

Dear Steve,

October 16 2018
Ref: BCC846

Re: Brentford Town Centre

Thank you for your letter with responses dated 29 August, 2018.

We've given much consideration and discussion to your reply, however we feel the issues and concerns we raised initially have not been fully addressed and we would ask that you give full consideration and detailed replies to our responses.

Your response 1

In reply to your first response are you in a position to elaborate and share with the community the detail of your plans for the Great West Corridor (Opportunity Area), the results of the recent Retail and Town Centre Study, and how, if successful in your bid the £1m of investment for a Creative Enterprise Zone with Brentford at its hub it will work?

We made the point in our response to the Opportunity Area consultation that the plan ought to relate the OA to Brentford Town Centre. At the moment there is more retail in the OA than in the Town Centre. Is it not the case that until LBH operates its article 4 direction, those offices which do remain in the Town Centre will be converted to flats? If this is the case the Town Centre will not be a vibrant community if it is all housing and poorly served through the lack of essential community amenities. Surely it will just become a dormitory town, with residents spending their hard-earned cash elsewhere and not sustaining the local economy and businesses? Town centre shops need lunch time trade from businesses to be viable! This could be achieved through the creation of pop up street food markets which are hugely successful all over London in attracting workers, perhaps with the added attraction of live entertainment from Waterman's? This would help to fuel the daytime economy as night time trade alone is insufficient to sustain retailers. We have a huge potential market sitting not half a mile away on the Great West Road, but we have to be imaginative and create a destination if we are to tap into it if we're to create a vibrant and prosperous town centre.

Also could you explain why Brentford Town Centre doesn't have a Supplementary Planning Document as did Brentford East, particularly as it is to undergo very extensive development? Surely the ramifications of scale will have a huge impact on the Town Centre's future, and as such a holistic plan would help shape that future and its success? We would also be very interested to know why the Brentford East SPD is now off the agenda.

I'm sure you'll appreciate it's difficult for us to see clearly how these initiatives will bring change to our High Street without a full understanding of the detail and how these plans will manifest change without more meat on the bone.

Equally so can you provide more detail of exactly how Brentford becoming a Business Improvement District would benefit the High Street, when we are already losing local business? A BID might be a model for sustainable town centre management in a few years, but right now it seems somewhat premature. Also what are the views of the Chamber of Commerce and local business following your engagement with them?

Your Response 2

In reply to your second response we are a little confused, on the one hand you very clearly identify the long term problems of independent retailers in smaller town centres, but you then go on to say that the regeneration of Brentford town centre will be a major component in the aforementioned very same centre with flourishing retailers – how so, the problems will not go away, more likely they will become greater?

In your last paragraph in this response re the south side of Brentford High Street you say discussions are at an advanced stage with the site becoming 'unconditional' in March 2019 –

again can you expand on this in more detail please and share your understanding with the Brentford's community? These are major changes about to happen to Brentford town centre which will affect local residents hugely and the LA appear reluctant to share this information with a very concerned community.

Your Response 3

In reply to your final response re transport and links, has there been further development/consultation to CS 9 beyond its current proposed destination point of Dock Road? If we are looking at regenerating Brentford then this should surely be a key element as you suggest, particularly so with reduced parking facilities? Also following objections to the last consultation, particularly from Chiswick residents, which as I'm sure you're aware also had the support from the Mayor's office, what is a realistic time table for this project to begin, and what data is there to support this as a solution to reinvigorating the High Street?

Re your comment on way-finding to Brentford town centre this is an issue which has been identified as a key benefit to a town's development and success, and is a crucial element of urban planning in developing a user friendly town and in creating a positive brand image. If the GWC plan identifies the potential for 7,500 homes and at least 14,000 jobs it's vital to explore every strategy which could draw this population to Brentford High Street; even more so if there is to be of a centralised arts centre! The existing investment in the Legible London signage scheme must be expanded and extended if we are to connect Brentford as a community. With so much regeneration happening now and in the coming years are LBH fully exploring all strategies of how Brentford can be stitched together as a complete town, rather than developments and schemes seemingly created in isolation of each other with no apparent connectivity?

Unfortunately, rail, canal, motorway, and road (in particular the A4) with high traffic levels and high speeds, all create physical and psychological barriers which separate our community causing severance – a north and south Brentford! The issue with this road is exacerbated through multi-agency ownership, which complicates change: Highways England manages the M4, TfL the A4, LB Hounslow the intersecting local roads, and several landowners who abut the corridor. Each has different, and sometimes clashing, priorities, surely a solution to this ungovernable situation has to be addressed if we're to create a connected community and social cohesion to enable better use of the High Street?

If we are to encourage better use of the High Street, particularly from the identified potential of the GWC we have to make access better not only through signage, but by improving transport links, possibly including a dedicated shuttle bus service at key points throughout the day and a redesign of the roads like Half Acre which link the GWC and the station to the town Centre.

The severance of the existing and potentially new community by the A4 is an issue which should be addressed as a priority now, and not one which awaits unlocking by future development.

In reply to your response that 'officers consider that Brentford town centre is well served by bus routes' is this based on recent research or consultation? It would be interesting to have LBH's views in respect of our observation on a connected community.

Going forward we do have some thoughts as to how to remedy the current situation.

1. Keeping the south side of the High Street active and saving the remaining traders – The remaining traders on the south side of the High Street should be supported urgently by the Council and Ballymore in transitioning into temporary retail units. Notably the Post Office is a vital community asset driving footfall across the High Street, but the take-aways, Aryas Styles, Greggs and Evans Cycles are popular too. We understand these traders are now counting down the weeks until they close. It is

important and vital to remember that every pound spent locally means 63% of it stays in the local economy.

2. Given the severity of the problem is it not time to hire a town centre transition manager who could put together an imaginative and entrepreneurial team to rethink the High street?
3. Following on, if we do hire a town centre transition manager should we then stop using the term High Street and designate Brentford as Town Centre? By doing so we could shake off the stigma attached to ailing High Streets, and focus on the redevelopment of a town centre with the creation of a greater mix of uses at its centre as a vibrant successful place, which is accessible to all. Our town centre needs to be repopulated and refashioned as a community hub, including housing, health and leisure, entertainment, education, arts, business/office space and shops.
4. How do we do this? First, at the centre of our town we have the Market Place, the site of a market since the 13th century. Markets are an excellent way of bringing people to a town, and enabling new traders to test out their idea before committing. Pop-up spaces and market-style events bring in smaller businesses that cater for younger people who demand more authentic local experiences – whether in food, fashion or beauty.
These work particularly well when supported by other initiatives such as reduced price or free parking, or evening markets tying in with the night time economy and other events. With the forthcoming advent of Watermans to the town centre they could work in tandem with the market providing a platform with a ready-made audience for live entertainment.
5. Goddard's redevelopment of Roman House - the proposed new development could be refashioned in partnership with LBH as a community hub, including housing, health and leisure, entertainment, education, business/office space and some shops. This would provide a focal point for the community, particularly with the new arts centre relocating opposite. Some more thought would need to be given to the design, but with the right mix of use it again would create greater footfall to the town centre.
6. Empty shops on the south side of the High Street - if the shops on the south side are to remain vacant until as and when the Ballymore development starts??? could not Ballymore/LBH encourage "experience" businesses to open up in these empty shops, or if not these an alternative such as containers units as other LA's have done? Whether that's done through heavily discounted rates to social enterprises and new local start-ups, or easing the switch to a different type of business, BUT please not simply more bookies! Temporarily filling empty properties through getting a 'meanwhile use' in place can help give an area more vibrancy and interest, and potentially stop a spiral of decline at the same time as providing jobs and public space we so desperately need?

A virtuous circle can be created. Put things on the high street people want to do, and they'll return, which can then in turn help those remaining shops that have survived with increased footfall. But it's going to take a bit more imagination from local government than simply bewailing the death of the high street yet again.

We need, to put the heart back into the centre of Brentford, reimagine it as a destination for socialising, culture, health, wellbeing, creativity and learning – not just for housing!

Would you please respond to our responses and comment on our thoughts with possible solutions to help return and create a Town Centre which is both healthy and prosperous, but most importantly meets the needs and requirements of a very long suffering community.

Martin Case and Denis Browne