

Brixton SPD 'Mole events' and staffed exhibition feedback report

1. Introduction

'Mole events' and staffed sessions at the small exhibition in the foyer of Lambeth Town Hall, gave people the opportunity to discuss the draft Brixton Supplementary Document (SPD) with regeneration officers.

We took advantage of a number of pre-arranged community and residents meetings and asked local organisations to contact us if they wanted officers to attend a meeting. In addition we publicised four staffed exhibition sessions at a variety of times to suit people with different commitments.

2. Methodology

A review of council and community meetings during the consultation period led us to identify pre-existing meetings that were opportunities for 'mole events'.

- 5 February, Young Lambeth Cooperative, Young People's Working Group
- 6 February, Brixton Area Housing Forum

We also offered to attend the Brixton Neighbourhood Forum but were informed that it wasn't necessary.

Using the key community stakeholder list and the Future Brixton mailing list we asked people to let us know if they wanted us to attend meetings during the consultation period. This offer was also included on the Future Brixton website – www.futurebrixton.org. One organisation, Transition Town Brixton, contacted us to request attendance at a Shared Space event on Monday 11 February. The Future Brixton Programme Manager and consultants from Allied Morrison Urban Practitioners attended and fed back comments.

A small exhibition was set up in the ground floor foyer area of Lambeth Town Hall, along with copies of the consultation booklet, copies of the draft SPD and supporting documents, and a postbox for completed paper questionnaires. Four two-hour staffed sessions were provided for people to drop in and talk to regeneration officers about any aspect of the SPD. Visitors were encouraged to make written representations and complete questionnaires but notes were also taken of any discussions to feed into the consultation.

The timing of the sessions was varied to allow for people who were working in Brixton and could come on a lunch break, who might be working further afield and would need to come in the evening or who might be able to come after collecting children from school. The times were as follows:

- Tuesday 12 February, 3pm to 5pm
- Thursday 14 February, 6pm to 8pm
- Wednesday 27 February, 6pm to 8pm
- Thursday 28 February, 1pm to 3pm

The sessions were promoted in all consultation communications, including:

- Press releases
- Email updates to the Future Brixton mailing list and to key Brixton community stakeholders
- On the website – www.futurebrixton.org
- Via twitter @FutureBrixton and re-tweeted by @Lambeth_Council and @LambethRegen
- Posters and flyers distributed throughout the town centre and in public buildings
- Summary booklets distributed to all addresses in the five Brixton wards and distributed at roadshow and mole events

3. Feedback and participation

Young People's Working Group: 'mole event', 5 February 2013

Attendees: 9

Attendee profile: Young people between the ages of 10 and 19, who are part of the Young Lambeth Cooperative. Seven of the participants were Black African or Black Caribbean.

Notes: Held at Lambeth Town Hall and we were an item on the agenda of a regular meeting. There was a short presentation by a regeneration officer and opportunity for discussion. They chose to complete the questionnaires as the main activity and submitted 9 questionnaires. Attendees also took summary booklets and questionnaires away for family, friends, school and college.

Themes and issues:

- Discussion focused on leisure activities for young people:
 - "I think that Brixton needs a new gym which is catered towards young people" The gym at Brixton Recreation centre isn't really attractive to young people
 - "I like the ice rink in Brixton, there's really no point in taking it down, it's close by for lots of people"
 - "Megabowl in Streatham closed down too, there is a lack of entertainment for young people"

Brixton Area Housing Forum: 6 February 2013

Attendees: 7 representatives from Arlington Lodge Estate, Renton Close, Cressingham Gardens Estate, Effra/Saltoun/Kellett Roads, St Matthews Estate
Attendee Profile: All tenants in Brixton. Mix of gender and ethnicity but ages mainly in the 40s and above range.

Location notes: Regular meeting held at Hambrook House

Themes and Issues:

- Concerns that rates/rents along Electric Avenue are set to rise significantly - potentially pushing out local business.
- Concerns that housing in the Brixton Central area is available to local people, including families, at affordable prices. And that the requisite community infrastructure is available.
- Queried whether other smaller infill sites had been identified.

Transition Town Brixton Shared Space Event: 11 February 2013

Attendee Numbers: 27

Attendee Profile: Cross-section of local residents active in local sustainability projects and environmental campaigning

Location notes: We were invited to attend the pre-arranged shared space event at the Loughborough Centre where there was a lively discussion. Some attendees had previously been at the Sustainability Workshop during the drafting phase of the SPD development.

Themes and Issues:

- Cooperative working - information on what was happening on Somerleyton project e.g. with Brixton Green. There is a need to work with the community
- Is the car park coming back?
- Are we going to see tall buildings in the central area? Tall buildings will create access to light issues (e.g. railway flats currently being built – Barratts?)
- What kind of town centre? Concerns re Brixton becoming a Croydon or an Elephant and Castle (not wanted); There are too many new business coming in – Starbucks, TK Maxx and 6 mobile phone shops; The markets are suffering from rent increases
- Need for a lived in community: They (the developers) don't live here; We don't want a transient community (buy to lets etc)
- There is a need to protect green spaces but they need to be more than just grass. There are no flowers in Brixton
- There is a need to see innovation and sustainability in buildings. How far are we going to be able to ensure the highest sustainability standards are met?
- There is potential for green rooftops... implications for health
- There is a desire for integrated heating systems – CHP
- We need accessible housing for those with disabilities
- Is Brixton going to have a hotel?
- Windrush Square issues: You can drink wine outside at the Ritzy but you cannot drink (alcohol) on the Windrush Square seating; Issues with the water feature and the astro turf

Exhibition staffed sessions

Visitor Numbers: 14

Visitor Profile: Even split of men and women. There were four elderly, white women visitors (although at least two of these visits were by the same lady). The remainder was a good mix of ages and genders from 20s to 50s. Anecdotally the majority of visitors were White British. Most visitors lived in Brixton and often had specific interests. Two visitors were potential developers. All visitors were encouraged to complete questionnaires at the exhibition or to take them away for completion.

Themes and Issues:

- Environmental sustainability – wanted incorporation of more green space in Brixton and more space for outdoor socialising; concerns over demolition within the four key investment areas when we should be looking at refurbishment and retrofitting
- Affordable housing - Brixton needs more affordable housing so that generations of families can stay in Brixton
- The town centre – opinions varied on the retail offer:
 - Need to encourage a better retail offer – currently too many phone shops on the high street
 - Brixton has a great retail offer now, although there are too many phone shops. You can get most things you need and people come

- specifically to Brixton, particularly for Brixton Village, which is great and good that it opens late.
- Brixton doesn't need to attract the bigger stores.
- Improvements to the public realm could include hanging flower baskets; more benches and seats for people to stop and talk.
- The area on Brixton Road between Town Hall and Marks & Spencer is probably the most high profile and should be prioritised. Improvements required are mainly about management – the coordination of cleaning and maintenance. The bins all smell badly.
- Congestion on the pavements, particularly at peak hours, means they are intimidating for older people and make life difficult for all. Buses should be re-routed too help ease some of the congestion and the air pollution. Traders who put little stalls outside their shops on the pavement also made matters worse.
- The central reservation on Brixton Road is dangerous and encourages people to step out in front of buses.
- Business rents that force out independent traders will have an impact on the town centre and what can the council do?
- Encouraging cycling by making it easier and more pleasant is really important and need practical measures.
- Brixton needs affordable gallery and creative space. One visitor was looking for space to base a small theatre company.
- Need facilities for young children now the adventure playground had closed
- Acre Lane: the bus stop outside the town hall is in the wrong place and causes congestion and the recycling bins by Tesco should be off street.

4. Evaluation

The mole events were a good way of engaging with significant numbers of local active citizens. In particular, they were good at targeting some specific demographic groups – e.g. young people (at the Young Lambeth Coop event), and council tenants (at the area housing forum); and for targeting interest groups – e.g. sustainability groups at the TTB event. One downside of consulting in this way is that there is often not enough time in the agenda to have as much discussion as people may have liked.

The staffed exhibition sessions were another way for individuals to drop by and talk to regeneration officers, hopefully at a time that suited them. This was in lieu of drop-in sessions at the Planning Advice Centre at Phoenix House, which is what we did for the draft Vauxhall SPD consultation. We did not expect large numbers of people to take up this option but would have liked to have seen a better representation of the local demographic.

These two methods contributed to the provision of a consultation strategy that aimed to provide ways for everyone to get involved in a way that suited their interests and inclinations.

Discussions at these meetings reflected views encountered at the roadshows and in the questionnaire responses. They also reflected some of the competing priorities, e.g. whether we should be encouraging more major retailers to the high street or not. There is general consensus on some of the key issues, e.g. affordable housing and business space; need for improved public realm; and pavement congestion.