

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EMPTY SHOPS SCRUTINY WORKSTREAM REVIEW HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 28TH NOVEMBER, 2018

MEMBERS: Councillors Chris Bond, Anne Brown, Joanne Laban (Leader of the Opposition and the Conservative Group), Vicki Pite, Michael Rye OBE and Hass Yusuf

ABSENT: Councillor Tolga Aramaz

Officers: Sarah Cary (Executive Director Place), Mark Bradbury (Director of Property and Economy), Fran Toomey (Regeneration) and Penelope Williams (Secretary)

Also Attending: Councillors Nesil Caliskan and Chris Dey

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tolga Aramaz.

Councillor Hass Yusuf was appointed Chair of the workstream with the support of all members, in the absence of Councillor Tolga Aramaz.

Councillor Hass Yusuf welcomed everyone to the meeting. He began by setting the context, saying he was looking forward to working on the review and developing some helpful recommendations. Scrutiny was helpful as it was an opportunity to look at things from different perspectives, with vigorous thinking and to work together, cross party.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

3. BRIEFING

Members received briefing papers from Fran Toomey (Regeneration) on the issue of empty shops and pedestrianisation.

1. Councillor Nesil Caliskan in her role as Cabinet Member for Regeneration presented the following information:

- The Council was on the cusp of a significant development in Enfield Town.
- The town had been struggling and residents and traders had expressed concern. She welcomed their contributions. Some work

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had been done to carry out enforcement measures but more needed doing.

- The draft Local Plan has identified Enfield Town and Edmonton Green as the borough's major shopping centres and a focal point for local residents. It was important to have active traders and that the Council's assets were used in best possible way.
- The lease on Edmonton Green Shopping Centre had recently been sold and now was a good opportunity to help shape the future. The Leader had been keen to make contact with the buyer and persuade them to work with the Council.
- There was also an opportunity to make a bid to the Liveable Neighbourhoods Fund for funding for public realm improvements in Enfield Town. Officers are working on the bid and have put in an expression of interest.
- Although all the town centres have different characteristics, all needed more funds to enable them to improve.
- There was a role for enforcement. Sarah Cary had had an initial meeting with the owners of Palace Gardens and Palace Exchange to work out what would be possible.

2. Questions and Comments from members

- 2.1 The workstream will want to hold a meeting on planning policy, invite comment from local associations and speak to local residents.
- 2.2 The workstream would aim to be ambitious and not party political. Everyone wanted to create vibrant town centres and acknowledged that there was scope for improvement.
- 2.3 At the end of last year 25 enforcement notices to improve had been issued. Officers had prioritised the issue and talked direct with owners. Fourteen of the original 25 were now being renovated. A property in Silver Street was appealing the notice, having made an application for a change of use. Councillor Bond suggested that the owners were not getting the right advice about the possibilities for changing use.
- 2.4 Fran Toomey was working with her planning colleagues to ensure that the planning policies were applied consistently and that the owners where applicable could be encouraged to apply for change of use. This will be more possible when the new Local Plan is finalised.
- 2.5 There was some sympathy with the idea of turning some of the shops into housing. Many of them were too small to be viable as shops and the rents were too high.
- 2.6 Foxtons had recently left their corner property the shop was now boarded up. #
- 2.7 The suggestion was made that we call a meeting of landlords and agenda to discuss how flexibility could be applied.

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- 2.8 Concern that ground floors should not be left empty. This could be imposed as a planning condition. It was important to have the right policies in place.
- 2.9 Officers were working on a draft action plan. The Council does have some power to do or influence things as they own some of the freeholds. They can also take enforcement action, encourage planning applications and co-ordinate activities.
- 2.10 When considering events, the Council would have to work with markets and town centre managers. The Enfield Charitable Trust has control over the Enfield Town Market and the island site.
- 2.11 Questions were asked about what was happening about the Cycle Enfield proposals which had been consulted on earlier last year. Further details were requested.
- 2.12 Deutsche Bank the new owners of Palace Exchange and Palace Gardens had plans to invest in the centres. Initial discussions had taken place and more detailed proposals requested by the Leader. It was felt to be a pity that the shopping centres were not open for longer hours in the evening. Few customers were around in the mornings.
- 2.13 The liveable neighbourhoods bid would centre around public realm improvements.
- 2.14 There were plans within the Enfield Town Masterplan to harmonise the Northern end of the town to make access to Town Park easier.
- 2.15 The quieter neighbourhoods programme would create better more people friendly streets.
- 2.16 The Planning Committee had recently granted planning permission for a development on the Genotin Road car park. Officers had thought it complied with the masterplan although some members had disagreed.
- 2.17 The Council could act as an enabler for town centres, to help create opportunities for outside investment.
- 2.18 When considering making reductions in business rates to encourage people to take up empty premises it was necessary to consider the impact on the Council's finances. Central Government sets business rates, but Councils were able to make reductions and offer some transition relief. Mark Bradbury clarified that business rates were based upon the rental value of the property, set by the Valuation Office.
- 2.19 Many businesses were stagnating. Some could benefit from the new Government initiative to offer some rate relief but the rating system was not always the fairest. Properties with a lower rent can have a higher

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turnover and benefit from rate relief. Others can have higher rents, rates and a lower turnover and not benefit.

- 2.20 Pedestrianisation needed to be looked at in the context of each different high street. A blanket policy would not work. Having cars driving through the town was thought to be beneficial by some, but others felt that it was unpleasant and discouraged people from using the shops on the post office side of Church Street. A traffic free environment could encourage shoppers and make it easier to link the market square to the shopping precincts on the other side. It was a fact that 80% of the traffic through the town did not stop. Work in this area could be done to build on the Cycle Enfield proposals.
- 2.21 There was also scope to look at improving the bus terminus at the end of the town and making the entrance more attractive.
- 2.22 It was acknowledged that Enfield Town probably had too many retail properties in some areas, some of which could be turned into residential. This would also increase footfall.
- 2.23 Having a better mix of restaurants, shops and cafés to create a more vibrant evening economy could also help. Encouraging other recreational uses, perhaps an art house cinema. Some consideration had been given to creating an arts hub in the old court house building. It was suggested that the factors behind the success of the Art Café at the end of the town be investigated.
- 2.24 It was important to talk to agents, retailers and residents to find out what they wanted and what they felt would bring people in to the town centres.
- 2.25 The suggestion was made that we could have a tourist train running through the town from a park and ride somewhere on the outskirts.
- 2.26 The market could be a central focus of activity. The Old Enfield Charitable Trust had a central role to play. Market opportunities should be offered to small traders. Agreed that a representative from the Trust should be invited to attend a meeting to discuss plans. Members queried why the market was not held every day.
- 2.27 Other suggestions included promoting musical performances, encouraging pop up shops and introducing a local loyalty card.

4. REVIEW SCOPE

The workstream received and discussed the draft scope for the review.

NOTED the following changes:

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1. The title should be changed to read Improving Enfield Shopping Areas – Empty Shops
2. The scope was expanded to include shopping areas across the borough.

AGREED to adopt the scope for the review with the changes above.

5. NEXT STEPS

The following issues were highlighted for future consideration:

- That the workstream would focus on three key shopping areas, Enfield Town, Edmonton Green and the Angel, plus one other but this would not preclude discussion of other areas. We would start with two meetings on Enfield Town.
- That the Council should consider encouraging use of empty shops by the community and possibly provide an outlet for crafts and mending things.
- That the Council should encourage the creation of a more village like feel to the hub areas.
- That we should look to suggest changes that can be made now and not wait for the implementation of the Master Plan.
- That Mark Rudling (the former Enfield Town Centre Manager) should be invited to a future meeting
- Invite a representative from the Enfield Charitable Trust to a meeting to discuss their plans for the market and what was possible.
- We should encourage other markets to use the market square.
- Bring the retailers together to find out what they feel would help discuss what they could do to improve things.

It was agreed that the workstream would ask officers for the following information for all the shopping areas:

- A list of all the key shopping areas in the borough and their formal designation
- A list of all empty shops in each shopping centre area
- Details of landlords who own the empty shops
- Size and rateable value of different units available
- Footfall statistics and analysis for each of the main shopping areas
- Where people are travelling from to shop
- Information gathered recently by Cycle Enfield in relation to shopping areas

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- Details of the Liveable Neighbourhoods public realm improvement bid. What is available and what are the criteria for spending any money received?
- What mechanisms does the Council have to make improvements?

6. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members agreed the dates of future meetings as follows:

- Monday 7 January 2018 at 6.30pm (later changed to Thursday 10 January 2018 at 7pm).
- Monday 18 March 2018 at 6.30pm

Another date in February will also be identified.