



Executive
9th September 2008

**Report from the Director of Policy
and Regeneration**

For Action

Wards Affected:
ALL

Town Centre Regeneration in Brent

Forward Plan Ref: PRU 08/09 01

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report sets out the findings of the Town Centre Regeneration task group set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 30 May 2007 to review the councils approach to town centre regeneration in Brent.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Executive responds to the recommendations set out in the Town Centre Regeneration task group report

2.2 That members of the task group be thanked for their work

3.0 Background to the Task Groups Recommendations

3.1 This report contains the findings of the Town Centre Regeneration task group. The work was commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to investigate the measures in place to support town centre regeneration in Brent and how it can be improved.

3.2 There are thirteen local centres in Brent of different sizes some of which border with neighbouring boroughs. The GLA have ranked town centres in London according to their size, status, range of shops and the wider facilities that they provide. Wembley and Kilburn are the main centres in Brent.

Smaller district centres include Willesden Green and Harlesden.

- 3.3 The task group's findings aim to inform the forthcoming town centre strategy. This will be important in developing a council wide approach to town centre management. The strategy will set out recommendations for each of the town centres in Brent.

Key findings of the task group:

- 3.4 Town Centres in Brent have been in decline over a number of years for a variety of reasons including competition from neighbouring centres, underinvestment and poor physical environment.
- 3.5 The Council has two town centre managers who look after Wembley, Willesden and Harlesden. They play an essential role in managing local partnerships, being the first point of contact for their town centre and leveraging in additional funding for town centre projects. The task group felt that they would benefit from additional support from officers across the council when dealing with environmental issues.
- 3.6 The newly appointed neighbourhood working team will be able to identify town centre issues at the ward level.
- 3.7 There is a key role for the planning department in helping to redefine town centres and identify sites on the edge of the high street, which would be suitable for alternative use such as offices or leisure facilities.
- 3.8 Transportation is a key issue within town centres. There needs to be a balance between parking facilities for short stay shopping and pedestrian concerns that high traffic volumes make centres unpleasant for shopping. Local residents could also be affected by congestion and poor air quality.

Task Group Recommendations

- 4.0 The following recommendations were agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 28th May 2008 :
- 4.1 That the planning service develop a protocol to agree priorities and improve the response to environmental issues raised by town centre managers.
- 4.2 That the new town centre strategy in the council's Regeneration Action Plan for 2007-2009 is endorsed by the relevant portfolio holders and clear resources to deliver its objectives are identified through the budget process.
- 4.3 That neighbourhood working officers ensure that local businesses are included within their consultation.
- 4.4 That the planning department research the possibilities of identifying suitable locations to trial a project on flexible uses of property on the periphery of high

streets, where alternative uses would add to the attractiveness of the town centre.

- 4.5 That the StreetCare department explore and report on how other councils overcome difficulties with enforcing fixed penalty fines for people who drop litter and suggest a model that might suit Brent.
- 4.6 That the StreetCare, Food Safety and Environmental Health Teams report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the scope for developing a performance indicator on ensuring that all local shops are compliant with waste management regulations.
- 4.7 That the transportation unit investigate the possibility for introducing more dual car parking bays close to town centres and where feasible and agreed in consultation with residents, enable paid short stay use by shoppers.

5.0 Service Department Responses

Regeneration Team

- 5.1 The regeneration team welcomes the findings of the task group report, and in particular the recognition that different approaches are required for different town centres. For some there will be the need for large scale intervention to either support or drive change (such as Wembley) whereas for others the market is likely to take care of necessary changes. The key service impact is on ensuring that a town centres strategy is prepared for the Borough and officers from the team will work with the Council's Environment & Culture department to deliver this.

Neighbourhood working Team

- 5.2 Officers from the Neighbourhood Working team have already started to include local businesses in consultation, particularly councillor walkabouts. Neighbourhood Working leaflets have been left in shops for completion by customers and this is an area that the team hope to build on to reach particular targeted groups. Issues around crime in town centres have been reflected in neighbourhood action plans.
- 5.3 Walkabouts do often include town centres and the team will continue with this approach. However, as the report notes, people from many areas use town centres, including people from outside the borough. It can be difficult to glean the views of local residents through a town centre walkabout. In order to retain the important element of walkabouts that offers an opportunity for councillors to hear from local residents, walkabouts in town centres will need to be carefully planned to ensure that they happen at a time and in a way that maximises the input of local residents.

5.4 **Environment and Culture Department**

5.5 **Recommendation 4.1**

5.6 Three town centre partnerships operate within Brent in Harlesden, Willesden Green and Wembley. The partnerships meet on a quarterly basis and project specific groups meet more often when required. StreetCare and Environmental Health, the main services needing to respond to environmental issues, are represented in all three Partnerships.

5.7 As the town centre management team is not resourced to work outside these three areas these are the only areas where environmental issues are likely to be raised by town centre managers.

5.8 Existing working arrangements are under review and a protocol is under consideration to agree priorities and improve the response to environmental issues raised by Town Centre Managers.

Recommendation 4.2

5.9 The development of a town centre strategy is an action in the Council's Regeneration Action Plan for 2007-2009. Although considerable preparatory work has been undertaken, the external consultants needed to review the current arrangements for town centre management have not yet been commissioned, and a timetable for delivery of the strategy has not been finalised. Pressures on the Planning Service's budget as a result of a reduction in fee income from planning applications mean that it is unlikely that this work will be commissioned in 2008-09.

5.10 When a consultant's report is received it will need to be carefully considered by officers before its proposals for town centre management, town centre regeneration and investment in town centres can be endorsed by the Executive and become a joint, council-wide approach to town centres. Lead Members for Environment, Planning & Culture, Highways & Transportation and Regeneration & Economic Development would all have responsibility for aspects of such a strategy.

5.11 The identification of the resources needed to implement the strategy, which could be significant, can be considered through the budget process for 2009-10 and 2010-11.

Recommendation 4.3

5.12 Town Centre Managers agree that one of the common complaints from the business community is that they are not listened to despite the fact they invest in the area and bring employment to it.

5.13 In the three centres with town centre management there is a network in place that facilitates this and the neighbourhood working officers have already been invited to join these Partnerships. Outside these centres it is agreed that the Council needs to ensure that businesses are effectively consulted.

- 5.14 It is agreed that this may be helpful and neighbourhood working officers will discuss with relevant ward Members whether they wish to focus a walkabout in this way.

Recommendation 4.4

- 5.15 The Planning Service has some experience of the approach proposed. There has been some success in using empty premises in short term for artists and creative uses. Changing designations of shopping frontages or relaxing non-retail policy within specific zones has also had some success, in one case helping establish a cafe zone.
- 5.16 The critical issue is establishing the demand for alternative uses which will add to the attractiveness of the town centre. Those uses for which there is high demand including betting offices, fast food take aways or further pubs may not provide the improvement sought.
- 5.17 It will also be important to be sure that the analysis of the cause of the difficulties was correct in that situation, and that there was a demand for suitable alternative uses. Otherwise, taking units out of retail could have unintended consequences such as pushing retail rents still higher, which might exacerbate the problem.
- 5.18 There are no identified resources to undertake the research suggested but officers will keep the approach in mind when considering particular high streets and it may be possible to explore the scope for using this approach through the research work underpinning the town centre strategy.

Recommendation 4.5

- 5.19 StreetCare's advice to the Task Group was that use of fixed penalty fines for dropping litter was problematic given that officers have no powers to compel perpetrators to identify themselves and hence no mechanism for enforcing the fixed penalty fines and in view of the risks to personal security of staff.
- 5.20 However, it is clear that other councils believe they have found ways to overcome these problems and officers will further investigate with these councils how enforcement has been made practical and effective and report on any model found which might suit Brent

Recommendation 4.6

- 5.21 The importance of effective enforcement to the health of town centres is recognised and we will assess whether the proposed indicator will add value to this approach as current work on business compliance is taken forward.

Our consideration of the proposed indicator and changes to the way that the council tackles business waste will be considered in parallel with other initiatives on waste and enforcement that we are undertaking this financial

year. These include:

an initiative to use a wider range of intelligence data to identify and target the worst businesses with the poorest compliance track record, and

a review of how we should be respond to the recent Audit Commission Inspection recommendation on trade waste enforcement.

Recommendation 4.7

- 5.22 The changes to controlled parking arrangements on the edge of town centres are often controversial. Consultation is largely with residents who prefer to have less dual use of bays whilst those users of the town centres who travel by car are unlikely to feature in the consultation. Nevertheless, officers will consider the scope for extending the numbers of dual use bays when considering parking arrangements in and around town centres.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The recommendations set out in the report, if implemented should for the most part be containable within existing resources. Further details are set out in the body of the report.

- 6.2 For some recommendations, such as 4.2 and 4.7 further work is required to establish the cost of implementation. Resources if required will need to be identified at that point before the recommendation can be moved forward.

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1 In respect of paragraph 4.4, planning permission would be required for the particular use in question which would need to be considered on its own merits in each particular case. If more flexible uses of such properties was to be proposed then this would need to be reflected in the Local Development Framework which the council is currently preparing under the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 7.2 In respect of paragraph 4.7 any alteration to the restrictions on use of parking bays would require variation to the traffic management orders relating to them.

8.0 Diversity Implications

- 8.1 Recommendations from task groups are incorporated within service department's delivery or development plans and as such will be subject to the equalities impact assessments carried out by services as part of their work programme.

9.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

None.

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