

Blueprint for Shortlands Village

Introduction

Shortlands Village grew up in the late C19 and early C20 following the construction of Shortlands railway station with links to central London and the City and out to the Kent coast. Initially, the shops were built in the same Arts and Crafts style and they were well used by the new local residents on both sides of the railway tracks. Even into the 1960s there was a great diversity of shops meeting most local needs. But, sadly, the Village is now suffering from a lack of investment and parts have become a little shabby. Action is needed urgently bring about regeneration.

So, the Shortlands Residents' Association and Ravensbourne Valley Residents, the two local residents' associations, have joined up to develop a blueprint for future improvements to the Village over the coming years, working in conjunction with local Councillors.

The momentum for making positive changes has been increased with the Village achieving Conservation Area status, and, since May 2022, with it becoming part of an enlarged Shortlands and Park Langley ward with the rest of Shortlands and with only one set of Councillors.

The blueprint outlined below results from consultations within the residents' associations and from issues raised at a very well attended Open Meeting held last Autumn, involving many local residents, businesses and Councillors, all of whom showed a strong and fervent commitment to bring about important improvements to the Village.

All the proposals take into account that financial resources are finite and the proposals have to be realistically achievable and 'doable' over a reasonable timescale; also enabling stakeholders could be parties other than Bromley Council. The ultimate aim is to make the Village a more attractive place for local residents and visitors and for further investment and improvement from the business community and beyond.

Pedestrian Safety

There is a general feeling that improvements to pedestrian safety are an immediate priority. A lack of timed crossing points at the junctions of Beckenham Lane, Ravensbourne Avenue and Station Road being the most obvious and concerning.

Near-term

- **Pelican crossing in Station Road.** We understand that the Council is already committed to this. We hope that the positioning of the crossing will be sufficiently close to Beckenham Lane, to make it of practical use for those looking to cross the road at that junction.
- **Lighting on the rail footbridge between Mays Hill Road and Queens Mead Road.** This has been raised as a safety concern on several separate occasions and it makes using the crossing unsafe during hours of darkness. We understand that Network Rail is committed to installing this lighting and would be grateful for any assistance that the Council can offer in ensuring that this happens.

Medium / Longer-term

- **20mph speed limit** on the road junctions around Shortlands Station and up Beckenham Lane to Valley Primary School. We feel that this would further improve pedestrian safety and reduce the audible impact of vehicles through the village. This proposal is also supported by local businesses, who currently view traffic speed through the village as a barrier to attracting trade.
- **Reopening of Pedestrian Access Tunnel.** There is a strong desire to see the reopening of the pedestrian access tunnel to the station, in Station Road, which would remove the need for passengers to walk around and under the rail bridge.

Parking

- **Parking bays on Beckenham Lane.** There is a desire from both local residents and businesses to see the introduction of improved parking in the village. The kerbless parking bays that have been installed in Beckenham High Street, are one possible option in achieving this, and we understand that there should be sufficient land under the control of the Council to facilitate this. Should there be metered 30 minute or 1 hour parking spots?
- **Commuter parking controls.** Separate SRA and RVR consultations have identified a significant number of parked cars are commuter cars from zones 5-6 and Kent taking advantage of lower train fares (Shortlands zone 4). Controlled Parking Zones are in operation off Beckenham Lane to reduce commuter parking but we would be grateful if Councillors could devote some time to considering extending more controlled parking, to certain roads that have been identified as being affected by this issue.
- **Clarity of private and public parking in the village on Beckenham Lane.** Related to the parking bays, we feel that clearer indication of public parking spaces versus privately owned parking bays in front of shop frontages should occur. This would make it clearer for members of the public to determine where they are permitted to park.

Station

A number of areas of concern raised during the meeting centered on Shortlands Station and matters that are likely to be within the control of Network Rail. Though the levels of crime in the ward are very low in comparison with most of the rest of the borough, there is a general view that the station is an easy access point to the local area for criminals, potentially fuelling shoplifting and other crimes in the village and Queensmead.

- **Clamping down on fare evaders.** Consideration to possible introduction of ticket barriers / more frequent ticket inspections.
- **Improve appearance of car park / recycling area.** Improving the general amenity of the area around the station should make for a more pleasant environment.
- **Station lifts / step free access.** This has been ongoing for some time, to the frustration of those members of the community who would benefit from the installation of lifts at the station. Can the Council put more pressure on Network Rail to come to a satisfactory proposal and deliver the necessary improvements?

General Amenity

Over time, there is a collective desire to see the visual amenity of the village improved. With the introduction of hybrid working, many office workers are now spending part of their week working from home, meaning that they are spending more time in their local areas.

- **Development of garden and seating area.** There is a general view that the area adjacent to the junction of Station Road and Beckenham Lane offers an opportunity to be improved with planters, more public seating and a space that could facilitate pop-up stalls and make it more pleasant for the community to use.
- **Accommodating Occasional Street Markets / Community Events.** Occasional closure of Station Road between Beckenham Lane and Martin's Road to accommodate street market / local events.
- **Restoration of Shortlands mural under the rail bridge.** The ingress of water from the railway into the brickwork and across the pavement, directly below the bridge, generally make for an unpleasant experience for those using this route coming in and out of the Village, and we would appreciate any assistance that the Council can provide in

encouraging Network Rail to install appropriate drainage below the railway, to stop the general seepage of water as described, so that the mural can be safely restored.

- **Preservation of Conservation Area.** This places a duty on the Council to preserve and enhance the village through the planning conservation advisory council. Relatively new businesses like Byron's Barbers and Village Fish & Chips are good examples of the type of frontage the Bromley Civic Society would like to see encouraged.
- **Better provision of litter bins.** Littering is increasing, especially with coffee cups, food wrappers and cans. Open bins allow litter to escape.
- **More frequent deep cleaning of storm drains.** A number of large puddles have formed after recent spells of heavy rain in the Shortlands area. Scheduling the deep cleaning of drains on a more frequent basis should help to avoid drains being blocked with leaf litter.
- **Family and leisure dwell time.** After using our nearby parkland in Queensmead there is very little provision or quality amenity to attract people to stay and socialize/relax in the Village. We should take advantage of the current and continued growth of outdoor pavement dining and snacking nationally to draw locals and visitors to the Village. Better quality spaces lead to more people, greater footfall, longer 'dwell time', so increasing trade for local retailers, and, hopefully, an ongoing upward spiral of demand and investment.

Engagement with and Involvement of Local Businesses

A number of concerns have been put forward by members of the local business community. These include:

- **Unsightly building developments.** The dilapidated hoardings around 87 Beckenham Lane, have been an issue for the past 5 years and blight our High Street .
- **Lack of footfall.** This has seen a number of small businesses opening and closing.
- **Shoplifting.** The village is viewed as a soft target and there are general concerns regarding knife and drug crime, even though crime statistics for the wider area indicate a relatively low level of criminality.

Suggested improvements include:

- **Improved street scene.** Seasonal street lights and shop front displays.
- **Increase fresh food sales and cafes.** These are seen as easier ways to attract people into the village. The Bridge Café is seen as a success story that has had minimal impact on the wider area.
- **Increase in the diversity of local shops, including some 'niche shops'.** This would encourage more outsiders to visit the Village and its facilities.
- **Local supermarket.** This would encourage local people to shop in the village instead of going to Beckenham / Bromley.
- **High rents.** The level of business rates is considered to discourage small independent businesses, with estimated costs at between £15K and £30K. The Council should encourage planning applications for new business in Shortlands and possibly invest in commercial property to rent out at discounted rates.
- **Community action.** Getting more people involved helps to build momentum in getting things done. Following the Open Meeting, nearly 100 people have registered their interest in being kept informed of developments associated with the Village Blueprint.
- **Disabled access ensured for all Village shops.** There are currently only a handful of shops providing effective disabled access, though we are currently surveying this.
- **Ensure Conservation Area quality for all shop fronts, including 87 Beckenham Lane site.** Pressure needs to be exerted on the present developer of this site to complete their development of the ground floor shops involved with planning permission and open them up.

Improved Traffic Flows

A longstanding issue is the high volume of traffic that is funneled through the village, due to the topography of the area and presence of the railway.

- **Review the phasing of traffic lights.** Consider the right turn filter into Ravensbourne Avenue including a red-light phase for traffic from Bromley Road to release more filtered traffic.

Longer term

- **Widening of the road under the rail bridge.** This would allow more filter lanes to be added, improving the flow of traffic through the area.

Conclusion

We have arranged the ideas and proposals set out in this blueprint under a number of key headings...pedestrian safety, parking, Shortlands Station, general amenity, engagement and involvement with local businesses, and traffic flows. Taken together, they provide a model for the regeneration of Shortlands Village. As explained, some are achievable more speedily than others, and, of course, funding will need to be found to take many of the improvements forward, whether from the Council, local businesses, or elsewhere.

On some proposals we are making a direct appeal to Councillors to help in bringing them to fruition, while in others we know that other organisations, like Network Rail or the private sector, will need to be involved.

But, there is an overwhelming desire on the part of all involved to get all or as many as possible of these improvements implemented, so that the Village will prove a greater attraction and source of pride not only for its existing community but also for new residents, businesses and visitors.

SRA and RVR

3rd February 2023