

## Response to Town Centre Regeneration Task Group Report

### 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides advice from officers in relation to the recommendations of the Task Group Review of Town Centre Regeneration in Brent. It also provides a briefing asked for by the Committee on the issue of parking in and around town centres.

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee note the officers' advice on the recommendations of the Task Group.
- 2.2 That the Committee considers the briefing on town centre car parking issues.
- 2.3 That the Committee consider whether there are further issues it wishes to refer to the Executive.

### 3.0 Detail

- 3.1 At its meeting on 25 March 2008 the Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the final report of the Town Centre Regeneration Task Group and resolved:

(i) that the report of the Town Centre Regeneration task group be re-submitted to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee accompanied by the implications for the Council's parking policy of the suggestion that parking restrictions in and around town centres should be relaxed.

- 3.2 Officers have prepared initial advice on those recommendations which is set out in Section 4 below.
- 3.3 Officers have also prepared a briefing on the issues around relaxing parking restrictions in and around town centres which is set out in Section 5 below.

### 4.0 Task group recommendations

#### ***1 That a core group of officers work in partnership with Town Centre Managers to ensure a quick response to environmental issues***

Currently three town centre partnerships operate within Brent; these are Harlesden, Willesden Green and Wembley. These Partnerships meet on a quarterly basis and project specific groups meet more often when a particular activity requires it. StreetCare and Environmental Health are represented in all three Partnerships.

There are currently no joint activities outside the three centres with Town Centre Managers as the team is not resourced to work in these areas.

We are reviewing existing working arrangements and considering a protocol to agree priorities and improve the response to environmental issues raised by Town Centre Managers.

**2 *That the new town centre strategy is endorsed by the relevant portfolio holder and clear resources are identified to deliver its objectives***

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.

When the 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.

The identification of the resources needed to implement the strategy, which could be significant, can only be achieved through the budget process for 2009-10 and beyond.

**3 *That neighbourhood working officers ensure that local businesses are included within their consultation***

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.

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.

**4 *That neighbourhood working officers with a town centre in their ward dedicate at least one walkabout a year to focus on town centre issues***

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.

**5 *That the planning department identify a suitable location to trial a project on flexible uses of property on the periphery of the high street***

Planning have some experience of the approach proposed. There has been some success in using empty premises in short term for artists and creative uses, and it may be possible to make this financially more attractive to the owners of the shops. Changing designations of shopping frontages or

relaxing non-retail policy within specific ones has also had some success, in one case helping establish a cafe zone.

The critical issue is establishing the demand for alternative uses which will add to the attractiveness of the town centre. A proliferation of betting offices, fast food takeaways or further pubs may not create the improvement sought.

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.

The scope for successfully using this approach can be explored through the research work underpinning the proposed town centre strategy.

**6 *That a pilot scheme is trialled in a designated area to issue fixed penalty fines to people who drop litter.***

StreetCare's advice to the Task Group was that they could not commit to such a pilot largely because they were not persuaded that such a pilot was feasible given that officers have no powers to compel perpetrators to identify themselves and hence no mechanism for enforcing the FPNs and in view of the risks to personal security of staff.

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.

**7 *That Environmental Health Team develops a specific performance indicator around ensuring that all local shops have a trade waste contract.***

In general StreetCare have responsibility for trade waste enforcement but it is understood that the concern related mainly to food businesses in town centres which are visited by the Food Safety team in Environmental Health.

Officers are developing a new approach to prioritising visits to businesses to ensure that more focus is given to non-compliant businesses and less to those that are broadly compliant. Officers will consider the scope for such an indicator in taking this work forward.

**8 *That the transportation department investigate the possibility for more dual use of car parking bays***

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. Members would need to adopt a clear policy to underpin such a shift in the allocation of parking.

The aim of more short term parking in town centres is hard to achieve without Council owned car parks in the town centres. Our main opportunity for achieving this is through pay and display on street parking.

Town centre parking issues are considered more fully in the next section.

## 5.0 Town centre parking in Brent

### 5.1 Background

5.1.1 The geographical nature of Brent means that many residents are not far away from their local town centre.

5.1.2 The Council's approved transport policy document, the Local Implementation Plan 2007-2011, put in place a raft of policies and supporting proposals to facilitate the increased use of sustainable transport modes, namely walking, cycling and public transport (bus, underground and rail). The key objective of such policies is to ensure that over reliance and increased use of the private motor car does not add to the already congested nature of Brent's strategic road network and town centres which are already dominated by the private car and suffer significant air quality problems as a result of engine emissions.

5.1.3 Such an approach is fully in line with national, regional and locally agreed policies and objectives, linked to national and regional air quality and emissions targets. However, this is not to say that the Council is 'anti-car'. Indeed, policies support the use of private-hire vehicles and the Council has introduced some 70 individual car club vehicles onto the borough's streets, many of which have been conveniently situated close to our town centres, for example, Kilburn and Willesden.

### 5.2 Brent – existing low cost town centre parking.

5.2.1 Brent charges one of the lowest tariffs for car parking available in London, particularly for its town centres. Specifically, it should be noted that Brent's charge of just 30p for 20minutes has remained unchanged since 2004, some 4 years. The borough's average parking charge (across the whole tariff of on and off-street parking) is just £1.22/hr, considerably lower than the average of Brent's seven neighbouring boroughs, this being £1.58/hr. As part of some increases to the Council's parking tariffs which took effect from 1 April 2007, both the 20 minute on-street stay charge and the 40 minute stay charge, remained unchanged.

#### On-street (pay & display)

Length of Stay	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2007 charge	April 2007 charge
20 minutes	30p	30p
40 minutes	60p	60p
1 hour	£1.20	£1.50
2 hours	£2.60	£3.30
4 hours	£4.00	£5.00

#### Off-street (car park)

Length of Stay	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2007 charge	April 2007 charge

1 hour	50p	50p
2 hours	£1.00	£1.50
3 hours	£1.50	£2.50

### 5.3 Risks associated with further relaxation of parking restrictions.

- 5.3.1 The introduction of 'free parking' at Preston Road seems to have led to a concerning trend which has meant the local off-street car park being almost unused. Members should note that facilitating free parking in Brent, be it in specific town centres or borough-wide, sets a precedent which risks undermining the council's agreed policy position.
- 5.3.2 Pursuing such an approach on a wider basis could, potentially, seriously harm the boroughs reputation relating to sustainability and environmental credentials and could also lead to lower levels of future capital funding sourced annually from funding agencies like Transport for London, and occasionally from the Department for Transport.
- 5.3.3 Members have made sustainability one of their four priorities for the term of this administration and this would also be undermined.
- 5.3.4 Members should also consider that there is likely to be a material revenue impact from introducing any form of free parking in the borough. The majority of "stay-times" are for 40-minutes or less. Hence free 20 or 30 minute stays could remove very considerable amounts of revenue which the Council has included in future budget plans. Whilst this policy option is open to Members, other ways of supporting and promoting town centres may be more cost effective.
- 5.3.5 From an enforcement point of view, it is essential for a ticket to be purchased from a machine. Officers are exploring the possibility of introducing a nominal charge for, say, 10 minutes, but this may causes problems when structuring the rest of the tariff and also has the potential to damage existing revenue funding on which the Council is reliant, as mentioned previously.

#### **Contact Officers**

Richard Saunders  
 Director of Environment & Culture  
 020 8937 5002  
 richard.saunders@brent.gov.uk

Michael Read  
 Assistant Director (Policy & Regulation)  
 020 8937 5302  
 michael.read@brent.gov.uk