

Item No. 8.	Classification: Open	Date: 28 January 2013	Meeting name: Cabinet
Report title:		Cabinet Members Response to Deputation from the Southwark Association of Street Traders (SAST) and the Walworth Town Team	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		East Walworth, Faraday, Newington	
Cabinet members		Councillor Victoria Mills, Communities and Economic Wellbeing; Councillor Barrie Hargrove, Transport, Environment and Recycling; Councillor Fiona Colley, Regeneration and Corporate Strategy Councillor Richard Livingstone, Finance, Resources and Community Safety	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR VICTORIA MILLS, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMIC WELLBEING

The council is committed to supporting all our high streets including the Walworth Road and the surrounding areas. We want Walworth to be a great place to visit, to have thriving shops, a busy market and for the area to offer a good mix of shopping and services to local residents.

We welcomed the deputation from the Southwark Association of Street Traders (SAST) and the Walworth Town Team because we know that improving our high streets is about working in partnership with businesses. By using their knowledge and expertise of an area and the leadership they have within their local communities, we know we can together find the solutions to bring real change across our borough.

The Council's relationship with businesses needs to be an open and honest and sometimes we need to be a critical friend. In our response to the deputation it is only right that we challenge the presumption that free or cheap and readily available parking is the key to the success of areas like Walworth. Focusing on one issue like changing parking, especially in an area that is well served by public transport and where most people walk to the shops, is very unlikely in itself to make a town centre more attractive. Working with local businesses we want to see a good mix of shops, market stalls and services and a quality environment as we know these are some of the most important factors for attracting shoppers to an area. We must also support local businesses to make the most of the regeneration that is happening, which will generate huge numbers of potential new customers.

The Town Centre Growth Fund (the 'High Street Challenge') provides an immediate opportunity to build on the events and promotions undertaken by the Walworth Town Team and funded through the Council's Community Restoration Fund. The CRF work saw the council invest the sizeable amount of £184,000 in Walworth. This helped to support a range of activities including direct support for the East Street market traders and local events to increase the number of people coming to the area, as well as allowing local young people to get valuable business experience through running a pop up shop. We look forward to seeing the Town Team's ideas to revitalise Walworth's shopping areas and to build on the successes of the CRF.

The regeneration of the Elephant and Castle and Walworth areas will bring unprecedented opportunities to businesses in these areas but it will also bring challenges. We want to make sure that traders and the Council are ready to respond to these changes in the most coordinated way. The council is in the process of developing a 'vitality, viability and vulnerability' study for the area. This will assess the underlying challenges for the Walworth Road and any barriers to growth. Most importantly, it is our intention to work closely with local residents and the business community and to make sure that they are central to our planning for the future.

RECOMMENDATION

That the cabinet

1. Note the response to the six point action plan proposed by a deputation of the Southwark Association of Street Traders (SAST) and the Walworth Town Team.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. A deputation from SAST and the Walworth Town Team addressed the cabinet on 19 November 2013 to outline issues relating to Walworth town centre, including East Street Market and adjoining streets.
3. The deputation asked cabinet to consider urgent action to address the following six points:
 1. Parking - more parking to be made available and the introduction of lower flexible parking charges
 2. Business rate reductions
 3. Events and promotions to increase footfall
 4. Business support
 5. Cleaner, Greener, Safer Walworth (refuse from commercial rubbish bins)
 6. Better co-ordination: Asking Southwark council to work better with the whole community in Walworth to ensure sustainable local regeneration.
4. It was agreed that a report on the issues raised by the deputation be received at a future cabinet meeting. This report is now being presented to cabinet.
5. Also and within a wider context, earlier this year the Walworth Society asked the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to carry out a scrutiny review of the trading environment on the Walworth Road. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report to cabinet in September which set out nine recommendations for cabinet to consider. A response to these recommendations, some of which reflect similar issues to those raised by the deputation, was agreed by cabinet in December. This report is listed as a background document and is available to view on the council's web site on the link provided.
6. Officers have reviewed the six point action plan proposed by the Walworth Town Team and attached is a response to each area.

1: Parking

More parking to be made available and the introduction of lower flexible parking charges during the weekdays

7. On-street parking is currently free at weekends. The Stead Street car park previously provided 200 off-street parking spaces which were also free at weekends. However its closure on 7 January 2014 removed off-street parking provision in the area.
8. The Stead Street car park has been identified for redevelopment since 2004. The site is to be redeveloped to provide 140 residential units 85 of which are for social rent and these will be made available to former Heygate residents in the first instance. In the long-term this regeneration of Walworth will provide a huge opportunity for traders to increase footfall in the shopping areas.
9. Stead Street car park was not closed until after Christmas in direct response to requests from local traders. Free parking was also provided in the period up to Christmas on 23 and 24 of December. However evidence suggests that parking is not a significant barrier to local economic growth.
10. The transport assessment submitted as part of the Stead Street planning application included a car parking study which assessed the extent to which existing on street parking bays could accommodate vehicles displaced from the car park as a consequence of its redevelopment.
11. The report concluded that during the week when the Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) are in operation [Mon-Fri] displaced car parking could be accommodated within the spare capacity on local streets. During the weekend when the CPZ is not operating the study concluded that there was enough capacity to accommodate increased demand
12. Increasing the amount of car parking for shoppers will always be a challenge and may not be practical in a dense urban environment where there is competing demand for land use, particularly for new homes.
13. The future prosperity of the Walworth shopping centre is to a high degree dependent on it being able to attract customers from a relatively local catchment area the vast majority of whom will continue to access the centre by foot, public transport or bike.
14. A recent survey was carried out in regards to 'Visiting and Shopping in East Street Market' Research for Action November 2013'. This illustrated that only 12% of shoppers travelled by car to shop at East Street Market. Of the remainder walking was most popular (40%), then bus (38%) followed by other public transport (6%) and then cycling and other (4%).
15. The only market day when significant numbers of shoppers travel to the market by car is Sunday and the report highlights that there is also a different mix of shoppers on that day from the other market days. However, this does not appear to lead to either increased footfall or spend.
16. During the survey shoppers were asked what could improve East Street Market and parking was not identified as the most important factor. Most of those surveyed felt that better quality food and drink, cleaner streets and pavements

and cheaper prices across the market were important factors. Cheaper parking and ease of parking rated low in the survey responses.

17. The evidence from shoppers suggests that lower parking tariffs or even free parking are not essential to the economic viability of this area, and that parking is only one variable and many other factors are more dominant, although the report acknowledged that some shop keepers thought otherwise.
18. The council has clear policies to reduce the number of car journeys and increase walking, cycling and public transport. Whilst some people may need to drive to the area, the impact of increased traffic and congestion needs to also be carefully considered. The area is well served with 20 bus routes of which 11 pass through the Walworth Road and nine which serve the other end of East Street on the Old Kent Road; as well as the Elephant and Castle underground and over ground lines.
19. The regeneration of the Walworth area will result in a significant increase in the residential population and this will generate significant numbers of new potential customers. Business support should in part be directed towards helping businesses take advantage of this opportunity.

2: Business Rate Reductions

There is a need to recognise Walworth as a special case for tapered business rate relief.

20. There is an opportunity to consider how recent changes to business rates as announced in the Autumn Statement could be used as a constructive policy tool to potentially deliver social and economic value.
21. Issues associated with the use of business rates to influence high street business use are addressed under recommendation 1(ii) of the *Cabinet Members Response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommendations Report* (paragraphs 11-15).

3: Events and promotions

A continuation of the promotion of the area to increase footfall.

22. Business Extra was awarded £100,000 from the Community Restoration Fund in August 2012, to establish a business network in Walworth, develop and market a theme and brand for the area, and improve East Street Market. The Walworth Town Team was established using this fund. £45,000 of the funding was allocated to supporting marketing and events in the area and 13 themed and cultural events were run including a Christmas Fair, Easter Procession, Charlie Chaplin Festival and Food Festival. A further £84,000 was awarded to the Creation Trust to run a pop up shop in the area
23. The proposed Town Centres Growth Fund (the 'High Street Challenge') will provide an opportunity for local businesses to bid into funding to undertake initiatives that promote local economic vitality and increase the number of shoppers coming into the Walworth area. Details of the Town Centre Growth Fund are also addressed under recommendation 4 of the *Cabinet Members Response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommendations Report* (paragraphs 24-27).

24. Details of the fund and a 'call for projects' will be made in February 2014. It is intended that the fund will be flexible enough to ensure opportunities for business-led groups and interested organisations to effectively address problems and explore solutions specific to their own town centres and high streets.

4: Business support

Continuing business support for the local small businesses and market traders.

25. The Town Centres Growth Fund referenced above is also targeted towards specific business support initiatives in local areas like the Walworth Road. In addition, the council has commissioned, or is in the process of commissioning, other business support activity available to small and medium sized enterprises from across the borough. These include:
- Supply Southwark which supports Southwark businesses to tender for public and private sector contracts
 - Investment Readiness which will support new start businesses and existing SME's to access sources of business investment. With delivery to commence in March, the initiative will help start-up and existing businesses to access a range of finance from start up loans to equity investors, and everything in between including bank finance and crowd-funding.

5: Cleaner, Greener Safer Walworth

More support for local action to clean the dirty [pavements, green the streets, screen unsightly commercial rubbish bins and move them off the main roads.

26. The survey referred to in paragraph 14 supports the importance of a cleaner Walworth, which 19% of shoppers cited as being something that needed to be improved. The council has recently increased the overnight cleaning in the area with funds to improve the town centres and have seen real improvement, but this remains a challenge for our street cleaning team because of the amounts of litter and waste generated in the area.
27. Although pavement jet washing has never been included in the overall street cleaning specification, since the spring of 2013 we have undertaken a quarterly jet-wash of the pavements along the main retail areas of Walworth Road to try to deal with the staining on the pavement surfacing.
28. The issue of unsightly trade waste bins is one that blights many retail areas but simply removing them will have an impact on local businesses as they require a place to store their trade waste prior to collection. The screening of the waste bins may be a more practical solution to this problem, subject to resource availability.
29. Business Extra has been awarded £17,000 CGS (Capital and Revenue Grant) in 2013/14 for street cleaning and bin screening on the Walworth Road. This money has not yet been spent. An application for further CGS funding for 2014/15 (amounting to £56,000) has been received. Local community councillors are expected to announce their decision on 1 February 2014.

6: Better coordination

Southwark Council to work with the whole community in Walworth to ensure sustainable local regeneration in the area that recognises, supports and values local people and businesses and the rich cultural heritage of the area.

30. The council is committed to ensuring the regeneration of the area benefits the local community. Plans are progressing well across the area and the council will continue to engage with local communities including businesses. The council will also shortly commence the process of community consultation on the New Southwark Plan, which has as its focus town centres and high streets. Local people and businesses in the Walworth Road area will be a key consultee in this process. The preparation of the New Southwark Plan will provide an opportunity to review planning policies relating to retail and town centres, and their contribution to securing a balanced mix of uses and the viability of town centres.
31. The council has already taken steps to strengthen its position through the implementation of Article 4 Directions which remove “permitted development” rights for changes of use to A2 class uses (financial and professional services which include betting shops and pay-day loan shops) from other retail uses, ensuring that such changes require planning permission.
32. The council intends to commission a study to explore the longer term viability of the Walworth Road and assess underlying challenges and how these might be addressed in a coordinated way. Extensive consultation with local residents and the business community, and the impact of wider regeneration initiatives, will be central to this study. This is also addressed under recommendation 7 of the *Cabinet Members Response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommendations Report* (paragraphs 34-35).

Community impact statement

33. The Town Centre Growth Fund (‘the High Street Challenge’) will be open to a wide variety of individuals and organisations representing town centres and high streets from across Southwark. These will include: business networks; groups from the arts or creative sectors; educational establishments such as schools, colleges and universities; voluntary sector, community or residents groups; and individual businesses if supported by other local businesses. Promoting diversity in Southwark’s town centres and encouraging wider community participation will be key themes to the fund.

Financial implications

34. The report makes reference to the Town Centre Growth Fund, which is a £600,000 fund to be drawn from the Business Support Fund and from the £100,000 High Street Innovation Fund.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Legal Services

35. The report requests that the cabinet notes the response prepared by officers in relation to an action plan proposed by a deputation of the Walworth Town Team.

36. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 confers upon local authorities a general power of competence, which allows them to do anything that an individual can do that is not specifically prohibited. This general power provides the council with more freedom to work with others in new ways to drive down costs and to do creative and innovative things to meet the needs of the local community.
37. The Public Sector Equality Duty set out under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the council to have “due regard” to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, as part of the process of decision-making. This duty must be complied with before and at the time that a particular policy is under consideration or a decision is taken. The duty is a continuing duty and the council must also have due regard to its aims when the policy or decision is being implemented or reviewed.
38. Advice should be sought from the Director of Legal Services in connection with any specific legal issues arising from the response to the action plan and any proposals which may be developed

Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services

39. The financial implications in paragraph 34 above have been noted. The full financial impact of any action arising from the response outlined in this report will be quantified and set out in a separate report if necessary. However, it is observed that funding may be available from the Town Centre Growth Fund, which contains £600k and that an additional CGS capital and revenue grant of £17k for street cleaning on Walworth Road has been received for 2013/14, with a potential further £56k available for 2014/15.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Cabinet Members Response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommendations Report (10 December 2013 - Item 18)	Southwark Website	Everton Roberts 020 7525 7221
Link http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=302&MId=4553&Ver=4		
Understanding Visiting & Shopping in East Street Market Report (November 2013). Item 8		
Link http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=302&MId=4554&Ver=4		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
	None

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Members	Councillor Victoria Mills, Communities and Economic Wellbeing Councillor Barrie Hargrove, Transport, Environment and Recycling Councillor Fiona Colley, Regeneration and Corporate Strategy Councillor Richard Livingstone, Finance, Resources and Community Safety	
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CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments sought	Comments included
Director of Legal Services	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Members	Yes	Yes
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