



BROMLEY CIVIC CENTRE, STOCKWELL CLOSE, BROMLEY BRI 3UH

TELEPHONE: 020 8464 3333

CONTACT: Jo Partridge
Joanne.Partridge@bromley.gov.uk

DIRECT LINE: 020 8461 7694

FAX: 020 8290 0608

DATE: 20 January 2021

To: Members of the
BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Councillor Peter Morgan (Chairman)	London Borough of Bromley
Katy Woolcott (Vice-Chairman)	London Biggin Hill Airport
Carol Arnfield	LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education
Sharon Baldwin	Orpington 1 st BID Company
Robert Buckley	LBB Head of Renewal
Zoe Carr	Beckenham Together BID Company & Penge SE20 BID Company
Judith Denyer	Prospects
Christopher Evans	Community Links Bromley
Frances Forrest	Your Bromley BID Company
Dave Freeborn	Proctors
Mark Haynes	The Glades
Alex Henderson	Henderson Biomedical
Lesley Holland	LBB Operations Manager, Bromley Education Business Partnership
Michael Humphries	Handelsbanken
Mike Lewis	Michael Rogers LLP
Marg Mayne	Mytime Active
Helen McIntosh FCIPR	South East London Chamber of Commerce
Lorraine McQuillan	LBB Town Centres & BID Development Manager
Adesina Okuboyejo	Education and Skills Funding Agency - National Apprenticeships Service
Sam Parrett	London South East Colleges
Melanie Ross	Barclays Bank PLC
Chandra Sharma	Federation of Small Businesses
Lee Thomas	Fairlight Group
Liz Waghorn	Jobcentre Plus

A meeting of the Bromley Economic Partnership will be held on **TUESDAY 26
JANUARY 2021 AT 3.00 PM** *

PLEASE NOTE: This is a 'virtual meeting' and members of the press and public can see and hear the Partnership by visiting the following page on the Council's website:

<https://www.bromley.gov.uk/councilmeetingslive>

Live streaming will commence shortly before the meeting starts.

PLEASE NOTE STARTING TIME

*Copies of the documents referred to below can be obtained from
<http://cbs.bromley.gov.uk/>*

A G E N D A

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3RD NOVEMBER 2020 AND MATTERS ARISING (Pages 1 - 14)

3 BUSINESS GRANTS UPDATE

4 UPDATES ON MAIN PARTNERSHIP THEMES AND OTHER RELEVANT COUNCIL INITIATIVES:

a TOWN CENTRE RENEWAL UPDATE

b PLANNING POLICY UPDATE

5 PARTNER UPDATES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOINT WORKING

On this occasion, please could partners notify the clerk by emailing joanne.partridge@bromley.gov.uk if you wish to speak about something relevant to the group or a joint working opportunity.

Please note that any updates should be no longer than two minutes.

6 BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members of the partnership are requested to notify the clerk of any items to be discussed at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

8 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

4.00pm, Tuesday 20th April 2021

BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Minutes of the meeting held at 3.00 pm on 3 November 2020

Present:

Councillor Peter Morgan (Chairman)
Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport (Vice-Chairman)
Sharon Baldwin, Orpington 1st BID Company
Robert Buckley, LBB Head of Renewal
Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley
Mark Haynes, The Glades
Lesley Holland, LBB Operations Manager, Bromley Education
Business Partnership
Michael Humphries, Handelsbanken
Marg Mayne, Mytime Active
Helen McIntosh FCIPR, South East London Chamber of Commerce
Lorraine McQuillan, LBB Town Centres & BID Development Manager
Chandra Sharma, Federation of Small Businesses
Louise Wolsey, London South East Colleges

Also Present:

Councillor Yvonne Bear
Russell Clarke, Sundridge Investments Limited
John Coupland, South East London Business Network (SELBN)
Greg Davies, BNI London South East
Ben Johnson, LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy
Steve Lipscombe, Ronin Marketing
Paul Mellor, LBB Regeneration & Transformation Service
Reverend Agnita Oyawale, Bromley Town Centre Chaplain
Tina Powley, Nugent Shopping Centre
Councillor Michael Rutherford
Robert Sargent, Acorn Group
Caroline Tatchell, Splash Damage
Chris Travers, Orpington 1st BID Company
Lawrence Wilson, Business Doctors

1 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2020/21 municipal year.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Vanessa Allen, Carol Arnfield – LBB Head of Service for Early Years, School Standards and Adult Education, Zoe Carr – Beckenham Together BID Company and Penge SE20 BID

Company, Dave Freeborn – Proctors, Chris Glover – Churchill Theatre Bromley, David Marcelline – Stiles Harold Williams Partnership LLP and Lee Thomas – Fairlight Group.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14TH JANUARY 2020 AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2020 be agreed.

4 TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members considered the Terms of Reference and membership of the Bromley Economic Partnership.

Members were advised that some minor amendments had been made to the Terms of Reference, mainly relating to the names of organisations and their representatives.

RESOLVED that the revised Terms of Reference for the Bromley Economic Partnership be agreed.

5 UPDATES ON MAIN PARTNERSHIP THEMES AND OTHER RELEVANT COUNCIL INITIATIVES:

Members of the Partnership gave an update around progress across the main themes of the Partnership.

a TOWN CENTRE RENEWAL UPDATE

Robert Buckley, LBB Head of Renewal provided an update on Town Centre renewal across the Borough.

With regards to Bromley Town Centre, architects had now been appointed to design a small public realm scheme, to include features such as a performance area, covered seating area, water fountain and sculpture. The aim of the scheme was to make the town centre a destination that residents were encouraged to come in to, and interact with the new features. The designs were currently being drawn up and further information would be circulated relating to the online public consultation, which would start from 25th November 2020.
(ACTION: LBB Head of Renewal)

Mark Haynes, The Glades, noted that it was positive to hear that investment was being made into the infrastructure of the town centre, and enquired as to how the area would look and feel like when it was not being used, and if there was a programme of events for its use. The LBB Head of Renewal said that the intention was for the space to be used as flexibly as possible, and the

designs to be provided for public consultation would show the potential for a tiered seating area which could still be used even when no events were taking place. With reference to what the performance area would be used for, Members were advised that this would be an event driven space. The Council would engage with Your Bromley BID Company to create a series of events to attract people into the town centre. Outside this, it was a space that could be used by the community. The Chairman noted that the stage would effectively be the use of a part of the existing pavement.

In Orpington, work was being undertaken on the proposed redevelopment of The Walnuts Shopping Centre, for which some public consultation had already taken place. The developers, Areli Real Estate, were intending to submit a planning application in spring 2021, and included in the plans was the provision of housing; a new leisure centre; day centre; and public realm improvements – plus retail, work space and hospitality offers on the ground floor.

The team were also working on a Digital Infrastructure Strategy, which was centred around place-based infrastructure such as broadband cabling and the provision for wireless connections. A Memorandum of Understanding was being established with BT Openreach, who were the main provider of fibreoptic cables to businesses within the Borough – the aim was for full fibreoptic broadband to be provided to 85% of the Borough by 2023. Similar work was also being undertaken in relation to 4G and 5G networks.

An Economic Development Plan was being produced with the LBB Planning Policy team and the Borough's Small Business Champion, Councillor Yvonne Bear. This was to help support the economic wellbeing of the Borough, which would include looking at training; tackling unemployment; and enhancing business networks.

Members were advised that Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) would be produced for Bromley and Orpington. These documents supported existing planning policy, but provided more guidance for developers and the Council to bring forward the developments in these areas. Urban design consultants would shortly be appointed to assist the LBB Planning Policy team. The SPDs would be progressed into the next year, and it was noted that consultation events would take place as part of this work.

RESOLVED that the Town Centre Renewal update be noted.

b PLANNING POLICY UPDATE

Ben Johnson, LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy provided an update in relation to Planning Policy.

It was highlighted at the meeting of the Bromley Economic Partnership in January 2020, that information relating to the London Plan was still awaited. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised Members that this was still the case – it remained a Draft London Plan and there was currently

no indication as to when it would be adopted. Several policies would be affected by this, including how planning applications in the Borough were determined. The situation would be monitored, and further updates would be provided once it was adopted.

(ACTION: LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy)

Some substantial changes had been made at a national level, including significant changes to planning use classes. Several use classes, which categorised developments such as shops and financial institutions, had now been grouped into one use category. This allowed more flexibility for a change in use for different shop units across all areas and undercut some of the policies included in the Local Plan, which had been adopted the previous year. There had also been a number of new permitted development rights introduced nationally – allowing the building of up to an additional two storeys to create more homes in a building, and the demolition of purpose-built offices to be rebuilt for residential use. It was noted that this could affect the ability to balance commercial versus residential use in town centres and economic areas.

Last week, the Government concluded a consultation on some significant planning system reforms. The White Paper proposals would fundamentally change the current system, moving to a zoning-based system, which was seen on the Continent and in the United States. This would see every inch of the Borough mapped into particular zones, which would dictate what could be developed in that area. Going forward, different elements of the proposals would be consulted on individually, but the Government envisaged that they would be in place by 2024. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised Members that detailed reports on these changes had recently been taken to the Council's Development Control Committee, links to which were provided following the meeting:

Development Control Committee report, 14th July 2020, Upwards Extension Permitted Development Rights -

<https://cds.bromley.gov.uk/documents/s50082500/UPWARDS%20EXTENSION%20PERMITTED%20DEVELOPMENT%20RIGHTSPART%201%20REPORT%20TEMPLATE.pdf>

Development Control Committee report, 24th September 2020, PLANNING LEGISLATION UPDATE – PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS AND CHANGES TO THE USE CLASSES ORDER -

<https://cds.bromley.gov.uk/documents/s50083418/PLANNING%20LEGISLATION%20UPDATE%20-%20PERMITTED%20DEVELOPMENT%20RIGHTS%20AND%20CHANGES%20TO%20THE%20USE%20CLASSES%20ORDERP.pdf>

Development Control Committee report, 24th September 2020, 'PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE' CONSULTATION -

<https://cds.bromley.gov.uk/documents/s50083439/Planning%20For%20The%20Future%20Consultation.pdf>

Russell Clarke, Sundridge Investments Limited, noted that due to current circumstances, large numbers of people were now working from home, and asked if this had been factored into the development of upcoming policies. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised that this was at the “forefront of their minds”. The LBB Head of Renewal had mentioned the SPDs earlier in the meeting, and one of the original rationales behind these being developed was to allow for more flexibility in town centres. However, the change in use classes took elements “out of their hands” to a certain degree. Longer term, a Local Plan review would also look to address this.

RESOLVED that the Planning Policy update be noted.

c BUSINESS SUPPORT UPDATE

Lorraine McQuillan, LBB Town Centres and BID Development Manager provided an update relating to Business Support.

A Business Support Taskforce had been initiated in April 2020, as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This provided a partnership and business-led approach to supporting businesses through the immediate crisis, as well as the recovery of the local economy. Members of the taskforce included Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), the South East London Chamber of Commerce (SELCC), London South East Colleges (LSEC) and Councillor Yvonne Bear in her role as Small Business Champion. The group had been instrumental in guiding the Council’s response to the pandemic – including setting up a Business Support helpline; establishing a mailbox to provide assistance to businesses; increased frequency of the Council’s business e-bulletin; and the website updated to create an online business hub. Members of the taskforce had also been involved in the project to reopen the High Streets.

The Business Support Taskforce was currently developing a recovery and resilience plan to provide support to business over the short, medium and long term. The group would be meeting the following day, and would be discussing their involvement in the new lockdown measures, which would be implemented from Thursday 5th November 2020.

Councillor Yvonne Bear, Small Business Champion, advised Members that the group would be looking at the new financial support to be offered to businesses during the new period of lockdown. Further specific details were awaited, but as it was anticipated that there would be another round of grants, preparations were already being made to administer these and provide support to businesses as soon as possible.

The LBB Town Centres and BID Development Manager informed Members that a number of measures had been implemented in the Borough’s town centres to encourage social distancing. These included floor stickers, signage and barriers to widen the pavements, which were continually being reviewed and monitored. An application had been made to the ‘Reopening High Streets Safely Fund’ to finance these measures, plus further measures such as

providing business advice and replacing the red and white barriers with planters. In response to a question, the LBB Town Centres and BID Development Manager said that from this fund, the Government had allocated up to £295k which Councils could apply for. This funding was to be used to implement measures allowing people to shop safely in town centres.

John Coupland, South East London Business Network (SELBN), enquired if any statistics or information had been published regarding the grants that had been distributed. The LBB Town Centres and BID Development Manager emphasised that the final figures of the original business grant scheme were still being reconciled, but approximately £48m had been paid to 3,300 businesses in the Borough. There had also been a discretionary grant scheme, for which £2.275m had been distributed to 178 businesses. A news release relating to this had been published on the Council's website.

John Coupland, South East London Business Network (SELBN), further noted that feedback received in relation to the discretionary grant scheme was that the initial guidelines were not written with small businesses, such as freelancers, in mind. It was queried if this would be incorporated in new guidelines for any future grants. The LBB Town Centres and BID Development Manager highlighted that they were required to adhere to any guidance provided by the Government relating to the business grant scheme, and there were some elements of discretionary grants. Following the new lockdown, local grants would be issued, but guidance relating to these was still awaited. It was agreed that this could be discussed in further detail following the meeting.

(ACTION: LBB Head of Renewal / LBB Town Centres and BID Development Manager / John Coupland, South East London Business Network (SELBN))

The Chairman advised Members that following the initial lockdown, the Borough had carried out a number of checks on the businesses applying for grants. This had resulted in the grants being issued at a slower rate than some other Local Authorities, but had led to fewer fraudulent claims.

RESOLVED that the Business Support update be noted.

6 PARTNER UPDATES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOINT WORKING

Ms Caroline Tatchell, Splash Damage informed Members that staff had been substantially working from home over the past few months. Very recently, ten members of staff has returned to the office, along with the IT and Facilities teams – however due to the new lockdown measures, they would revert back to working from home again. Business overall was good, and it was noted that online gaming companies had been performing well throughout the pandemic.

Mr Greg Davies, BNI South East London advised that in relation to the local business community, they had around 200 members from across the Borough. There was a lot of insecurity following the recent announcement of a

second lockdown, however they were seeing businesses grow and actively look for new staff. It was noted that there was a Government-backed scheme to get people aged 16 to 24 years, and on Universal Credit, into workplaces, which enabled them to add support and experience to their CV's. A number of businesses were thriving, due to them benefitting from residents spending their money locally.

Ms Helen McIntosh, South East London Chamber of Commerce noted that the Chamber had been extremely busy since the first period of lockdown, and a number of breakfast meetings had been held – including one which had involved the Chairman, Councillor Peter Morgan, as guest speaker. For many years, the Chamber had been affiliated to the London Chamber of Commerce, and they were continuing to work with them closely. The Chamber community in London, and across the country, had really been strengthened. Ms McIntosh informed Members that as well as being the Chair of the South East London Chamber of Commerce, she had recently been appointed as Chair for the London Chamber of Commerce.

Mr John Coupland, South East London Business Network (SELBN) informed Members that the network did not charge any membership or joining fees. This was beneficial for members, but posed challenges in terms of justifying the work undertaken. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, SELBN had been one of the first networks to announce that face to face events would cease. In the spring an online proposition for sponsors was launched, however over the last few months he had been working on a voluntary basis to support the network. The latest campaign that the network was supporting was Small Business Saturday, for which an announcement had been made the previous day regarding a virtual bus tour, one of several events that would be taking place. Members were asked to get involved, by creating tweets and social media posts regarding the Small Business Saturday events.

Ms Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport (LBHA) said it had been a tough and challenging time for the aviation industry. A decision had been taken early on during the pandemic that LBHA would remain open. During the first month, large losses had been made, however during the subsequent month they slowly worked towards breaking even, and recorded a profit in the third month. It was noted that they would be way behind any budget projections for the current year, and in comparison to the previous year. LBHA had been looking after its staff, and all had remained employed – no redundancies had been made, but the furlough process had been utilised in certain sections of the organisation. The Bombardier hangar was progressing and on target, and planning conditions were in the process of being discharged for the hotel development, for which the planning application would soon be submitted to the Council.

Mr Chandra Sharma attended the meeting representing the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB). It was noted that updates had regularly been added to www.fsb.org.uk, providing advice and guidance to small businesses and the self-employed during the pandemic, and that the Kick-Start scheme had also been very successful. Over the last couple of months, seventeen events

had been held across Greater London and had been extremely popular. The events held in Orpington and Bromley had been completely sold out, which highlighted the need for good networking opportunities. Business confidence had been quite positive, but had taken a little bit of a knock since the new lockdown measures were announced. The FSB were also championing Small Business Saturday (www.smallbusinesssaturdayuk.com) which would be taking place on 5th December 2020, and Members were encouraged to support this event more than ever before. Other work being undertaken by the FSB included looking to open up further procurement opportunities for businesses, and it was hoped that the LBB Procurement Team would present an item at an event in January 2021. It was highlighted that the number of FSB members were increasing, particularly in Bromley and the Greater London region.

Ms Louise Wolsey, London South East Colleges (LSEC) advised Members that schools, colleges and universities would remain open during the second period of lockdown, and LSEC were continuing to deliver “business as usual” as best they could. Timetables had been modified to restrict the number of students on campus at any one time, with more theory and practical work was moving online. This had been in place since the summer, with a cycle of rotas for when curriculum areas were to be on campus, which was challenging and complex for colleagues. Broadly, things had been going well – only a handful of positive cases had been recorded, which highlighted that the COVID secure measures appeared to be working. In response to questions from the Chairman, Ms Wolsey advised that the College did not carry out any COVID-19 testing – only 10 test kits had been provided, so if students notified the College that they had symptoms, they were required to organise a test themselves. The College had a self-isolation policy, and an internal test and track process. With regards to enrolments, it had been a “bumper” year. The LSEC target for 16 to 18 year olds had been 3,700, and 4,500 had been recruited – however it was noted that some of these students may have since switched colleges, or not showed.

With regards to LSEC’s employer partners and strategic developments, these were continuing to be progressed as best they could in the current complex operating environment. Another area of work which they were hoping to hear about shortly was in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), for additional support to provide youth hubs. Things were generally positive, with good results having been recorded the previous academic year. The College was financially stable and was awaiting further funding announcements from the Government.

Ms Marg Mayne, Mytime Active emphasised that leisure facilities had been massively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The organisation had been pleased to reopen facilities over the summer period, and several protocols were put in place to ensure they were safe and secure. In total, only three cases of positive COVID-19 tests had been reported to Mytime Active through their track and trace system. This highlighted the successful use of social distancing measures, and strong health and hygiene factors within the gym and group exercise classes. Following the announcement of the second

national lockdown, the team were now in the process of closing the business and securing facilities. As the organisation was a social enterprise trading charity, it was entirely reliant on income from customers. They were working to look after their customers, by freezing all accounts and keep the class communities going. Several staff had volunteered to keep this ethos going through social media – encouraging clients to feel linked with other people, and to keep active. The vast majority of staff would again be furloughed, and a second round on redundancies was just being finalised – it was a very difficult and challenging time. The organisation was working to ensure that they managed their costs as tightly as possible during the months ahead. A lot of work had become digital, and they were in talks with the Local Authority as to how they could provide support to help navigate through the current crisis.

Mr Mark Haynes, The Glades advised Members that the business had gone through a particularly difficult time during the first lockdown period, with only four essential retailers remaining open. When the shopping centre reopened there had been a few casualties, including Joe's Kitchen and Carluccio's closing. Members of the team had also been directly affected by the virus, and when the signage had been installed for the reopening, a large heart had been included in the middle of the shopping centre in memory of 'Love for the Lost'.

Over the last few weeks, footfall in the shopping centre had slowly been building and there had been interest in some of the vacant shop units. A new shop, Crew Clothing Company, had recently opened and a local chef would soon be fitting out the former Carluccio's unit. However, following the announcement of the second lockdown, everything would be closed again, and around 40% of centre's staff would be furloughed. Only essential retailers Mark and Spencer, Superdrug, Boots and Holland and Barrett would remain open, plus a handful of businesses offering 'click and collect' and takeaway services. Work was underway with retailers for recruitment of Christmas staff, and they were looking forward to hopefully reopening the shopping centre on 2nd December 2020. It was noted that following the Government's announcement on Saturday, the shopping centre had experienced its busiest Sunday, Monday and Tuesday since the first lockdown period. Compared to the previous week, footfall had been up by 21% on Sunday, up 25% on Monday, and a similar increase had been seen that day too.

Ms Sharon Baldwin, Orpington 1st BID Company said that during the original lockdown period, businesses had been prepared to be as agile as possible, and spent significant sums of money to accommodate the Government requirements. A lot of support had been provided via the furlough scheme, which had been welcomed. Several businesses had diversified, operating in different ways, and modernising at a quicker pace. Since the reopening of the town centre, footfall had remained steady and confidence levels had been high. However, this had been hugely affected when the Borough moved into Tier 2 measures – there had been the first round of redundancies, and the cancellation of up to 80% of restaurant bookings had been experienced. Going into the second period of full lockdown the response from businesses had been more positive, as they were now aware of the possible ways

forward – such as ‘click and collect’ and takeaway services. The BID had been working with Gareth Bacon MP on lobbying the Government for more consistency in the approach to equalling the independent retailers with big businesses. Guidance for businesses was required in advance of them reopening on the 2nd December relating to which Tier they would be in – businesses needed to be able to prepare for closure and reopening. It was noted that more emphasis was needed on customers taking responsibility for the way they behaved in a “COVID world”, to avoid businesses taking the brunt of any issues.

From an economic perspective, it was considered that there were huge opportunities for the suburbs, with a resurgence of people shopping and working locally. Looking forward, flexible spaces would be required – however the grants available fell short on the amount needed to adapt. These grants needed to come to the businesses themselves, and not just the landlords. Landlords also needed to be involved in discussions regarding opportunities, as currently they were reluctant to take any risks with their tenancies – they were not looking at taking on start-up businesses or non-essential retail, which was limiting the offer provided.

Mr Robert Sargent, Acorn Group advised that the HG Wells building at Bromley South would be completed by the end of the year. The Acorn Group headquarters would be moved into the first four floors of the building, the fit out of which was proceeding. This was a build to rent scheme, which it was anticipated would be fully occupied, both commercially and residentially, by the end of the first quarter of 2021. The sector was in a unique position, as it was being actively encouraged by the Government to continue with its “day to day” work, albeit subject to social distancing. The residential property market across the UK, and particularly in London and the South East, had never been busier. However, for the commercial market it was a completely different picture. The company were working hard with both owners and tenants, looking to provide as much flexibility as possible around landlord and tenant negotiations – encouraging landlords to be openminded, and approach things in a different way. The office space in Bromley remained a two-tiered market, with a mix of space that would not allow the required social distancing measures – alongside new, quality space that could provide a complete solution for a tenant.

The Acorn Book Club charity was continuing to be a huge success, recycling pre-loved children’s book for 3 to 11 year olds. The charity was looking for schools in the Borough which may be underfunded, or did not have access to a variety of library material. They had collected 20,000 books that were to be supplied back to schools in a COVID-friendly way – they were also in contact with the local foodbanks to supply books to children through them too.

Mr Russell Clarke, Sundridge Investments advised Members that the company was a freeholder with a number of investment properties, as well as carrying out development and submitting planning application. One of the “side lines” of the company was a town centre coffee shop, which had seen its turnover decrease by 15-20% – this had been an ongoing situation throughout

the lockdown period. They had several tenants, including pubs and restaurants, which had been hit extremely hard by the pandemic. It was noted that landlords also had covenants to meet, and they could not just completely write-off rents – they would work with both the tenants that were able to pay, and those that were not, and take a pragmatic approach.

From a development point of view, they were continuing to submit planning applications, both residential and commercial, but were experiencing some delays at a local level. However, it was noted that they were generally experiencing a more positive and realistic attitude from planners. The biggest problem currently being faced related to planning appeals, which were often sat for twelve months or longer before even a site visit date was provided. The issues were with the Planning Inspectorate, but it was having a knock-on effect. Another issue was that the funding and financing for developments had become restrictive – banks were not lending much money and were requiring developers and investors to put all their money in, prior to releasing any funding. This stopped developers from carrying out as many developments as they would probably wish to, which slowed down the market.

Mr Steve Lipscombe, Ronin Marketing noted that it was quite easy for companies to cut their marketing costs when times became tough, however their customers had been incredibly supportive. Since the end of July, business had picked up well, and they had been able to take on two new recruits. The company was busy and had half a dozen new clients – these had replaced any business that had been lost during the pandemic. Some interesting work was taking place relating to the construction and education sectors, including the promotion of online and recorded exams for the University of West London.

Ms Tina Powley, Nugent Retail Park informed Members that as landlords, they had reached out to occupiers at the beginning of the first lockdown. Rents for independent retailers, and small to medium businesses had been written-off, and rents had been renegotiated for medium to large businesses, to help them through this uncertain period. It was noted that they had also experienced some delays in relation to planning applications, which hindered the support they provided to small, local independent businesses.

The retail park had four stores which had remained open during the first period of lockdown, and footfall had fallen by only 50%. Several stores would be offering a 'click and collect' service during the second lockdown, so more were anticipated to stay open. In terms of "bounce-back", the retail park was, on average, only 19% behind where it was the previous year – this was thought to be due to the free parking on offer, and the ability for people to walk round in an open space. It was anticipated that the furlough scheme would be utilised for some site staff during the second lockdown, as service charge payments had not been forthcoming. As a landlord, they had needed to supplement a large volume of this themselves, which would not be sustainable going forward.

Reverend Agnita Oyawale, Bromley Town Centre Chaplain informed Members that she represented the churches in central Bromley. The chaplaincy team offered supported to people who worked in Bromley by way of a 'listening ear'. Communication could be difficult due to the requirement to wear facemasks, however they also offered a telephone service. The team had links across the Borough, and could be contacted via bromleychaplaincy@gmail.com.

Mr Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley informed Members that they supported around 2,000 businesses in the Borough. Support had been provided to the sector in a number of different ways. A series of advisory services and training courses had been held, with input from businesses – looking at employment schemes; the furlough scheme; and guidance on returning to work and compliance with social distancing requirements. They had also acted as a broker for the 'Kick-Start' programme, encouraging businesses to utilise the scheme which supported 18 to 25 year olds into employment. Community Links Bromley had also been involved in the running of a grant scheme. With the assistance of the Council, funding had been secured from the Direct Line Group and Clarion Housing – £185k had been distributed across 40 local charities. Another area of work, in partnership with the Local Authority, had been managing the volunteering scheme – 4,000 local residents had put themselves forward to provide a range of services and support to around 1,200 that were shielding.

A bid had been submitted with a local charity for funding to conduct some work looking at what digital exclusion looked like, and how to address this. A 'State of the Sector' survey had also been undertaken which, subject to sign-off, would be circulated to elected Members and commissioners. Of the organisations surveyed, 50% had indicated that they were "dipping into the reserves" – many were also experiencing challenges with delivery, and funding pressures.

Mr Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group provided a written update following the meeting:

Due to the extended COVID-19 period, we have seen many clients / lessees suffer and in some cases, go out of business. Lots of smaller clients are finding sustaining income difficult and we are doing our part in trying to assist with their cashflow. We are seeing new clients but are having a heavier than normal turnover due to current circumstances.

We are confident that the adaptability that our Flexible Workspace provides will be very popular when we re-emerge from the pandemic. In the meantime we are continuing to carry out enhanced sanitisation and our buildings are available for businesses to take advantage of, from one desk through to thirty desks in one suite, as well as flexible co-working space.

However, lack of assistance / grants and the inflexibility in the way that LB Bromley deals with the discretionary grants is somewhat worrying. Not all businesses saw their cashflow crash immediately after the 22nd March 2020,

such as shops, especially if decisions made on the 22nd March 2020 (start of first COVID-19 lockdown) take three calendar months to work through to your cashflow (due to 3 month notice periods). This very real cause and effect has no 'discretionary' element to it, as it seems to have in other Boroughs. There is no appeal, so two discretionary grant applications (two separate entities) were dismissed purely because we could not demonstrate that our cashflow dived in the first two months! None of my businesses have received any grants from LB Bromley directly. Indeed we are now paying more rates directly than we have done for many years, due to changes in SBRR during the pandemic and more vacant units than is normal.

Devonshire House and Newman Flexible Workspace remain committed to nurturing business in LB Bromley.

Mr Mike Humphreys, Handelsbanken also provided a written update following the meeting:

2020 has been a very different year for all of us. I am pleased to report however that Handelsbanken has remained open for business throughout, office operational, (staff rotating between office working and working from home). We have continued to support our customers, both business and personal, throughout this period as they have experienced varying fortunes / challenges (at present we are pleased to report we have no customers in Bromley in "difficulty"). This therefore enables us to continue to process new business enquiries, (and whilst some banks are unfortunately at present having to focus on Customers experiencing difficulties / hardship; and so are declining to open accounts / new loan proposals) we are able open accounts (albeit for businesses there are certain criteria that have to be initially met); and we are actively providing new loans to existing and new customers who meet criteria. In summary pleased to report that at present it is largely Business as Usual.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.

**7 BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP WORK PROGRAMME
2020/21**

Members of the Partnership considered the forward rolling work programme for the Bromley Economic Partnership for 2020/21. Members were asked to send any suggestions for agenda items to the clerk.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was brought to the meeting.

Bromley Economic Partnership
3 November 2020

9 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

4.00pm, Tuesday 12th January 2021
4.00pm, Tuesday 20th April 2021

The Meeting ended at 4.35 pm

Chairman