and balance the challenges of housing need with physical supply.

2.11 Protect character. Vauxhall is home to a distinct Portuguese and LGBT community and it is necessary to preserve cultural diversity whilst delivering an ambitious programme of growth. This part of the borough has a young population with over 53% being between 18-34 years and existing places, spaces and infrastructure do not reflect this aspect of community life.

2.12 Provide a cultural offer. Currently Vauxhall does not build upon the strengths of local cultural heritage nor does it capitalise on its proximity to the major cultural icons of the South Bank. The area has so far failed to incorporate culture at the heart of place-making, yet this is a characteristic that often separates places of success from places that are less popular. There is a danger that large scale modern development will subsume intricate places of interest in Vauxhall that do stimulate variety and creativity only to replace them with monotonous brands that have no local or meaningful significance.

Physical Challenges

2.13 Create a sense of identity. Vauxhall is the meeting point for a number of major distributor roads, and is on the edge of the congestion charge zone. The area suffers from a poor image, all too often being associated in the minds of Londoners simply as an over-scaled gyratory. It lacks a sense of civic identity and a definable 'sense of place'. It currently has no civic space that can be identified as a 'heart' which would give a sense of arrival to capture the interest of thousands of passing commuters as well as establishing a rejuvenated sense of pride amongst local residents and businesses.

2.14 Transform the gyratory. The gyratory is a major junction on the Inner Ring Road and pre-dates virtually all of the current surrounding development, and now dominates Vauxhall. Characterised by traffic islands and multiple crossing points, it interrupts the safe flow of pedestrians and cyclists. Generating high levels of pollution, and encourages greater car use and makes for a poor environmental experience for residents and visitors alike. In terms of air quality and road traffic accidents, the Vauxhall area of North Lambeth is amongst the worst performing parts of the borough. The gyratory and the bus station it contains have come to symbolise Vauxhall; a negative connotation.

2.15 The bus operation is not as efficient as it could be. The bus station (figure 2.2) is the second busiest in London and has been successful in providing interchange facilities at Vauxhall. It currently retains approximately 20% spare capacity although much of this will be absorbed by additional bus services required as a result of development proposed in Vauxhall Nine Elms. However, this can only be achieved if there is a re-balancing of the road network in favour of buses and cyclists, improved pedestrian connectivity and a reduction in private motorised transport. Whilst providing a good interchange between public transport modes the bus station is isolated within the gyratory and the canopy does not provide adequate protection from the elements. There is a need to retain the effectiveness of the interchange but with significantly improved public realm and connectivity to surrounding areas as well as the rail and underground stations.

2.16 Constrained station capacity. The Vauxhall London Underground Station currently suffers regular peak-hour congestion due to the poor arrangement of ticket gates and narrow platforms. There is little spare capacity on trains during peak periods. Network Rail has undertaken works to improve capacity at the Station to increase circulation area and lift access. This will provide limited additional capacity but, in view of the fact that many trains during peak hours are already over capacity and that station usage is forecast to rise by 20% by 2014, these works will not provide sufficient capacity for additional development at Vauxhall.

2.17 Address unrealised potential. Albert Embankment, with its fine views of the Palace of Westminster and Battersea Power Station has nonetheless been allowed to become featureless; its waterfront potential remains largely unrecognised. There is a need to capitalise on the prime location of Vauxhall and its role as a strategic interchange, enabling it to realise its full potential as a positive inspiring gateway to Lambeth.



Figure 2.2. Bus station with ineffective canopy

2.18 Address poor public realm. Piecemeal development over the centuries and in particular since the Second World War, has resulted in poor public realm with little active frontage and a lack of open space. The rail arch spine is too often associated with poor quality footpaths and spaces which inhibit routes towards the river and connections between communities. Some improvements have been delivered in terms of the public realm, for example removal of guard railings around the gyratory. However, the quality of the public realm in Vauxhall on the whole is poor. Evidence of neglect and dereliction is widespread as is poor signage and unsightly advert hoardings.

2.19 Improve the pedestrian experience. The current pedestrian experience is poor. There is a lack of legibility making navigation difficult, with the gyratory and railway spine creating barriers. This is exacerbated by poorly located pedestrian crossings and little thought to pedestrian desire lines i.e where people want to go to and come from. Overcoming this to create an area where residents, workers, visitors and the thousands of commuters can easily walk will be a challenge.

2.20 Promote cycling. The current domination of vehicles and engineering solutions designed for the needs of road traffic means that the experience of cyclists at Vauxhall is extremely poor. Anecdotal evidence suggests that cyclists find the gyratory in particular intimidating and the Mayor has announced Vauxhall as an area to ‘Go Dutch’ where cycling will dominate. Radical changes are needed to see this realised.

2.21 Safeguard and enhance open space. There is a need to safeguard the green spaces of the area, enhancing accessibility with neighbouring estates, improved connectivity, quality public realm investment and active frontage between parks perimeters. Local parks are a delightful and precious resource which are highly valued by local people, but they fail to link together to provide a cohesive journey through the Vauxhall area making a connection with the proposed Linear Park in Wandsworth.

2.22 Re-connect neighbourhoods. Both the gyratory and the railway line act to segregate the area, making east-west movements particularly difficult. Neighbourhoods to the east of Albert Embankment so-long divided from the river must be re-connected, both westward to the river, to each other and to the emerging district centre. The historic street pattern of Vauxhall Cross has been lost and there is a lack of coherence as a consequence. Development must seek to restore a legible pattern with defined streets and spaces that operate at a human scale.

2.23 Protect the historic environment. The Vauxhall / Albert Embankment area sitting, as it does at the heart of the city, is within an area of significant architectural and historic interest. Delivering major regeneration / change without harming the significance of these heritage assets is a key challenge. One objective will be the protection of outstanding universal value, including setting, of the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey, including St Margaret’s Church World Heritage Site. The preservation / enhancement of the special interest, including setting, of statutory listed buildings and conservation areas in Lambeth and Westminster will also be a key challenge. The significance of undesignated heritage assets (especially locally listed buildings), although not benefiting from statutory protection contribute, with designated heritage assets to local distinctiveness and enrich the area. The potential for archaeology to be revealed, interpreted and better understood is significant given the long and rich history of human occupation in the area. This is particularly important in relation to the River Thames foreshore. The impact of development in London View Management Framework (LVMF) views (identified by the Mayor), locally important views (identified by Lambeth Council) and views of metropolitan importance (as identified by Westminster City Council) will be a key consideration.



Poor perception of safety



Unusable green open space



Cluttered public realm



Ill defined streets



Over scaled road network