

BRIXTON

Neighbourhood Forum

Notes of Forum General Meeting on Wednesday 26 April 2017

Present:

Devon Thomas (Forum Chair),	Tom Shakti (Brixton £),
Alan Piper (Forum Secretary),	Maria Thacker (Forum Admin.)
Mark Slowikowski (Somerleyton Trust),	Jason Gibilaro (Forum Exec.),
Dinah Roake (Brixton Green),	Chris Paddock (Regenesi),
Will Steadman (Lambeth Regen.)	Manuel Santos (2Qubits),
Jennifer Angus (Lambeth Regen.)	Jose Ribeiro (Hebron Centre),
Gerry Evans (Lambeth/ LFN)	Linda Quinn (Brixton Bugle),
Frazer Serle (Community Connectors)	June Armstrong (Naybur),
Caroline Funnell (Brixton Comm. Base)	Matthew Clarke (REC user group)
Michael Smith (Brixton BID),	Jedidah Onchere (LCF/Big Local),
Laverne Walker (BID/ Sackville Travel)	Leon Kreitzman (Sudbourne Rd.),
Reece Simwogerere (Brixton BID),	Daniel Solomon (Netervitar),
David Warner (Brixton Society)	

Apologies for absence from: Helen Hayes MP, Jean Kerrigan (FoWG), Binki Taylor (BDT), Marilyn Rogers (FofTL), Lucy Cava (Brixton £), Rob Goacher, Jane Duncan-Ribeiro.

Brixton Pound

Tom Shakti welcomed members to the community room below the Brixton Pound café in Atlantic Road. The Brixton Pound set up the Brixton Fund, which last year distributed £11,000 in grants to local groups and enterprises. This year they have pooled resources with the Neighbourhood Forum and the BID to increase the fund, but 2nd May is the closing date for applications. The bids will be short-listed and then an event will be held in early June to vote on the most deserving.

The Brixton Pound can also channel help “in kind” from the Impact Hub (at Pop Brixton) and from other local businesses who are willing to offer their skills to local groups.

Devon added that the Forum was also distributing news of other funding sources and methods. It was hoped there would be a Brixton-based briefing for the Crowd-funding scheme supported by the Mayor’s Fund.

Brixton BID

Laverne Walker (Co-Chair and Treasurer of the BID) said the BID was now in its 3rd year. It has been promoting Brixton and attracting extra funds into the area.

Michael Smith added that the BID was funded from a percentage of the business rates collected locally. Business rates had increased sharply this year, so the BID had reduced its levy on local businesses.

Smaller businesses typically pay £120-£180 per year. The largest contributors are Lambeth Council, Lambeth College and the Metropolitan Police, because of their larger premises in the BID area.

A ballot on continuing the BID was next due at the end of 2018, so they were keen to get feedback on how well they were doing.

In addition to promotion, plans were to have at least 3 or 4 training events each year, typically health & safety, first aid, food hygiene and marketing skills. The BID already pays for 2 additional police officers on duty in the Town Centre, and for additional street cleaning. A bid has been made for re-opening the public toilets in Windrush Square, but a decision is still awaited from the Council.

The next project is around Procurement, to get members better deals for their insurance, utilities and merchandising.

Efforts are being made to support the remaining businesses along Brixton Station Road (e.g. below the Recreation Centre) following Network Rail's closure of several railway arches for refurbishment. Brixton is joining in the nation-wide "Love Your Market" promotion around the late May Bank Holiday, with the street markets and arcades all involved.

Several urban space/ streetscape projects are being pursued, as funding opportunities arise. The Brixton Orchard is one example, where the (dead) Holocaust memorial tree is to be replaced.

The Bowie memorial proposal is being reconsidered – the original idea conflicted with last year's Christmas tree/ lights ceremony location.

Brixton Economic Development Plan

Will Steadman introduced Chris Paddock from Regensis, who have been researching the local business situation and prepared a plan with a number of proposals. The emphasis was on how to support local enterprises, rather than a plan identifying future sites or zones, though the distribution of different types of businesses had been mapped.

Comparisons had been made with other London districts which were competing for investment, but also facing similar pressures.

The growth of the "evening economy" threw up specific challenges.

There were a lot of small embryonic enterprises, but a lack of spaces for expansion, compared with other London districts. There was strong social capital but also a long-standing background of deprivation.

Seven priorities had been identified:

- Providing new business space which is appropriate to local needs.
- Providing space for Innovation, so new types of business can develop.
- Enhancing the local environment and infrastructure to be supportive.
- Supporting local businesses to grow or adapt.
- Improving external perceptions of Brixton.
- Linking local residents to job opportunities.

- ☐ Recognise and nurture Social Value: supporting community groups, networking and co-operation.

Points from Discussion:

- ☐ **Faltering Plans:** Matthew Clarke pointed out that, after considerable local engagement over the Central Sites Masterplan, Network Rail had gone ahead on their own with the railway arches refurbishment and created a lot of problems by their mismanagement. Lambeth Council should have exercised more control as the Planning authority. There was a risk of similar problems being repeated where developers were impatient or short-sighted.
- ☐ **Compulsory Purchase powers:** David Warner advised that these gave Lambeth more direct control over sites, but recent experience in Somerleyton Road was not encouraging. Lambeth were too slow in preparing a CPO for one of the proposed housing sites, so the owner of the factory units was able to get planning permission for his own scheme and enhance the value of his land, so the Council will have to pay more for it.
- ☐ **Transport Infrastructure:** improving transport links (e.g. access to London Overground) cut both ways – it also enabled local people to reach competing centres more easily.
Others reported that Brixton Tube Station was reaching capacity at peak hours. Reopening the rear entrance and arcade from Electric Avenue might ease access between the two stations. If funds are limited, we should make better use of what we already have.
- ☐ **A user-friendly Town Centre:** Leon Kreitzman pointed out that presently Brixton was attracting more young people but it was not user-friendly for older people, particularly the High Street and Atlantic Road. Proposals needed to take on board equalities and mobility issues, including the likelihood of people having to work longer before being able to retire.
- ☐ **Sustainability and Health issues:** A few years earlier, the Brixton SPD made much of “one planet living” principles, but this appeared not to have fed through into the Economic Action Plan. Recent progress against this aim should be evaluated.
More intensive use of urban sites had health implications, both from pollution and from considerations of how to maintain “well-being” in the face of increased stress.
- ☐ **Suitable Employment Space:** Members were concerned about the suitability of space provided by developers as part of mainly residential sites. Too often this is a token gesture and not of much practical use for the businesses that want a local presence. It also needs to be affordable - chains tend to dominate the High Street shopping frontages because they are willing to pay more than independent traders. Alan Piper proposed stricter conditions on planning

permissions. Michael Smith suggested greater control where the Council was developing its own sites.

- [?] Routes into Employment:** June Armstrong urged that local groups should be supported in steering young people towards local jobs or training opportunities.

Other Business:

Brixton Green/ Somerleyton Trust: Mark Slowikowski introduced himself as the recently appointed Director of the trust, established by Brixton Green to oversee the Somerleyton Road development and then to manage the new housing.

Forum Website and e-bulletins: Manuel Santos reminded members of the Forum website, which was being expanded, so more news is now being posted on it and extra material is welcome. An on-line discussion forum is not possible yet, because it needs someone to act as moderator, but comments by e-mail were welcome.

Alan Piper announced that another e-bulletin would be circulated soon after the MayDay bank holiday, including further funding sources for groups and upcoming events.

ADP, 30.4.17