

THE BRIXTON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring, March/ April 2017

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Distributed free to members.

Registered with the London Forum of Amenity
Societies, Registered Charity No.1058103,
Website: www.brixtonsociety.org.uk

Our next open meeting
Thursday 8th June:
Annual General Meeting

7 pm at the Vida Walsh Centre,
2b Saltoun Road, SW2

Time again to report on what we have been
doing over the past year, collect ideas for the
year ahead, and elect committee members to
carry them out. More details from the
Secretary, Alan Piper on (020) 7207 0347 or
by e-mail to apiperbrix@aol.com

We plan to get out more!

With the first signs of Spring, our thoughts turn
to how we can get out around our area, to
meet new people and touch base with existing
members. We have already applied for our
spot at the Lambeth Country Show, which has
crept forward to the **15/16 July** weekend.
Should we also turn out for the Myatt's Fields
Park Fair on **17 June** or for one of the events
at Brixton Windmill? Or if you would like our
presence at another local festival or street
party, we need early notice to line up our
volunteers.

Remember also that on the second Saturday
of each month, we run a stall as part of the
Makers' Market in Station Road for a couple of
hours prior to our **Market Walks** – next dates
are **11 March & 8 April** - see page 2.



*Brixton's new post office and the restored old
fire station in Ferndale Road (C940-F17-17.jpg)*

Spot the post-box!

In our last issue we referred to the square
post-box in Electric Avenue without realising
that it had been removed during the re-paving
works. The consensus from a flurry of e-mails
among members was that a more practical
place to put it back would be outside or near
the relocated Ferndale Road post office, as
above, where there is none at present.

Curiously a pillar box still remains in Acre Lane
outside where Brixton's main post office stood
until a flying bomb destroyed it in June 1944!
(This incident was reported a year ago in
Newsletter No.221.)

Our first Summer Walk: Sunday 21 May - Ferndale

Meet at 2-30 pm outside Clapham North
Station (Northern Line) to explore the area
between Clapham Road and Acre Lane.
Based on Brixton Heritage Trails 2 & 3
On bus routes 88, 155, 322, 345, P5, also
close to Clapham High St. (Overground).

Diary of Events, Spring & Summer 2017

Society Meetings

The Executive Committee usually meets on the second Thursday of the month to plan activities and agree our responses to current issues. Meetings are at 7 pm at the Vida Walsh Centre, 2b Saltoun Road, SW2 (at the Effra Road end, facing Windrush Square).

- 13 April
- 11 May
- 8 June (AGM)
- 13 July
- 10 August
- 12 October

Market Walks

Our guided walks round the market area continue on the second **Saturday** of every month, at £3 including the illustrated booklet of the route. Tickets are best booked in advance via marketwalks@brixtonsociety.org.uk

Walks start from Brixton Station Road at **2-30 pm** and take about 80 minutes.

Sunday Walks

We join with other amenity societies to offer a wider range of guided walks on most Sundays through the summer – the full list should be enclosed with this issue.

Brixton Windmill

Guided tours and other events are about to start up again, on at least one weekend a month from **25 & 26 March** – see the Friends' website for further details:

www.brixtonwindmill.org/visit



Editorial Notice:

Space permitting, we try to feature local events and publish reminiscences or enquiries in our newsletter. We welcome news and comments from all who are interested in the Brixton area, so opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the Brixton Society.

All material should be sent to the Secretary, Alan Piper, 82 Mayall Road, SE24 0PJ, or by e-mail to APiperBrix@aol.com

Our next issue will appear in mid-June, so please send in before the end of **May**.

Links with Other Groups

Please check directly with the organisers if any queries over times or admission.

Secret Underground London

Talk by Nick Catford including catacombs, bunkers and former Tube stations, on two dates:

Monday 20 March:

starts 8 pm at the Woodlawns Centre, 16 Leigham Court Road SW16.
Streatham Society

Wednesday 12 April:

7-30 pm for 7-45 start, Herne Hill United Church Hall, corner of Herne Hill and Redpost Hill, SE24.
Herne Hill Society

Friday 24 March – Utopia London

Screening of a feature-length documentary from 2010 on the post-war rebuilding of London, doors open 6pm for 7-30 start, tickets £3, at the Cinema Museum, 2 Dugard Way, (off Renfrew Road) SE11.
The Cinema Museum

Monday 27 March – Up in Smoke

Failed dreams of Battersea Power Station: Peter Watts relates the history of successive plans for the power station site between its closure and the present development. Starts at 8 pm (doors open 7 pm) at Omnibus, the former Clapham Library, 1 North Side, SW4.
Clapham Society

Sunday 9 April – God and Mammon in the City

A circular walk around the heart of the City of London, passing St. Paul's Cathedral and the Bank of England. Meet at the north entrance to Blackfriars Station, on Queen Victoria Street, EC4. (Thameslink or Circle line)
Lambethans Society

Thursday 18 May - Lambeth's lost buildings

Illustrated talk by Edmund Bird, Heritage Adviser to the Mayor of London, 7-30 pm at Upper Norwood Library, Westow Hill SE19.
Norwood Society

Whatever happened to Neighbourhood Plans?

At the end of 2015 there was controversy over proposed boundaries for the **Tulse Hill** Neighbourhood Plan, proposed by the Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum (Newsletter 220).

More than a year later, there is still no clear map of the Plan boundaries, but some ideas are now emerging from local discussions during 2016. Left to market forces, new development would only be housing, but residents have already identified the need to find space for small businesses, particularly start-up enterprises, and to include recreation facilities, particularly for young people. The early stages of making the Tulse Hill Plan were assisted by Locality and Aecom, but nobody at Lambeth appears to be looking after Neighbourhood Plans at present – leaving several loose ends to tie up, such as the map.

There is a great deal of work still to do, such as tweaking existing Council policies for issues such as use of shops or Rush Common land along the east side of Brixton Hill. There is a growing risk that the Territorial Army Centre in Upper Tulse Hill may be sold for new housing, and local policies need to ensure that other facilities are also included. Cressingham Gardens Estate remains under threat, and older estates in turn may face redevelopment.

Further consultations will resume as the weather warms up and people are more willing to come out for events. Local support for the final plan is critical – last year there was a big upset in the small world of Neighbourhood Planning because for the first time, residents of a provincial area decisively rejected “their” plan at the Referendum stage.

In the meantime, the Forum’s new website includes a section dedicated to the Neighbourhood Plan, with the opportunity to feed in ideas or ask questions – go to www.tulsehill.london and follow the links, or e-mail to hello@tulsehill.london

In contrast, proposals for a Herne Hill Plan have been proceeding in secrecy, and details of their proposed boundary have only recently leaked out. We had already heard of concerns from Loughborough Junction Action Group and the Norwood Forum about the area being claimed by the Herne Hill Forum. Now to our surprise we find them laying claim to Trinity Rise (created as part of the original Tulse Hill Estate) and to the seat of the April 1981 Brixton Riots in Railton Road, but excluding the Peabody Estate in Rosendale Road, despite its Conservation Area status. In the next few months, turf wars seem more likely than constructive plan-making!



309-313 Brixton Road, by Peckford Place, in the Brixton Road Conservation Area
C876P-12.jpg

Conservation Areas 50 years on

Conservation Areas (CAs) have now been part of the Town Planning tool-kit for 50 years, so the London Forum of Amenity Societies reviewed them at a recent meeting, including speakers from Heritage England and amenity societies covering some of the pioneer areas.

The first London examples were in Highgate, St. John’s Wood and Bedford Park, while the earliest locally were on our northern fringe (Stockwell Park, Vassall Road and northern parts of Brixton Road) designated in 1968, followed by Brixton Water Lane in 1969.

The emphasis from the outset has been on the group value of buildings which may not individually qualify for heritage listing, but as a whole have distinctive character worth saving.

Planning and Development

Planning permission is required for any demolition, and for tree surgery. New buildings within or around a CA should respect the existing character. It has long seemed to me that CAs tend to fall into 3 types:

Firstly, estate developments with a consistent style, or constructed within the same time-frame. New development should be of similar scale, and architects have sometimes played safe by creating replicas, with varying degrees of success.

Parks or other open spaces form the core of some CAs, and here the presumption ought to be against adding new buildings within that open space, or at least keeping them discreet to respect the original landscape design.

Finally, the most demanding type of CA is one based on a commercial town centre like Brixton. Here the key is to maintain business vitality while conserving a character that originated with enterprises from department stores to cinemas competing to attract attention from potential customers. The aim should be to avoid either domination by a grossly over-sized block, or diluting the character with bland “in-keeping” infill that might be acceptable for the first type of CA.

Some early Conservation Areas have been enlarged or combined so that now more than one of the above models may apply within the same CA. Designation reports for the earlier CAs were rather sketchy, with the priority on protecting the existing, but offering little guidance on extensions or infill development. In recent years, Lambeth has embarked on more extensive appraisals for some of these CAs, on which we have made detailed comments. However this work proceeds in fits and starts according to staff availability, and right now the Conservation team leader, Doug Black, is busy looking after the whole Planning Department following the departure of David Joyce.

Early conservation plans included aspirations for enhancement and even small grants for sympathetic repairs, but since Lambeth shut down its Conservation Areas Advisory Committee in 1988, CAs and their residents' groups have been left to fend for themselves.

Conservation officers have long been reluctant to allow any involvement by local societies or residents, perhaps to make themselves more indispensable in the prevailing climate of cuts!

Alan Piper.

Redesigning Atlantic Road

Over the last few months, we have been taking part alongside Council officers in the steering group for the improvement of Atlantic Road.

It has long been clear to us that traffic flows in the Town Centre are complex, and simple measures like one-way flows or outright pedestrianisation would not address all the problems. Repaving proposals by landscape architects a few years ago were mainly cosmetic and failed to attract support. Since then the situation has been complicated by the remodelling of the Electric Avenue street market, and realising that deliveries must reach the street markets and the covered market arcades, as well as the businesses in Atlantic Road itself. Night-time uses have thrown up fresh challenges.

The consultants have visited most of the remaining shops in Atlantic Road between Brixton Road and Coldharbour Lane. Two public events were held in mid-February to discuss the draft proposals, one at the Dogstar and the other at International House. These picked up a lot of detailed comments, from which a proposed layout has been compiled, as shown opposite.

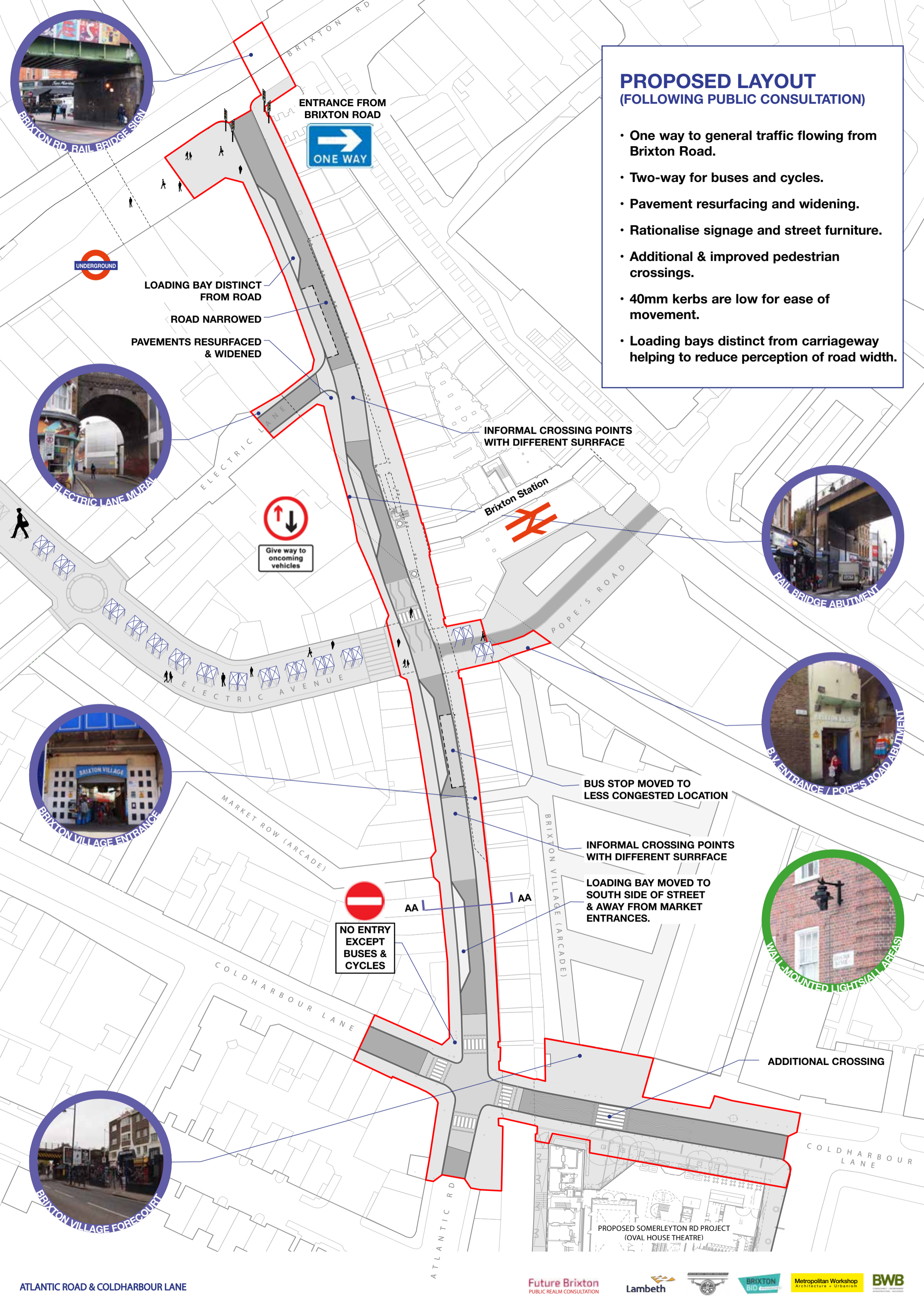
Much detail is still to be settled, including timings for loading bays and one-way traffic, and the choice of surface materials. There may even be a night-time taxi rank, and there are some opportunities for artworks or features to brighten-up gloomy bridge supports.

There will be a market stall display in early April to collect more comments, and the proposals will also be displayed at the Brixton £ Cafe, 77 Atlantic Road, later in April. Let us have your comments in the meantime.

The final test will be submission to Transport for London in August, to compete for a share of their funding against other London boroughs.

PROPOSED LAYOUT (FOLLOWING PUBLIC CONSULTATION)

- One way to general traffic flowing from Brixton Road.
- Two-way for buses and cycles.
- Pavement resurfacing and widening.
- Rationalise signage and street furniture.
- Additional & improved pedestrian crossings.
- 40mm kerbs are low for ease of movement.
- Loading bays distinct from carriageway helping to reduce perception of road width.



Brixton's Oldest House?

This question arises from time to time, but it's not a simple answer, depending on how you define Brixton, or even a house.

Currently the oldest building on our patch is St. Andrew's Church at Stockwell Green, founded in 1767 but much altered since. Some early domestic buildings have since changed to other uses, otherwise 2 blocks in Stockwell Road would be the top contenders. Opposite the Stockwell Park Estate is Queen's Row of 1786, long since adapted into shops. Nearer to Stockwell Tube Station, two pairs of houses (40-46) fronting the YMCA complex, were built between 1781 and 1788.

One cottage on the east side of Brixton Hill was apparently built as an encroachment on Rush Common 20 years before the Inclosure Act of 1806, so must go back to at least 1786. This is No.95, subsequently expanded into a whole parade of shops between Josephine Avenue and Arodene Road. The first truly urban development in our Town Centre was Brixton Place in 1800, from which only half a house survives above the Reliance Arcade, as shown in our previous newsletter.

There are then several survivors from the first fifteen years of the 19th century. Nos. 309-313 Brixton Road (photo p.3) originated in 1801-2. Off the north end of the road, 5 Prima Road, facing St. Mark's churchyard, was built under a lease granted in 1801. The same builder, William Broadhurst, was responsible for 22 & 24 Brixton Road in 1802.

In Acre Lane, the oldest survivor is No.46, opposite Tesco, from 1808. Cottages at 208-214 are thought to date from c.1815. There are a few cottages of similar date around New Park Road, approaching the South Circular, such as Brashier's Cottage. 1-3 Effra Road, now the Black Cultural Archives, dates from 1810-15. In Brockwell Park, the Hall dates from 1811-13.

There are many surviving buildings along Brixton Road from the first wave of ribbon development which followed the opening of Vauxhall Bridge in 1816 – the same year as the opening of Ashby's Windmill.

Lambeth Vintage Voices

Sixteenfeet Productions invites Lambeth elders to take part in a series of 7 writing workshops at Brixton Community Base. The sessions are on Thursday afternoons from **23 March** weekly until the final session on 4th May. Part of Lambeth Readers and Writers Festival, participants will we hope develop skills, share experiences and have fun.

Sessions will run from 1 pm to 3pm, and lunch is available from 12-20 (free but donations welcome). We will explore different writing styles, how stories are crafted, and mapping Brixton's recent past. We are keen to record memories and experiences of first generation Brixtonians who settled here and shaped its identity. This is an exciting opportunity to paint a picture of how things were, to pass on to a new generation.

Brixton Community Base is at the corner of Talma Road and Probert Road, SW2. To find out more or to sign up, please contact either:

Caroline, 07 958 448 690,
info@sixteenfeet.co.uk

Or Jane, 07 941 624 247,
brixtoncommunitybase@gmail.org

Old photos – past, present, future Thursday 16 March

Helen Dawkins of Black & White Revival will speak on the conservation of old photographs, including advising on examples brought along. 7 pm at the Civil Service Club, 13-15 Great Scotland Yard, SW1 (light refreshments served from 6-30 pm). Arranged by the London Ashridge Circle – £5 fee for non-members, pay on the night but reserve a place by phone to Judith Thursby, 01553 782959 or to enquiries@londonashridgecircle.london.

Recent Enquiries

An interesting mix in recent months, but mostly connected to work-places or businesses in Brixton, including chimney sweeps in Lyham Road, Turkish baths in Brixton Road, and Doubledays in Acre Lane We will share the information in these pages once the stories are more complete.

A year of Waste for Lambeth Libraries

Despite the Council's recent approval of a 1970s-style extension to Carnegie Library, providing a rear entrance to the new basement gym, Friends of Lambeth Libraries and the Defend the 10 Campaign are maintaining their opposition to Lambeth's plans to cut the library service in favour of physical recreation. Here are the key points from Laura Swaffield's address to Lambeth's Cabinet on 22 February:

The very first speech we made to Councillors emphasised that we realised this council had to make cuts. That's why we were puzzled that Lambeth wanted to waste millions on installing gyms that nobody needed.

This was rushed through at Lambeth's Cabinet meeting in October 2015, with no prior consultation, but it was obvious from the outset that the plan made no sense – least of all financially. We naively believed that the councillors would think again if we demonstrated that people all over the borough were strongly against it. We did so again and again but no-one listened.

As we started to find out more, it emerged that the plan only aimed to make less than half the savings required, and would incur a massive extra spend of £4 million. Lambeth's own assessment showed that the creation of 4 un-staffed libraries would severely disadvantage all the most vulnerable people in the borough, with people living in some of the most deprived areas singled out to lose their library.

Also it emerged that a much better and simpler plan from the library manager could make the full savings demanded while keeping all 10 libraries running, but had been rejected unseen. It took a threat of legal action to force the council to look again at the library manager's plan, but it was rejected again – on the specious grounds that it would not be in place to make the full savings by April 2016.

Yet almost a year later, the gyms plan is nowhere near in place. No savings have been made at all. Only one "neighbourhood" library

has been set up, with two other libraries closed and rotting. Lambeth is still paying all the running costs of a full library service plus massive extra costs for security guards

There is still no known business plan, no financial workings or market research, and only the vaguest idea what these neighbourhood libraries might provide, or how. Yet the council has become more and more determined to force through the plan at all costs, and has thrown more and more money at it. It has recently emerged that the council says it is unable to explain how the gyms plan was ever thought of, because the officer responsible has departed.

Overall the Culture 2020 plan has been an obvious disaster waiting to happen from the very start, with much damage done and much money wasted.

Curious that Southwark has been able to build new libraries in Peckham, Canada Water and, Camberwell Green, and even last December e-mailed us to announce the re-opening of the refurbished Nunhead Library. – Ed.

Support Myatt's Fields Park

Myatt's Fields Park Project have their Annual General Meeting on **Sunday 19 March** at 3pm by the bandstand. There will be a marquee for shelter, and free afternoon tea. There will be an update about the year just passed and plans for the year ahead, with opportunities to be elected to the executive committee.

Brockwell Hall project news

Staff cuts mean 2 years have gone by since a feasibility study was prepared for renovating the Hall, with additional facilities to be included within the adjacent service yard and stable block. Last year, initial proposals were sent to the Heritage Lottery Fund, who recommended a Stage 1 application.

Lambeth are leading the bid (with advice from Brockwell Park Community Partners) and have re-appointed Land Use Consultants who oversaw earlier HLF work to restore Brockwell Park as a whole. The bid will go to HLF this summer, for a decision before the end of 2017.

Winter Quarters

We have been busy...

Although public events thinned out during the winter months, we have been busy behind the scenes, as summarised here.

Windrush Square

As a result of the Friends' efforts, more bulbs have sprung up this year around the base of the oak trees along Saltoun Road. We must thank Annick Alet for championing the square over recent years, in the face of official indifference and commercial abuse, but sadly she is standing down as Chair of the Friends due to her many other commitments.

After discussion among several interested parties, plans were agreed last year for the Afro-Caribbean War Memorial to be sited in the square, at the base of the flank wall of Norfolk House, which fronts Rushcroft Road. The obelisk design will be backed up by stone or tile panels on the wall, echoing the shape. Arrangements are currently being made for the official dedication ceremony on **Thursday 22 June**.

Town Centre Improvements

We have been involved in various meetings, together with Council officers, market traders, Brixton BID and the Neighbourhood Forum to help improve Electric Avenue and its immediate surroundings. There is still a great deal to do, but we are beginning to see results.

Urban Spaces Manual

Last year we assisted the Brixton Business Improvement District with steering production of the Brixton Urban Spaces Manual, which identifies a number of locations around the Town Centre where artworks or landscape features could enhance the street scene. This followed on from Council-led design work, notably the creation of Canterbury Square in front of the police station.

One of the early results is the planting of the Brixton Orchard now underway at the corner of Brixton Hill and St. Matthew's Road, once the site of the Council's nuclear bunker. Another site – also linked into the Atlantic Road works – is the bridge abutment between Marks &

Spenser and the former Bon Marche store, for which we have started discussing ideas with Art4Space, based in Stockwell.

The People's Fridge

Another idea that we were asked to endorse is the Brixton Community Fridge. My expectation was of a Smeg-style fridge sitting out on the pavement, but in reality it's a chiller cabinet, at present discreetly sited within Pop Brixton.

Aimed at preventing waste and easing food poverty, the idea is simple. Left-over but edible food destined for the bin goes into the fridge. Anyone can donate, but only food businesses can leave cooked food. Anyone can take food out, and it's all free. There's no bureaucracy and no waiting list (it's shut at night).

Inspired by similar projects elsewhere, the founders realised there were some 200 food businesses within 5 minutes walk, while half a mile away is Angell Town, a deprived estate. According to Ben Longman, one of the founders, "You've got this juxtaposition: people having fun, food being sold and eaten, but just down the road you've got great need."

OFM/ADP

Brixton Design Trail returns

We have just heard that planning is starting for another Design Trail in September, as part of the London Design Festival. Creative folk and firms are being invited to the launch briefing on **Thursday 23 March, 6-30 pm** at Brixton East in Barrington Road, SW9. Enquiries to hello@brixtondesigntrail.co.uk

Website revamp

It's difficult to reflect urgent issues in a printed newsletter, so our intention was to rely on our website to alert members to high-profile planning applications, project proposals or late changes to meeting arrangements. In practice, the present site has proved cumbersome in use, so we recently commissioned somebody to redesign it to be more user-friendly, not only to navigate but especially to enable us to add fresh events and news stories more easily. We hope to report some progress in time for the next newsletter.