

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 6 May 2011	Meeting Name: Regeneration and Leisure Scrutiny Committee
Report title:		Brixton Town Centre study visit	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		ALL	
From:		Julie Timbrell ; project manager, Scrutiny.	

Introduction

- 1.1 Southwark members and officers visited Brixton Town Centre for a site visit on 4 April 2011.
- 1.2 They met the Deputy Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Town Centres, the Brixton Town Centre Director and the Planning Policy Officer; who did the master planning. The visit started with an overview of the Brixton master plan and the Town Centre management programme and ended with a walk about of the key sites.

Brixton master plan

- 2.1 The Brixton master plan was initiated because of concerns that it could perform much better as a town centre:
 - It has below average in areas such as retail and leisure turnover for a major town centre
 - Physical difficulties such as the railway lines have limited regeneration in Brixton and this has led to a general physical decline
 - There were problems with crime, grime and high levels of unemployment
 - Traffic congestion was a problem and there was an opportunity to develop Windrush square, widen pavements and change the gyratory system
 - A new Labour administration instituted area based strategies
- 2.2 The master plan process started with visioning workshops from summer 2007. It was reported that local people were keen to have their say and were very passionate about Brixton. The consultation process included questionnaires, workshop, road show events, discussion groups, a schools activity programme, vox pops and in-depth interviews at market stalls.

- 2.3 There were regular members briefing for ward members and the cabinet approved the master plan in July 2009.
- 2.4 Two key themes emerging from consultation - sustainability and retaining the unique character of Brixton. The community was concerned about the potential for 'gentrification' and a negative impact on existing businesses. Densification and overcrowding were also identified as issues, as well as potential loss of green space. Improving the quality of life for local people was identified as important.

General approach

- 3.1 Sites with potential for development were identified, a retail ring was established and there was an emphasis on keeping momentum with early improvement to the public realm and the use of public art. Town Centre management was established.

Town Centre Management

- 4.1 The Town Centre Management took a strategic approach.
- 4.2 The physical improvement and public arts programme have kept up momentum.



- 4.3 There was a major emphasis on perceptual change around community safety by focusing on the substantive issues. This was done by establishing close relationships with the large existing local police team and encouraging a robust approach to low level crime, drug dealing and street robbery, all of which were problems. There was a major crack down on drug dealing in central Brixton targeting wholesale drug dealers and street dealing. Officers reported that there has been significant success in reducing visible drug dealing in central Brixton. There has also been a focus on reducing street drinking by introducing an alcohol dispersal zone and changing the physical space used by street drinkers. This has also resulted in reducing crimes such as shop lifting.
- 4.4 A new public space has been created ; Windrush square, and this has had a very significant positive impact. The public space dynamic has changed; street drinkers no longer dominate the area and the new public space been added to by the Ritzy opening a cafe facing the

pavement. New buildings are planning their frontage on the green space. The changes have been funded through TfL investment. The new transport interchange has enabled safer, clearer routes through the town centre and better routes between public transport points.



- 4.5 There has been an emphasis on supporting and improving the covered market and its business units – this space is not owned by the Council. The focus has been on small business support, and this has meant helping traders to improve their business practices and assistance in resolving outstanding issues. Further improvements to Brixton's streets and markets are planned, with an emphasis on celebrating their unique character.
- 4.6 The programme has sought to bring residential properties back to the town centre by reviving upper floors of vacant buildings. The plan is aiming to increase affordable residential housing further.
- 4.7 There has been some interest from big retail business, including a MAC concession and a new H & M, but not a huge shift. Businesses reported that having town centre management improved communication, as there was one clear point of contact.
- 4.8 Network Rail development sites are planned for regeneration, particularly a viaduct site which offers a challenging, but potentially dramatic, venue for a cultural, retail or residential use. The East London Line will pass through Brixton; however it will cost £50 million to build a station because of the differences in level between track and station. Officers reported that the problem is finding the right person to talk to at Network Rail and understanding that they are economically driven.