

BRIXTON BID

WE'RE TALKING BUSINESS

Brixton Business Improvement District (BID) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to strengthening Brixton's diverse business culture. We represent more than 500 levy-paying businesses and work to develop new and exciting opportunities for Brixton.

Brixton – beyond business rates and Brexit



Michael Smith,
Director of the
Brixton Business
Improvement District

No one has really explained why Starbucks are leaving our High Street after nine years. Did they jump or were they pushed?

Could they, like Poundland, like New Look or like Virgin Mobile, have succumbed to the deadly combination of high rental values and, consequently, high business rates?

This major burden is still affecting all other high street business establishments in Brixton. But, who knows, maybe they will be back?

Brexit

A Brexit deal in October could add to the problems of the remaining high street retailers in Brixton. The possibility of a “No Deal” Brexit could significantly increase the pressures of business rates on the production model of many businesses even further afield than Brixton.

Worryingly, on Brixton's High Street the perfect business storm appears to be gathering and the dark clouds are ominous.

Empty shops are remaining vacant for longer or not being replaced by “like-for-like” businesses. Discount stores, cash-only stores and hastily constructed mini-mini arcades are appearing. Could this be the beginning of the end of the crush to get into Brixton? Hastily assembled arcades provide no additional business rates for government coffers.

In Brixton, we seem to be avoiding the proliferation of charity shops – very noticeable on some other high streets – on the busy A23.

With a bit more of a “curated” approach to filling these empty units, could more be done to bring more lasting benefits to the Brixton area in the long run?

Is the local authority prepared to encourage and support more local or innovative business options on our high street – a dedicated book shop or entrepreneurial start-ups?

Could the Brixton Pound concept be supported to find a space on the high street? More clubs/live music venues maybe, promoting more of that Brixton “edginess” for which we have become so internationally renowned ... and with no residents to disturb.

Could this also be the chance to for the provision of much needed public toilet facilities on our high street?



There are shops in there

This is what customers see – or don't see – of some local shops not far from the high street. And Atlantic Road may remain like this for at least the next two rounds of business rates payments for these businesses (April 2020/21 and 2021/22). Something needs to be done and it's more than simply business rates relief. Starbucks would certainly have demanded much more for its business rates payments.

Who gets what?

Local authorities collect approximately £25 billion a year in business rates from businesses. They are then allowed to retain 50% of what they collect. Business rates and council tax are now the largest source of income for local authorities.

Lambeth council's use of business rate relief to

support a range of businesses is commendable. Its newly announced policy of supporting businesses to pay a Living Wage via business rates relief [see <http://bit.ly/LBL-NDR-LW>] is also very commendable. However, care needs to be taken that this new policy does not add an even greater burden on businesses whose business rates may already be close to matching or exceeding the rental value of their property.

Businesses up and down the country are crying out for a non-domestic rates (business rates) assessment process that is transparent, fair and nationally acceptable to all businesses at the point of assessment.

Councils collect it all

Business rates or council tax, local authorities collect them all. So, when licensing campaigns are waged against businesses by residents wanting to see pubs/bars replaced by housing and shops, local authorities are winners at every round, collecting tax from either party.



Local representatives (councillors and officers) in Brixton must be careful about being drawn into taking sides in such disputes. Councils with their licensing and planning functions need to remain objective, independent, inclusive and engaging with all parties in these disputes.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have now been created to represent the interest of businesses in many such disputes. Residents' associations and neighbourhood forums act adequately to gather and represent the views of residents.

Residents or businesses people come to live, work and visit Brixton for the same reasons.

They all see Brixton as:

- Iconic
- Fashionable
- Electrifying
- Buzzing with nightlife and independent shops and coffee bars
- Excellent for food and transportation links

Residents and businesses will, however, leave Brixton behind should these things continue to happen:

- An above average crime rate for London
- Theft
- Violence and assaults

After Brexit, and irrespective of what you pay, council tax or business rates or just plain old VAT, let's continue to make Brixton a place for everyone.

Only in Brixton



AN ORCHARD TO CONNECT WITH AND CARE FOR

Brixton Orchard, which the BID began to create in 2016 following its green infrastructure audit of the area funded by the mayor of London, serves more purposes than being a beautiful and restful place in a bustling town. Urban Growth Learning Gardens, the Lambeth-based social enterprise that helped to dig and plant the orchard, outlines some of them ...

Green infrastructure consists of natural and semi-natural measures that address issues like air quality, urban heat island effect* and water drainage problems.

Brixton Orchard, opposite the new Lambeth town hall development, aims to showcase how green infrastructure interventions to address air quality can also serve other functions, like reconnecting people to where food comes from.

Trees and plants help to reduce air pollution created by vehicle emissions by trapping small particles that are suspended in the air on the surface of leaves.

By trapping pollution, the leaves act as a protective barrier for people and animals.

Deciduous plants and trees, which shed their leaves as winter approaches, do this in spring, summer and autumn.

Evergreen plants and trees do it all



year around.

Rain washes particles off leaves and away to another location and out of the air we breathe.

Brixton Orchard is nurturing 35 fruit trees, and hundreds of examples of edible and woodland hedging. These produce apples, pears, quince, plums, damsons, cherries, sloes, rose-hip, hawthorn, amelanchier (a large shrub or small tree with edible berries), gooseberry, alpine strawberries and others.

Planting has been chosen to encourage and support biodiversity and to provide food for pollinators all year around.

Improving biodiversity creates a more resilient ecosystem that can complement other green space nearby like the rest of Rush Common, and possibly extend its support to areas like Brockwell Park where stunning native wildlife like the elusive stag beetle can be found.

Brixton Orchard is for the people, plants and animals living in and visiting Brixton. Please come and enjoy this public space, it is part of Rush Common and is for you to connect with and care for.

The orchard is part of a wider strategy to promote Brixton as a destination and

to raise awareness about sustainability in the city.

*An urban heat island occurs when a city area experiences much warmer temperatures than nearby rural areas. The difference in temperature is the result of how well the surfaces in each environment absorb and hold heat.



Urban Growth Learning Gardens host free weekly open gardening workshops at Brixton Orchard where people are invited to help them take care of the local ecosystem and learn skills and knowledge about fruit trees, edible and ornamental plants and horticulture.

They are open to people of all interests and skill levels, so do join in on Thursday afternoons between 1pm and 2:30pm.

■ Sign up for free tickets at <http://bit.ly/UG-orchard>

Resolution of concerns must not close this pub

The BID has called for a resolution of residents' concerns about the Duke of Edinburgh pub on Ferndale Road that does not threaten its continuing operation.

With pubs currently closing at a rate of 18 per week across London, we need to find a solution without putting the Duke of Edinburgh under threat of closure.

Some local residents have compiled a list of objections to a licensing application by the pub's operators which will be

decided by Lambeth council. While concern has been expressed about live music and DJs, these are not a consistent feature of the pub. Neither are outdoor event screenings – another issue raised by residents.

The pub has not been accused of exceeding sound levels that can be monitored by the local authority.

The Duke of Edinburgh is a member of the Brixton BID and, among other things, a vital community resource for members

of the South American footballing community from Stockwell.

It has a history of complying with local authority licensing conditions and is committed to making its part of Brixton safe for all, inclusive of residents and customers.

It has an effective dispersal policy in place with security staff leading customers away from the area quickly after closure, followed by litter picking to clean the area.

BRIXTON BID

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