

The Brixton Society

Understanding the Past, Looking to the Future

Reg'd. Charity No.1058103, Registered with the London Forum of Amenity Societies

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BRIXTON AT NIGHT CONSULTATION

1. Introduction

I am writing on behalf of the Brixton Society to respond to the recent consultation commissioned by Lambeth Council.

The Brixton Society was established in 1975 as the amenity society covering the whole Brixton area. We are registered with the London Forum of Amenity Societies, and locally we are in touch with the Brixton Neighbourhood Forum, the Brixton Business Improvement District and the Sleepless Brixton campaign. We regularly comment on local plans, policy changes and individual planning applications, and try to promote good practice.

Several issues connected with the Night-Time economy have been of concern to our members for some time, but need repeating here for those less familiar with Brixton Town Centre.

2. Context and Trends

Brixton began to develop a significant night-time economy some 25 years ago, with a few key venues which attracted visitors from a wider area. These gradually were joined by more small-to-medium venues, either music-based or food-based. At the time this was welcome, both to compensate for declining retail use and to reduce demand for non-conforming entertainment uses in the surrounding residential areas.

However, since then, residents have been returning to the town centre in significant numbers, either in new apartment blocks or in renovated accommodation over the shops.

A crisis has now been reached with the introduction of the Night Tube and the increase in “vertical drinking establishments”, i.e, bars open late with little else to offer. The environment is rapidly deteriorating due to lack of public toilet provision, high overnight noise levels, and overcrowding around bus stops, stations, and outside venues.

3. Disturbance to Residents

Although some control is possible over noise emanating directly from premises, the most acute problems arise from customers leaving those premises and trying to find their way home.

Dispersal and entry to venues must be managed to minimise the impact on residents and passing members of the public.

External spaces are particularly sensitive. The use of all outside spaces, including beer gardens, roof terraces, and pavements outside premises, should be carefully considered for any licensing applications.

4. Weak Planning Control

The Council has failed to address conflicting uses, and has been too ready to allow late-night uses close to existing homes.

Although proposed changes to the Lambeth Local Plan include a “Brixton Evening Economy Management Zone”, its boundary covers a ridiculously small area.

Ideally it should cover the whole of Brixton Town Centre, but as a bare minimum to protect existing residential accommodation, it must include:

- The triangle bounded by Atlantic Road, Brixton Road and Coldharbour Lane;
- 1-9 Acre Lane (mainly to protect residents of Porden Road);
- The block bounded by Brixton Station Road, Popes Road, Canterbury Crescent and Brixton Road.

Neither is it clear if there will be any effective “management” in place after planning permissions have been granted.

5. Controlling Public Areas

Noise problems also arise from buskers and street preachers, mostly around Brixton Tube Station, particularly where amplified sound is used.

The Council has so far failed to adopt the Busking Code promoted by the GLA/ London Councils, but another option is a Public Space Protection Order to enable easier enforcement against people causing a nuisance.

6. Public Toilets

Provision of public toilets in Brixton Town Centre is grossly inadequate in scale and opening times for current visitor numbers.

The situation is far worse outside the traditional working day, and fails to meet the demands of the 24-hour economy, resulting in public health risks and a degrading environment from street urination, defecation and vomiting.

7. Clearing up Afterwards

Our members feel strongly about the impact of late-night businesses on their local area.

Clearing up after the “night-time economy” is a costly business to the Council, even after contributions from the Brixton Business Improvement District. Many side streets have a wave of empty bottles, cans and takeaway litter following most weekends, giving street sweepers extra work to do.

It is not widely realised how much of each 24-hour cycle is taken up by the street markets to set up, trade, clear away and then finally for street cleaning after traders have departed. Conventional shops nearby are also receiving more deliveries outside peak hours to avoid congestion. The “night time economy” should not be allowed to impact on the efficiency of the retail sector.

8. Summary:

It remains our view – based on the experience of our members - that any expansion of the night-time economy must be planned for, in terms of infrastructure, policing and the mix of competing uses in town centres. So far, the Council has been reluctant to invest or to act on suggestions for improvements to management or amenities. As a result, the environment for residents and visitors continues to deteriorate.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'A.D. Piper', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

*Alan Piper,
Hon. Secretary.*