

**London Borough of Bromley DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE  
held at Bromley Civic Centre on TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 7.00 PM**

**Agenda item 9 - SHOPFRONT DESIGN GUIDANCE**

**Report of the Beckenham Town Centre Team**

**2. AMENDED RECOMMENDATIONS PROPOSED BY COPERS COPE WARD COUNCILORS**

- 2.1 That the Beckenham High Street Shop Fronts Design Guide be adopted forthwith to assess relevant planning applications in Beckenham Town Centre and be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, providing strong support for planning decisions where needed.**
- 2.2 That the Beckenham High Street Shop Fronts Design Guide be used by the Council to inform the future production of borough-wide shopfront design guidance in the forthcoming Bromley Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document.**

Issue

1. Beckenham TCT has worked since 2017 to produce a shop front guide for the Beckenham Conservation Area, at the request of the then Conservation Officer, Rob Buckley. In February this year, when it was almost complete, we were informed that it could not be used as a Bromley guide because it had not been written by Council officers and that it would therefore have no status. This was a shock and a blow to the eminent professionals who had produced the guide. There had been three years wasted effort. In collaboration with Copers Cope Ward Councilors, we ask that the Committee agree to adopt the Guide at least until such time as a Bromley wide Conservation Guide is produced, so that the TCT can actively promote its good practice.

Consideration

2. Beckenham Conservation Area was approved by the Development Control Committee on 24 March 2015. The proposal for a conservation area to cover all of Beckenham's High Street and parts of some immediate surrounding streets had been promoted by the Beckenham Town Centre Working Group chaired by Cllr Tickner, a formally constituted working group under Renewal and Recreation Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee. The Working Group was serviced by Council officers.

3. Beckenham TCT is comprised of three Residents' Associations, The Beckenham Society, Beckenham Business Association, Beckenham Together (the BID), Safer Neighbourhood Panels, Churches Together, Beckenham Rotary and a freeholder of a parade along Beckenham High Street. It was set up on the recommendation of Cllr Tickner and formed a consultative body for residual issues of the Beckenham Town Centre Public Realm Improvement Project. The initial aim of the TCT, set up in 2013, was to consider how best to invest the remainder of the £200K capital improvement funds for Beckenham and report back to the Council Working Group – the minutes of the working group will reflect the TCT's role. The TCT's formal inauguration was attended by Ward Councilors and Council Officers, and until the Beckenham BID was formed, Bromley Council Town Centre Management Officers sat on the TCT. Further the TCT was for many years a member of the ATCM a recognised body for Town Management, and Town Teams are a recognised type of community group by Councils across the country. At no time were we told we needed to get some other official accreditation as a "relevant neighbourhood forum", nor that our Town Team is not recognised in this capacity.
4. On 8 August 2017, the then Conservation Officer, Rob Buckley, attended a TCT meeting and asked TCT to draft a shop front guide to be incorporated into a Bromley CA guide. He cited the Chislehurst precedent.
5. Therefore, the statement in para 3.2 of the committee paper that "*nor was its production specifically encouraged by any Council decision*" is not wholly accurate. It is true that no committee specifically asked us to produce the guide, but we were specifically asked to produce it by a senior officer and encouraged to do so by the official working group. We had no reason to question that this was a legitimate and fully supported project.
6. Eminent local professionals and well regarded experienced local resident and business association members worked to produce the guide. Dr John Parker, Member of the RIBA, Fellow of the RTPI and Fellow of RSA, was in the lead. David Wood, the chair of the Council's own Advisory Panel on Conservation Areas also played a substantial role and Colin Hughes provided technical and practical expertise from his work on IT and shop design. Jackie Groundsell (recent former Chair, Beckenham Business Association), Chloe-Jane Ross (Chair, Copers Cope Area Residents Association), Marsha Berg (West Beckenham Residents Association) Marie Pender (Chair, West Beckenham Residents Association) made a significant contribution to the Beckenham Public Realm improvements project and continued that work in support of this guide. The previous Conservation Officer, Robert Buckley was consulted in the scope and development of the guide. The

current Conservation Officer, Simon Went, has been consulted throughout on the drafting of the guide and kept informed of progress right up the production of a near final version in February this year. We understand that the quality of the document is not questioned.

7. As far as the comment in para 3.4 is concerned, that the guide “*does not reflect the most up to date planning policy*”, we were in the process of updating the planning policy context when we were told, quite abruptly, via the conservation officer, that the document could not be used in any shape or form. We have had no direct communication from the planning officers. We consider it would have been courteous to have explained the situation direct to Beckenham TCT rather than have a two line email message delivered by the conservation officer. Nevertheless we would like to work with the planning officers to update the policy content.
8. Also, referring to para 3.5, any guide will of course, “*not prevent those who are ignorant or intent on breaching planning regulations*”. It can however help to prevent ignorance. There continue to be illicit shop front renewals in Beckenham on a monthly basis. One aim in producing the guide is to circulate it among agents and consultants to help owners to avoid expensive alterations which subsequently have to be corrected at unnecessary additional expense. Early adoption of the Guide will also help to protect valuable historical features – it is too late to take enforcement action when the features are already in a skip. We cannot see why the guide cannot be adopted by the Council and circulated in Beckenham as a precursor to the Bromley wide CA. The fact that it uses specific Beckenham illustrations is surely a good thing.
9. A considerable amount of work has gone into this document, produced on the suggestion of a Council officer and with the support of the properly constituted working group. We want to work co-operatively with our planning officers on any local issues. We are available to provide local knowledge to help develop policy and its local application, for example on Article 4 Directions. If local groups can help the Council’s finances by volunteering for physical work such as Tree Friends, Snow Friends, Friends of parks and open spaces, why cannot we provide intellectual input in written form to save the Council money?
10. We note the recommendation that the Guide be “*used by the Council to inform the production of borough wide shop front design guidance in the forthcoming Bromley Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document.*” However we also note that this Document has been “forthcoming” since 2014, when the same was said of the Chislehurst Guide.

## Conclusions

11. If the Committee endorses the Guide, the Beckenham Town Team aims to be proactive in taking a forward leaning role in engaging with lessors and agents when shops are being changed to promote the Conservation Area and signpost them to Council planning information – we can provide on the ground information as works occur to minimise unauthorised changes and encourage enhancements that improve the Conservation Area. We look forward to working with Council Officers in this aim.
  
12. We therefore ask that the Council endorse our Document, and we hope that the proposed amended recommendation by Copers Cope Councilors can be accepted by the Committee.

## Signatories

Chloe Jane Ross, Chair Beckenham TCT and Chair Copers Cope Area Residents' Association

Marie Pender Secretary Beckenham TCT and Chair West Beckenham Residents' Association

John Parker and David Wood, The Beckenham Society

Colin Hughes, Beckenham Business Association

Tony Powers Beckenham Rotary

Joan Conway, Beckenham Churches Together

Marsha Berg, Safer Neighbourhood Panels

Jackie Groundsell, 1230 The Women's Company Ltd