



**Report to the Resources and Public
Realm Scrutiny Committee**
14 July 2020

**Report from the Strategic Director of
Regeneration and Environment**

The Public Realm in Brent

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	0
Background Papers:	0
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1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide information on the public realm strategies for Brent, including; Brent Council priorities, strategies and policies, planned strategy review and the impact of the COVID19 epidemic and public health restrictions.
- 1.2 To respond to the key lines of enquiry identified by the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee note the contents of this report.

3. Detail

- 3.1 This report has been prepared in response to a report request from the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee on 22nd June 2020.

- 3.2 The report request outlined questions for the key lines of enquiry by the Committee.

Key Lines of Enquiry

- Q1. What are the current Council priorities, strategy and objectives for the public Realm in Brent?**
- 3.3 The Brent Long Term Transport Strategy 2015-2035 (LTTS), the third Local Implementation Plan (LIP3) and the draft Local Plan outline the Council's strategy for improvements to the transport system and public realm, including the implementation of measures and interventions which will help connect people and places; promote healthy, sustainable travel; improve safety and security; and create better streets, spaces and places.
- 3.4 Our LIP3 aligns with the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy 2018 which sets out plans to improve London's streets, public transport and create opportunities for new homes and jobs, encouraging people to walk, cycle and use public transport. Also relevant is the Mayor's Environment Strategy May 2018 outlining the approaches to bring together aspects of London's environment integrating air quality, green infrastructure, climate change mitigation, waste and other areas.
- 3.5 A central tenet of the Council's strategy is the Mayor's 'Healthy Streets' Approach – with the view to making health and personal experience the priority for Londoners. Providing sustainable, safe and secure places to encourage greater levels of walking and cycling, especially for shorter journeys, represents one of the best ways of achieving this. An example of this approach is the Wembley to Willesden Healthy Streets corridor scheme where we are working with TfL, residents and businesses to deliver significant improvements to the highway and public realm and to improve people's walking and cycling experience. Further examples are the Kensal Corridor Scheme which was developed working closely with the community and includes wider pavements, improved accessibility to buses and the over ground station, tree planting and greening (including rain gardens), cycling amenities and safer pedestrian crossings. Another, the Kilburn High Road scheme being developed in partnership with Camden which also adopts 'Healthy Streets' principles.
- 3.6 The Council is consulting on the draft Brent COVID-19 Transport Recovery Plan which outlines its approach for delivering improvements to the transport system and public realm in response to the challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Plan outlines changes needed in the short-medium term as well as those needed to support longer-term ambitions to ensure a more inclusive, healthier and sustainable future for Brent's residents. This plan will deliver new Low Traffic Neighbourhoods which will prevent through traffic and encourage walking and cycling, school streets to support safe and active travel, new cycle links and widening pavements in busy town centres.
- 3.7 The Local Plan emphasises the importance of good design, which is not just about what things look like but also about how places function and how individual buildings and the spaces around them contribute to the public realm and community wellbeing. The Plan outlines opportunities to improve and enhance the quality of the public realm across the borough. These include the implementation of improvements in town centres, securing high quality design and public realm improvements on individual site allocations, in identified Growth Areas and through the masterplanning process.
- 3.8 In areas of the Borough that are subject to Masterplanning, the improvement to and creation of good public realm is one of the core principles. This is evident in Wembley Park (planting of many trees, pedestrian and cycling connectivity between the stages,

spacious outdoor seating /open areas including a 3 hectare park). The emerging Neasden Growth Area masterplan and SPD has public realm as a core principle. The Alperton growth area and housing zone seek improved connectivity and enhancement to the Canal. The South Kilburn masterplan includes improved improved public realm including reinstating the original Victorian street pattern, and a major street improvement project on Carlton Vale.

- 3.9 The objectives of these strategies are to create a pleasant, safe and sustainable public realm where more people wish to walk and cycle, improving public health and the quality of life in the community.

Q2. *How do Brent's public realm strategies link with other Council strategies and programmes and partner organisation's strategies; – specifically, the London Plan?*

- 3.10 The objectives and commitments set out in the LTTS and LIP3 are focused on the creation of safe, sustainable and more welcoming streets and places for people. As such, they are closely aligned to the Borough Plan – in particular its themes around securing a future built for everyone; a cleaner Brent; and a borough where people can feel safe, secure, happy and healthy.

- 3.11 The draft London Plan places a strong emphasis on sustainable infrastructure, efficiency and resilience and seeks to capitalise on 'good growth' opportunities to become a smart and sustainable city, requiring developments to contribute towards becoming a zero-carbon city by 2050. The LTTS and LIP3 advocate close partnership working with a range of stakeholders, including developers, to ensure the delivery of good quality and well-designed public realm and 'Healthy Streets and Places' that facilitate residents making shorter, regular trips by walking and cycling.

- 3.12 The draft Local Plan has been prepared in line with the requirements of the London Plan. The Council has engaged with key partner organisations such as the GLA, TfL the OPDC, neighbouring boroughs and local stakeholders in the preparation of the Plan to ensure strategic and cross boundary issues have been carefully considered. The Council will continue to work with its neighbours and partner organisations in the implementation of the Local Plan and relevant public realm strategies.

Q3. *The new draft London Plan was due to be published this summer. Has Brent Council contributed to the development of the new London Plan public realm sections? Please can you summarise the points submitted? Will the current public health situation affect the publication of the new London Plan and will the public realm sections of this now need to be reviewed in the light of the public health precautions?*

- 3.13 Yes, the Council has contributed to all stages of the development of the new London Plan. The Spatial Planning Team commented in detail on the draft London Plan during each stage of consultation, namely in 2017 and 2018, and participated in and gave evidence during the London Plan examination hearings that took place in 2019.

- 3.14 In relation to London Plan policy D7 Public Realm, the following points were made:

- Overall support for the policy
- Policy needs to recognise the pressures on public finances to maintain the quality of spaces in the long term
- Design from the outset should be around ensuring increased cleanliness and greenery

- Communal areas to meet need to be designed to design out anti-social behaviour
 - Suggested changes to the policy were put forward, including an emphasis to promote active change of streets as places of public realm that can create a sense of place, with a rebalance to reduce vehicle dominance, e.g. specific mention of shared space/Homezones
 - Policy to benefit from greater emphasis on street trees as well as the generic term green infrastructure and pedestrian crossings being direct and unenclosed.
- 3.15 The Mayor of London and London Plan Team are currently considering their response to the Secretary of State's latest Directives before the Plan can be presented to the London Assembly for adoption. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic this work has been delayed. Officers are in regular contact with the GLA and updates on the London Plan adoption process can be provided when firmer timescales from the GLA are published.
- 3.16 It is not yet clear whether the public health sections of the London Plan will be updated to respond to the pandemic. It is more likely that the Mayor will publish the current version of the London Plan rather than delay its adoption, and then possibly seek to produce more detailed supporting guidance on issues such as the public realm/built environment. This could involve guidance for Councils to consider how they adapt the built environment to implement a range of measures that will help address wider priorities around public health, air quality, and climate change. As outlined under Q1, the Council has published its draft Brent COVID-19 Transport Recovery Plan which outlines its approach around introducing some of these measures.

Q4. *What is the link to the Councils Local Plan and the development of the new Local Plan for Brent?*

- 3.17 The ambitious growth plans set out in the draft Local Plan, including significant new housing and employment provision, will bring new populations into the borough and place additional pressures on our public realm. In this context, the LTTS and LIP3 highlight the need for investment in the public realm - including the need for high quality, safe places and the provision of supporting infrastructure that maximises opportunities for walking and cycling.
- 3.18 The draft Local Plan also emphasises the need for public and private sector investment in the public realm. The Plan's site allocations and Growth Areas present a number of opportunities to improve and enhance the quality of the public realm. In addition, policy BT1 Sustainable Travel Choice outlines the Council's ambition to promote active and sustainable travel and the importance of designing public realm to meet healthy street principles and provide access for all.
- 3.19 A number of Neighbourhood CIL awards relate to community led public realm projects, for example trees, murals and open space.

Q5. *Please could you briefly summarise the Councils role in creating well-designed places that are prosperous and welcoming to the benefit of both businesses and residents – and the impact of the requirements of post-COVID 19 recovery?.- including changes to public highways etc.*

- 3.20 The Council has an important role to play creating well-designed places that are prosperous and welcoming to the benefit of both businesses and residents. This is one of the main intentions of the Local Plan and new developments. Also the council will approve the design of streets for adoption and we generally carry out all of the design

for improvement schemes to deliver the TfL funded LIP3 programme in-house. With TfL removing the LIP funding and focussing on funding measures to deliver the London Streetspace Plan in response to COVID-19, the Councils in-house design team have developed schemes for implementation. The Council has more recently placed a greater emphasis on improved design and public realm in recognition of the value that it creates in improving quality of life. It has updated its design guidance, provided better design advice in masterplans and requires the use of a design review panel on major developments. The Local Plan contains a number of site allocations which present opportunities to deliver a high quality public realm.

- 3.21 The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed how our streets and public realm are being used. For example, when lockdown measures were imposed in March 2020 this initially resulted in a significant reduction in trips being made on the transport network, but has also led to changes in the way in which people travel – with more people walking and cycling. Even though lockdown restrictions are being lifted, the need for people to remain physically distant is predicted to remain for a long period. Therefore, Brent’s infrastructure needs to be adapted to enable effective physical distancing to protect the health and wellbeing of residents when activity and journeys increase as the lockdown lifts.
- 3.22 Where immediate problems have been identified emergency measures such as temporary footway widening have been designed and implemented. Work is also progressing on the identification and implementation of more short-medium term measures to enable safe social distancing and provide people with safe, expedient access to work and key facilities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also provides significant opportunities for the Council to adopt radical new approaches and implement a range of measures that will help address wider priorities around public health, inequalities, air quality and climate change.

Q6. *Please provide an update on the implementation of the Councils strategic objectives for the public realm.*

- 3.23 The Council is making steady progress towards achieving its objectives for improving the public realm. Notable achievements include;
- £20m investment programme into footways, which will see 42 miles of public footways repaired and improved between October 2019 to March 2021.
 - Improved road infrastructure using innovative injection patching method, via contractor Velocity, to treat potholes. In March 2019, Velocity were awarded a two-year contract to delivery injection patching across the borough.
 - Piloting two ‘schools streets’ in 2019 with the aim to roll out to other areas in the borough as part of our LIP programme.
 - Cycleway 3 (a residential cycle route) runs between Regents Park and Gladstone Park, with the Brent section linking Kilburn to Gladstone Park.
 - 67 cycle hangars installed will be installed by the end of 2020. Additional cycle hangars will also be installed with low traffic neighbourhoods (2 per area) subject to funding.
 - Removed the byelaw which used to prohibit cycling in our parks
 - 115 charging points for electric vehicles installed across the borough. We aim to add 120 more lamp column charge points, and 75 kerbside charge points this year.
 - 553 adults and 2,942 children received free cycle training in the last year.

- 16% drop in the most polluting cars after changes to parking permits.
 - 1,033 new trees planted in 2019/20.
 - Procurement of a landscape design team for Carlton Vale boulevard
 - Many NCIL community led public realm projects awarded and implemented
 - Draft Local Plan which will provide statutory planning framework at examination stage.
 - The proposed landscaping and public realm within the Grand Union (formally Northfields) will be an exemplar in landscaping in large new developments.
- 3.24 The Council recognises that ‘Healthy Streets’ schemes have been delivered successfully across London, and have resulted in behavioural change and reduced congestion and air pollution, particularly where there has been a significant investment.
- 3.25 The Local Implementation Plan (LIP) Annual Spending submission report to [Cabinet on 11th November 2019](#) highlighted a new ‘healthy neighbourhood’ approach to improving the public realm.
- 3.26 Our ambitious COVID-19 Transport Recovery / Active Travel plan provides an opportunity for a new approach to improving the public realm in the borough. Whilst some of the measures are temporary there will be the opportunity to permanently implement schemes such as Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and support modal shift towards greener travel. This plan identified 23 locations for LTNs, 16 new school streets, 10 additional footway widening locations and also cycling quick wins, and bus priority measures.
- 3.27 The programme is designed to be flexible and adaptable to address emerging issues as lockdown measures are eased. Although delivery of the programme is subject to funding availability, the introduction of schemes under this programme will represent a step change in the Councils approach to improving the public realm.
- 3.28 Our environmental services are regarded as of critical importance to the council; they contribute significantly to both the appearance of the public realm and the quality of the built environment. In recent years the department has adopted a ‘neighbourhood approach’ with a strong focus on community engagement, performance, customer satisfaction and cross-council working.
- Q7. *How do we consult residents, local interest groups, partner organisations and cross departmental stakeholders on our public realm strategies?***
- 3.29 Consultation and partnership working are central to the development of our various programmes and strategies and ongoing engagement will continue to inform their planning and implementation. Methods of engagement typically include:
- Workshops/meetings involving Council Members and officers, local businesses and representatives of local interest/amenity groups;
 - Transport forums, such as the recently reconvened Active Travel Forum and Public Transport Forum which meet regularly to consider transport issues in the borough;
 - Partnership arrangements with health, education, social services authorities and transport operators to work on joint interest projects;

- Joint working with other departments, neighbouring local authorities (e.g. Camden regarding on-going highways improvements in Kilburn) and other organisations (e.g. OPDC as part of the recent Park Royal Liveable Neighbourhoods bid);
 - Workshops/events/surveys seeking the views of the wider public on individual schemes and the transport issues that most affect them (e.g. the recently completed Kingsbury High Streets Improvements scheme);
 - Consultation on the portal supported by a communications plan to raise awareness.
- 3.30 Since mid-2017 a significant amount of work has gone into shaping the draft Brent Local Plan. Public consultation took place in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Throughout the process, all stakeholders had the opportunity to comment on challenges and opportunities related to planning for accommodating Brent's predicted population growth – this included commenting on policies and site allocations.
- 3.31 The draft Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 17 March 2020. Examination hearings are anticipated to take place in Autumn 2020 (dates tbc).

Q8. *What is the organisational structure for delivering this service?*

- 3.32 Responsibility for the development/delivery of the Council's transport and public realm related policies and programmes is split between a number of services including Planning and Development services, South Kilburn estates regeneration, Regeneration team, Property and Assets, and the Highways and Infrastructure teams within the Regeneration and Environment Directorate, plus Housing in terms of their responsibility for estates.
- 3.33 Spatial Planning is principally responsible for the more strategic issues around policy (the Local Plan and LIP), strategy and programme development and working with various organisations and developers to secure transport and public realm infrastructure improvements in the borough; the landscape architect contributes to scheme design and leads on community bids for trees under NCIL. Development Management is responsible for negotiating improvements within schemes and S106 contributions.
- 3.34 Highways & Infrastructure is largely responsible for the development, design and delivery of a range of transport and public realm schemes and initiatives and working with the local community and partners to achieve healthy, sustainable places. Also, this service leads on air quality policy and projects, road safety, travel planning, and active travel initiatives to promote walking and cycling.
- 3.35 Cabinet Member leadership is shared across two portfolio areas:
- Cabinet Member for Environment – including responsibility for: operational transport planning; highways; the Conway Aecom contract; street cleaning; envirocrime and enforcement; and air quality / climate change.
 - Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning – including responsibility for: strategic transport planning, estate regeneration and renewal, planning (spatial planning and development management); CIL allocations; and property.

Q9. *What are the future plans for the public realm in Brent?*

3.36 The development/delivery of a range of transport and public realm schemes aimed at creating healthy, sustainable places and increasing the number of journeys made by walking and cycling is planned. Priorities include:

- Healthy Streets Wembley Corridor (Wembley to Willesden Junction), providing a valuable strategic link once TfL's programme resumes;
- Delivery of the Kensal Corridor and Kilburn High Road schemes;
- A Liveable Neighbourhood scheme in Park Royal;
- Introducing new School Streets schemes to encourage active travel, following the successful completion of two pilot schemes;
- Continuing to introduce new Low Traffic Neighbourhoods;
- Delivery of a series of 'quick win' measures to remove barriers to walking and cycling - for example, improving signage/wayfinding;
- Providing more electric vehicle charging points;
- Introducing more cycle parking including cycle hangars;
- Promote greener and sustainable travel through improvements to our website and active travel initiatives.
- Carlton Vale Boulevard procurement and implementation

3.37 The delivery of the above will be dependent on funding available.

3.38 A review and update of the Brent Long term Transport Strategy 2015-2035 and the development of a Brent Parking Management Strategy are planned for 2020.

Report sign off:

Amar Dave

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