

BRIXTON

Neighbourhood Forum

Notes of Meeting on 24th April 2012

Held at ACCORD, 336 Brixton Road, SW9.

Present:

<p>Devon Thomas (Chair), Brixton Business Forum, Nicholas Weedon (Treasurer), FowG, Alan Piper (Secretary), Brixton Society, John Spicer (Membership) Stuart Horwood, Market Traders Federation, Charlotte Evans, Active Communities, Lambeth, Biljana Savic, The Prince's Foundation, Matthew Clarke, Carlton Mansions HC, Tim Dickens, brixtonblog, A.Naphtali, Lambeth ACCORD, Fred Taggart, Brixton Advice Centre, Clare Moore, Streatham Society, Juneary Raymond, Lambeth Enterprise, M.Thacker , Lambeth Enterprise, Giles Gibson, Herne Hill Forum, Dinah Roake, Brixton Green, Philippe Castaing, Brixton Green, Brad Carroll, Brixton Green.</p>	<p>Ella Dorfman, Maureen Johnston, Sue Bell, Joanna Boehnert, Tim Gaymer, LJAG, George James, Fezzan Ahmed, R.Selva, Phil Isaac, B.Cawall, Dan Sinclair, Liz Obi, Cllr.Lorna Campbell, Alrick Cambridge, Thomas Wood, Kees Frederiks, Christina Burnett, TARA,</p>
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Apologies for absence received from:

<p>Alison Young, Lambeth Planning, Bill Linskey, Brixton Society, Matthew Thomson, Porden Rd Residents, Gerry Evans, Lambeth Forums Network.</p>	<p>Cllr. Lib Peck, Cllr Florence Nosegbe, Annie Quick,</p>
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Introduction

Devon Thomas opened the meeting by recalling the Forum's recent concern to get the local community more involved in Brixton's planning and regeneration. The recent Localism Act seemed to provide a number of ways towards this. This meeting had been opened to representatives of other forums around the borough, to share the emerging information.

Charlotte Evans (head of Active Communities, Lambeth Adult & Community Services) reported that, following a Cabinet reshuffle, Cllr Lib Peck has only recently taken over responsibility for Planning & Regeneration, and had a prior commitment for this date. She hoped to set up another meeting in June, by which time Council members and officers hoped to have a better grasp of the new legislation.

The Council had recently appointed Allies & Morrison Urban Practitioners to prepare a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) covering Central Brixton, and they had already been in touch with some stakeholders.

Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods in Planning:

Biljana Savic had been in touch with the Forum since October because the the Prince's Foundation was one of 4 bodies funded by the Government (DCLG) to support local communities in developing the first wave of the new Neighbourhood Plans. The Foundation already had experience in promoting sustainable development and running educational programmes around buildings and planning issues.

She outlined their recent work with community organisations in drawing up regeneration plans for neighbourhoods. Their usual approach was to run local discussion workshops, drawing on a pool of professional advisers, to help develop a shared vision with some resulting planning policies. These might strengthen or adapt existing policies, identify new uses for key sites, or improve links with nearby areas. The two main case studies illustrated covered the old High Street area of Bristol and the Wolverton town centre within Milton Keynes.

Neighbourhood Plans had to respect the existing planning framework, i.e. the borough's local plan or core strategy, the Mayor's London Plan and the new National Planning Policy Framework. They must also take into account Listed Buildings and plans for adjacent areas.

A Neighbourhood Plan is subject to an independent examination by a professional planner or planning inspector. This is intended as a quality control or checking process for errors or contradictions, rather than a formal hearing of objections.

The final stage would be submitting the Plan to a local referendum for community endorsement. How this will work is still to be clarified, but DCLG's intention is that this would be organised by the Council, preferably to coincide with any other elections (MP, Council, GLA).

The role of a Neighbourhood Forum in this would be to initiate the process by getting the boundaries of the plan area agreed by the Council. The Forum then takes responsibility for driving the plan-making process forward. There are no set time-scales yet for the different stages or Council responses. The Council in turn is responsible for approving the boundaries, providing technical advice, facilitating the process, finding an independent examiner and organising the referendum, then finally putting the plan into effect as part of its own planning control.

Biljana suggested the Forum could start with the following actions:

- Identifying issues or sites that the Plan should cover;
- Define the Plan boundary and apply for designation;
- Collate information about the area as existing;
- Clarify the current planning framework;
- Gather ideas from a broad local base, including local experts;
- Seek wider professional and financial assistance;
- Be creative and ready to take up new opportunities that emerge.

Questions & Comments:

How flexible should the Plan be? *Although the Plan should have a long-term vision, a 5-year window is realistic for some sort of review, to take account of changing circumstances.*

How should we deal with the SPD being prepared by Allies & Morrison? *The Forum should try to avoid a collision, it would be better to align with the consultants' work and use it as part of the process. An SPD would need local consultation in order to be credible, but even so it would not carry as much weight in planning cases as a Neighbourhood Plan with local endorsement.*

Stuart: our input in previous planning consultations seemed to make little impact on the outcome, but the Foundation's approach was encouraging as a way forward.

It is important that a Neighbourhood Plan is submitted with details of the consultation and outreach that has been carried out to produce it. This will strengthen its credibility in case of later disputes.

Residents in the north of the borough were affected by 2 competing sets of plans, based on Vauxhall and the Albert Embankment to the north. *It would be worth exploring the scope for Neighbourhood Planning to assert local needs, while the Government climate was still favourable.*

Herne Hill Forum faced the challenge of dealing with both Lambeth and Southwark Councils.

This had been identified as a potential issue and the final wording of the Localism Act provided for a Neighbourhood Plan area to straddle borough boundaries.

What can be included in a Neighbourhood Plan? What about social issues and sustainability?

Social issues can be covered to some extent, for example policies on affordable housing and retaining social housing could be important.

There may be scope to strengthen or highlight existing policies such as air quality, environmental standards and design quality.

Policies can be built in to provide or safeguard space for small businesses, and provide more control over the use of shops.

Devon: The Business Forum would be keen to include the latter issue. There are clear needs for start-up space for new businesses, and for local spaces that these firms can move into as they develop.

A Business Improvement District (BID) is a possibility, but would need enough local firms and shopkeepers to support it. Similar proposals are already more advanced in Vauxhall and Waterloo. He estimated it would take 12-18 months to set up. Unfortunately in the past year the Council had cut back its business support services, so progress would be down to businesses working together.

Alan recalled a long history of past plans for Brixton, and others had doubted that the Council would act in our interest or take our views into account. It was possible to make a difference if groups worked together - in the early 1980s local groups lobbied with some success to make the Town Centre plans more realistic and less harmful, though it had been necessary to pursue the matter through a public inquiry.

However, having a Neighbourhood Plan would not be enough – Brixton also needed to be actively promoted. The Market Traders' recent drive to reinvigorate the street market in Brixton Station Road was a good example of the complementary activity we needed to support any overall Plan.

There had been concern too that the new National Planning Policy would allow too much unsuitable development, but it would only take effect where local plans were obsolete or ineffective.

How could people get involved?

Nic encouraged people to join the forum, as groups or individuals – we need enough names to be eligible for Neighbourhood status.

We are also now linked to other forums around the borough through the Lambeth Forums Network.

There was general concern that the Forum should be representative and broadly based. Websites, Twitter and Facebook could be useful for spreading the word, but old-style media such as posters and press reports also had a place in reaching people without IT access.

Next steps:

Biljana reported that the Foundation is presently funded to work only with groups that had already been accepted by DCLG as pilot projects, but hoped for more funding beyond July. She suggested that the Forum made a start in the meantime.

Devon thanked her for her presentation, and advised that the forum officers would be following up shortly, with a view to organising a meeting with Council representatives in June.

Notices from Member Groups:

As part of London's Open Garden Squares Weekend, the Brixton Society is co-ordinating a community event on Windrush Square on Saturday 9th June. Local community groups are invited to set up stalls to promote themselves or to raise funds. There is no charge BUT groups will need to have third party liability insurance. Booking details were available at the meeting, or by e-mail to bill@linskey.org.uk

Notes prepared by:

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