

**BECKENHAM
CIVIC SOCIETY**

Founded 1943

**RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE FUTURE
OF BECKENHAM
HIGH STREET**

DECEMBER 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Brief Executive Summary of our report and recommendations

1. Vibrant Village

The aim should be to harness Beckenham's unique heritage to create a more attractive village-style environment that will draw in more shoppers and visitors. It should be a place where traffic is well managed, so that pedestrians feel at ease. The identity of **'Beckenham Village'** should be boosted with matching heritage-style signage. New development should be carefully controlled to avoid spoiling the character of Beckenham's centre. The history and heritage of Beckenham should be emphasised and Lottery funding should be sought for a Heritage Trail and Centre. The police office should be open to the public.

2. Traffic calming

This should be introduced to make the High Street safer and more comfortable for pedestrians. Buses and local domestic traffic should continue to use the High Street; footways (pavements) should be widened where possible, street clutter removed, and signage and cleaning improved. Ways of easing the traffic flow at Beckenham Junction crossroads should be urgently investigated. Heavy goods through-traffic should be diverted away from the High Street. Loading facilities need improving. Parking charges should be reviewed, to encourage ease of short stay for visitors and to make all parking free after 18.30.

3. Pro-active planning and marketing

These should be adopted urgently to come up with new initiatives for growth and to promote Beckenham as an attractive place to do business. More support is needed for retailers by reducing business rates, especially for start-up enterprises. There should be strict control on the spread of licensed premises and restaurants (A3 uses). The opening of any further charity shops, estate agencies or betting shops should be discouraged. Urgent action is needed to tidy up unsightly empty premises and the London Borough of Bromley should consider taking them on in the short term to provide new community assets - for example, an advice centre or an internet café. Themed markets, community events and a regular farmers' market in the High Street should be encouraged, to promote diversity.

4. Better teamwork

Positive steps should be taken to strengthen the Town Centre Management team and foster closer relations between shopkeepers, shop owners, local residents and the Local Planning Authority.



AIMS

Beckenham Civic Society (BCS) has studied the London Borough of Bromley's (LBB) Review of Beckenham and West Wickham Town Centres Report¹ presented in late 2009 (which was drawn up without consultation with the BCS). It has responded by appointing its own Working Party to draw up recommendations for safeguarding the future of Beckenham High Street. Attached is BCS's resultant Report, which is tendered to the LBB for due consideration. It provides constructive, practical ideas, reflecting the views of Beckenham's local residents and shopkeepers on the future of our Town Centre.

The aims of this Report for Beckenham High Street are to:

- re-establish its village character
- manage traffic to make conditions safer and more pleasant for pedestrians
- safeguard its future as a secure, attractive and desirable place to shop, work, live and visit
- improve its appearance whilst maintaining and enhancing its local distinctiveness and history
- encourage renewed confidence in its economic future and attract investment
- increase opportunities for promoting retail and business growth and tourism in Beckenham.

Ten meetings² of the BCS Working Party have been held between February and November 2011. On 7 April, consultation was made with the broader BCS membership plus members of the public at an open meeting at Beckenham Public Hall. Views expressed have been taken into consideration. In June, a questionnaire was circulated by BCS to all shopkeepers in the High Street; replies have been analysed and the responses incorporated throughout this report.

We need to act decisively, imaginatively – and swiftly – to find new ways to breathe life into our local High Street and get people using it.



Beckenham's Grade II listed milestone

¹ *Review of Beckenham and West Wickham Town Centres Report* carried out by the London Borough of Bromley Renewal and Recreation Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee (RRPDSC) in October 2009.

² 22 Feb, 14 Mar, 28 Mar, 11 Apr, 23 May, 27 June, 8 Aug, 19 Sept, 26 Sept, 17 Oct.

INTRODUCTION

Beckenham is generally regarded as an attractive and aspirational place to live

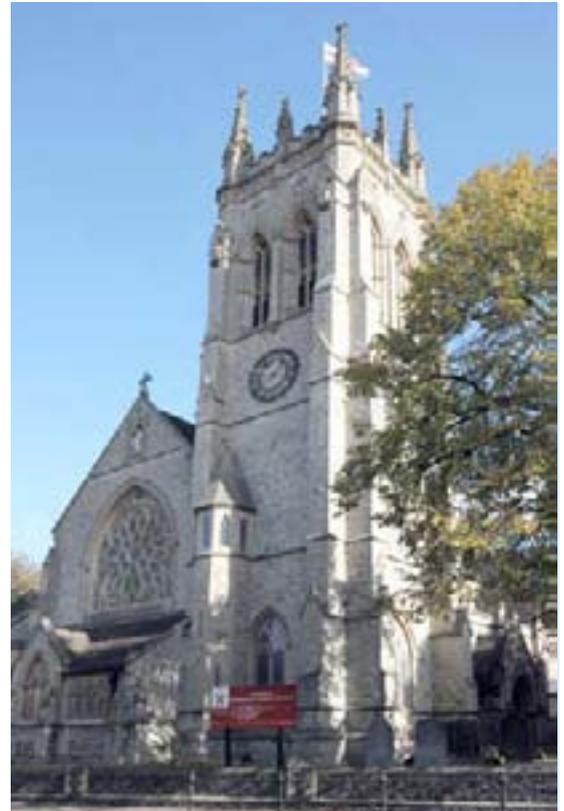
For many people, **Beckenham High Street's attributes, historic heritage and proximity of housing still give it a desirable 'village' character**, even though it has been absorbed into the conurbation and become urbanised. Several other places nearby are still called 'The Village' by their users, e.g. Blackheath Village and Dulwich Village and such places are now recognised as 'Urban Villages'.

We believe that this applies to Beckenham High Street and its immediate environs, as well. It still has many of the key features/advantages of a traditional village: a winding road, parish churches, a village green, a school and our historic pub *The George*. Alongside well-known chains such as *Boots* and *W H Smith*, it has locally-rooted, independent shops which give it individual character, e.g. a sausage shop, kitchenware shop, toyshop, bookshop, clothes shops and a hardware store. It also has banks, building societies, a post office and a choice of supermarkets. Its wide range of pubs, bars, restaurants and cafés attract leisure users by day and in the evening. All of these are clustered tightly within surrounding housing.

For many people, a village, with its tight-knit mixture of facilities, amenities, uses and services is an ideal.

Convenience and ease of getting around; visual interest with a strong sense of place and cohesiveness, all contribute to a sense of local ownership. This engenders a desire to support and encourage improvements and resist change that does not promote and harmonise with a village atmosphere.

Yet despite all its apparent advantages, there is no doubt that the recession is hitting hard and shops and businesses in Beckenham, as in all high streets around the UK, face a fragile future.



St George's Parish Church



Villagers Fine Sausages

Requirements for recovery

- **sustainable partnership approach between interested parties**
- **clear vision from LBB and a willingness to plan ahead**
- **investment**
- **resolving of traffic and pedestrian conflicts**
- **improvements to physical environment and amenities**
- **management of the types of frontage, uses and shops**
- **a tailor-made, local approach**
- **good accessibility for residents, businesses and visitors.**

“Many high streets and town centres are in a critical but stable condition. Their recovery is not just going to happen, but will need nursing.”

Liz Peace, Chief Executive of the British Property Federation

A NOTE ON THE WIDER CONTEXT

Other pertinent reports have been considered in the preparation of this one and BCS recommends these to LBB for study. These include:

- **The imminent publication of the *Portas Review*** (due out Autumn 2011), an independent, government-backed review of how government, local authorities and businesses can promote the development of more prosperous and diverse high streets.
- ***100 Ways To Help The High Street***³ a Local Government Improvement & Development report (published June 2010) advising on helping high streets onto the road to recovery.
- **A national *Shop Vacancy Report***⁴ (published 8 Sept 2011), reviewing the shop vacancy figures of over 1,000 retail centres across the country.
- ***Looking After Our Town Centres***⁵ a guide for town centre managers and local partners - for identifying and taking advantage of new opportunities for growth.
- ***Rotherham's Business Vitality Scheme***⁶ an example of an innovative, award-winning plan to attract new, specialist independent retailers.
- ***Civilised Streets and This Way to Better Streets***⁷ briefings on street improvements, from Design Council Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Design Council CABE).

Nationally, vacancy rates have increased three-fold since 2007 to 14.5% and 1 in 7 shops now stands empty. In the worst performing towns, 1 in 3 shops is vacant. **Beckenham's vacancy rate is 9.5%, one of the highest in the borough**⁸.

A faltering economy, the rise of the supermarkets and the long-term trend towards online and out-of-town shopping are contributory factors but it would be defeatist to sit back and let decline continue to take its toll.



Vacancy rates are increasing

³ www.100-highstreet.co.uk. Produced by the Improvement & Development Agency with Association of Town Centre Management and National Skills Academy for Retail.

⁴ www.localdatacompany.com/news. 'The Good, The Bad And The (Very) Ugly', published by retail analysts Local Data Company.

⁵ www.communities.gov.uk/archived/publications/planningandbuilding. Published April 2009 by Communities & Local Government/ Dept for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

⁶ www.rotherhamtowncentre.co.uk/businessandproperties/grants.asp

⁷ www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/CABE/CABE-publications

⁸ Data from Report to LBB's Development Control, January 2011

BECKENHAM HIGH STREET'S Identity and appearance

Our High Street and its immediate environs could be viewed and 'branded' as a Village, as per Wimbledon Village, Blackheath Village and Dulwich Village. This would shape the way residents and visitors see its future, allowing it to grow in prosperity but preventing its desirable characteristics from being eroded by future change.

The appearance of Beckenham Town Centre, especially its High Street and public spaces, is fundamental to its success. It is fortunate to have a good proportion of parks and green spaces but **the sense of visual order is being lost**. There is a risk that increasing urbanisation could bring with it utilitarian and alien design that would do irreparable damage to the High Street's attractive historic character.

Well-planned improvements to the High Street and its environs would boost commercial activity, encourage visitors and shoppers and benefit local trade. In our BCS shopkeepers' questionnaire, the majority felt that the High Street's appearance is not attractive enough to shoppers, and that **improvements could be made**, especially to tidiness and cleanliness.

A BCS walking survey of the High Street (in February 2011), revealed many areas needing improvement, including:

- noise and pollution from vehicles
- unnecessary street clutter of signs and posts
- unattractive railings and street furniture
- unappealing / dominant and poorly maintained shopfronts, especially signage
- high level of grime on footways and at the base of shopfronts
- litter and lack of well-managed recycling facilities
- uneven footways, resulting in pooling in the rain
- lack of soft landscape, e.g. planting areas, street trees.

It is desirable to:

- co-ordinate urban design
- reinforce historic local character
- improve safety
- reduce street clutter to a minimum
- remove eyesores.



Unattractive street furniture needs improvement

BECKENHAM HIGH STREET'S Identity and appearance

Recommendations for Immediate Improvements

- Jet-cleaning periodically by LBB Street Services of the High Street footways and at the base of shopfronts, and more frequent removal of chewing gum and bird droppings.
- Audit by LBB of street care to identify and reduce street clutter by removing redundant posts, utility boxes etc and, where possible, attaching street signs to buildings to reduce the number of posts on footways (particularly beneficial where footways are narrow).
- Plant more street trees and soft landscaping. Extend hanging baskets and planters to include spring and autumn planting, as well as summer.
- Improve the siting and external cleanliness of litterbins.
- Provide dedicated cigarette bins, particularly around the cinema.
- Support and encouragement from LBB to shopkeepers to improve the appearance of their businesses, particularly with upgrading of signage. Possibility of LBB offering grants to facilitate this.
- Manage the appearance of vacant premises. Tidy site and window blinds as a minimum requirement. Consideration to be given to window dressing with temporary 'shop jackets'⁹ (mock shop fronts using high quality images to give the appearance of a utilised shop), with the aim of attracting new investment from independent retailers.
- Open up views of Beckenham Green by lowering the height of the planters that divide it from the High Street.
- Improve the areas around the Post Office and the War Memorial roundabout, (an important historic feature), with better planting, improved pedestrian access and renovation of brickwork.
- Make all newly-painted yellow lines approximately half the width of conventional yellow lines, where possible.
- Establishment by Town Centre Manager (TCM) of a co-ordinated 'Pride In Our Town' initiative; drawing together all interested parties, including LBB, retailers and local businesses, property owners, residents, community groups, schools, police and so on. (See also *Community Partnerships and Funding*, page 18).



Street clutter needs reviewing



More cleaning is needed



Attractive planters brighten the street scene



Some shop signage needs upgrading



Temporary mock shop fronts help disguise empty shops



The War Memorial roundabout needs improvement

⁹ See www.shopjacket.co.uk.

Recommendations for Longer-term Improvements

- Appointment by LBB of an urban design consultant to prepare a scheme and design guide for the visual improvement of the High Street. To be co-ordinated with other future improvements recommended elsewhere in this Report, i.e. relating to signage, shop fronts, lighting, traffic management, Heritage Trail, etc.
- Provide co-ordinated and upgraded street furniture, with heritage-style fittings, e.g. seats, lampposts, railings, litter bins.
- Widen the footways where possible. A particularly narrow section runs from outside 94a High Street round the corner to 132 (Miso restaurant). Incorporate attractive planting where feasible.
- Upgrade all footway surfaces, particularly uneven surfaces that present trip hazards and where rain puddles form.



Heritage-style fittings would upgrade our High Street



Municipal-style railings are unattractive

SIGNAGE

BCS agrees with LBB that signage in Beckenham High Street and its environs should be clear, useful, attractive and sensitively sited.

As stated above, a **street care audit is needed to declutter** as much as possible.

Communication with shoppers and visitors should be improved. Our High Street could benefit enormously from having **two high quality town centre community noticeboards**. These could be used by the TCM, local traders, residents' associations, community groups etc, and would be administered by the TCM or an appointed liaison officer.

Visitors on foot are poorly served in terms of directions. High quality fingerposts would be beneficial, as would **well-designed town centre maps** at the railway station and in one or two strategic places in the High Street. This could tie in with the Heritage Trail (see *Conservation, Heritage and Tourism*, page 17).



High quality noticeboards and signage would be beneficial

Recommendations

- Rebrand Beckenham as 'Beckenham Village'.
- Install a Beckenham sign, at the war memorial entrance to the High Street, to match the one on Beckenham Green.
- Add 'Beckenham' to signs saying Town Centre or High Street, to reinforce identity.
- Install two high quality community noticeboards.
- Erect high quality fingerposts.
- Improve signage directing visitors from Beckenham Junction railway station and tram terminal to the High Street.

PEDESTRIAN NEEDS

– options for improvements

The current challenges in Beckenham High Street are:

- It is a main through-road with vehicles having priority of movement, bringing road safety hazards and air, noise and visual pollution.
- Pedestrians are at a disadvantage; the road is difficult to cross and the footways are narrow in places.
- The High Street has a narrow, winding and hilly nature.
- Buses passing through the High Street are seen by shopkeepers as essential for trade as they bring customers right to them.

If the High Street stays as it is, its problems will no doubt worsen as traffic increases **but significant improvements could be made, with upgrading suited to its particular conditions.** There are many ways to manage Town Centre traffic, which can be varied/combined to fit a particular location's circumstances and the timescale for implementation (short/medium/long term). These include: 1. Traffic Calming; 2. Shared Space and 3. Pedestrianisation.

1. Traffic Calming

Intended to give more priority to pedestrians and can include engineering measures that alter street layouts, diverting, reducing and slowing vehicles to improve the local environment and pedestrians' and cyclists' safety and comfort. Traffic calming alterations in Beckenham High Street could include the following:

* narrower carriageways and vehicle lanes and wider footways; * more frequent and improved pedestrian crossings with raised surfaces and kerb extensions; * sharper radii at turnings; * parking bays; * speed tables, especially at side roads; * textural changes to surface materials including rumble strips; * visual reminders and demarcations such as tree planting and other landscaping. (Examples of traffic calming schemes in shopping streets can be found in many British towns. In London, Kensington High Street and Walworth Road are often cited.)



Pedestrians are currently at a disadvantage

2. Shared Space

Includes but goes beyond Traffic Calming measures and can dramatically alter the balance of available street space between pedestrians and vehicles.

Involves removing kerbs and paving over carriageways and footways into a single surface for both vehicles and pedestrians¹⁰. Whilst vehicles still have to travel within a specific alignment (defined by landscaping, bollards, seating, colour of paving etc), pedestrians are free to cross the street wherever they choose. All users have to move more carefully, with vehicles travelling at near to walking pace and yielding right of way to pedestrians.

3. Pedestrianisation

Involves closing a street to most vehicles, paving over and incorporating landscape and other features to improve the environment.

(A local example is the middle part of Bromley High Street.) Exceptions for access are made for emergency vehicles, and service vehicles at certain hours. Usually, all other vehicles, including buses, have to be diverted.

¹⁰ The removal of kerbs has caused some controversy because of the needs of blind people. Kerbs also deter vehicles from intruding onto pedestrians' territory. Research evidence varies.

Conclusions

Pedestrianisation is not favoured by the vast majority of shopkeepers who responded to the BCS questionnaire. They need passing trade in order to thrive. It was considered that pedestrianisation of all or some of the High Street would be detrimental, as it would reduce the bustle/vibrancy that comes from a mix of activity and varied transport. Pedestrianisation could foster a bleak and potentially threatening atmosphere at night with closed shops and no passing traffic. Buses would be diverted to peripheral roads. This would be inconvenient for people (particularly elderly, infirm, disabled or with young children) who would have further to walk to reach the High Street from bus stops.

In Beckenham High Street, pedestrianisation, even in part, would have an impact both locally and in the wider area. It could only be achieved if Rectory Road and/or The Drive and Church Avenue were used as a bypass with an essential highway improvement at the Beckenham Junction crossroads and railway bridge (see *Traffic and Transport*, page 12).

Shared Space is not an appropriate solution for Beckenham High Street because of its narrow, winding and hilly nature. There are serious safety issues to consider, especially for the visually impaired and disabled. Shared space could require the re-routing of buses out of the High Street but, as mentioned above, they are needed in the High Street itself to allow customers to reach the shops easily. A road train has been suggested in the LBB Report as a temporary alternative but as these are generally associated with tourist or novelty use, this would be wholly inappropriate for Beckenham. It would be a waste of money. Air quality is another concern with Shared Space: even if buses were re-routed out of the High Street, slowing of traffic to only 5-10 mph would cause a rise in pollution levels.



Crossing our High Street can be hazardous

Traffic Calming

Traffic calming is the only viable solution for Beckenham High Street. It would still allow a flow of traffic, which is so essential in maintaining a positive, vibrant, bustling feel to the High Street. It would also redress the balance between pedestrians and vehicles and make the High Street safer and more pleasant to use.

Whilst the BCS Working Party was finalising this report, it became aware that LBB was in the throes of submitting a second bid to the London Mayor's Outer London Funding Project for the creation of shared space along a substantial portion of Beckenham High Street. If the bid is successful, BCS should like to see any funding won directed to the following recommendations under Pedestrian Needs and also to this Report's recommendations on *Traffic and Transport* (see page 12).

Whilst it is not clear whether such a transfer of funding may be allowed by the terms of the Mayor's fund, **BCS needs to make clear that it does not endorse local taxpayers' money being spent on shared space as recommended in the LBB report. BCS has firm viable alternative recommendations.**

Recommendations

- LBB should consult widely with all interested parties (residents, shopkeepers, businesses, community groups etc) in Beckenham before adopting any of the above traffic management measures.
- If anything is to be done about resolving the current problems for pedestrians, Traffic Calming seems to be the most appropriate measure and could be achieved in the short term for a relatively small cost.
- To enhance Beckenham's traditional character, a minimalist approach should be adopted to any scheme, avoiding excess traffic signs and road markings.

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

Beckenham is well served by public transport, having six bus routes through the High Street, plus rail links and the Croydon/Wimbledon Tramlink. These make it easy to access the High Street without use of a car.

However, as part of the main A222 route, the High Street is busy, and often congested, with unwanted through-traffic, which deters visitors and shoppers and is hazardous for pedestrians.

The greatest traffic problem dominating the town centre's High Street is the congestion at the crossroads at Beckenham Junction. Until this is addressed, it is difficult to see how useful improvements could be made to the traffic flow and pedestrian movement in the High Street.

This would necessitate a widening of the Southend Road (A2015) railway bridge, and extensive property acquisition on the western side, adjacent to the railway station. Whatever the proposals for the High Street, **this highway improvement is vitally needed** for existing traffic, and LBB should be safeguarding its future achievement.

Respondents to the BCS shopkeepers' survey were, in the main, content with the public transport facilities but feel that it would be better if HGVs with no business in the High Street were diverted elsewhere, to cut down congestion and pollution.

Cyclists have poor facilities in the Town Centre: there are currently no cycle lanes (it is likely that the High Street is too narrow for them) and secure parking is very limited. *Bromley Cyclists*¹¹, who surveyed the Town Centre for BCS, advise that the latter is the one main area of concern.



Congestion at Beckenham Junction crossroads



HGVs could be diverted elsewhere

Recommendations

- LBB to commission a traffic survey to monitor the bottleneck at Beckenham Junction crossroads with a view to recommending future improvements, e.g. road widening, especially provision of a better turning facility towards Southend Road. In the long term, it is possible that the existing railway bridge could be widened.
- In the short term, LBB to consider diverting large commercial vehicles with no business in the High Street, via Rectory Road.
- LBB to provide increased cycle parking to encourage cyclists to use the Town Centre.
- Create a more equitable balance of highway space between vehicles and pedestrians, e.g. by widening footways and controlling speed (see *Pedestrian Needs* on page 10 for details).



Cyclists have poor facilities in our town centre

CAR PARKING

High charges and a shortage of parking provision are key deterrents to high street shoppers. The majority (87%) of BCS shopkeeper respondents agree that **parking is an issue that deters their customers**. Their suggestions for improving the situation include:

- cheaper parking charges overall
- free short-term, on-street parking for first 20 (or 60) minutes in permitted areas
- free parking in permitted areas all day on another one day a week, e.g. Thursday (as well as Sunday)
- free parking in permitted areas on Bank Holidays
- tighter controls on all-day car parking to discourage commuter parking.
- a review/reduction of the number of yellow lines
- an increased number of Loading/Unloading bays and/or at least 15 minutes' restriction-free parking for loading and unloading.



Reduced parking fees would encourage more visitors

Car parking is available on-street, and in three public car parks: Fairfield Road; Village Way and St George's Road. There is additional parking at Beckenham Junction, Marks & Spencer and Odeon cinema; it is possible that these could be harnessed to provide out-of-hours public access.

Charging is inconsistent: charges run until 18.30 on-street and until 19.30 in car parks. Also, on-street charges allow purchase of parking time of less than one hour and yet car parks have a minimum charge for up to one hour. If car park charges were consistent with on-street charges it would **encourage a more rapid turnover of cars**, enabling more shoppers to make quick stops.

Parking signage is generally quite good (although some is in poor condition), but it is unclear whether the number of spaces indicated on the High Street car parking signage is correct.

The lower part of the High Street (between Village Way and the War Memorial roundabout) is considered by many to be too narrow to support car parking on both sides. This is a particular problem near the pedestrian refuge in the High Street, beside Sainsbury's. Buses and lorries have difficulty negotiating this stretch and often cause hold-ups. However, **shopkeepers are generally in favour of on-street parking** as it encourages shoppers to stop.

As the government is scrapping centrally-imposed limits on town centre parking spaces¹², it may be possible for LBB to create new parking facilities in and around the High Street. Suitable sites may arise only rarely. Compulsory purchase powers should be used to ensure that such opportunities are not missed.

Recommendations

- Reduce parking fees overall to encourage more visitors.
- Co-ordinate all parking charges (on-street and in car parks) to be per part-hour and to be free after 18.30.
- Provide signage in the High Street to indicate a right turn up Fairfield Road to the car parks beside Christ Church and Lidl.
- LBB to audit current number of parking spaces and accuracy of signage; and review ways of increasing the number of spaces.
- Review parking in lower stretch of the High Street, between Village Way and the War Memorial roundabout.
- LBB to consult with High Street traders re provision of loading/unloading bays to ease traders' delivery problems. More need to be provided, with consideration of an allowance of up to 15 minutes' free parking therein.
- Introduce free parking in permitted areas all day on another one day a week, e.g. Thursday (as well as Sunday).

RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES

Although the High Street does still have a number of locally-rooted independent shops, BCS members and shopkeepers themselves would like to see more, in order to maintain individuality and balance for the High Street. **Increased diversity is required** in the retail offering, in order to attract shoppers, both locally and from further afield.

It is regrettable that there are **empty shops**, especially if they are shuttered and/or left to deteriorate, greatly detracting from the High Street's appeal. Shopkeepers report that rents and rates are too high, in many cases, for them to cope financially.

Beckenham has developed a **strong bar and restaurant culture** over the years **but we have now reached saturation point**. Whilst a good variety of bars, restaurants and cafés is a distinct advantage and encourages trade, a balance needs to be struck. This opinion is backed up by shopkeeper questionnaire respondents.

Retail shops of different kinds should now be encouraged as a priority, rather than any more betting shops, charity shops or estate agents.

The majority of shopkeeper questionnaire respondents agreed that **the High Street needs stronger management and organisation** and that **LBB could do more to support traders**. Their suggestions include:

- **reconsidering the high charges levied on businesses**
- **reducing business rates**
- **having more input from councillors 'coming to see for themselves'**
- **attracting new businesses to the High Street with reduced rents**
- **having more involvement from the TCM.**

Shopkeepers favour regular themed street markets – both food and craft and consider that they encourage visitors and shoppers to come to the High Street. Holding them in the street (requiring part-road closure) rather than on Beckenham Green brings more business to the local shops.

On a more general note, other suggestions to ease the pressure on High Streets nationwide include: encouraging e-retail businesses to open High Street collection points; allowing local authorities to retain rates collected; and limiting increases in business rates to 2% (Bank of England inflation target).



Our High Street needs a diverse range of retail outlets to attract shoppers



LBB could do more to support traders

Recommendations

- The High Street and its environs are now past saturation point with A3 licensed restaurants and drinking places. Enforcement should be introduced by LBB through strong Planning and Licensing procedures, to limit A3 premises in number. (LBB should look at case law Pelling versus Harrow).
- LBB to approach the multiples, e.g. large supermarkets to fund improvements and offset the current imbalance, which is heavily weighted in favour of big business.
- LBB to offer support and encouragement, through the TCM, to improve untidy and unkempt shop fronts and signage.
- LBB to be encouraged by TCM to invoke the Untidy Site procedure.
- LBB to consider introducing innovative measures to utilise empty shops, e.g. civic or community purposes; temporary art gallery for local artists etc, and to take a more proactive approach by acquiring premises.
- Consider decorating empty shop fronts with temporary 'shop jackets' (mock shop fronts) to disguise their appearance to look like utilised shops.
- Regular markets and events should continue to be held, to attract more visitors to the High Street. The programme for these should be extended.
- As per *A Note on the Wider Context* (see page 6), LBB should study and use *Looking After Our Town Centres* as a resource and consider setting up a Business Vitality Scheme, offering grants to set-up retailers.



Markets attract more visitors to Beckenham

THE NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY

Beckenham High Street has a high proportion of cafés, restaurants, bars and pubs, so is well placed to enjoy a vibrant night-time economy. Visitors' confidence in it relies on the High Street being well lit, adequately policed and populated at night; having safe, accessible and reasonably priced (or preferably, free) parking and good public transport links. Beckenham also has the advantage of a marshalled taxi rank outside Marks & Spencer on Friday and Saturday nights, 10.30pm to 2.30am.

Shop window lighting helps to create a friendly setting and attract evening visitors, even when the shops are closed. However, in the wake of the recent riots, more shopkeepers are choosing to have security shutters, and the government is considering allowing them as 'permitted development'. Whilst this is understandable, it must be said that steel shutters, (along with vacant premises, graffiti and litter) warn of danger and vulnerability and if these begin to proliferate, it will be very off-putting to evening visitors.

Recommendations

- Maintain a more visible police presence to reassure night-time users of the High Street.
- LBB to resist the proliferation of solid-style steel shutters and lobby government to retain the current planning permission legislation.
- LBB to consider installing extra lighting for pedestrians, in an appropriate style, over footways.
- Floodlight heritage buildings and signs with uplighters to enhance the night-time atmosphere.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

As with any Town Centre, there are some problems in the High Street and its environs. This is mostly associated with shoplifting or pick-pocketing during the day, burglary and anti-social behaviour (including vandalism and graffiti), and night-time drunkenness and drug dealing. For burglary, the crime rate in Beckenham is one of the highest in the Borough.

Safety and security are paramount so a police presence is required to deal with any anti-social behaviour. There are residential apartments above many of the shops in Beckenham, which means that residents have sight of what's going on. Surveillance is also provided by CCTV.

Beckenham High Street needs to be busy and friendly, look attractive and be well-lit at night, in order to appeal to visitors and customers, who will perceive that the place is under control.

Residents and BCS members have stated that the car park at the cinema feels unsafe both by day and in the evening. This area needs particular attention. There are also **concerns about the alleyways** off the High Street, where LBB could consider the use of gating orders. The police station in the High Street closed in 2005. There is a Safer Neighbourhood Team office, covering Copers Cope and Shortlands wards, including Beckenham High Street, in Albemarle Road but unfortunately, it is not open to the public. It is vital that the public has a recognised point of contact with the police on a day-to-day basis.



Alleyways need reviewing

BCS members are strongly in support of **keeping public lavatories open** and regard the facility at the junction of Kelsey Park Road and the High Street as a vital community resource that should be maintained. The garden area in front of it with its planting and beautiful Persian ironwood tree presents an attractive feature in the streetscape.



The public lavatories are a vital resource

The LBB report proposes the provision of a pop-up toilet for the night-time economy at Beckenham Junction. Whilst it is accepted that this may help to deter anti-social behaviour in the immediate area at night, the provision of automatic toilets elsewhere in the Borough has led to closure on grounds that they were expensive to install, they became prematurely obsolete and expensive to de-commission.

Recommendations

- Establish a crime reduction partnership between shopkeepers, businesses, the police and LBB to foster co-operation to combat High Street crime.
- The Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Safety to challenge and monitor the Metropolitan Police policy on front desk opening times. In particular, opening the front desk of the Safer Neighbourhood Team office in Albemarle Road to the public at certain hours.
- LBB to carry out a review to check that all pedestrian areas and routes are well lit, clean, and are covered by either good natural surveillance or CCTV.
- LBB to consider installing lower level lighting for pedestrians, in an appropriate style, over footways.
- LBB and local police to review whether venues, particularly those that attract large crowds, are well controlled.
- LBB to review places where public and private spaces are ill-defined e.g. alleyways and access to backland, and consider gating orders or encourage property owners to install gates, if necessary, to improve security.
- LBB should retain safe and well-maintained public lavatory facilities in Beckenham.

CONSERVATION, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

Beckenham has a strong historic heritage and this deserves to be celebrated. Its history can be traced back to Roman times and St George's Parish Church in the upper part of the High Street stands on a 6th century Saxon site. The line of a Roman road runs through Kelsey Park and Beckenham Place Park.

The High Street benefits from having two Conservation areas within it – St George's and Kelsey Square. There is a case for linking these two areas together by designating the buildings in between along the High Street, which include Christ Church, the 17th century George Inn and several other significant buildings. This would add extra development safeguards towards maintaining the village appearance of much of the High Street. Three further Conservation areas are within a five-minute walk: Elm Road, Manor Way and Southend Road.

Links with more recent famous names should be highlighted, e.g. David Bowie (recently celebrated by Zizi's, the former Three Tuns pub, at which he played); Bob Monkhouse who was born in Bromley Road, Beckenham; Enid Blyton, who lived and went to school in Beckenham.

A Heritage Trail, marked with plaques in the footways, would guide people to the many points of interest in and around the High Street. It could be backed up by Heritage Trail maps located on signboards in the High Street, an online resource on the Beckenham website, plus paper leaflet maps available in local shops, cafés and the Library. The Trail could extend outwards from the High Street itself to Kelsey Park, Clock House and Beckenham Place Park.



St George's historic lychgate



The 17th century George Inn

Recommendations

- **Overdevelopment from housing schemes close to the High Street should be resisted as they would have a detrimental effect on Beckenham's village character.**
- **Link the two Conservation areas of St George's and Kelsey Square by designating the buildings in between, along the High Street.**
- **The establishment of a Heritage Trail, highlighting the many points of interest in and around the High Street and its hinterland.**
- **Heritage Trail maps to be posted in the new noticeboards (see page 9).**
- **Give consideration to establishing a High Street based Heritage Centre with displays and local history library facilities. Lottery and private funding to be sought for this.**

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING



Beckenham's own identity should be recognised and celebrated for the benefit of local people and to attract visitors to our area and help increase trade.

The High Street is used by every section of the community and it would be beneficial to **encourage more input from community groups**, both secular and religious, particularly to hold functions that are well advertised across Beckenham. By creating and building partnerships, giving a voice to all interested parties, the High Street's future can be better safeguarded and possibilities for funding streams can be more fully explored.

The partnerships could include:

- London Borough of Bromley
- Town Centre Manager
- Beckenham Business Association
- retailers and local businesses
- landowners and landlords
- residents' associations and Beckenham Civic Society
- the police
- local churches
- local schools
- transport operators
- local charities e.g. Rotary Club, Round Table
- community groups,
- youth groups

Recommendations

- Step up the TCM's rôle to increase and broaden partnership initiatives, including setting up a High Street Friends group.
- TCM to establish a co-ordinated 'Pride In Our Town' initiative drawing together all interested parties, including LBB, retailers and local businesses, property owners, residents, community groups, schools, police and so on.
- Explore possible funding streams, both from LBB and from external sources, for instance The London Mayor's Town Centre regeneration fund and the Heritage Lottery fund.
- LBB to secure financial contributions from Sainsbury's, Tesco, Marks & Spencer, Waitrose and Lidl and encourage them to become involved in the community regeneration.
- As per *The Wider Context* (see page 6), LBB to study and use the impending *Portas Review*, as well as the reports *100 Ways To Help The High Street* and *Looking After Our Town Centres*, as valuable resources for identifying and taking advantage of new opportunities for partnership and growth.
- Upgrade the Beckenham website and look at ways of using it to greater effect to share information and resources and draw interested parties together.
- LBB to publicise the Street Friends initiative in Beckenham and encourage individuals, groups, schools, scout and guide groups and so on, to take part.

A FINAL WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I hope you have found this report both interesting and practical. I have spent my lifetime as a resident of Beckenham, during which the town centre has altered little in respect of the buildings lining the High Street. The shopkeepers have changed and horses and carts have been replaced with today's traffic.

Retailing has changed radically in recent years with the growth of supermarkets and internet shopping, such that goods are delivered to people's homes once again, just as they were in the 1930s. High street shopping has changed, with many people visiting the supermarket by car and doing all their buying in one place. Shops selling capital goods for the home in Beckenham have gone but we still have a cinema and plenty of places to eat and drink.

It is very difficult for small shopkeepers and I congratulate them for keeping going and providing those specialist items that are not available elsewhere. A number of new businesses have come here in the last couple of years so let's make them very welcome and give them our support. The current empty premises need new tenants soon.

This special BCS report is a blueprint for the future, which makes a series of recommendations to ensure that the High Street environment in Beckenham is attractive to shoppers and visitors, as well as entrepreneurs who will want to set up their businesses in our attractive and refurbished town centre. Some will argue that the 'Beckenham Village' idea is an anachronism but it works elsewhere so let's ensure it will in Beckenham too, despite the financial gloom surrounding us today.

May I close by thanking my five colleagues of the working party, who have involved themselves tirelessly in producing this comprehensive report, and Caroline Bellenberg who masterminded its design. I must also thank those shopkeepers who responded to our questionnaire back in the summer – the information they provided was very valuable. I thank all readers for their interest and look forward to everyone coming together to make Beckenham the first place to visit for shopping and entertainment.

DAVID J WOOD

Chairman

Beckenham Civic Society

WORKING PARTY MEMBERS, invited by BCS Chair, David Wood

David Wood – Chairman of the Beckenham Civic Society, lifelong resident.

Dr John Parker – Chartered architect, town planner and urban designer; Beckenham resident for 46 years.

Rod Reed (MA Cantab) – local businessman and lifelong Beckenham resident; former Councillor and Cambridge University History graduate.

Pam Notcutt – member of BCS committee; Beckenham resident for 40 years.

Alan Duncan – lifelong resident of Beckenham and chartered surveyor involved in town planning throughout professional career.

Paula McWaters – journalist, and lifelong local resident with an interest in conservation and sensitive development.

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Beckenham Civic Society is registered with the Federation of Bromley Residents' Associations; The London Forum and Civic Voice.

