

Town Centre Regeneration

What are the main issues? *What is the policy background?, how does it link to the councils corporate priorities?*

Introduction

Brent Town Centres have been in decline over the years due to a number of reasons of which competition from neighbouring centres and a lack of investment in infrastructure are key contributory factors.

Town Centres are at the 'heart' of every community. They are the hub for economic, social and leisure activities; often a microcosm of the wider community, giving an insight into the demographics, people, culture, diversity and economic prospects of an area. When successful, town centres are the economic engines of most communities, allowing enterprise to flourish and providing jobs for local people. In Brent, some of our centres, Harlesden and Wembley fall within the most deprived wards in the borough, and in some cases, London. Our town centres are often areas of high crime activities, topping the list of crime hotspots in the borough.

The Strategic objective as contained in the current unitary development plan is to maintain the viability and vitality of established town centres and to promote their physical and economic regeneration.

Town Centre Management (TCM) is one of the vehicles being used to deliver the regeneration of our town centres. TCM is a partnership between the private and public sector to seek means to revitalise our declining town centres.

The purpose of the TCM team is to provide strategic coordination for investment and maintenance in order to help regenerate, sustain and develop the well-being of specific town centres.

The service includes the following key functions: business partnership development; promotion and marketing; business support and signposting; service delivery liaison and coordination; research and consultation; project development and delivery.

Like all London boroughs, Brent has gradually developed a hierarchy of shopping centres over time regarding their individual size, status, range of shops and facilities they provide.

Strategic Context

The London Plan has reiterated the importance of town centres to local communities, and requires London Boroughs to develop ways of sustaining their vitality and viability. The plan recognises the important roles urban and suburban town centres play and requires work to define and promote them within the context of sub-region. Defined within the UDP is a hierarchy of town centres and this will be taken forward within the Local Development Framework (LDF) in addition to up date analysis of changing roles as determined by current health check data, analysis and robust policies reflecting the range of services centres need to provide. There is also recognition in the Regeneration Action Plan that some town centres are at risk of decline.

The strategic objectives of TCM are designed to reverse the decline of our centres; achieve sustainable regeneration; improve economic prospect of businesses and residents and most importantly contribute to borough's corporate priorities of:

- Promoting quality of life and the green agenda
- Regeneration and priority neighbourhoods
- Tackling crime and community safety

The Brent Approach

Town Centre Management in Brent has matured from an ad hoc arrangement of co-ordinating council activities and managing decline to one which is increasingly one of project initiator, a co-ordinator of strategic funding plans (such as transport), and a role requiring close liaison with the private sector in order to attract inward investment through active marketing and promotion.

Until recently, TCM had existed only in Wembley and Kilburn, the latter in partnership with Camden. In 2005, TCM was extended to Harlesden and Willesden, increasing staffing level from one to four (3 Town Centre Regeneration Managers and 1 Town Centre Information Officer). The team is being transferred to Planning with the exception of the Kilburn Town Centre which Brent no longer funds.

Why are we looking at this area? Have there been recent legislation/policy changes? Are there any performance or budgetary issues?,

Brent's town centres like all traditional town centres have recently undergone many changes and they are set to undergo further change brought about in part by changing retail patterns and the introduction of new technologies. The growth of out of town centres and e-commerce has not, however, diminished the importance of town centres, with their traditional High Streets. Indeed, the Government in the Urban White Paper (2000) and the initial consultations on London's draft Spatial Development Strategy (May 2001) and the London Development Agency's draft Economic Strategy support active town centre management.

Ensuring sustainable town centres is seen as a way of meeting a range of local needs, besides addressing the social inclusion agenda, through safeguarding the provision of local services and facilities. The Urban White Paper and the Finance Green Paper (2000) have also proposed the introduction of a range of new financial measures to ensure the renaissance of the traditional town centres, such as a supplementary business rate to fund improvement districts, to be known as Business Improvement Districts (BIDS). Brent's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) has also responded to this new agenda and town centre land use policies have been revised to encourage this urban renaissance. The emerging LDF will seek to strengthen policies around town centre revival.

The challenge now for the Council and its Partners is to be able to respond imaginatively to these drivers for change and ensure that Brent town centres, local centres and neighbourhood parades have the appropriate formal town centre management structures and management plans in place to take

advantage of future funding opportunities

What should the review cover? Give brief outline of what members could focus on, which partners to engage with, how residents/public can be involved.

In recognition of this, Brent's TCM is currently producing the first ever borough-wide town centre strategy. This strategy will be used as a tool to guide the development of our centres so that their prosperity can increase and provide the many economic physical, social and cultural opportunities to be gained. It is imperative that Members not only endorse this document but also buy into it and champion the suggestions and recommendations that are contained therein.

Another important document in production is the Public Realm Strategy being produced by the Public Realm Theme Group. The importance of this document cannot be over-emphasised, as it seeks to address long term neglect and decay of our public realm and infrastructure. The document will give a good understanding as to what constitutes a public realm, better design concept, quality palette of materials and maintenance of investments. It will also recognise and seek to bring about the difference in nature between areas of business and residence. There is also a clear hierarchy of places of business; their characteristics, uniqueness and differences will be epitomised in the design concept of any improvement, going against the grain of the 'clone' town syndrome that is evidenced in high streets across England.

To continue with the Brent Model for currently managed towns with a view to revisit in another 3 years when it is envisaged that undertaken intervention works would have improved the economic prospects of those town centres.

A Business Improvement District could be developed for Wembley in the future in conjunction with the Quintain developments but it is unlikely that BIDs will be developed for the remaining Town Centres because they do not have the essential ingredients to make a BID such as major private sector employers, or significant retail representation. However, there are elements of the approach that can be adapted to suit Brent town centres.

Partnerships and strong local leadership for example, is a recurring theme in all recent Government legislation, strategies and policy guidance and core to the success of BIDs. This is a key part of any Town Centre Strategy in addition to common purpose, geographical identity (i.e. town centre boundary) in order to produce Levels of commitment through a partnership approach leading to tangible results.

Members could consider endorsing the suggestion to set up 'working parties' for centres not currently benefiting from TCM. These will be Informal fora, which bring together stakeholders, ward councillors, representatives from agencies such as the police and transport operators and officers. In addition to discussing day-to-day issues of common interest, each working party will identify development objectives and take forward specific projects. This will hold the centres in good stead to transit to a more formalised partnership arrangement if and when funding is provided to further expand TCM.

TCM has long advocated for area based schemes to be drawn up for our major and district centres. These schemes will draw together land use and transport

Appendix B

needs for centres, promoting a holistic approach to their regeneration. It puts the council in a more proactive position to effectively respond to centre needs and stop them slipping into further decline. The bonus of having prepared schemes to draw on is that it affords the council the opportunity to respond to often tight deadline demands from external funding bodies.

Sustainable funding for town centre regeneration has long been a problem faced by many town centres. Even where investments have been made, their future maintenance becomes a challenge with the end result being a cyclical case of constant decline. However, this described situation could easily be overcome by devising a funding strategy for the long term maintenance of investments.

S106 agreements and Local Authority Growth Incentive Schemes (LABGI) are possible funding sources. The latter, is an essential element of the Section 71 of the Local Government Bill which allows local authorities to individually retain some of the business rate revenues that are associated with growing the business rate tax base at a local level. This scheme will create positive financial incentives for local authorities to work in partnership with business, Regional Development Agencies, Learning and Skills Councils and other key local and regional players to maximise economic growth. The bid is for some of the tax surpluses to be reinvested in town centres.

What could the review achieve?, influence policy change?, improvement to service delivery?, budget savings?, develop partnerships?.

This review has the potential of doing the following:

- Increase priority of town centre management and place within corporate strategies
- Enhance awareness of TCM as a delivery vehicle with which to tackle economic decline and raise quality of life within our town centres
- Strengthen political representation and input to existing Town Centre Partnerships
- Enhance ongoing work and create stronger ties to cross Council initiatives or projects, e.g. London 2012, New Wembley Stadium, NRF in Harlesden
- Create new or strengthen existing links between the Council and the business community of Brent
- Identifying adequate budget to deliver regeneration
- Promote regeneration friendly policies toward our town centres
- Increasing buy-in across council departments
- Explore and establish a funding strategy specific to town centre regeneration