

REDBRIDGE STREETS COMMISSION

AN INDEPENDENT REPORT ON THE STREETS OF REDBRIDGE

JUNE 2017

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1. Foreword and Introduction by the Commission

The independent Streets Commission was established by the Cabinet Member of Environment, Councillor John Howard who recognises that the way our streets look and feel is an important issue for both residents and members and is a high priority in the Council's Civic Pride objectives. The streets affect everybody who lives, works and visit Redbridge and the intention is that we all work together to take active care of our environment and promote a tangible sense of cohesion and civic pride in safe, clean and attractive streets.

Environmental problems such as fly tipping, litter, graffiti and dog fouling, affect all residents and businesses and can seriously blight a neighbourhood. The quality of the local environment is a key element of public satisfaction with the Council. It is important for quality of life issues and for the ongoing growth and development of Redbridge. But street cleanliness is only part of the picture - feeling safe in decent quality housing and with access to good transport links are other important factors.

The Panel were appointed to undertake an investigation into how the London Borough of Redbridge can contribute in making the community and neighbourhoods a cleaner, greener and more pleasant place to live, recognising that issues such as having clean streets, tidy gardens, well-lit streets, safe roads and an overall cohesive community are amongst the list of very important issues for residents, businesses and our local councillors. These issues are also a high priority in the Council's 'Civic Pride' objectives.

The Local Authority highlighted the fact that as with other local authorities across the country, Redbridge are approaching a point where they can no longer rely on back office savings so as a Commission, we were tasked to find out how we could do things differently and work more collaboratively with the Council as well as highlight areas that they can make improvements in. This means not only a focus on transforming services as an agent of delivery, but also about how they can change the relationship they have with local citizens.

We present this report on behalf of the many local residents of Redbridge who gave their time and effort to provide evidence to the Panel and we would like to thank everyone who contributed to the work of the Commission.

2. Terms of reference

The Commission was set up to understand what issues and solutions residents would prioritise and how the community might work to support these initiatives. The work of the Streets Commission would feed into a new "Our Streets" Strategy that the Council will be producing which recognises the importance of residents and the Council working closely together to achieve the best possible outcomes. The aim is to work in partnership with residents and communities, to provide a comprehensive picture of what residents really think and give residents and businesses a platform to both highlight issues as well as make suggestions, to help with ongoing improvement to the street scene and working towards making our streets great.

The Commission was asked to consider the following questions with regards to Redbridge streets:

- 1) What are the 'good' things about Redbridge streets and what are not so 'good'?
- 2) What do you think are the causes of the problems?
- 3) How can the Streets Commission work to help build pride in Redbridge?
- 4) What can the Council do to support the community to help build pride in the local area and tackle some or all of the following issues identified such as:

- Street cleansing and littering
- Green Spaces and Parks (including Pocket Parks)
- Streetscene, green streets and front gardens
- Safe Streets and parking
- The community and volunteering

3. Members of the Redbridge Streets Commission

The panel consists of five non-party political commissioners selected according to different geographical location, historic interest in improving the street scene and their role in the community.

Ishrat Hossain - Young Cabinet Member and Youth Parliament Member

Nneena Anyanwu – Redbridge Advice network

Ross Diamond – Redbridge CVS

Geoff Hill – Redbridge Chamber of Commerce

Alan Howe – Barkingside 21

4. Methodology

The approach adopted was to hold Focus Group sessions across the borough and carry out an online survey to gather views and suggestions about what makes good streets and how we can improve them. This work would help inform which areas in the Borough had issues that needed addressing and look at what the root cause of these issues might be as well as identify how resident or business behaviour might be changed so that everyone takes pride in the Borough.

Quantitative, qualitative and pictorial information was captured via many different ways including:

- Four public Focus Groups ran by an independent facilitator;
- One Focus Group inviting a group of young people from the “Young Leaders” programme who represent the pupils at a range of secondary schools across the Borough;
- One Focus Group engaging elected Members;
- An online consultation survey;
- Submissions received via the dedicated Streets Commission email inbox.

Invitations were sent out to the Council’s stakeholder lists which included businesses, community groups, schools and faith groups. Details of the Streets Commission were also advertised on the Redbridge website and using social media.

The online feedback forms gathered quantitative and qualitative data relating to residents' satisfaction with the following issues:-

- Overall satisfaction with the state of the streets in Redbridge
- Overall satisfaction with the following issues in the Borough:-
 - Street cleansing and litter removal
 - Bin collection services
 - Cleanliness of neighbourhoods (including neighbours' front gardens)
 - Community spirit and cohesion
 - Pocket parks
 - Street furniture (including street lighting and benches)
 - Grass and planted verges
 - Street trees
 - Accessible pavements
 - Safe roads
 - Volunteering opportunities and resources

Over 400 feedback forms were received and the data has been collected and analysed by the Streets Commission and has been collated in the writing of this report.

Over 100 people in total attended the public Focus Group meetings including representatives from Residents' Associations, local businesses and community organisations as well as members from the Commission. These meetings were held in Barkingside, Wanstead, Woodford and Ilford.

5. Focus Group Engagement

The Focus Group sessions enabled residents to talk openly about all things "streets" related and allowed the Council, Commissioners and community to think about issues more holistically, raising ideas of how we can all work together and develop and deliver ideas differently to make public spaces the best they can be.

Typically, a lot of the issues are assumed to be the 'Council's problem' and part of the Council's remit. However it was recognised by many participants that a collaborative approach between the Council, community groups, businesses and other stakeholders was needed in order to address problems and issues particularly with the constraints of tightening budgets. In addition, the Council know that local knowledge from residents and community members, at a grass roots level is invaluable and key to understanding how to do things better. Instead of asking what the Council can do, the Streets Commission has asked: "How can we work together to make Redbridge and our streets somewhere we can all be truly proud of?"

Many positive comments were made about Redbridge Streets. Some of the things highlighted included:-

- Good parks and green spaces
- Education and great schools
- Good and accessible public transport
- Mostly good waste and fly-tipping collection as well as conscientious and friendly street cleansing staff
- A diverse and cultured community
- Fairly low crime rates

These are positives that should be publicised and celebrated to remind us what we love about Redbridge.

6. Summary Recommendations

The issues and recommendations included in this report are not exhaustive but provide a good overview of all the different areas in scope. Some of the more detailed suggestions and comments will be used to shape future action plans by the Council in response to this report.

6.1 Street Cleansing and Littering

Infographic: Survey responses indicate that the majority of residents are satisfied with the bin collection services- with 83% rating this service satisfactory or good and 51% rating it good overall.

55% of survey participants have rated "cleanliness of neighbourhood" as good or satisfactory, including neighbours' front gardens and 50% rated street cleaning and litter removal as good. This suggests that although there is evidence of satisfaction in some areas, equally it is likely that the standards of cleanliness are not high in other areas, owing to a variety of reasons.

Recommendations

a) Infrastructure

- Review effectiveness of Cleansing Services and introduce more effective practices ie. Clean streets after bin collection day.
- Develop the online "Report It" function on the website making it more informative and improving the feedback mechanism.
- Review effectiveness of Green Garden Waste Collection charge and clarify alternatives to using this service to dispose of green garden waste.
- Re-consider the design of public litter bins to make it as easy as possible for residents and visitors to dispose of their rubbish as well as increasing frequency of emptying especially in high footfall areas.

b) Education

- Provide more information and education about how residents can take more responsibility for their local area and show civic pride via a well targeted public awareness campaign.
- Provide visual messages or leaflets in different languages to communicate effectively with non-English speaking residents.
- Work with schools to raise awareness in the importance of keeping our streets clean and organise competitions.
- Provide new residents and tenant's information on Council services eg. Refuse collection days, bulky and garden waste collection service etc.
- Publicise prosecutions for fly-tipping and littering.

c) Enforcement

- Make local takeaways, pubs, clubs and businesses more accountable for preventing and removing litter. Work with them to reduce packaging.
- Continue to ensure that a zero tolerance policy is in place with regards to litter enforcement and look at alternative means to educating perpetrators eg. Community awareness courses as an alternative to fining or community litter picking.

d) Encouragement

- Increase the promotion of the “Adopt-a-site” scheme to encourage community groups to look after more recycling banks in exchange for a fee from the Council.
- Provide more resource for school litter picking projects, as well as competitions or initiatives to encourage pupils to look after their local area.
- Support community groups with grant funding to help keep streets clean.
- Provide incentives to the local community for cleanest street/area eg. Mayor’s awards and other recognition.

6.2 Green Spaces and Parks (Including Pocket Parks)

Infographic: During the focus group sessions, participants consistently stated that Redbridge parks are one of their favourite things about the Borough. In addition, 76% of residents rated pocket parks as good or satisfactory.

As one of the key assets, participants have suggested methods of looking after and utilising parks and green spaces to make them the best and most effective spaces they can be.

Recommendations

a) Infrastructure

- Consult young people on changes to park facilities to ensure resources are spent in the most effective way. This might include consultations on what types of playing and sports facilities to prioritise and invest in at certain parks.
- Create more communal areas for young people to congregate in parks and designate them as ‘safe zones’ with visible patrols.
- Parks to cater for more physical activity and sports to promote healthy communities.

b) Education

- Introduce signage to deter inappropriate and anti-social behaviour.

- Provide information about support available for community members to set up of “Friends of park” groups for each major green space and provide resources to promote those that currently exist.

c) Enforcement

- Introduce visible patrols to control littering and watch out for aggressive behaviour in major parks.
- Increase enforcement activity in pocket parks to reduce misuse of spaces and reduce litter, as well as the introduction of an active and visible ‘caretaker’.
- Prevent and remove fly-tipping and litter in lakes and water ways.

d) Encouragement

- Encourage residents to set up “Friends of pocket parks” groups or “adopt-a-pocket-park” initiative for smaller, irregular, vacant pieces of under-utilised public land.
- Encourage relevant community groups, businesses and stakeholders to define a clear “lifespan” for projects concerning parks to ensure there is commitment between the parties involved.
- The Council and community should work together to consider alternative and creative ways to use pocket parks and explore crowdfunding and other initiatives to raise funding for new initiatives.
- Develop projects encouraging schools and young people to transform and maintain pocket parks and open spaces.
- Support community groups to develop an initiative that will allow flower bulbs from parks to be recycled instead of being disposed of, encouraging the community to green and beautify public and private spaces.

6.3 Street Scene, Green Streets and Front Gardens

Infographic: 75% of residents rated street trees as good or satisfactory. 79% rated street furniture as good or satisfactory.

68% rated grass and planted verges as good or satisfactory. Participants shared positive examples of effective verge planting by the Council and community and guerrilla gardeners. However, participants suggested a variety of ways that the Council could encourage more guerrilla gardening and projects to attract volunteers to take care of public and private spaces.

Recommendations

a) Infrastructure

- Improve cooperation and communication between those responsible for mowing and maintaining green spaces and verges and local gardening groups.
Make a commitment to plant and maintain trees in residential areas that have too few trees or none at all.
- Enhance the selection of street furniture and use better quality materials however remove excess street furniture.
- Protect and fix pavements and consider methods of preventing pavement damage caused by developers and heavy vehicles.
- Discourage paving over front gardens.

b) Education

- Highlight the benefits of greening a residential front garden to residents.

c) Enforcement

- Increase enforcement activity tackling untidy front gardens as well as clearer and stricter guidelines with regards to what is classified as an untidy front garden.
- Impose tougher controls on landlords.

d) Encouragement

- Introduce incentives to encourage residents to look after their front gardens, frontages and their street eg. Give out plants as prizes for best kept gardens, "best street" competition, publicise Redbridge in Bloom etc.
- Encourage local residents to manage and maintain planters in residential areas.
- Explore options of livening up key public spaces, as well as Town Centres and encourage community groups and organisations to initiate and support these projects.
- Ask businesses to sponsor hanging baskets.

6.4 Safe Streets and Parking

Infographic: 57% rated safe roads as good or satisfactory. On many occasions, participants raised their concerns about speeding cars, particularly on residential roads, as well as a lack of enforcement to tackle this issue.

76% accessible pavements.

Recommendations

a) Infrastructure

- Introduce more cycling lanes and promote cycling as an attractive means of transport.
- Increase the number meetings involving police Safer Neighbourhood Teams, Council Officers and resident groups to ensure that there is an effective dialogue about local issues regarding community safety.
- Keep residential areas free from traffic using effective traffic management measures. Reinstate or introduce air quality monitoring in areas where there is a demand or a need for this eg. Fullwell Cross

- Introduce traffic calming measures to reduce speeding and provide a clear means for residents to suggest and report which areas are problematic so that they can be prioritised for intervention.
- Discourage the introduction of dropped curbs to prevent the reduction of parking spaces on the street.
- Explore ways of limiting the number of street parking spaces for each household.
- Regular maintenance of roads.
- Improve disabled access in the streets.

b) Education

- More zomph zones and better signage.

c) Enforcement

- Utilise Council powers to reduce street drinking and create safer streets.
- Encourage the police to Increase the level of enforcement and surveillance to reduce the number of speeding cars.
- Control permits linked to new developments and houses of multiple occupation. Explore and implement methods of preventing commuters and commercial vehicles parking in residential areas.

d) Encouragement

- More community involvement to help keep streets safe, for example the Council can support more Community Roadwatch groups.

6.5 The Community and Volunteering

Infographic: 71% satisfied with volunteering opportunities and resources.

58% community spirit and cohesion.

Recommendations

a) Infrastructure

- Develop a space on the Redbridge website for the community to share ideas and engage with each other and the Council.

b) Education

- Support the community to organise a community event celebrating the diverse Redbridge community, bringing together of faith and non-faith groups and enabling residents to learn about different cultures.
- Council to provide skills training to enable the community to be proactive in helping to improve our streets.

c) Enforcement (and Education)

- Engage with transient and hard to reach populations.

d) Encouragement

- The Council to encourage and help enable neighbours to connect with each other using social media ie local community Facebook groups.
- Increase positive engagement with the community by holding coffee mornings in local venues
- Support community and voluntary groups as well as volunteers to connect and network to encourage collaborative projects.
- Encourage voluntary and faith community representatives or ambassadors as point of contact for community and channel for communication between the Council and community, supported by Council outreach workers.

"Whilst we may comfortably live in our homes and busy ourselves with our lives, we must remember that the effects of the choices we make will echo throughout society. Sometimes all it can take is one person to go out of their way and do something that may seem insignificant but, who knows, maybe it will mean that one day, we will wake up to a cleaner and greener future"

Quote from a Young Leader at the Fullwell Cross Session

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