

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

EXECUTIVE – 14th September 2004

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT

FOR DECISION

NAME OF WARD: ALL

Report Title : PROGRESSING TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT IN BRENT

FP REF: ES-04/05-252

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 This report seeks agreement on a town centre framework document for Brent. This will help guide the further implementation of Town Centre Management initiatives across the Borough whilst outlining the changed approach which might result from the intended production of a borough-wide town centre strategy. It then also identifies certain town centres to be prioritised within the resources attributed to the scheme, in addition to the existing centres of Wembley and Kilburn, and highlights the initial work programme to be undertaken in these areas.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members of the Executive are recommended to:

- (a) Adopt the town centre framework document for Brent attached as Appendix A and support further work to develop a more detailed Borough town centre strategy as outlined in the report.
- (b) Agree the priority town centres identified in paragraph 7.29 as being those in which additional town centre management initiatives will initially be focussed and in so doing note the feedback received from an initial consultation with key stakeholders.
- (c) Agree to the strengthened political representation on emerging town centre partnerships as outlined in paragraph 7.37 to support such initiatives.
- (d) Note the work programme, performance management and liaison arrangements being established to enable ongoing implementation, monitoring and review of these initiatives; and
- (e) Note the progress and issues arising from existing town centre management activity in Wembley and Kilburn which have helped inform this report.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The Council agreed additional part-year revenue growth funding of £125,000 for town centre management initiatives for 2004/5 at its budget setting meeting in March of this year.

3.2 The proposals set out in this report set out a programme which can be delivered within this allocation for this year and within an associated full year budget of £250,000 in future years as included in the draft cash limit for 2005/6. The detailed breakdown of expenditure areas is included in paragraph 7.47 below.

3.3 Additional budget provision already exists for current contributions to town centre management in Wembley and Kilburn, however this is discussed further below.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The objective to expand town centre management to other centres across the Borough will inevitably require additional posts to be created in support of this. This is discussed further below and is included within the financial implication projections.

5.0 DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Any ethnicity 'breakdown' for town centres within Brent will result from their various catchment area populations and local business profiles. This information has not as yet been collated and whilst when available this may highlight useful mechanisms for addressing town centre vitality issues the criteria for identifying priority areas has been largely based on economic need.

5.2 However, an Equalities Impact Assessment initial screening was undertaken to identify any adverse impacts associated with the proposed decision to expand town centre management initiatives and none were identified at this stage. Conversely, town centre management will have a significant positive impact by tackling areas at risk of decline. Furthermore, existing initiatives are already located in Wembley and Kilburn which exhibit higher than Borough average BME populations.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 gives the Council the power to do anything which it considers is likely to achieve the promotion of the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of the community. The power must be exercised having regard to the Council's Community Strategy (known as the 'Community Plan' in Brent). Two of the themes in Brent's Community Plan, 'environment and transport' and 'regeneration and employment' specifically make reference to the need to improve town centres.

6.6 Emerging legislation and recent consultation papers outlined below suggest an increasing role for local government in promoting partnerships with the private sector and enabling business growth within the local economy.

7.0 DETAIL

Introduction

7.1 Thriving town centres are a key component of a healthy local economy, providing a range of quality shopping facilities to meet the needs of local people and serving as a focus for many leisure, entertainment and cultural activities.

- 7.2 The image, appearance and vibrancy of the town centres in Brent are crucial to meeting the Council's Corporate Strategy objectives to improve local quality of life and promote regenerative investment within the Borough.
- 7.3 Nevertheless, a number of inter-related factors can challenge the ongoing viability of local town centres that may have emerged into something approaching their present form perhaps some 30-40 years ago. Examples include:
- Changing demographics and socio-economics in town centre catchment areas
 - Lack of investment from retailers and/or the local authority across the wider public realm contributing to a poor shopping environment
 - Competition from out-of-town shopping centres and the expansion of town centres in adjoining Boroughs
 - Accessibility and parking difficulties dissuading potential town centre users
 - Higher crime levels experienced particularly at town centre transport interchanges
 - Increasing use of e-commerce by consumers for buying many goods and services
 - Customer demand for 24/7 shopping and leisure opportunities
- 7.4 Whilst recognising that commercial 'market forces' will continue to play a dominant role in affecting change within local town centres, the Regeneration Strategy and the recent 2004-2006 Action Plan seek to address the positive preventative actions the Council and other partners can take in areas most at risk of falling into decline in the future. Two key actions in this regard are to develop a borough-wide town centre strategy by 2005 and to maximise the effectiveness of investment and initiatives to support this strategy.
- 7.5 In addition, to support this regeneration theme, the Council agreed additional part-year revenue growth funding for town centre management initiatives for 2004/5 at its budget setting meeting in March of this year with provision for full year costs for 2005/6. The remainder of this report outlines the key considerations which would maximise the effectiveness of such funding.

Background to Town Centre Management (TCM) in Brent

- 7.6 In Brent the concept of TCM was first introduced in 1992 through the implementation of the Urban Programme in Willesden and Harlesden town centres, then subsequently in Harlesden via City Challenge funding. With the cessation of these programmes the remaining Council revenue funding for TCM was diverted to Wembley. Core revenue funding also currently part-funds a TCM post for Kilburn (who is actually employed by LB Camden).
- 7.7 Previous TCM functions largely concentrated on coordinating and implementing public realm projects, apportioning business marketing and shop front grants, setting up and running projects such as the radiolink scheme, and dealing with day-to-day town centre business concerns.
- 7.8 Currently, formal TCM initiatives exist only in Wembley and Kilburn, the latter through a cross-borough SRB partnership with LB Camden. The NRF programme in Harlesden however does undertake some business support activity as part of a business focussed BME initiative.
- 7.9 Furthermore and for clarity, the Town Centre Wardens Scheme and the Safer Neighbourhoods Initiative both contribute to reducing crime, including the fear of crime and envirocrime, in the town centres in which they are deployed. However whilst they form an important element to partnership and liaison relationships required as part of progressing TCM they are separate programmes with a primary focus on day-to-day enforcement matters.

7.10 Importantly however, as the Wembley TCM model is maturing, the TCM role it performs is increasingly becoming more one of project initiator (rather than ongoing management), coordinator for strategic funding plans (such as transport, public realm, and public art programmes), and attracting inward investment through liaison and marketing to the private sector. This point is discussed further when looking at the way forward for TCM initiatives in the Borough.

Successes from Wembley and Kilburn

7.11 Whilst this paper proposes developing the more strategic roles which TCM initiatives seem best placed to deliver, it is also worth recognising the successes that recent work has achieved. A few examples include:

7.11.1 Overall, Wembley health check data and qualitative feedback suggests that the vitality of the centre is improving. The shopping rent for Zone A has increased from £30 per sqm in 1999 to £45 per sqm in 2003. The vacancy rate has also fallen, particularly along the primary frontage, and new business frontages are being created following recent planning approvals along the High Road.

7.11.2 The Wembley TCM initiative has agreed a town centre strategy framework to help develop more detailed sector specific plans and the partnership is now being strengthened through a membership scheme launched at the end of 2003. This scheme has already signed up around 50% of its initial target organisations and has helped deliver a number of public art initiatives as part of its work to change trader and shopper perceptions.

7.11.3 Physical environmental improvements in Wembley have backed up these improved market conditions with TCM working groups helping coordinate public realm work as part of a strategic approach to developing a café quarter along the High Road. This change of use policy has helped reduce vacant premises in the area and the high quality footway and street furniture has been recognised as good practice across the industry.

7.11.4 Finally, community safety objectives are reaping benefits through the ongoing use of the Radiolink scheme and the achievement of a Secured by Design award for St.John's Road car park. The Radiolink scheme is also now being integrated into wider complimentary initiatives regarding the town centre warden scheme and the new multi-agency Control Room at Brent House.

7.11.5 In Kilburn, the Kilburn Partnership has successfully overseen the expenditure of a £4m Single Regeneration Budget fund for Kilburn.

7.11.6 Kilburn TCM is implementing a streetscape strategy drawn up four years ago. This involves the installation of 16 CCTV cameras, new paving, new lighting, and a shopfront improvement grant to help small businesses improve their visual appearance. A new town centre strategy is currently being developed.

7.11.7 The health of the centre has improved immensely. Shopping rents for Zone A have increased from £55 per sq m in 1999 to £80 per sq m in 2003. Vacancy rates have fallen from 14.2 % in 2001 to 10.5% in 2003.

7.12 These outcomes rely on effective coordination and delivery from a number of service areas and units in order to be successful. It highlights the two-way benefits that result from town centre management structures, notably strategic work to address barriers to day-to-day operations and service improvement measures to maintain momentum and ensure change is being seen 'on the ground'.

- 7.13 Whilst the Kilburn 'New Commitment to Kilburn' SRB programme funding ends in March 2005, the Kilburn TCM post is core-funded by both Brent and Camden and the initiative will remain as part of the SRB forward strategy. Existing links between different TCM initiatives will be further developed as part of the proposals detailed below.

Emerging UK issues

- 7.14 With over 200 TCM initiatives across the country there is now a substantial collection of good practice examples with regard to the organisation, management and funding of TCM which address the particular issues of each town centre, the key interests in a town centre and the level of organisation within the business sector. Much of this experience has been summarised in the work the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) and the move towards a more strategic function for TCM meets with such guidance.
- 7.15 The Government's recent report 'Our Towns and Cities: The Future', published by the ODPM Urban Policy Unit, highlights the actions being taken at a national level to promote an urban renaissance and sees the continued development of TCM initiatives as a valuable tool in this process. It sets out a vision which stresses the need for partnership and local leadership in delivering sustainable centres which serve the needs of local people. A review report on measures taken to implement this vision is expected in 2005.
- 7.16 Perhaps the two other associated areas of legislative change with most relevance to future TCM work are in the planning and local finance fields. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 will lead to fundamental reform of the current planning system to require the production of a Local Development Framework for a local authority area, made up of Local Development Documents to give further detail on specific issues or geographical areas.
- 7.17 Separate legislation is also forthcoming on Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and a consultation is currently underway on further Local Authority Business Growth Incentives (LABGI). These initiatives propose new and innovative financial mechanisms to encourage and foster further local authority action to promote the local economy and engage in public-private partnerships and service level agreements. The latter for example would allow local authorities to retain some of the revenue associated with growing the business rate tax base. This not only encourages local economic growth initiatives but helps offset and address the impacts that such growth may have on the local environment and the demand for other council services.

Way Forward

- 7.18 The background and emerging issues highlighted above suggest it is an appropriate time to review and reflect on how best to make best use of the resources devoted towards TCM and maximise the new opportunities that exist with changing legislation.
- 7.19 The development of a borough-wide town centre strategy over the next year will bring these issues together into a more detailed way forward, nevertheless this process can usefully benefit from the lessons being learnt as part of the current and expanded TCM activity being undertaken now.

- 7.20 As highlighted above, the role of TCM itself has traditionally been perceived to surround acting as an 'interface' between businesses and council services the potential that such partnerships offer is much greater. Often this focus on relatively minor concerns is as a result of enforcement action or poor service delivery - issues that are best dealt with and resolved directly by the council units concerned. In addition, new ways of accessing council and agency services which rely less on face-to-face communication (such as via the internet, FAQs, helplines and One Stop Shops) are becoming more common and acceptable.
- 7.21 The risk in continuing this 'interface' activity is that whilst such TCM actions may help resolve day-to day problems and business concerns it diverts attention and resources from wider TCM functions regarding making strategic improvements and taking positive actions in areas most at risk of decline.
- 7.22 These could take the form of facilitating necessary change, tackling market failures, and/or addressing wider issues which have an impact on town centre vitality. In some areas, the development of distinctive 'quarters' to target specific markets has proven very effective and Brent's rich cultural diversity offers further opportunities for developing this concept in future. In other areas, a managed contraction of a centre may be appropriate in order to consolidate a viable retail core, thereby rebuilding confidence and mobilising private sector investment.
- 7.23 In addition, TCM can take a greater role in supporting the new development documents produced for 'development opportunity areas' as part of an emerging LDF for Brent. Proactively marketing these sites to the private sector can help bring forward positive change to support town centre viability. Such an approach was supported in the Inspectors report for the recent Planning Service review by the Audit Commission.
- 7.24 Furthermore, other changes that TCM will need to be aware of and respond to will be the Council's new 'ward working' initiative and its consideration of local area management within future service delivery and decision-making arrangements. Ward Plans will need to be developed within the context of any existing town centre plans and frameworks already agreed and in place, yet the process can be iterative as part of a two-way process of communication and consultation.
- 7.25 An important point therefore in moving forward will be that whilst there may be a need for a degree of business/council 'brokering' as part of initial TCM activity in order to achieve buy-in and confirm the credibility of the initiative, a clear message regarding a more strategic focus for TCM will be required. This will help prevent new TCM partnerships and work programmes suffering from addressing service delivery and communications problems best resolved at a service operational level.

Identifying Priority Centres

- 7.26 In order for the additional Council investment into TCM in Brent to be effective and deliver the desired outcomes mentioned above, the rationale for which areas the initiative is extended to needs to be clear, logical and robust. The factors which are taken into account in this process therefore include the:
- Importance of the centre in terms of its size (retail floorspace and catchment area)
 - Need for action and support resulting from town centre 'health check' results
 - Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified for each Borough including:
 - Existence of local business association(s) for TCM to foster further local activity
 - Existence of agreed development plans to enable more rapid TCM results
 - Existence of other complimentary programmes and projects to establish momentum

- 7.27 Furthermore, whilst recognising the unique problems faced by centres which overlap two or more borough boundaries an initial focus in areas solely within Brent is likely to derive the greatest outcomes.
- 7.28 These criteria enable the TCM investment to go towards supporting the maximum number of businesses and people which make up the larger centres catchments and also pick up on issues which complimentary projects and programmes are unable to focus on but which are causing barriers to delivery, for example strategic partnership work.
- 7.29 On the basis of the above criteria, and within the resources available, the priority centres proposed for the expansion of TCM initiatives are listed below and then supported by further commentary. A more detailed assessment and reasoning against these criteria is included in Appendix B to this report which gives details for each of the main district town centres in Brent. The proposed priority centres are:
- Harlesden
 - Willesden Green
 - Kingsbury
 - Neasden
- 7.30 Harlesden and Willesden Green are larger centres located entirely within the Borough and which have also been chosen for recent complimentary initiatives, for example the Town Centre Wardens Scheme. Harlesden is the third largest centre in the Borough and whilst having benefited from a range of public sector funds, including the current NRF programme, TCM could play a part in ensuring the gains derived from such investment do not deteriorate. Willesden Green is undergoing substantial change as a result of a buoyant property market and as the centre develops a leisure and night-time economy. Although this change highlights the role market forces play in town centres and should be encouraged it can bring with it both problems that TCM can seek to mitigate and further opportunities that the market alone may not be in a position to deliver.
- 7.31 Kingsbury merits priority treatment not only because of its size but because of its importance in serving a large part of the north of the Borough. It has experienced negative effects from new developments such as Safeway at Honeypot Lane and the centre is only now beginning to display some characteristics which suggest a reversal of decline may be evident that could act as a catalyst for further renewal.
- 7.32 Finally, whilst Neasden in retail terms is a smaller centre in the Borough it has recently benefited from substantial public realm investment into the town centre by the Council and a retail study suggested a modest growth is possible for the centre should the necessary supportive framework be developed. A business association exists for the centre and a regeneration framework is in the process of being developed.
- 7.33 These proposals are supported by the policies and statements made within the Council's Replacement UDP. Further data and studies will be commissioned as necessary to augment this analysis and in taking TCM forward within the Borough as part of an ongoing review process.

- 7.34 Other centres may be targeted in future however this will depend on the funding available for TCM (both Council and external), the success of TCM in delivering outcomes in the above priority areas, and the level of cooperation and coordination with neighbouring boroughs in relation to the centres that cross borough boundaries. Kenton and Cricklewood together represent a significant percentage of the retail floorspace in the Borough however would need Harrow and Barnet respectively to make necessary commitments for TCM to be in a position to make significant advances in those areas. Such a dialogue will be taken forward when appropriate and in the case of the Cricklewood once wider regeneration plans in that area are resolved.

Consultation and Feedback

- 7.35 A preliminary consultation exercise on the draft Framework document has been initiated with key business and agency stakeholders. This consultation ends on 13th September and officers will be in a position to give a verbal update to the Executive on the feedback received. This will then be supplemented by more detailed and ongoing consultation to take forward action in the priority centres agreed
- 7.36 Further feedback from existing TCM initiatives also suggests a need to provide strengthened political representation on emerging town centre partnerships. The nature of town centres will mean that a number of the current Executive portfolios will have a role in improving town centres, particularly Regeneration, Environment and Safety. In addition, the need to feed in issues and concerns arising from local Area Consultative Forums (ACFs) is important for TCM initiatives to have a holistic view of town centre needs.
- 7.37 To this end it is suggested that TCM partnerships consider representation from the respective chair of the local ACF and one of the above Executive members depending on the issues most relevant for that area.

Programme of work

- 7.38 Although the programmes of work and the specific focus for individual centres will be dependant upon the circumstances of the particular centre there are some areas of work to be undertaken across all centres. These include:
- 7.38.1 Partnership development – whilst a business partnership organisation exists in one form or another for each of the identified centres except Kingsbury, building and supporting such bodies to ensure cross-sector representation and the involvement of key agencies will be vital if long term improvement is to be made.
- 7.38.2 Programmed Health Checks – commissioned via the Planning Service to establish baseline and trend data to help benchmark centres, assist in prioritising resources, target bidding opportunities and provide a clear evidence base
- 7.38.3 Strategic coordination – developing and supporting existing strategic action plans which cover town centres across a range of issues including retailing, transport, the public realm, safety, housing and culture.
- 7.38.4 Attracting investment - ensuring Council capital and revenue funds and external funding bids are developed and implemented to help deliver such action plans. Exploring and developing new opportunities to help finance TCM activities in future.
- 7.38.5 Promoting identified town centre ‘opportunity sites’ to private sector partners and developers

- 7.38.6 Undertaking marketing and promotion projects to develop a positive image for each town centre and attract further investment. Identifying easy 'quick win' improvement projects to engage local stakeholders, achieve buy-in and confirm the credibility of the initiative
- 7.38.7 Signposting existing and new businesses to relevant business support initiatives and grants
- 7.38.8 Addressing resident concerns on town centre issues raised through existing Area and User Forums and the new 'ward working' initiative
- 7.39 In addition, renewed discussions and liaison will take place with neighbouring boroughs, specifically Harrow and Barnet, to identify future opportunities for tackling town centres which overlap respective borough boundaries.
- 7.40 Where necessary, and to establish momentum as soon as possible some external consultancy support and advice will be sought in the initial stages of delivering the work programme.

Management Arrangements

- 7.41 Different TCM models exist which place management responsibility for such initiatives within the local authority, as part of a partnership body, or as a separate and distinct not-for-profit company. Whilst the benefits and pitfalls of each model can be explored as part of the future development of TCM in Brent, when first introduced into a town centre without an existing partnership it is unlikely that the capacity to support such a structure, organisationally or financially will exist. To be most effective, it is therefore considered necessary, initially at least, to base the expanded TCM function within the Council.
- 7.42 Furthermore, the nature of the TCM 'team' that would be required to deliver the programme detailed above is worthy of consideration. To gain the confidence and trust of key stakeholders with identified priority town centres it would clearly be beneficial to have a single point of contact where individual officers have responsibility for a 'patch'. Nevertheless, on occasions it will be necessary to have flexibility within a team so that the service could more easily respond to certain peaks of activity in a given area. Also, it is unlikely that individual officers will be expert in the complete range of skills and experience required for delivering TCM in a town centre.
- 7.43 A multi-disciplinary team therefore, with different but complementary skills and experience is considered the most suitable approach, where managers have specifically allocated centres whilst at the same time working as a team, pulling such resources together where necessary to deliver any particular project. To cover the proposed expansion referred to in paragraph 7.29 an additional two TCM posts would be created and the team would be supported by a support and research officer as outlined in the Table 1 below.
- 7.44 Generic skills for such a multidisciplinary team would include project management, analytical, organisational, communication and influencing skills, an understanding of businesses and knowledge of marketing, promotion, public relations and partnership building. Specialisms sought which would complement these skills could cover issues such as site assembly, exploiting niche markets, managed contraction, development finance, etc.
- 7.45 To ensure corporate coordination and ownership a cross-department steering group would be established, including the Member representation outlined above, to oversee the delivery of the work programme and ensure a focus on strategic outcomes, including any changes to the way TCM might be funded over the medium term.

- 7.46 In addition to establishing a team to manage the identified centres, it is important that there is funding available for start up costs and to enable some early visible initiatives and/or improvements to be made which will help generate confidence and interest amongst stakeholders and within the town centre. As time progresses this project funding can more effectively be used for 'seed-funding' new initiatives and attracting additional external investment. Nevertheless, as stated above, a major TCM role will involve working with colleagues and other partners to ensure the impact of larger capital and investment programme expenditure is maximised.
- 7.47 The projected breakdown for the 2004/5 half-year spend and 2005/6 full year budget is therefore as follows:

Table 1 – Expenditure Breakdown 2004/5 and 2005/6

Expenditure area	2004/5	2005/6
Additional TCM post 1 (incl. on costs)	£20,000	£50,000
Additional TCM post 2 (incl on costs)	£20,000	£50,000
Additional TCM support post	£10,000	£30,000
Admin/Set-up/Office space	£10,000	£20,000
Initial consultancy/interim support	£15,000	n/a
Project funding	£50,000	£100,000
Total	£125,000	£250,000

- 7.48 Performance measures for both town centre level trends and TCM team effectiveness will be integral to the work programme. The former exist in many circumstances through health check data and trends monitored by other agencies and partners such as the police, transport bodies and retail consultancies. These will be collated and reported on to provide an ongoing awareness of the vitality of each town centre. Internal management information will also provide performance indicators for assessing the key milestones necessary as part of a successful TCM initiative.
- 7.49 It is important to reiterate that whilst TCM activity can help support change and maintain vibrant town centres the local, regional and national market and legislative environment will mean direct correlation of town centre performance information with TCM activity will be impractical and it is better used as a guide for ongoing review purposes.

Conclusion

- 7.48 A vibrant and healthy town centre provides the employment, goods and services, and entertainment needs that can benefit local people and local quality of life. Nevertheless, if a centre is to maintain or improve its viability it needs to have a clear ability to change in response to market conditions. Town Centre Management can help create the necessary partnerships and town centre strategies for this process to happen however this must result from a long term commitment from all stakeholders for it to be most effective. The report therefore proposes a range of actions which can expand such activity now whilst creating a more detailed strategic framework to support town centres into the future.

8.0 FURTHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Details of Documents:

1. Association of Town Centre Management best practice case studies:
www.atcm.org

2. ODPM 'Our Towns and Cities':
www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_608358.hcsp
3. Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_planning/documents/sectionhomepage/odpm_planning_page.hcsp
4. Local Authority Business Growth Incentives - consultation paper, August 2004
<http://www.local.dtlr.gov.uk/finance/labgi.htm>

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact Keith Tallentire, Projects and Policy Unit, 3rd Floor, Brent House, 349-357 High Road, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 6BZ.

Telephone: 020 8937 2273

Email: keith.tallentire@brent.gov.uk

Richard Saunders
Director of Environment

Brent Town Centre Framework

Purpose

The Brent Regeneration Action Plan 2004-2006 proposes to develop and implement a borough-wide town centre strategy. The objective of such a strategy would be to secure healthy and vibrant town centres that serve the needs and remain at the heart of the local community. It would also contribute in part to wider action proposed to address those areas most at risk of decline in the Borough.

This Framework begins a process of dialogue and review to enable a more detailed town centre strategy to be in place by the end of 2005. It recognises the need to take a fundamental look at our existing town centres, and at the way investment is directed into them, in order that these centres can change and adapt in response to market forces.

This Framework also highlights the increased action the Council is taking now with regard to Town Centre Management. It establishes criteria for identifying further centres where additional resources will be placed to promote greater partnership working and strategic coordination with key stakeholders.

The Context for Developing a Town Centre Strategy

Thriving town centres are a key component of a healthy local economy, providing a range of quality shopping facilities to meet the needs of local people and serving as a focus for many leisure, entertainment and cultural activities.

The image, appearance and vibrancy of the town centres in Brent are crucial to meeting the Council's objectives to improve local quality of life and promote regenerative investment within the Borough.

Traditionally, Town Centre Management initiatives have been perceived as being associated with dealing with day-to-day maintenance and environmental improvement issues. Within Brent the nature of town centre management needs to undergo a rethink, it has to better define the form and function of each town centre and ensure centres are able to change where necessary to reflect the needs of the local community and catchment areas they serve.

Whilst recognising that commercial 'market forces' still continue to play a dominant role in affecting change within local town centres, the Council sees 'Town Centre Management', working in conjunction with its statutory and enforcement powers, as a powerful mechanism to develop and implement strategic improvements in support of town centre vitality.

This will by necessity require partnerships with businesses, agencies and other stakeholders in order to be successful. Experience has shown that those partnerships which have a shared vision of a centre's identity, function and market niche have better managed to maintain its competitive edge.

In some areas, the development of distinctive 'quarters' to target specific markets has proven very effective and Brent's rich cultural diversity offers further opportunities for developing this concept in future. In other areas, a managed contraction of a centre may be appropriate in order to consolidate a viable retail core, thereby rebuilding confidence and mobilising private sector investment.

Funding Town Centre Management

Whilst the Council are able to provide 'seed' funding to enable Town Centre Management to become established within identified priority centres the intention is that these partnerships eventually become more independent bodies and in doing so increasingly self-funded.

Due to the challenges facing many of the centres in Brent this may be more of a medium-term objective. Nevertheless this approach is supported by the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) and is being increasingly aided by new and emerging Government legislation.

Clearly however the Council will continue to play a role in ensuring high quality Council services are delivered in town centres and future external funding and private sector investment is encouraged and maintained.

Key principles for a borough-wide town centre strategy

In developing the borough-wide town centre strategy therefore the Council sees the following as key principles to be explored and expanded upon:

- The strategy will aim to secure healthy and vibrant town centres in the Borough that serve the needs and remain at the heart of their local communities
- Each town centre should seek to create a shared vision of its identity, function and market niche leading to actions and marketing to capitalise on these strengths and opportunities
- Each town centre is different and may necessitate different actions and areas of focus e.g. retail competitiveness, leisure and cultural uses, civic functions, community safety, housing development, transport and access, public realm improvements, etc
- Development and implementation of the strategy will involve and encompass a corporate approach from within the Council
- Creating successful partnerships with public, private and community representation is essential to improving town centres.
- Identifying funding mechanisms to enable town centre management initiatives to become more independent self-funded bodies will be encouraged

Progressing Town Centre Management (2004-2006)

To move forwards now, whilst developing a more detailed strategy in conjunction with key stakeholders, the Council has attributed additional investment to Town Centre Management initiatives across the Borough.

Such initiatives will seek to:

- Establish local town centre partnerships in identified priority areas
- Undertake regular 'health checks' of the town centres to provide a clear evidence base for action
- Coordinate strategic action plans across a range of issues including retailing, transport, the public realm, community safety, housing, civic functions, leisure and culture
- Ensure Council capital and revenue funds, as well as external funding bids, are developed and implemented to help deliver such action plans
- Promote identified town centre 'opportunity sites' to private sector partners and developers
- Undertake marketing and promotion projects to develop a positive image for each town centre and attract further investment
- Signpost existing and new businesses to relevant business support initiatives and grants
- Address resident concerns on town centre issues raised through existing Area and User Forums and the new 'ward working' initiative

These actions will be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure satisfactory performance is achieved and clear outcomes within respective town centres are visible.

The experiences and learning gathered from undertaking Town Centre Management initiatives will help test and inform the development of a borough-wide town centre strategy.

Identifying Priority Town Centres for TCM expansion

Brent has two major town centres, Wembley and Kilburn, around a dozen district centres, and numerous neighbourhood centres and parades. These centres form an overall network and perform different functions in relation to the catchment areas they each serve and the level of services they provide.

To identify those most in need and/or those most able to benefit from a new Town Centre Management (TCM) initiative a number of factors have been taken into account:

- Size of the town centre (retail floorspace/catchment) - to maximise economies of scale and address competition from neighbouring centres
- Health Check results - to address those centres most in need of support
- SWOT analysis - to consider strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, including:
 - Existing business associations
 - Existing plans and/or frameworks
 - Existing programmes and/or projects

Furthermore, whilst recognising the unique problems faced by centres which overlap two or more borough boundaries an initial focus in areas solely within Brent is likely to derive the greatest outcomes.

Major Centres	Main District Centres	Other District Centres
Wembley Kilburn*	Burnt Oak* Cricklewood* Harlesden Kingsbury Willesden Green Ealing Road	Wembley Park Colindale Kensal Rise Kenton* Neasden Preston Road Queens Park Sudbury

Source: Unitary Development Plan 2000-2010

* Centres which lie across Borough boundaries with Barnet, Camden, or Harrow

The Wembley and Kilburn TCM initiatives are already in place and will remain key centres for the Borough, particularly in Wembley with the expansion of the town centre eastwards within the Wembley Regeneration area.

Based on an assessment of town centres in Brent using the above criteria, within the resources available, the priority areas for the expansion of TCM initiatives would be Harlesden, Willesden Green, Neasden and Kingsbury. Discussion and dialogue with neighbouring boroughs would nevertheless continue in order to promote the establishment of cross-borough schemes within other key centres in future.

Brent Council
August 2004