

## **BROMLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP**

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.00 pm on 11 January 2022

### **Present:**

Councillor Peter Morgan (Chairman)  
Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport (Vice-Chairman)  
Sharon Baldwin, Orpington 1<sup>st</sup> BID Company  
Zoe Carr, Beckenham Together BID Company & Penge SE20  
BID Company  
Russell Clarke, Sundridge Investments Limited  
Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley  
Frances Forrest, Your Bromley BID Company  
Chris Glover, Churchill Theatre  
Councillor Hannah Gray, Executive Assistant for Renewal,  
Recreation and Housing/Small Business Champion  
Mark Haynes, The Glades  
Alex Henderson, Henderson Biomedical  
Gary Hillman, N. Hillman & Sons  
Lesley Holland, LBB Operations Manager, Bromley Education  
Business Partnership  
Michael Humphries, Handelsbanken  
Sarah King, Federation of Small Businesses  
Helen McIntosh FCIPR, South East London Chamber of  
Commerce  
Jamie Stevenson, Acorn Group  
Caroline Tatchell, Splash Damage  
Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group  
Bruce Walker, Lansdown Asset Management  
Louise Wolsey, London South East Colleges

### **Also Present:**

Ose Akpom, LBB Economic Development Manager  
Councillor Vanessa Allen  
Councillor Yvonne Bear  
Ben Johnson, LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy  
Hal Khanom, LBB Head of Economic Development  
Alicia Munday, LBB Head of Regeneration  
Jessica Naylor, LBB Project Support Officer Regeneration

## **23 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting of the Bromley Economic Partnership, which was held virtually via Webex.

Apologies for absence were received from Mike Lewis – Michael Rogers LLP, Donald Mars – Jobcentre Plus, Marg Mayne – Mytime Active and Lorraine McQuillan – LBB Place Shaping and Local Economy Manager.

Apologies for absence were also received from Sam Parrett – London South East Colleges, Robert Sargent – Acorn Group and Chandra Sharma (FSB), and Louise Wolsey – London South East Colleges, Jamie Stevenson – Acorn Group and Sarah King (FSB) attended as their respective substitutes.

**24 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING**

No questions had been received.

**25 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH OCTOBER 2021 AND MATTERS OUTSTANDING**

The Chairman noted that there were no matters outstanding.

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021 be agreed.**

**26 BUSINESS ITEM - BROMLEY BUZZ PODCAST**

The Chairman welcomed the founders of Bromley Buzz, Darren Weale, Zeenat Noorani and Sarah Marsh-Collings, to the meeting to provide an overview of the podcast.

Members were informed that the Bromley Buzz podcast had been providing audio output since 4<sup>th</sup> August 2021. Its aim was “to lift up and join up Bromley” and had been established as it was considered that other Bromley-wide media was limited.

The podcast discussed all sectors and walks of life – the business sector, which linked closely with the Bromley Economic Partnership, was a regular feature and had focussed on Start Up Bromley, the Bromley Business Hub and local businesses. During recent podcasts, the presenters had spoken with: Carina Lapore, winner of The Apprentice and owner of two local bakeries; local Councillors and the Mayoress and Deputy Mayor of Bromley; as well as members of the general public. Future podcasts would feature three local MPs; the Chief Executive of Bromley Council; the President of Blackheath and Bromley Harriers; the El-Emaan Centre Mosque, Keston; the lead for the Council’s Loneliness Strategy; and, with the help of the Churchill Theatres, interviews had been arranged with Kevin Clifton and Danny John-Jules.

The Bromley Buzz podcast was available via 7 listening channels (Podbean, Spotify, Apple, Tune In, Amazon, Audible and Listen Notes) and 4 social media channels, so far (LinkedIn page, Twitter (225 followers), Facebook and Instagram (297 followers)). It was highlighted that there had been 732 full downloads from Podbean, 162 of which had taken place in the last 30 days. To date, 27 episodes of the podcast had been produced which included 54 interviews.

It was highlighted that Bromley Buzz was also promoting Bromley outside the borough. Mr Weale advised that the following day he would be speaking on BBC Radio London during Eddie Nestor's show 'Trends at Twelve Twelve-ish', and features on the podcast would be included in Startups magazine online; Enterprise Nation online; and the Federation of Small Business magazine.

The next steps for the Bromley Buzz podcast would include a 'tour of Bromley' to widen content further – they wanted to continue to improve output and increase the audience. It was noted that other things, such as creating a website and holding events, would be subject to income. The team were looking to arrange a communications partnership meeting and have greater interaction with the Council.

Sarah Marsh-Collings emphasised that the Bromley Buzz podcast looked to promote the whole borough, reminding people that Bromley was a fantastic place, and it was highlighted that the hosts were doing a great job.

Mr Weale asked Members of the Partnership for their assistance by coming along and talking on the podcast and/or promoting the Bromley Buzz social media links. Several Members said they would be happy to assist Mr Weale, and it was agreed that his contact details would be circulated following the meeting.  
*(ACTION: Clerk)*

In response to questions from Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley, Mr Weale advised that the governance structure was informal – there were three founders, two co-presenters, a local reporter and someone who provided creative support. With regards to its constitution, this was currently a collaboration between In Tune PR, Zeenat Noorani's coaching company and Sarah Marsh-Collings' Digital Marketing company, but in time they would be looking for it to become a not-for-profit organisation.

The Chairman suggested that future episodes of the podcast could focus on sports and leisure – as well as there being a number of high-profile sports stars, there were also a variety of great sports clubs within the borough. Mr Weale agreed, and advised that two football clubs had recently been featured on the podcast. Norman Park and Blackheath and Bromley Harriers would feature in future podcasts, and they would be looking to include disabled and Paralympic sports and athletes.

The Chairman thanked Darren Weale for his presentation to the Partnership, which is attached at Appendix A. Further information was available via the following links:

Podcast – <https://bromleybuzz.podbean.com>

Social media:

Instagram – [www.instagram.com/bromleybuzz](http://www.instagram.com/bromleybuzz)

LinkedIn – [www.linkedin.com/company/bromley-buzz](http://www.linkedin.com/company/bromley-buzz)

Twitter – <https://twitter.com/BromleyBuzz> - @BromleyBuzz

Facebook – [www.facebook.com/Bromley-Buzz-109258504810625](http://www.facebook.com/Bromley-Buzz-109258504810625)

**RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.**

## **27 PLANNING POLICY UPDATE**

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

Members were informed that the ‘Call for Sites’ consultation exercise had closed in November 2021. This was the first stage of the Local Plan review, which would look at any potential sites for economic development or any other uses. The team were currently assessing the responses received and looking towards the next stages of the Local Plan process which would be undertaken later in the year.

Gary Hillman, N. Hillman & Sons, enquired as to the number of sites put forward following the consultation and what the Council’s housing target was. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy highlighted that the number of residential units to be build was dependent on the length of the period covered by the Local Plan, but the current housing target was 774 units per year. With regards to the number of sites put forward, this was what the team were currently working through, so it was not possible to give a definitive answer. However it was noted that lots of responses had been received and the consultation appeared to have been more successful than some similar exercises previously undertaken.

In response to a question from Bruce Walker, Lansdown Asset Management, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised that as the analysis of the sites put forward had not been completed, it was not possible to provide a breakdown of the percentage that were currently greenfield and greenbelt sites. It was noted that the team would be working on the hierarchy and the national policy which looked to prioritise the development of brownfield and well-located sites. As they were at the early stages of the process, it was not possible to rule anything in, or out – if there were lots of urban sites that met the requirements there would not be a need to look at greenbelt sites, but they were not yet in a position to make those determinations. Mr Walker considered that there needed to be an emphasis on the provision of social housing.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised that the overall Local Plan review was a lengthy process, and it was anticipated that final adoption would take place towards the end of 2024. The aim was to launch an 'Issues and Options' consultation before the end of the year. In response to a further question, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy said that if the sites proposed as part of the 'Call for Sites' consultation were practical propositions the team would initiate follow-up conversations. There would be further rounds of consultations which would allow people to respond, clarifying previous responses and/or put forward new justifications if sites were not taken forward.

Members were advised that a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) had been prepared for Orpington town centre, which provided guidance to help the implementation of planning policies. A report would be presented to the Development Control Committee that evening, and the Council's Executive – if approved, the SPD consultation would be launched in early March 2022. In response to a question from Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy said that a SPD for Bromley town centre was actively being prepared and was expected to go out to consultation in the spring.

The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy informed Members that a report related to Article 4 Directions would also be considered by the Council's Development Control Committee and Executive, which proposed the withdrawing of permitted development (PD) rights which allowed the demolition of existing office buildings to provide new residential buildings. If the Article 4 Directions were approved, they would come into force from May 2022.

Russell Clarke, Sundridge Investments Limited enquired if there was a policy that protected residential units from being turned into offices. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised that there were policies within both the London Plan and Local Plan that resisted the loss of residential units. In response to a further question from Mr Clarke, the LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy said that the issues considered as part of the Article 4 Direction were limited. The report regarding the Article 4 Directions recognised that housing supply could be affected – however it did not preclude residential leases coming forward on a site, but a planning application would be required to do so. Mr Clarke considered that the policies contradicted each other and, as an applicant, were a burden. The LBB Head of Planning Policy and Strategy highlighted that the planning policies in the London Plan and Local Plan were borne out of years of preparation, consultation and engagement – they were in place to deliver benefits to residents and employers in the borough and were applied appropriately to each application. It was noted that objections to an application could be received for a number of reasons, but it was the quality of objections, and not the quantity, that would be considered when determining the outcome.

Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group, said that Article 4 Directions ensured that Bromley town centre had a great mix of residential and commercial (shops,

offices and industrial) units, and it should not become purely residential. Mr Thomas considered that the Article 4 Direction was a “soft touch” approach to ensure that everyone benefitted in the long-term, and that there would not be one policy that fitted all. There was a need to keep Bromley town centre as a job creation hub and he was in favour of the Article 4 Directions, if they were used properly.

The Chairman said that he was keen to see first class offices retained in Bromley, and new offices built. It was suggested that areas, such as Elmfield Road, should be protected as prime office locations.

**RESOLVED that the Planning Policy update be noted.**

## **28 BROMLEY TOWN CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS**

Jessica Naylor, LBB Project Support Officer Regeneration, provided an update regarding the Council’s project proposals for Bromley High Street.

There were currently three new project that the Regeneration team were looking to bring forward to enhance the vitality of the town centre:

- A lighting project on the façade of the Churchill Theatre;
- A tree-lined avenue; and
- Exploring canopy options for the High Street.

With regards to the first project, it was noted that the Churchill Theatre and Bromley Central Library were located at the centre of the pedestrianised High Street – the building provided a landmark within the town centre and was visible from Bromley South Station. As the frontage of the building was a blank and flat canvas, it provided a unique opportunity to enhance the High Street with a creative and innovative lighting programme. There were two proposed lighting improvements. The first would be for lighting to cover the entire eastern and southern façades of the building which could be programmed to change colour and used to support a range of local and national events. The second was for a lighting projection on the eastern façade of the building, which overlooked the pedestrianised area of the High Street. This could be used to support a range of events and enable the heritage and culture of Bromley to be celebrated with static or motion projections.

The main objectives of the project were to use the lighting to create a landmark within the town centre; improve wayfinding from Bromley South Station; enhance the public realm; and to create an atmospheric environment. This work would support the diversification of the High Street and an enhanced evening economy. The LBB Project Support Officer Regeneration advised that consultants had been instructed, and Phase 1 of the project would involve them preparing three concept ideas and drawings, which would be presented within the next month. It was anticipated that the lighting project would be completed by May 2022.

The second project proposed the creation of a tree-lined avenue, increasing the provision of trees between Bromley South Station and the Elmfield Road junction, which may include trees being planted on both sides of the pavement and along the central reservation. Phase 1 of the project would involve topographical and utility surveys being undertaken before the end of January 2022. This would determine whether each of the locations identified were suitable for a tree pit. Once these surveys were completed, the Regeneration team would work with colleagues in Highways, Traffic, Arboriculture and Public Protection to bring the project forward.

Hal Khanom, LBB Head of Economic Development, informed Members that with regards to the third project, some work had previously been undertaken in relation to canopy options for the High Street as a means to attract greater footfall. It was noted that this work had been paused whilst the team focussed on the distribution of grants, but as soon as there was the capacity to do so, this project would be revisited.

Frances Forrest, Your Bromley BID Company, informed Members that a count of vacant units in the town centre had taken place the previous day. Of the 338 units, which included The Glades and The Mall, but not offices or temporary usages, 61 units had been vacant (18.04%). This figure compared well with the count at the end of December 2019, which was pre-pandemic, where 56 vacant units (16.57%) were recorded. It was highlighted that this increase was surprisingly low after what had been a challenging couple of years. Members were advised that there was plenty of interest from businesses looking to come to Bromley, and Ocean Basket would soon be opening in the former Café Rouge unit.

With regards to footfall in Bromley town centre, the data provided showed that footfall had dropped significantly when periods of lockdown were enforced during 2019/20 and 2020/21. It was noted that the last “normal” year for comparison had been 2018/19. There had been a continual increase in footfall from April 2021. By October 2021 footfall had almost reached the levels seen in 2018/19 – but had then dipped, and there had not been the usual peak in December, which was likely to have been impacted by the uncertainties around whether further lockdown restrictions would be implemented. In response to a question from Michael Humphries, Handelsbanken, Ms Forrest advised that footfall was measured within the pedestrianised area of the High Street, with cameras located at Primark and Marks and Spencer.

Recent events in Bromley town centre had involved the installation of brand-new Christmas lights, including 32 trees which were lit up. A reduced switch-on event had taken place on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021 and street performers had been located in the High Street on Saturdays from 27<sup>th</sup> November to 18<sup>th</sup> December. On one of the days, ‘red envelope’ vouchers, which had been generously donated by businesses, were randomly offered by performing elves to passers-by and gifts/vouchers were also rewarded online in return for people posting Christmas “selfies” in the town centre.

Members were informed that the 'Snowman Trail', which had run from mid-November to the end of January was proving to be extremely popular. The trail consisted of large snowmen sculptures decorated by local artists in the theme of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas'. The snowmen were located around the town centre and were a great way to showcase Bromley. There had been 3,042 visits to the snowman page on the Your Bromley website from 17<sup>th</sup> November to 9<sup>th</sup> January – 41% of visits to the website were for this page, and the total website visits had increased by 382% from previous months.

An Annual Survey of levy payers had recently been carried out, and feedback received indicated that they appreciated the safety and cleanliness of the town centre, as well as the events. In response to a question from Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group, Ms Forrest advised that the BID membership was based on businesses having a rateable value of £20k or over. During the BID's first 5-year term the starting point at which members paid in was at a rateable value of £15k or over – this had been increased to £20k to help businesses recover from the pandemic as they would all still benefit from anything that the BID undertook within the town centre.

Ms Forrest advised Members that new branding would be launched for Your Bromley in February 2022, along with a new website. In response to a question from the Chairman, Ms Forrest advised that they held a list of the vacant units in the town centre, and it was planned that the new website would provide a platform to encourage people to contact local letting agents with regards to vacant properties.

Ms Forrest advised that a copy of the presentation (Appendix B) and additional footfall data (Appendix C) would be provided to Members, and are appended to the minutes.

Mark Haynes, The Glades, informed Members that footfall during 2021 had been 11.2m, which was -2.2% compared to 2018. However the 2021 figure was only for the period 12<sup>th</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> December, as prior to that The Glades had been closed due to the enforced lockdown restrictions, and was positive compared to the different platforms that reported national footfall. There had been an increase in footfall during December 2021, with people shopping for Christmas earlier due to the new strain of the COVID-19 virus and concerns that further lockdown restrictions may be enforced. It was highlighted that footfall had been impacted by the pandemic for the last couple of years, and there was no data available for The Glades for 2019. The number of car park visitors during 2021 had been 884,779 for 2021, which was -37% compared to 2019.

During 2021 there had been twelve new stores (Paperchase and Ted Baker) including pop-ups, refurbishments (The Perfume Shop and The Body Shop) and kiosks (Sky), which was extremely positive during a year that had been significantly disrupted by the pandemic. Bunka and Marlowe's Burgers were both local operators that had also opened units in The Glades. A Local Showcase initiative had been launched, working with local artists and makers to display their products and creations in, or on, shopfronts within the



shopping centre. Students from Harris Academy (Beckenham) had also created artwork which had been photographed and installed on the hoardings of empty units. The Glades had also appointed a new Marketing Agency, Blackline Creative.

The Glades had supported over ten different charities during 2021, including Bromley Autism Partnership, Chartwell Cancer Trust, The British Legion and Bromley Foodbank/Trussell Trust. The Chartwell Cancer Trust had received over 460 gifts that had been donated via The Glades 'Giving Tree' at Christmas. Shoppers were able to select a label, listing the age and gender of a child – a gift could then be purchased and handed to the Guest Service Desk, following which the Chartwell Cancer Trust would collect them and distribute to the children and families that they supported.

Mr Haynes advised that some sustainability milestones had been achieved in 2021. The Glades were the winners of the Community Engagement Award at the BIG Biodiversity Challenge Awards (CIRIA) for its Green Roof, above the Restaurant Terrace, and the Wild Glades on-line festival, and they had also been the overall winner of the BIG Biodiversity Awards (CIRIA). The Green Roof and the Wild Glades on-line festival had also won a Gold Award at the Green Apple Environment Awards and had achieved the ISO 14001 sustainability accreditation. A Net Zero Carbon audit of the shopping centre had been completed with recommendations, such as phasing out the use of gas, that would be worked through over the next few years.

With regards to 2022, Mr Haynes informed Members that the leasing picture was improving, following a depressed market over the last 18 months or so. However many new leases were turnover only deals or rents below those previously achieved. New agreements were also capital investment heavy, meaning that fewer new retailers could be supported from the same pot of capital investment. It was looking positive, with five national multiples currently nearing completion of leases or were in negotiation – one of those was Bread Ahead who were taking the former Oasis unit at the High Street entrance. Three new restaurants would be opening shortly – Black Cab Coffee and Cocktail Co and Wing Shack (both on the Restaurant Terrace) and Bella Roma on the lower mall next to Boots. Suits Direct would be opening in January, located on the upper mall next to Crew/Phase Eight, and the former Debenhams unit had been stripped out ready for whatever the space would be used for.

Lee Thomas, Fairlight Group, congratulated Mr Haynes for the work undertaken and highlighted how important The Glades was to Bromley town centre. Mr Haynes emphasised that The Glades was more than just opening up shops, and partners working in conjunction with each other would have a real benefit for the town centre. A copy of the presentation is attached at Appendix D.

Gary Hillman, N. Hillman & Sons, informed Members that he owned The Royal Bell which had opened in May 2021 and had a successful summer period. Temporary planning permission had been applied for a market hall

concept inside the building – as the outcome of this was still awaited, they had unfortunately had to close, and no further investment could be made into the building. The Chairman suggested that Mr Hillman send him further details following the meeting.

The Chairman thanked the LBB Project Support Officer Regeneration, Frances Forrest and Mark Haynes for their presentations to the Partnership.

**RESOLVED that the updates be noted.**

## **29 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STATUS AND NEXT STEPS**

Hal Khanom, LBB Head of Economic Development, informed Members that the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant was a mandatory payment of up to £6k, based on the rateable values – £15k or under would receive a grant of £2,667; £15k-£51k a grant of £4k; and £51k and over a grant of £6k. The applications for this grant would need to be completed by 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022. Payments would be made as quickly as possible after this date, administered by the Business Rates team.

With regards to other grants, £640k had been received in Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) top-ups, which had to be spent by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. As there had been a substantial amount of interest in the existing ARG schemes (Business Start-up during COVID Grant; Business Growth Grant; Grants for occupying a vacant unit; and Cultural Grants), and a significant amount of applications received, it was felt prudent not to develop a new project and the additional funding would instead be used to meet the existing demand. The team had been looking through the current submission backlog received over the Christmas period – 146 applications for the Vacant Unit Grant and 309 applications for the Business Growth Grant.

Christopher Evans, Community Links Bromley, considered that there was a need to make it clear if applications for grants were going to be accessed as soon as they were received, as opposed to when the closing date was reached. The LBB Head of Economic Development said that the Business Growth Grant had clarified that the applications would be assessed in two tranches, however she agreed that this could easily be missed in the detail, and they would look to make this clearer. It was noted that all applicants would receive confirmation of their submission, but after the first tranche of assessments an application would not be rejected as the team were still working out where the additional money could be allocated.

The LBB Head of Economic Development advised Members that there was also a new COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF). This had been announced by the government in March 2021, as a means to appease those wishing to appeal their business rates, but no further details regarding the scheme had been received until the end of December 2021. Bromley had been allocated £5.3m, which was substantially less than the amount anticipated would have been requested by businesses through appeals. It

was expected that this funding would need to be spent by the end of March 2022, however clarification of the requirements were still awaited. This would be a mandatory scheme, which excluded retail, hospitality, leisure, nurseries and airports, and work was currently being undertaken to identify who would be eligible. Members were advised that the team were working as quickly as they could to distribute the grants.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the LBB Head of Economic Development said that further information was available via the following link:

[https://www.bromley.gov.uk/info/200013/business\\_support\\_and\\_advice/1457/business\\_grants\\_during\\_covid-19](https://www.bromley.gov.uk/info/200013/business_support_and_advice/1457/business_grants_during_covid-19)

Ose Akpom, LBB Economic Development Manager informed Members that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of start-ups in Bromley had fluctuated around 200 businesses per month during the past few years, until May 2020 – following the initial lockdown restrictions and announcement of the furlough scheme, there had been a sharp rise, increasing to approximately 300 businesses per month in September 2020. The rate of new start-ups had been steadily decreasing since September 2020 and stood at around 120 businesses per month in November 2021. There had been 34.8% fewer businesses start-ups in Bromley during the first eleven months of the year compared with the corresponding period last year. A similar picture was being seen across London as in comparison, there had been 35.4% fewer business start-ups during the same period.

The number of unemployed claimants in Bromley had remained below 5,000 during the past few years until April/May 2020 after which there had been a sharp increase (which coincided with the lockdown restrictions), eventually reaching a peak of approximately 12,000 in September 2020. The unemployed claimant numbers in Bromley had been gradually reducing since April 2021 and stood at 7,760 in November 2021.

With regards to business stock, the total number of enterprises in Bromley showed an annual increase over several years, until it peaked at 15,475 in 2019, which was followed by a fall to 15,100 in 2021. The number of enterprises both nationally and across London had shown a small annual increase continuously over the past several years.

The LBB Economic Development Manager advised that the 2020-21 Bromley town centre footfall data showed a steady increase up until October 2021. This followed the easing of the lockdown restrictions in accordance with the roadmap from April 2021. However, there was a slight reduction in footfall experienced during November 2021. The total number of visitors for the first eleven months of the year to date was up by 12% on the previous year and 25.3% below normal footfall levels in 2019. In comparison, there was an increase in footfall of 14.6% experienced across Greater London during the first eleven months of the year, which was 39% below normal footfall levels in 2019.

Data was also provided in relation to the general retail (i.e. eating/hospitality and clothes) spending activity level baseline for Bromley High Street. From March 2020 the retail spend in Bromley High Street had dramatically reduced to around 20% of the normal spend (Lockdown 1). There was a significant recovery (up to 80% of normal spend) with the easing of restrictions from June/July 2020, but subsequent lockdown restrictions had generally suppressed retail spending up until April 2021 (Lockdown 2 and 3). Retail spending increased from April 2021, in accordance with the individual steps within the government roadmap, and it was up to 80% of normal trading activity in August 2021. General retail spend in Bromley High Street returned to pre-pandemic levels from September 2021, which was the net effect of higher than normal spending levels on eating/hospitality and lower than normal spending on apparel/clothing shopping.

Bromley town centre and Chislehurst continued to experience larger vacancy rates overall compared to the other town centres within Bromley. The rate in Bromley town centre increased from 9.4% in April 2020 to 11.7% as at October 2021. This vacancy rate was the highest observed across the other local town centres within Bromley, as well as higher than the average rate across Greater London (10.4%). However, the vacancy rate in Bromley town centre was lower than some other comparable areas such as Croydon (23.8%), Guildford (15.2%) and Sutton (15.8%). In response to a question from the Chairman, the LBB Economic Development Manager said that the difference in the vacancy rates provided compared to the figure stated by Your Bromley BID Company may be due to the provider of the service counting different types of spaces. It was suggested that the lists of the units counted could be provided for comparison.

*(ACTION: LBB Economic Development Manager / Ms Forrest, Your Bromley BID Company)*

With regards to 4G/5G mobile technology and full fibre broadband coverage, the LBB Economic Development Manager advised that over 37,500 premises in Bromley had been provided with their full fibre upgrades by Openreach, mainly due to upgrades at the Orpington, Farnborough, Grove Park, Chislehurst and Hayes Common exchanges. In May 2020, 1% of premises within Bromley had full fibre broadband access available, compared with an average of 13.1% across several outer London boroughs. There had been a significant improvement during December 2021, with access to full fibre broadband access in Bromley at 24.7% (Openreach 24%), compared with the average of 32.7% (Openreach 19.7%) across several outer London boroughs.

In terms of priority actions, Members were advised that the Bromley Business Hub launched in the autumn as an online one-stop-shop. It provided a wide range of free business resources, including a business start-up guide; business directory with local suppliers; recruitment database advertising vacancies; events calendar; and local demographic data, blogs and latest news. Through the Hub, 636 new users had been engaged by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021 after being live for two months – 47.5% of the traffic had come directly to the site and 35% has come via organic search (SEO). In terms of impact, the Hub had assisted in maintaining/increasing the existing start-up rates of

between 112-140 businesses per month in Bromley; aided the retention of business stock in Bromley; and maintain higher than average employment rates of 76-80% experienced over the past several years.

Another priority action had been the Start Up Bromley scheme and another business lounge had been launched at Biggin Hill Library on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The scheme had supported over 168 Bromley businesses and entrepreneur members with 1:1 advice, networking, digital training, funding training sessions to increase enterprise and aid the sustainability of businesses in the Borough. Further projects included the BID Booster grant scheme for small independent businesses within BID areas; the Welcome Back Fund; ARG business grants; and working with Openreach on full fibre installation and 4G/5G infrastructure providers and mobile network operators.

A copy of the full Bromley Economic Data Report and Economic Strategy Work Plan Update for Q3 2021/22 (October – December 2021) is attached at Appendix E.

**RESOLVED that the updates be noted.**

### **30 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Katy Woolcott, London Biggin Hill Airport, (LBHA) said that business had fluctuated, but they were currently on budget and the Bombardier development of just under 250,000 sq. ft. was on schedule to be completed. This would create several hundred job at the airport and provide the associated business rates contribution. The hotel development was also on schedule to be completed before the end of 2022 and would create additional jobs in the catering and hotel sector. Demand at the airport was high and an application had been submitted for modifications to an existing hangar to better suit the needs of a prospective customer.

Caroline Tatchell, Splash Damage, informed Members that the business was doing well. Staff had not yet fully returned to the office, and this would be phased from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. The company now had 408 employees and 58 vacancies, so were recruiting at a vast rate. A refurbishment of the ground floor at Royal Courts had just been completed and the refurbishment of the upper three floor was underway in preparation for the return of staff.

Chris Glover, Churchill Theatre Bromley, said that they had a successful pantomime run, with only a few performances cancelled due to COVID-19 amongst the cast. The theatre would be hosting the premieres of the Da Vinci Code and Cluedo. Audiences were returning and they were in a good position.

Jamie Stevenson, Acorn Group, advised that the ABC Book Club, which redistributed donations of books to schools, was going very well, as was the property side of the business.

Michael Humphries, Handelsbanken, said that reports were positive – it was busy, with lots going on, and there was no shortage of lending requests.

Louise Wolsey, London South East Colleges, advised that the College were awaiting the outcome from the Department of Education (DfE) of a large submission for investment into the Bromley Campus. If successful, and subject to any required planning consent, the intention was to extend the STEM provision. The College was working in partnership with London Biggin Hill Airport and Bombardier with the intention to play a key role in the growth of business in the borough.

Sarah King attended the meeting representing the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB). Members were advised that there were a few days left to enter the FSB London Celebrating Small Business Awards 2022. There were twelve categories to choose from and the closing date for London entries was 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022. This provided a great opportunity to showcase Bromley businesses and more information could be found via the following link: <https://www.fsbawards.co.uk/>

With regards to net zero, the London region target was 2030 and lots of work was being undertaken in this area. There were some great resources available to for small businesses and further information was available via the FSB Sustainability Hub: <https://www.fsb.org.uk/campaign-listing.html> and the Zero Carbon Business website: <https://zerocarbonbusiness.uk/>

**RESOLVED that the updates be noted.**

### **31 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

4.00pm, Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022

The Meeting ended at 5.53 pm

Chairman