

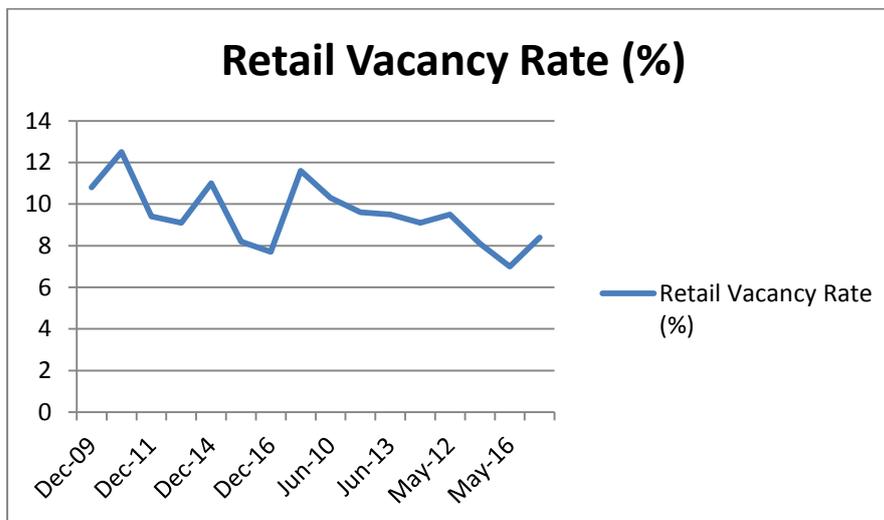
BECKENHAM TOWN CENTRE WORKING GROUP 9 MARCH 2017

UPDATE ON VACANT UNITS IN BECKENHAM TOWN CENTRE

The following summarises the current position with regards to voids in Beckenham Town Centre and compares this with the national picture and the historic trend for Beckenham. The briefing note concludes with some suggestions for how the problem of vacant units could be mitigated in the Beckenham context.

A survey of the ground floor units on the High Street was undertaken by an officer from the Town Centre Management team on 23 February. The extent of the survey was an area bounded by the junction of Southend Road / Copers Cope Road in the North, Beckenham Beacon in the South, Chancery Lane in the East and War Memorial Roundabout in the West. In that area a total of 13 units were vacant. A list of these – with addresses, previous use (if known), length of time empty (if known) and other information – is provided as APPENDIX A.

In the area under survey there are 208 ground floor commercial units (retail, catering or services). This means at present the vacancy rate for the town centre is 6.25%. This is consistent with a survey of the town centre undertaken by the Local Data Company (LDC) in December 2016 which showed that the overall vacancy rate was 6.1%. Splitting the LDC figures down into retail and leisure vacancies shows a retail vacancy rate of 7.7% and a leisure vacancy rate of 1.7%. In comparison with national average figures for vacancies Beckenham has a very low rate of voids in the town centre. The national overall vacancy rate is 11%, retail vacancy rate is 12.1% and leisure vacancy rate is 8.1%. In comparison Beckenham's vacancies are well below the average – significantly so in terms of leisure units. It should also be noted that the trend for Beckenham vacancies has reduced considerably since the height of the recession – in 2009 and 2010 the retail vacancy rate was 11% and 12% respectively. See chart below.



Source: Local Data Company

The list of shops in the appendix shows that 4 of the 13 empty units are already in the process of being refurbished or have plans for re-occupation in train. This suggests that the vacancy rate could move even lower in the near future. Of the 13 listed 3 were known to be unoccupied for more than a year. It is not known at this stage as to why these have been on the market for so long, but it could be a number of factors including location, state of repair or planning use classification. Generally, however, given the relatively low level of vacancies across the town centre, and the relatively short period most units remain empty, the market for retail space in the town centre would appear to be reasonably buoyant.

LDC data shows that in the period between May and Dec 2016, there were 8 new openings of businesses in the town centre, and 10 closures – with a net loss of 2 businesses. Mostly the changes had no effect on the mix of business uses but there has been some net loss of businesses in the Fashion & General Clothing and Estate Agents & Auctioneers classifications (4 units in total).

The relatively low level of vacancies and the apparently buoyant market for retail units in the town centre as evidenced by the above data suggested that little needs to be done in terms of intervention by the Council. Although there may be some short term challenges to this buoyancy related to disruption from the major improvement scheme for the town centre, in the medium to long term (barring a significant deterioration in the national economy) it is expected that the usual market mechanisms will help maintain vacancies at the current low level. Indeed increased business investment in Beckenham will be encouraged by the planned public realm improvements.

The units which may be of more concern are those which have been empty for some time. Officers could explore the potential for engaging with landlords for these units to offer assistance with marketing (e.g. use of the free Bromley Commercial Property database) or potential application of techniques to mitigate the impact of the vacant frontage – such as shop front vinyls or meanwhile uses. It should be noted however that the Council itself has very few property holdings in Beckenham and therefore is dependent upon the willingness of private landlords to engage with these sorts of initiatives. There is also a cost to undertaking these projects and at present no Council budget is identified which could be used for this purpose. Potentially funding of such initiatives could be within the remit of any future Business Improvement District (BID) for Beckenham.

Martin Pinnell
Town Centre Management & Business Support
1 March 2017

APPENDIX A

Vacant ground floor retail outlets in Beckenham as at 23/02/2017

<u>Address</u>	<u>Old use</u>	<u>Approx. time empty</u>	<u>Notes</u>
82 Bromley Road	Clinic	3-4 years	
96 Bromley Road	unknown	over a year	
69 High Street	Furniture shop "Publiki	unknown	Undergoing refurbishment
49 High Street	Frock follies ladies wear	unknown	Soon to be steak house extension
10 High Street	New regency cabs	2 years	
120 High Street	Computer shop	unknown	
162 High Street	Fashion boutique	unknown	
206 High Street	unknown	unknown	About to open as Art/Photo shop
218 High Street	unknown	9 months	Undergoing refurbishment
242 High Street	Argento – Jewellers	2 months	
286 High Street	Chicken takeaway	2-3 years	Has sample paving outside
241 High Street	Your move Estate agents	3 months	Viewings are ongoing
223 High Street	Remels kids store	unknown	

The area checked included: Beckenham High Street, Bromley Road (Chancery Lane), Manor Road, Village way and Croydon Road

The limits were:

- North - Copers Cope Road
- South - Beckenham Beacon Hospital
- East - Chancery Lane
- West – Odeon Cinema

Summary: 2 vacant units on Bromley Road, 11 on High Street of which 3 are under refurbishment.

Where known, the use was: 3 clothing, 1 fast food, 1 Estate agent, 1 Jewellers, 1 cabs, 1 IT sales, 1 furniture and 1 clinic.
3 with unknown former usage.