

Executive summary

Introduction

This study was commissioned in May 2012 by London Borough of Bromley to inform and complement other related initiatives that form part of the Council's Improvement Strategy for Beckenham Town Centre.

Beckenham has a rich collection of high quality buildings, spaces and uses but it currently under performs in some aspects as a local centre and public spaces are compromised along the High Street. Annual footfall counts undertaken by the Council across the town have illustrated that there has been a continued decline in footfall over the last three years. Whilst there are some empty units within the town centre, there is evidence of healthy number of new businesses and limited long term vacancies. A number of national retailers are interested in taking space within the centre. The key objective of this study is to identify and unlock the potential of this area by proposing a series of interventions (projects) that we believe will help Beckenham perform better and make best use of the assets here for the benefit of local communities, businesses and visitors.

We found an impressive level of commitment from local people, willing to give their time and energy to help reveal, enhance and help maintain the special nature and potential of Beckenham. There are several dedicated community groups including the Beckenham Civic Society, Beckenham Business Association, Copers Cope Residents Association, West Beckenham Residents Association, Central Beckenham Residents Association and the Bromley Mobility Forum engaging with the Council and the Beckenham and West Wickham Working Group to collaborate toward resolving issues that currently undermine the functionality and potential of the area.

The projects put forward in this report include straight-forward logistical issues relating to parking and movement for example as well as others that aim to celebrate the rich, high quality buildings and spaces such as lighting and cleaning special buildings. As a collection, the projects work well to address key issues across the area.

Study area

The scope of this study extends from Beckenham Junction Station in the north and covers the High Street as far as the War Memorial at the Croydon Road junction in the south. Project proposals are focused along the High Street with key junctions and side roads included to address wider connectivity issues.

The plan of the High Street is unusual in that it is a long winding street with a ninety degree turn at the High Street / Kelsey Park Road / Manor Road junction. This poses certain challenges in terms of legibility and wayfinding, especially for shoppers and casual leisure visitors, which this project aims to address.

Beckenham High Street also forms part of the TfL Strategic Route Network (SRN) and is heavily trafficked. This has some negative impact on the economic prosperity of the High Street.

The A2015 (Rectory Road and Southend Road) is also SRN. Part of the challenge of this project is to look at how public realm improvements can be implemented without unacceptable affects to the movement of traffic on the SRN.



Above
Beckenham public realm improvements
study area.

Project methodology

East undertook initial surveys of the area and gathered a baseline of information about previous studies and current proposals for the area. We identified a list of proposals to complement the area and achieve project objectives. At client team meetings and public and other consultations, this list was shared to test the validity of projects and add more to address issues we hadn't (or in sufficient detail) recognised.

Consultation;

- Regular meeting with Beckenham and West Wickham Town Centre Working Group.
- High Street traders consultation, 6 June 2012. We called in to retail units on the High Street to have conversations with businesses about their views on possible improvements to the High Street.
- Beckenham Business Association, 12 June 2012. We made a presentation to businesses and traders to introduce the project and understand the requirements of shops and businesses on the High Street.
- Stakeholder evening walk, 14 June 2012.
- Bromley Mobility Forum, 17 July 2012. Meeting to introduce the project and have initial feedback on accessibility issues.
- Bromley Mobility Forum, 20 August 2012 - walking accessibility audit
- Public Consultation, 23 August 2012. We set up a market stall on the High Street and discussed proposals and objectives of the project with residents, visitors and business owners.

SWOT

Key issues revealed during this study.

Strengths

- Rich collection of existing high quality assets
- Committed local community willing to partner/work with the council to improve the area
- Well-connected by public transport including trams, trains and buses to other areas.
- Some new shops and businesses have recently opened on the High Street.
- Good number of independent shops and businesses. This was identified by stakeholders as something which makes the High Street a good place to work and shop.
- Beckenham has an above average representation of restaurants and bars and a strong night time economy.

Weaknesses

- Congestion; public transport and private car use congests roads and compromises pedestrian experience
- Station environs are unwelcoming and orientation to and from them unclear
- Pedestrian movement is difficult with poor crossing provision
- Existing parking provision is complicated and doesn't meet local needs
- Rich history of the area could be strengthened.
- There are few generous public space or green spaces along the High Street.
- Existing retail offer is becoming less varied and lack of a clear strategy for High Road retail offer undermines the existing traders who are uncomfortable with the shifting quality of retail around them.

- There is a gap evident in the comparison offer of Beckenham town centre. The presence of eight charity shops representing 13% of comparison floorspace is an indication of weak comparison retailer demand.

Opportunities

- Capture importance of existing public buildings by redefining spaces between them.
- Create welcoming arrival sequences to the area at Beckenham Junction Station and at the southern end of the street at the War Memorial area.
- Carriageway widths are at present wider than they need to be in many areas. A key opportunity of the project is to reset this balance and make generous footways and public spaces.
- Establish stronger relationship between existing uses with signage and interpretation
- Beckenham's heritage could be a significant tourist attractor, playing an important role in regeneration and long term sustainability of the area.
- Temporary uses for shops that are currently vacant can be used to introduce new programmes and people to the area.

Threats

- New development is not properly coordinated with the existing context; full benefits of development are not realised and negative impacts are exacerbated