

BRIXTON

Neighbourhood Forum

Notes of Meeting on 23 January 2013 – Brixton Plan

1. Present:

Devon Thomas, Chair (Brixton Business Forum)	Chris Patton (FoWG)
Alan Piper, Secretary (Brixton Society)	Tim Dickens (Brixton Blog)
Gerry Evans (Lambeth Forum Network)	Sue Bell (Gresham Rd.)
Fiona Freund (Dumbarton Rd.)	Ellie Manwell (Brix Theatre)
Stuart Everitt (Marmalade Productions)	John Rolby (.. ..)
Fezzan Ahmed (Battersea Arts Centre)	Roger Baker,
David Warner (Brixton Society)	Ruth Moore,
Matthew Clarke (Carlton Mansions)	Zayd Al-Jawad,
Deborah Bestwick (Oval House Theatre)	Brad Carroll (Brixton Green)
Nic Weedon, Treasurer (FoWG)	

(One attendance sheet is missing so please advise if you were not listed above.)

Apologies for absence received from:

Cllr. Jackie Meldrum,	Young Lambeth Co-op,
Stuart Horwood (Brixton Market CIC)	Brixton Rec User Group,
John Gordon, (.. ..)	Mardi, Brixton Therapy Centre,
Emma-Louise Stewart (Brixton BID)	

2. Introduction

Devon Thomas opened the meeting, which was mainly to discuss the draft Supplementary Planning Document for Brixton. The official consultation period was about to start, with 15th March as the closing date for comments and objections. Devon read a message from Cllr. Jackie Meldrum which highlighted the issues affecting many town centres across the country, and the need for Brixton to achieve the right balance between different uses.

3. SPD Overview

Bill Linskey, Chair of the Brixton Society, outlined the draft proposals which had been prepared by consultants. They had to fit within the broader framework of Lambeth's borough-wide "core strategy" and the Mayor's London Plan. The SPD could not contradict these, but could emphasise some uses over others, and protect or promote key sites. The draft includes proposals for a number of sites within the Town Centre, and has strategies for the markets, shopping, workspaces, the night-time economy, the public realm, transport, parking, energy and waste issues. Ultimately, the SPD will steer what individual owners or commercial developers will do, but the council's ownership of several key sites gives it leverage.

The present draft is rather glossy and aspirational, lacking in firm policies or proposals, so this is an opportunity to highlight what is needed to fill the gaps.

The Brixton Society had already identified a few issues, including the dilution of retail uses within the market arcades, and the need for clearer policies on tall buildings.

The Brixton Recreation Centre user group had recently persuaded the new Council leader, Cllr Lib Peck, to give assurances about retaining the existing building, but investment and upgrades would still be needed. Cllr Peter Robbins has proposed an amendment to the SPD to cover this.

Devon added that recent progress had been made by Brixton Green on a partnership arrangement with Lambeth Council over the Somerleyton Road sites, including provision for a new base for Oval House Theatre.

4. Discussion Groups on Key Areas

Four "Area Strategies" are covered in more detail within the SPD, and the meeting split into groups to discuss these:

4.1 Town Hall and Brixton Road:

These are two distinct areas within the plan, i.e.

SW2 Enterprise Centre: based on the Town Hall and nearby council office buildings, mainly covered below;

Brixton Road: the main shopping frontages on both sides of the road, between the Town Hall and Stockwell Park Walk.

Extent of the Plan area:

Concerns that SPD guidance should extend to cover the area further along Acre Lane to protect the quality of the older buildings and shopping parades, and to maintain / nurture the area as a place of employment and businesses.

Co-ordinated development strategy for Town Hall environs:

The draft document has many statements that are sensible and positive, but leaves open the possibility that individual developments could take place without taking notice of the others. An example is how a 1990's proposal to integrate the Library and Ritzy renovations with a common entrance and cafe area to form a larger cultural hub was not pursued, due to funding streams being too disparate. A more exact strategy for how activities in St Matthews and the Town Hall site should be relate to each other should be developed.

Ground floor uses in the Town Hall area:

The draft document suggests a variety of uses that should enliven the ground floor frontages of buildings such as Hambrook House. The Guidance should set specific diversity quotients to type of uses, so that, for example, the spaces cannot all become the same sort of small national supermarket convenience stores that are spreading with increasing density along Brixton Hill. An example could be that the properties in question, taken as a whole, should not become more than 60% one use between possible retail, leisure, offices and community.

Town Hall building:

We recognise that the building offers interesting development opportunities that would not destroy its listed status, such as an extra storey and atrium developments. There is a general impression that the listing relates solely to the external appearance,

however the Forum was noticeably in agreement that the Chamber and Assembly rooms should be respected, architecturally, and that their functions should be retained as well as developed. The view was most strongly put forward that whilst a greater variety of people may use the building, and the Council Chamber may offer additional opportunities as a meeting place, it must still be used for Council meetings.

Surrounding buildings:

The workshop took the view that development of the upper floors of buildings such as Hambrook House may incorporate residential as well as office or community, and agreed with the flexible approach suggested in the document. We welcome the idea of bringing the administration staff back to a concentrated area in and around the Town Hall. The main thing missing from the document is specific targets for “affordable housing”, and with community hubs in mind a similar concept for “affordable community space”

Tesco site:

The current store and car park do not represent the best use of space in an urban centre such as Brixton, and could be developed better with street frontages whilst retaining a large store and car park. We recognise that the space over this site offers a major development opportunity. The nature of Acre Lane, and the proximity of residences in Baytree Road require more specific guidance than the draft currently offers. Examples of guidelines should include respecting the privacy of back gardens from public areas of new housing, acceptable heights (perhaps similar to Arlington Lodge) and break-up of massing, so that any multi-storey development retains gaps allowing light and space from the front to the back of the site (e.g. ¼ of the site should allow light and space through at upper storey height). The Forum workshop did not deem this site as suitable for high rise.

4.2 Markets & Arcades:

Arcades: Uses of individual shop units need to be controlled, so that the proportion in retail use does not decline further. It is important to maintain a mix of uses in each arcade.

Tall Buildings: The priority should be to protect the daylight and views from existing buildings within the Town Centre – which includes extensive residential enclaves, from Nursery Road in the west to Moorlands Estate in the east. Residents want to be able to see the sky!

Housing: the aim should be to achieve a social mix in the Town Centre, with a variety of forms of tenure. It is important to ensure an adequate proportion of affordable housing, and of family dwellings.

Street Markets: the number of street pitches should be safeguarded, but also supported by adequate infrastructure, such as traders’ parking and space for refuse/ recycling facilities.

More promotion of the street markets would be welcome, to encourage visitors from a wider catchment area.

The Town Centre Manager role appears to have lapsed – will the Brixton Business Improvement District be able to fill the gap?

The former Tesco site in Popes Road, and land to the rear, should be safeguarded for Retail use and for small creative enterprises, to help provide affordable business space.

Vehicle Flows: Traffic flow around the Recreation Centre and Ice Rink site needs to be reconsidered, to allow delivery access and minimise hazards. If the car park use can be reinstated, better access must be designed from the outset – this was a weakness of the old multi-storey car park.

London Overground: the plan should provide for platforms to access the new rail service – nearest access at present is at Denmark Hill or Clapham North/ High Street. Sites should be safeguarded, preferably accessible from the present rail station.

4.3 Somerleyton Road area:

Housing: the aim should be for at least 50% of the new housing to be affordable.

Angela Davis Industrial Estate: Future use needs to be compatible with the surrounding residential areas.

Somerleyton Passage: preferred to flank this with active uses that provide community benefits, such as health, training or education.

Coldharbour Lane corner site: A “landmark” building should not overpower the street scene, but help define the character of that part of Brixton. The Carlton Mansions frontage should be retained, as well as the mural on the side of the building.

Brixton Station: more work needs to be done to refine suitable positions for extra platforms for the London Overground service, with expert advice, and the locations need to be safeguarded for an adequate period of time.

Space for Arts generally: Arts-related enterprises have been a major source of employment locally for the past dozen years. Workspace needs to be affordable, in order to retain creative enterprises in the area and encourage long-term economic revival. Existing workspace needs to be protected from change of use to residential, with emphasis on provision for smaller/ start-up enterprises. Railway arches have provided economical workshop space for messy creative/ manufacturing activities, as well as for retail.

5. Reports and Comments:

Groups reported back as above. Further comments from the floor included:

- The document is good on intentions but lacks specific, quantified, guidelines for developers to ensure the outcomes.
- Proposals for the 4 key areas need to be more prescriptive.
- Groups and individuals should take the opportunity to insert the policies or proposals which are missing from the draft.

- Plans such as this should meet the needs of the surrounding community as a whole, rather than just accommodate the prevailing market forces.
- Offices, such as Hambrook House (Brixton Hill) and Iver House (Acre Lane) should have active uses on the ground floors.

6. Next Steps:

Forum officers urged members to feed comments into the consultation process, but also to share them with others, to stimulate new ideas and identify gaps in the plans.

Input is welcome to the Brixton Blog – see www.brixtonblog.com - and the Brixton Society aim to put their draft comments on their website before the deadline.

The Council would have a number of local stalls or exhibits in the month ahead, with further information on the Future Brixton pages of the Lambeth website, i.e. www.lambeth.gov.uk/futurebrixton

The closing date for comments or objections is Friday 15th March.

7. Next Meeting:

This has since been confirmed as Wednesday 10th April, 7 pm at The Brix (St. Matthew's Church) Brixton Hill SW2.

Notes prepared by:

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