

London Assembly Regeneration Committee

16 December 2013

Briefing notes on Mayor's Outer London Fund Round 1 funded project in Willesden Green

How has the Outer London Fund (OLF) been used in the London Borough of Brent?

The Outer London Fund has allowed Brent to deliver an integrated and holistic approach to the regeneration of the High Road in Willesden Green in the context of the delivery of a major new council building, the Willesden Green Cultural Centre (WGCC) being built to replace an existing building, the Willesden Green Library Centre (WGLC).

Brent has been able to invest time and funding to turn this period of transition into a positive experience. Through the Town Centre Activities Programme (TCA) we have been able to deliver a series of projects which have used wasted or underused spaces on the High Road to nurture new enterprise and create new community resources and activities.

Which aspects of the project have been successful?

<p>New Windows on Willesden Green (September 2011 – December 2011)</p> <p>This was the first project funded by the OLF Round 1. Our team delivered an intensive programme of design and culture-led activation that sought to revive and improve the high street bringing new energy, audience and positive change to the area. Projects included a shop display competition in the lead up to Christmas and the creation of a pilot shop in a vacant unit acting as the ground base for project information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 shop windows transformed • 5000 visitors to the 2011 Christmas Events Programme
<p>Queens Parade (January 2012 – present)</p> <p>This project focused on activating a vacant eight-unit retail outlet known as 'Queens Parade'. This property was given a new look and became home to twelve meanwhile start up businesses, the tenants pledged to take up a space on a greatly reduced rent and in return 'give back' the community in some way. Queens Parade is still in operation today.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 empty spaces transformed overall • 19 Meanwhile Leases • 20+ local trainees • 36 activities with existing shops
<p>Library Lab (February 2012 – March 2013)</p> <p>Architecture 00:/ transformed a previously disused café space in the WGLC into a temporary public community workspace that offered free workshops, lectures, co-working space, and a crèche. This combination of uses was aimed at accelerating local entrepreneurship and pioneering new ways of working and learning. The Library Lab offered a range of workshops from business support to coaching drop-in sessions for local migrants with ideas for new enterprises.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average footfall of 3000 per month • 5 – 7 events hosted each week • 120 public workshops • 150 people used the Language Exchange
<p>Willessden Green Team (May 2012 – present)</p> <p>The Outer London Funded projects got the attention of the community and when the Portas Pilot Round 1 Fund was announced residents decided that a town team would be a positive next step. Whilst the bid was not successful it brought people together and since May 2012 the town team has grown in numbers and enthusiasm. In August 2012, the Willessden Green Team was formally constituted as an unincorporated association. In September 2013 the Town Team voted to apply for Charitable Status.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 market days • 2 community noticeboards installed • 6 new planters • 20 new trees

What has gone less well?

Although the Willesden Green Team has grown as a robust community organisation its weakness remains the lack of business involvement. Perhaps too much emphasis was placed on engaging with vacant and 'problem' shops and less on the bulk of surviving businesses. The new phase of the Town Team will be designed to work with existing businesses more.

Brent has one of the highest rates of self-employed workers in London and Brent are leading the way in provision of temporary co working space but we also need to provide more secure affordable workspace. The OLF Round 2 bid sought to build on the temporary nature of the first round bid by securing long term space in order to better support the start ups, SMEs and also the town centre, unfortunately this bid was not successful.

There remains significant support to bring the Library Lab back to Willesden Green and there are suitable properties on the High Road which could be secured for medium term leases giving businesses the security they need, Brent is currently seeking funding for this.

How would you describe the application process?

The process for Round 1 was clear and the Brent team enjoyed the creative process of putting the bid together. Round 2 had more weighting on capital funding than revenue which, whilst a great opportunity to make physical changes to an area, was challenging as it restricted the amount of resources available to manage the project and deliver the economic and social programming and capacity building that is essential to successful town centre regeneration.

How did the GLA support you during throughout the project's life?

We had very good support from the GLA team, assisting in addressing some challenges with financing and funding at the start of the project and also in setting up contracts. Spend on this project was under budget at stages and the GLA were open and flexible to our suggestions for new initiatives, allowing us to extend the Library Lab and test new models like the pop up crèche.

What will happen next to your Outer London Fund-supported projects?

Brent has committed to a third extension of Queens Parade since the planned redevelopment of this site has been delayed and we want to avoid the parade standing empty again; this has been funded by Brent, Ward Cllrs and the High Street Innovation Fund. In the latest phase Brent will use the recently established Meanwhile Foundation to take on the lease; this will allow the site to continue to be occupied with minimal business rates liability.

Six of the eight units will continue to provide affordable retail space for the high street and the new phase now includes a small art gallery space, co working space and a community meeting space called BAR Lab managed by local community group Brent Artists Resource.

The next step for the Town Team is to seek Charitable Status; the emphasis moving forward will be on recruiting businesses to join the company board and help bring others in as members. If successful this opens the door to new funding streams so the group can continue to grow, the Town Team has lots of good ideas for the High Road and we need financial support to realize these. Some of the ideas include:

- **Willesden Green Lab** - a new site on the High Road offering low-threshold enterprise support
- **Willesden Green Connects** - providing fast Wi-Fi services throughout the town centre
- **The Willesden Green Card** - a loyalty card scheme
- **WG Rent and Rates advice resource** - specialist advice and negotiations on rent reviews and rate valuation
- **Willesden Green Neighbourhood Plan** – a community led plan for the town centre

Brent also wants to carry out further research into the ownership on the High Road and how non-institutional freehold ownership of businesses can mean that businesses are not incentivised to improve their offer. We have recently commissioned a Land Registry Search of the whole High Road and now want to commission a study of this data so we can better understand the micro economic of this town centre.