

LATIN ELEPHANT EVIDENCE - AYLESHAM CENTRE PUBLIC INQUIRY

Tuesday, 28 October 2025

Hi, I'm Sarah Goldzweig. I am the Research and Policy Officer at Latin Elephant, a Southwark-based registered CIO. For over ten years, we've supported racialised and migrant traders and small, independent businesses in Elephant and Castle, Southwark, as they've navigated regeneration, subsequent displacement and failing relocation.

The Aylesham Centre redevelopment is not the first time Southwark communities have fought to sustain the retail, community and cultural spaces that they care about and rely upon. To ignore that these spaces are both carefully curated and culturally-specific, not just sites of economic transaction, has grave consequences.

Losing retail spaces like the Aylesham Centre is harmful from a cultural and equalities perspective. All the Peckham traders currently threatened with displacement, as were those in Elephant and Castle, are from migrant or racialised backgrounds.

Research by Latin Elephant and others has substantively evidenced that markets and affordable retail are central sites of migrant life within London, and sustain the cultural existence of diverse working class communities, providing culturally-specific and affordable goods to those already disproportionately impacted by poverty and deprivation, as well as create spaces from which local community networks emerge and are sustained.

Learning from experience and past research, we anticipate the proposed plans will disproportionately harm Peckham's diverse working class communities, with disastrous consequences for local people and for the entire business ecosystem in Peckham and in Southwark generally. A historical pattern of development-induced displacement in the borough will be accelerated by the proposed plans.

When the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre was shuttered, 80 to 90 traders were operating within the red line. The developer undercounted. Of those identified, just 40 were relocated to purpose-built relocation sites. Provided units are not fit for purpose, have been insufficiently advertised and are not actually affordable. 2 more traders were promised spaces that never materialised. 15 traders remain without any relocation space, and promises for another market for them are still unfulfilled.

Traders have been further displaced in the five years since, and have been unable to relocate again locally because of a lack of affordable space across Southwark. In the two main relocation sites, over 60% of relocated traders – 10 of 12 and 9 of 19, respectively – have been forced to leave because of well documented poor business conditions like insufficient footfall, abuse by management and lack of relocation support.

Of relocated traders surveyed, 86% reported a decline in income since relocation, and 81% reported a decision to pursue a second income stream. 76% reported that relocation units were of poor quality with major infrastructural issues.

What were promised as affordable units made specifically for relocated businesses have proven unaffordable and unsuccessful.

While the Aylesham proposals include a relocation fund, there are no provisions that ensure such failures are not replicated, not to mention there is no provision of temporary space - making it even less likely that traders will successfully relocate.

In Elephant and Castle, we secured £834,000 from the developer and council, plus a promised but rarely approved additional fund, for around 80 traders. Even this proved to be entirely insufficient, and traders were left paying out of pocket to facilitate their relocation. The two largest businesses were required to contribute £334,000 and £600,000 of their own funds towards fit out costs in order to secure a relocation unit. They were ultimately unable to relocate, and dozens lost their jobs. Requiring traders to pay for fit-out — whether for temporary or permanent relocation — is prohibitive, and increases the likelihood of permanent displacement. And, as in this case, businesses were insufficiently consulted about their relocation needs.

£200,000 divided by roughly 25 traders, as proposed in these plans, is even less per trader than we saw at Elephant and Castle. This is not enough money to support successful relocation. The assertion that it does ignores the material realities of relocation and the challenges that traders will face rebuilding their businesses.

An offer of discounted space in the completed development is meaningless if businesses cannot successfully relocate in the meantime and if they have to pay for fit-out.

This is to say nothing of the wider impact on the hundreds of small businesses and traders in the wider Peckham retail community, who will be threatened by redevelopment-related rising rents, or the customers who will lose a sense of belonging that the businesses help to provide – just as we've seen in Elephant and Castle.