

 Brent	Cabinet 8 February 2021
	Report from the Strategic Director of Regeneration & Environment
Meanwhile Use Strategy & Action Plan	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	N/A
No. of Appendices:	Two Appendix 1: Meanwhile Use Strategy Appendix 2: Equalities Analysis
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Alice Lester, Operational Director, Regeneration, Growth & Employment Tel: 020 8937 6441 Alice.Lester@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Jonathan Kay, Head of Regeneration Tel: 020 8937 2348 Jonathan.Kay@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Meghan Grant, Regeneration Researcher Tel: 020 8937 3472 Meghan.Grant@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet the Meanwhile Use Strategy & Action Plan, for approval prior to publication on the Council's website, dissemination of the same to key partners and stakeholders, and implementation.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To approve the Meanwhile Use Strategy & Action Plan.

3.0 Detail

3.1 This report and the proposed Meanwhile Use Strategy & Action Plan seek to deliver outcomes that accord with the following corporate priorities:

- Borough Plan 2019-2023: by promoting and investing in meanwhile uses to reoccupy and test new uses in vacant shops to rejuvenate our town centres, reverse decline, support diversification, employment and enterprise, and thereby deliver “a future built for everyone, and an economy fit for all”.
- Black Community Action Plan 2020: meanwhile uses provide opportunities which can support and deliver Workstream 3 “Developing community spaces – run and managed by local communities” and Workstream 5 “Support for employment and enterprise”.
- Poverty Commission 2020: meanwhile uses are a clear opportunity to regenerate declining high streets post COVID-19, reoccupying vacant shop units to test new uses and thereby support job creation, affordable workspace, and places for community hubs, while enhancing the local environment, in line with Recommendation 13.

3.2 Brent Council has a track record of delivering meanwhile uses in vacant properties and promotes meanwhile uses in its adopted Local Plan, Inclusive Growth Strategy and Affordable Workspace Strategy. However, the Council lacks a dedicated meanwhile use strategy and guidance. Following a report to Members last year, officers have now finalised a Brent Meanwhile Use Strategy and Action Plan (MUS). The MUS explains the policy context for meanwhile uses, reviews meanwhile uses in practice, and sets out an Action Plan to realise their full potential across the borough.

3.3 Meanwhile uses take multiple forms and deliver against a variety of regeneration objectives. They are defined as an occupation of vacant or underutilised premises, sites or spaces, during a period until a landlord secures a new lease, before redevelopment, or in a long term vacant space¹. In September 2020, there were 1,124 vacant commercial units across the borough, and town centre vacancies had increased from 290 units to 302 units over the previous 6 months.² With increasing vacancies on the high street and continuing economic uncertainty, meanwhile uses can play a number of important roles. For local authorities, they are opportunities for placemaking, enterprise, business innovation and jobs, creative expression and community development. For landlords, they can provide security, reduce costs and offer options to test out new uses. For providers and occupiers, they accommodate flexible, low-cost space for start-ups, microbusinesses, SMEs and community groups.

3.4 Business reels from the shock of the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown, with the UK seeking recovery from the deepest recession since records began³. Early estimates prior to government intervention considered a fifth of small businesses to be at high risk⁴ and increased business closures together with a slowdown in new start-ups have been reported⁵. Consumer spending is down, and with a further wave of coronavirus and renewed government restrictions, the state of the high street becomes

¹ Palaiologou, G. (2019) Meanwhile Space: 10 Years in Practice

² NNDR Data (March and September 2020)

³ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/coronavirus-largest-recession-on-record-but-signs-of-recovery/>

⁴ <https://www.thecfn.org.uk/18-of-all-smes-are-set-to-collapse-within-the-next-4-weeks-unless-the-government-steps-in-a-team-of-leading-industry-professionals-are-ready-to-launch-such-a-rescue-plan/>

⁵ <https://www.ft.com/content/5d198135-b38f-4512-b611-9f017f76929d>

increasingly precarious. Retail and hospitality services – both vital to Brent’s economy – are viewed as sectors least resilient to recession, and many commercial premises that have shut down will not reopen.

3.5 National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) data indicates vacancies in town centres are on the rise. There is concern that coronavirus will accelerate decay in already struggling town centres, leading to a spiral of decline which negatively impacts the local economy, environment and community. The table below outlines changes in vacancy levels in Brent’s 9 Priority Town Centres between March and September 2020. Review of NNDR data for November 2020 indicates changes in town centre office vacancy levels in Wembley and The Hyde, and Town Centre Managers observe that some properties listed as vacant in Willesden Green and Neasden are occupied.⁶

NNDR Vacancies	March 2020	September 2020	% Increase
Wembley	113	113	0
Ealing Road	4	10	150
Kilburn High Road	19	24	26
Harlesden	31	31	0
Neasden	11	8	-27
Willesden	11	15	36
Church End	9	10	11
The Hyde	10	10	0
Burnt Oak	3	3	0

3.6 Government reforms of the planning use class order and new permitted development rights have been introduced with the stated intention to provide flexibility and support the recovery and re-imagination of high streets and towns. Whilst these changes should allow more flexibility between uses, potential unintended consequences include a rise in out of town retail and slum housing on the high street. Meanwhile uses have the potential to benefit from these new freedoms in their efforts to allow places to experiment and test new uses, but local authorities have a leadership and place making role in setting and shaping a vision for positive change, then promoting, facilitating and working with partners to make it happen.

Proposed Action Plan

3.7 The MUS proposes 10 actions to deliver new meanwhile uses across the borough, and will require a joined up approach, building new and better relations between Council departments, landowners, meanwhile providers and local communities

Action 1: Establish Meanwhile Provider guidance and a preferred provider list

Action 2: Raise awareness and promote meanwhile uses to owners of vacant land and property, landlords, developers, start-ups, micro and SME businesses, business associations, ward members, town teams and community groups across the borough

Action 3: Consider a discretionary business rates relief for meanwhile uses

⁶ NNDR Data (March, September and November 2020)

Action 4: Coordinate Town Centre Manager (TCM) networks and intelligence, together with National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) data, to target meanwhile uses in vacant properties in priority town centres and on the high street.

Action 5: Implement draft Local Plan policy for robust meanwhile use feasibility studies for phased major developments. Proactively engage with owners of vacant development sites to facilitate/realise meanwhile uses to test out commercial uses.

Action 6: Mitigate the risks of meanwhile use through effective pre and post project planning.

Action 7: Inform and direct meanwhile use projects into vacant Council assets and developments.

Action 8: Create/facilitate meanwhile projects that focus on creative, enterprise and workspace uses to fill vacant properties in priority town centres and on the high street.

Action 9: Work with Council licencing to activate temporary pop ups and spaces in town centres and high streets (in private and Council owned assets).

Action 10: Explore options for strategic area based partnerships where providers are selected to take on multiple units on a sub-borough or borough wide basis.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The MUS has been produced from within existing budgets and no additional budget or approvals are sought for delivery at this time.
- 4.2 Some actions within the MUS will have financial implications and in some cases costs. These will be examined on a case by case basis and the relevant approvals sought where required and prior to implementation.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have set up guidance for meanwhile use by providing industry standard leases. Information can be obtained by prospective landlords on contracted out leases, obtaining the necessary consents for letting the premises, service charge and other payments.
- 5.2 The GLA identified that there is a need for greater flexibility in the planning system to support meanwhile uses that last more than 28 days, Accordingly, MHCLG has updated its planning practical guidance detailing when planning permission for change of use is required. The update has aligned the guidance with changes to the Use Classes Order from 1 September 2020, which includes new and amended paragraphs concerning use classes, the change of use, and national permitted development rights.
- 5.3 The Guidance highlights the Commercial, Business and Service use class (E) includes a broad and diverse range of uses. The use class allows for a mix of uses which recognises that a building may be in several different uses concurrently or be used for different uses at different times of the day. The class incorporates the whole of the previous shops (A1) (apart from those that now fall within scope of the F2 Local Community use class), financial and professional services (A2), restaurant and cafes (A3) and business (B1 including offices) use classes, and uses such as nurseries, health centres and gyms (previously in classes D1 non-residential institutions, and D2 assembly and leisure) and it seeks to provide for new uses which may emerge and are suitable for a town centre area.

5.4 Brent through its Local Plan supports flexibility on use to maintain commercial premises at ground floor level particularly for meanwhile use.

6.0 Equalities Implications

6.1 Equality Analysis has been undertaken to accompany and inform the MUS, which has included identifying opportunities to:

- 1) Advance equality of opportunity through targeting actions to improve access to work or community space for economically disadvantaged groups, such as groups observed to have higher unemployment
- 2) Overcome potential barriers to provision of disabled access when activating meanwhile use spaces in older buildings; and
- 3) Establish robust monitoring of membership schemes to ensure projects are and continue reflect Brent's population and local community, and explore avenues for further involvement for any under-represented groups.

Equalities analysis is appended to this report.

Report sign off:

Alan Lunt

Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment.