

MAYOR OF LONDON

Night Surgery Bromley





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Night Surgery: Bromley

In July 2023, London's Night Czar visited Bromley town centre to take part in the BR1 Lates Sport and Wellbeing Festival, delivered through the borough's Night Time Enterprise Zone (NTEZ) programme. The event brought sport taster sessions and health and wellbeing organisations out onto the high street alongside live music, food trucks and a silent disco. The event provided an opportunity for the Night Czar to speak to council officers, councillors, stakeholders, partners and businesses on the high street about the impact of the Night Time Enterprise Zone and BR1 Lates events.

On 25 July I visited Bromley town centre for the second of three Night Time Enterprise Zone events being delivered in 2023 under the BR1 Lates brand. Following the huge success of their first event, Library Lates, which saw over 3,000 visitors to the library and footfall up by 12.8% across the town centre, I was excited to hear directly from local businesses and partners about the impacts of the NTEZ programme. I was also keen to see how the Bromley town centre at night had evolved since my last night surgery in 2019.

The Umbrella Project launch

The Umbrella Project, a six-week installation of colourful umbrellas suspended and illuminated along the high street, launched as part of the event. The installation is part of a campaign to challenge stigmas and raise awareness about neuro-diversity, an umbrella term that encompasses a range of conditions such as autism, ADHD, Dyslexia and OCD that collectively impact 1 in 5 people in the UK. I was honoured to give an opening speech alongside John Kelly of sponsors and local recruitment specialists Hanson Regan, Daley Jones and Carl Mumford from the ADHD Alliance, Josh Beale from the ADHD foundation, Caragh McMurtry from Neurodiverse Sport, and the Deputy Mayor of Bromley, Councillor Keith Onslow.

The council is working with the ADHD foundation and ADHD Alliance to improve work standards for neuro-diverse staff and develop good work practices for employers in the borough. The ADHD Alliance is also working with the Met Police to support neuro-diverse staff and improve interactions between police officers and members of the public with neuro-diversities. It was inspiring to learn about their work and to hear former Olympic rower, Caragh McMurtry, talk about Neurodiverse Sport, an organisation set up to make sports more inclusive and accessible.



Night Czar Amy Lamé giving a welcome speech at the launch of the Umbrella Project



Umbrella Project sponsors and partner organisations

Former Topshop unit

Following the launch of the art installation, I was delighted to DJ a short set at the BR1 Lates silent disco. Silent discos have proved extremely popular at previous BR1 Lates events and it was brilliant to see a diverse group of people, young and old, hitting the dance floor!

I was also grateful to have the chance to speak to local sporting clubs and organisations including the local rugby clubs and running group. It was great to see activities for all ages with a great mix of sports represented offering taster sessions and providing information to encourage people to engage with sport, fitness and wellbeing after dark.

My next stop was the former Topshop retail unit on the high street, which occupies a prominent location on the pedestrianised part of the high street. The large council-owned space has been vacant for a number of years. I spoke to officers from the economic development team about the opportunity to activate the space with start-ups or incubator workspaces and to programme the space into the evening and night time. I was excited to hear that the economic development team had secured funding to undertake a feasibility study for council-run uses, rather than looking to find another anchor tenant to lease the whole floorspace. It is exciting to see the council take a hands-on approach to bringing activity and new uses to the high street to address the long-term vacancy of a strategically important unit on the high street.



The vacant Topshop unit with an exhibition of Bromley getting active



Night Czar Amy Lamé speaking to Bromley RFC coaches and players

Churchill Theatre

My next stop was the Churchill Theatre where I spoke to the theatre manager and representatives from the local Business Improvement District, Your Bromley BID. That evening, the theatre was staging a performance of Annie that would finish at 10pm. They told me that the NTEZ has been a game-changer for the town centre. The theatre foyer hosted the silent disco for the previous BR1 Lates event and had strengthened connections to other local organisations and businesses as a result. In June, they opened the theatre bar and hosted live music in their outdoor courtyard as part of a 'Make Music Day' organised by the BID. No one had expected such a large crowd and the aim is to build on that momentum and continue to run evening events under the BR1 Lates banner, which now has a strong brand identity and awareness.

The theatre is also working closely with the council to develop bespoke lighting projections for their façade, funded by the Mayor of London's High Streets for All programme. These new projections will launch at the next BR1 Lates event, a Winter Light Spectacle, in late October 2023.

The theatre is in a prominent location between the high street and Churchill House Gardens, a beautiful green space that is hidden and difficult to access after dark, but includes an outdoor amphitheatre by a lake. The theatre's forecourt is a gateway to the gardens and there are longer-term ambitions to create a civic square and cultural quarter around the theatre and to activate the gardens at night.

Representatives from Your Bromley BID were also very encouraged by the positive impacts of the BR1 Lates events, with dwell time in the town centre increasing in the evening on event days. The BID is continuing to encourage businesses to stay open a bit later to take advantage of the events. They are promoting the benefits through their own communication channels and are profiling businesses that have benefited from later opening. The BID wants to keep surveying businesses to assess the relationships between footfall, dwell time and spend. On Make Music Day, for example, all the businesses they surveyed reported increases in both footfall and trade.



Night Czar Amy Lamé speaking to the General Manager of the Churchill Theatre



Night Czar Amy Lamé speaking to Your Bromley BID representatives and board members

Bromley Library

Next, I headed to Bromley Library. Following a huge increase in visitor numbers during the Library Lates event in April, they'd decided to stay open late again. This time they were hosting a small market of traders, makers and entrepreneurs from the council's Start-up Bromley programme. Alongside attracting more footfall, the events have also prompted the library to strengthen ties with other organisations in Bromley, including the local museum who had some of their collection on display in the foyer.

I had the chance to speak to local entrepreneurs selling their products at the library. They were all part of the Start-up Bromley business support programme, which operates from the library and supports businesses with marketing, social media, business development and opportunities to showcase and sell their work. I heard from people developing natural beauty products, sustainable fabric and clothing designers and writers working in Bromley. All were appreciative of the opportunity to connect with other businesses and access free support and resources at the library.



Bromley Library workers



Night Czar Amy Lamé speaks to market stall holders and Start-up Bromley entrepreneurs

Lolli's

My final stop of the evening was Lolli's, a local confectionary shop that had stayed open later to benefit from the additional footfall brought by the event. The owners told me that the BR1 Lates events have been good for trade. The shop usually closes at 6pm and had previously stayed open later on Thursdays, but this had been rolled back as evening trade declined. The events were seen as essential for bringing life and activity back to the high street after 6pm and the retailer had benefited from more families visiting the high street during the events.



Night Czar Amy Lamé with Lolli's owner and staff



Amy Lamé with GLA and Bromley officers and NTEZ partners

Final Thoughts

It was wonderful to meet the council officers and Night Time Enterprise Zone partners and hear about the successes of the programme to date. The events have been a great way to test ideas and have acted as a catalyst to encourage businesses to open later. The NTEZ events have seen impressive footfall figures and increases in dwell time and spend on the high street. It was also great to hear about how the programme has supported closer working between organisations, businesses and the council in Bromley – something I hope will continue as a lasting legacy of the NTEZ.



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Theatre

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