

Meeting Name:	Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission
Date:	26 September 2024
Report title:	Town Centre Action Plans
Ward(s) or groups affected:	Rotherhithe, Surrey Docks, Peckham, Rye Lane, Nunhead and Queens Road, South Bermondsey, North Bermondsey, North Walworth, Faraday, Newington, St George's, Chaucer, St Giles, Camberwell Green
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	N/A
From:	Cllr John Batteson, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Jobs and Business

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission note the contents of this report setting out the council's approach to promoting thriving high streets, including the development of town centre action plans.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. This report responds to the request of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission for the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Jobs and Business to provide an overview of the town centre action plans.
3. This paper sets out the council's approach to the development of town centre action plans and sets out key elements of the programme going forward, including broadening engagement with communities and businesses, fostering town centre networks, and ensuring ongoing alignment with emerging neighbourhood plans.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Town Centre Action Plans

4. The council delivery plan includes the commitment to deliver thriving high streets, investing in our town centres and delivering major improvements. The town centres identified in the council delivery plan (CDP) as areas of specific focus for a town centre action plan are:
 - Peckham

- Camberwell
 - Elephant and Castle / Walworth Rd
 - Canada Water
 - Bermondsey
5. To support delivery of the CDP commitments, detailed action plans have already been developed for each town centre. Each action plan brings together the whole range of existing and proposed activity that takes place across each town centre. These action plans have been informed by town centre walkabouts and business conversations that have taken place with the lead cabinet member and seek to respond to stakeholder concerns. A whole range of council services have also informed the development of the action plans including Environmental Services, Planning, Sustainable Growth, Culture, Transport, Public Health and Local Economy.
 6. While delivery responsibility remains with each service area, each town centre has a dedicated lead officer who has coordination responsibility of the action plan and secures regular updates every quarter. The lead officer is the single point of contact for their respective town centre, although they will work closely with all teams involved with the delivery of the action plan. The Cabinet Member and a Director level senior officer group for town centres are kept abreast of key points of progress or concerns.
 7. It is recognised that while existing town centre action plans are a helpful repository of all town centre activity, they are internally focused and are not easily accessible to communities and businesses. To facilitate community and business engagement, external-facing versions of the action plans are being developed. Example public-facing action plans have already been prepared for [Camberwell](#) and [Peckham](#).
 8. The external action plans will align with and complement the neighbourhoods work. Whilst the community plans aim to cover all aspects of a neighbourhood such as public health, community safety, street cleanliness, transport and housing; the town centre action plans will sit alongside the community plans as a more focused, complementary document which is targeted specifically towards local businesses, with a focus on issues affecting our high streets and town centres. They will be updated regularly and can be used as a tool to engage businesses specifically on the development and health of their high street.

Supporting Town Centre Networks

9. Work has been ongoing across the town centres to develop active business led town centre networks. To support this work, a number of member led visits and business engagement events have taken place across our town centres.
10. The business engagement events have been useful for the development of a good relationship between the council and the business community, while also providing opportunities to promote initiatives such as the Thriving High Streets Fund, the Southwark Climate Collective and the Southwark Pioneers Fund.
11. The council has helped build capacity for the SE5 Forum which is a local

business network operating in Camberwell. The forum received funding from the Thriving High Streets Fund (THSF) to offer support to local businesses, promote the local business community of Camberwell and build the forum's capacity.

12. The Peckham Business Forum aims to champion the business community in Peckham. The establishment of the forum was facilitated by Tree Shepherd who were funded by the GLA's Highstreets For All Fund. This funding was secured by the council in collaboration with Mountview to support delivery of the forum which was launched in February 2024.
13. The Elephant and Castle Business Forum established in 2021 with the aim of fostering collaboration between local businesses. In October 2023 the forum commissioned a feasibility study to assess the appetite for a Business Improvement District (BID). Following the report, the forum is moving in the direction of forming a BID, however this is not likely to happen until 2025 at the earliest. The council is supporting by attending meetings, continuing engagement and staying abreast of developments.
14. The Canada Water Business Advisory Group has been established to support local businesses affected by the Canada Water development, either due to disruption or due to needing to relocate. The group acts as an advisory and information sharing body to ensure that the opportunities from the development are maximised.

Thriving High Streets Fund

15. The THSF was launched in response to the CDP commitment to promote thriving high streets, while supporting our town centres to adapt to a range of challenging economic factors such as the recovery from the pandemic and cost of living crisis.
16. The projects aimed to attract more people to Southwark's high streets and town centres, and to increase local spend. Two rounds of the THSF have been awarded, with grants of up to £25,000 awarded to businesses and voluntary sector groups. Funded through UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), a total of £484,703 has been awarded to 21 organisations in town centres and high streets across the borough. Details of the awards can be found in Appendix 1.
17. All funding is fully committed and additional funding will need to be secured if further grants are to be awarded. We are exploring alternative funding sources such as possible future rounds of UKSPF.

Next Steps

18. The action plans provide a good foundation for our work on town centres and will continue to be refined and updated in consultation with our key stakeholders. These will continue to align with and support the emerging neighbourhoods approach currently under development. The external versions of the action plans will provide a launchpad for additional community and business engagement.

19. We will build on the work supporting the development of town centre networks by reviewing and further developing business engagement activity. We will benchmark good practice from other local authorities on supporting local highstreets with the aim of establishing a clear set of objectives and outcomes.
20. We will review the new Government's approach to supporting high streets and small businesses to stay abreast of any policy developments or funding opportunities. This includes securing funding for further rounds of the THSF, possibly through an extension of UKSPF.
21. Work will continue to align with the emerging neighbourhoods approach to ensure town centre action plans and the broader town centres programme continues to complement and support the work on neighbourhoods.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Southwark Economic Strategy 2023-30	Planning and Growth, 160 Tooley Street	Danny Edwards 020 7525 5105

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Thriving High Street Fund Awards Rounds 1 and 2

AUDIT TRAIL

This section must be included in all reports.

Lead Officer	Danny Edwards, Head of Economy	
Report Author	Libby Dunstan, Principal Strategy Officer	
Version	Final	
Dated	17/09/2024	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director, Finance	No	No
List other officers here	N/A	N/A
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	17/09/2024	

Note: Consultation with other officers

If you have not consulted, or sought comments from the Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and assurance or the Strategic Director of Finance, you must state this in the audit trail.