

Chislehurst

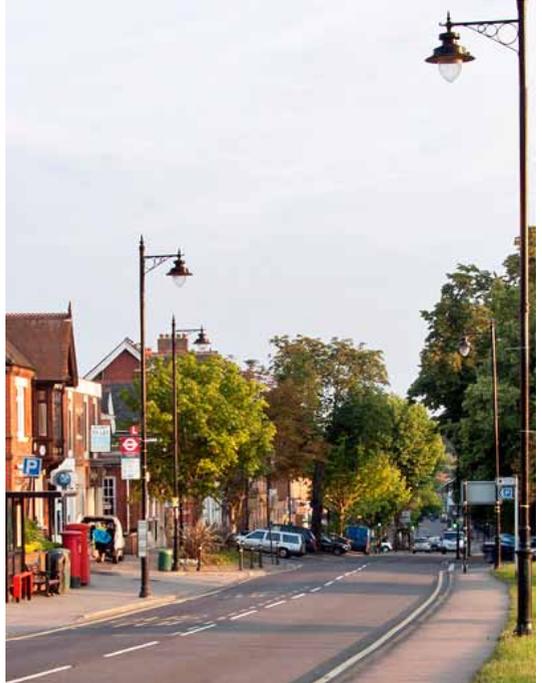
REPORT

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This edition of *Chislehurst Report* is almost wholly given over to proposals we are developing with the Chislehurst Town Centre Management Group to improve the High Street.

At our AGM in April we set out our thoughts on what needed to be done. These have been supplemented by the responses to the questionnaire we issued on the subject, and the newly formed Town Team is busy converting these ideas into proposals that we will be putting to Bromley Council in the coming months.

Many thanks to the 426 people who responded to the questionnaire and the many who provided thoughtful and constructive comments. The quotes and statistics in this report are taken from the responses.

Many offered further assistance. If you would like to become actively involved in this exciting project, please contact us.

Go online to the Society's website at www.chislehurst-society.org.uk

Chislehurst High Street - fit for the future?

Chislehurst is not alone in being concerned about the future of the High Street. Changes in shopping patterns and developments in technology mean that High Streets will survive only if people actively want to go there – if they are attractive and enjoyable.

There is no single magic solution, and each High Street will need to look at its own particular circumstances to see what is likely to work there.

We have looked at our own circumstances in some detail. There are a number of positive aspects to the High Street.

- The relationship between the High Street and the Commons, and particularly the pond, is an important one, and makes the area particularly attractive to visitors.

- There are a large number of restaurants and cafes, though only one pub on the High Street itself. These provide a reasonable and generally above-average choice for evening and lunchtime visitors without the risk of large numbers of badly behaved drinkers.

- There is generally sufficient parking space in and around the High Street, with four off-street car parks, and on-street parking on the west side of the High Street; only occasionally are all the parking spaces filled.

- Chislehurst and its surrounding areas have a range of different socio-economic groups that should enable a variety of outlets, suited to different budgets, to flourish.

Sainsbury's presence is both positive and negative for Chislehurst – negative, in that it has driven most independent shops out of business, but positive in that it brings large numbers of people into the High Street, who otherwise wouldn't visit.

We believe that these positive elements give Chislehurst a very good starting position, but we are also clear that we need to deal with a number of negative issues that may otherwise seriously undermine the positives.

In the Spring edition of *Chislehurst Report* we reported on the design objectives we had already articulated as a way of focusing on ways to improve everyone's experience of the High Street. After further discussion, and some useful input from Bromley Council officers, we have narrowed down our objectives.

93% visit the High Street once a week
76% think we have good dining
95% think the High Street is safe

84% go to shop at Sainsbury's
70% use other High Street shops
56% dine on the High Street
54% go to the Doctors
41% use the library



‘Chislehurst is a great place to live...the High Street needs to reflect this’

‘The High Street is unique and with the ponds and commons is a very lovely environment. It should be preserved for future generations’

An outline plan

Our proposals to deal with these issues now fall into five areas, though these all overlap to some extent:

- maintain and enhance the village feel of the High Street, **56% want to improve planting and trees**
- work to attract a wider range of independent retail outlets, and facilitate the filling of empty retail units, **56% want better traffic management**
- improve the attractiveness of the High Street, **52% want the pond to be improved**
- improve and rationalise the parking facilities around the High Street, **47% want better maintainance of shops and buildings**
- find ways of reducing traffic congestion around the High Street and Willow Grove.

The Village feel

The simple architecture and the location of the High Street by the Common and Prickend Pond give it the feel of a village, and we believe we can do more to enhance that feeling. We should give the High Street area a more distinctive name, and are proposing we call this area 'Chislehurst Village'. Royal Parade was originally called Village Street, but no one uses that name any longer, and postcards from the late 19th century refer to the High Street as Chislehurst Village. The Town Team is looking at the installation of stylish welcome signs on the approaches to the High Street.

More than 80% of those who completed the questionnaire felt that the pond was one of the most important features of the High Street. The Town Team will be supporting the Trustees of the Commons with their proposal to rejuvenate and enhance the pond, which has fallen into poor repair mainly as a result of low rainfall in recent years.

Some of the terraces of shops would benefit from some care and attention: 47% of respondents agree, and there is a case for requiring a better standard of shops fronts, shop signs and advertising boards. We will be discussing with Bromley Council the possibility of enhancing the High Street in planning terms so that better minimum standards are applied, and we are taking advice on possible schemes to upgrade the quality and appearance of some of our existing terraces. The three-unit terrace on the corner of Willow Grove and the High Street is the most pressing. We will be seeking to identify funding for this. An example of improvement in Forest Gate is shown opposite.



'I think we need to decide whether we are a quaint village or a mixture of old and new...I personally feel variety could be interesting.'



Before and after.
The same terrace in Forest Gate before and after the scheme of improvement was undertaken



Retail outlets

There are some excellent shops in the High Street, including a number of new arrivals. Comments in the completed questionnaires contained suggestions for additional shops that people would like here, but there is a crucial point to be made;

57% say that the current range of shops do not meet your needs

96% of those who visit the Farmers' Market thought it was good quality

our independent shops are mostly run by individuals trying to make a living, and they will only remain open, and new ones start trading, if people are prepared to support them, by spending their money there – high rents, high business rates, and staff costs can only be met if enough customers are prepared to spend money in the new shops.

One striking example of this was made in the responses to the questions about the Farmers' Market, held every third Sunday. While 55% of respondents said they rarely or never attended the market, only 13% said they went often, and yet the vast majority commented that they would like to see a

wider range of specialist food shops on the High Street.

The CTCMG is considering extending the market idea so that there are a few market stalls on the High Street during the week, enabling small businesses to develop with lower overheads, and discussions are taking place with Bromley Council about the logistics and permissions required.

Chislehurst does not have as many empty retail units as some locations, but we do have a number that have been empty for some time, and there are some landlords who do not seem to care about the appearance of the High Street. Chislehurst Travel has been empty for the last 15 years, and the shop on the corner of the Willow Grove junction is in an appalling state of repair.

We are writing to all landlords explaining our objectives, and asking them to become involved, and we will do what we can to try to get them to have more regard to the impact that their properties have on the appearance and well-being of the High Street.



Appearance and tidiness

Members of the Town Team have recently undertaken an inventory of signs and other 'street furniture' on the High Street.

Some of it is important to retain: the flower beds and trees add to the ambiance, though they need to be better maintained on a regular basis. Litter bins are also important, though we appear to have several different types, with two or three in close proximity in some cases. Some signs are needed, and some are required by law.

But there are many signs that are so old that they cannot now be read, or are no longer relevant, and others that serve no useful function. Some signs have been mounted on specially installed posts when they could have been attached to a nearby lamppost. We counted 21 items of furniture outside the Red Cross Car Park.

There is also a growing number of utility boxes springing up, for which no planning permission is required. The companies involved seem to install them without regard to their visual impact.

Our plan here is simple: work with Bromley Council to get rid of unnecessary clutter, institute a better cleaning programme for litter and better maintenance for trees and plants, make sure those signs that are needed are properly located, and finally better arrange the installation of appropriate new signs. We welcome the introduction of the concept of community W.C.s, but exactly where does the new sign on the High Street point?

'I think that Royal Parade looks much better than the High Street. Here trees are damaged, some shop fronts are old and haggard.'



35% felt that the appearance of the High Street was one of the biggest issues
47% asked for better maintenance

Parking in Chislehurst

We are fortunate that we have reasonably good parking facilities in and around the High Street.

We are not so impressed with charges for car parking, and especially not impressed with the new increased charges that took effect from 1 May, about which we are seeking discussions with Bromley Council. We want users of the High Street to use the car parks, and not park on local streets, which many are now doing as a result of the higher charges

75% think parking is adequate and convenient

55% felt that deliveries at

Sainsbury's caused congestion

But we do have some other parking issues to deal with.

On-street parking is both a blessing and a curse. When available, it enables people to quickly park and shop – good for parents with young families and for those less able to walk far, and traders welcome the opportunity for parking near their stores.

But the way the parking is designed on the High Street adds to the problems of traffic congestion. Cars (especially larger 4x4s) often overhang the pavement, restricting pedestrian access at key points on the western side of the High Street.

Consideration is being given to how best to use the on-street parking bays, possibly dedicating some to those with young children, and disabled car users, and perhaps converting a few into loading bays to reduce the impact of shop deliveries on the flow of traffic. One or two may be used as locations for more regular on-street market stalls. The Town Team is also reviewing whether the remaining car parking here should be diagonal or parallel to the pavement (as it used to be), rather than its present alignment.

Our other car parks are functional, but nothing more, and we are investigating whether some landscaping and realignment of parking could make them rather more attractive, and indeed easier to use.

With the Nugent Centre nearby and Bluewater not so far away, the cost and ease of car-parking is of key importance to the economy of the High Street, as so many respondents commented in the questionnaires.

'On-street parking should be limited to 30 minutes only'

'We are lucky that Sainsbury's don't charge for parking - the day they do will be the death of the High Street'



Which car park would you prefer?

'Chislehurst High Street is very nice but could be a lot more appealing with a more efficient traffic flow and cheaper parking'



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Traffic management for the High Street

Chislehurst High Street is a busy through road; north-bound traffic comes from three different directions onto the High Street, and there are two south-bound routes, and the busy Willow Grove feeds in from the west. At rush hour it is nearly always congested, and can become so, unpredictably, at any time of the day.

The movement of cars using on-street parking exacerbates this problem, but the main problem seems to be the junction of the High Street and Willow Grove. We have in earlier editions of *Chislehurst Report* referred to different suggestions for dealing with this problem, which is set to get worse as the large housing development at the site of the former Ravensbourne College nears completion.

The Town Team has set up a separate sub-group to look at these issues, and will be taking into account some of the very interesting suggestions made by many respondents to the questionnaire, which included:

- closing off Park Road to through traffic
- making the High Street one-way
- taking out the traffic lights on the Willow Grove junction
- installing some form of shared space on the High Street
- working with Sainsbury's to re-engineer the flow of traffic in and out of the Sainsbury car park
- installing a mini-roundabout at the junction.

73% feel that traffic congestion is a problem
56% want to see a better traffic management system

None of the possible solutions will be easy, nor acceptable to everyone. Since the High Street is on a number of bus routes, we will need to ensure any proposal is acceptable to TfL, in addition to Bromley Traffic Department, so this programme will take some time.

But with the majority of respondents agreeing that we need a better traffic management system, this has to be a key part of our plan.

'Sufficient provision for cyclists?' I am not aware that there is any provision at all'

'The traffic lights at the junction with Willow Grove are often a cause of the congestion. The phasing needs to be altered...'

The future?

The last edition of *Chislehurst Report* commented on the suggestions for a new building on the site of Chislehurst Library, which would house a new supermarket store, with an enhanced library facility on the first floor. Many thought this was a good idea, but many more were very hostile to the proposal.

We understand that the proposal is at a very early stage, and many of those involved think it most unlikely to develop much further. We will of course be keeping an eye on this, and the many comments in the questionnaires will be fed into any discussions.

Nevertheless, the matter raises an interesting question for the High Street. There is a great deal that can be done with our existing infrastructure which has served the community well for the last century and more, most of which we have touched upon above. But some argue that a sustainable plan for the next century will require some additional investment in new buildings, or significant development of existing buildings. The community will need to be ready to consider these, and the debate on the library has given us all notice that any proposals will need more community discussion and better explanation if they are to have any hope of success.

With this in mind, the Town Team is considering whether it should apply to become the Neighbourhood Forum for the High Street under the new Localism Act. This would give it the right to develop its own Neighbourhood Plan for the area, which would be able to include most of the proposals mentioned in this Report. This would need to be put out for consultation to local residents, but if adopted would have to be implemented and supported by Bromley Council.

What Next?

The Town Team has identified a series of 'quick wins', and other early actions in each of the areas mentioned, which are now being progressed. We have:

- commissioned the design of new High Street signs,
- drawn up a first programme for de-cluttering the High Street,
- invited a Town Centre refurbishment specialist to advise us on maintenance and upgrading of some of our High Street terraces,
- written to Bromley Council to open discussions on the impact of the new parking charges on High Street users,
- set up a team to draw up more detailed alternative proposals for traffic and car parking management, and
- written to Bromley's Chief Planner asking for assistance in the development of plans for creating a Neighbourhood Forum for the High Street.

Road Stewards' update

Members who attended the Society's AGM on 26 April will have heard that Keith Heselden has had to step down from the role of Membership Secretary after 12 years due to ill health. We are extremely sorry to lose Keith's invaluable services to the Society, and want to thank him for the many years of service he has given to the Society as he has maintained and developed the Road Steward membership. We wish him a rapid and full recovery. We are grateful that Keith and his wife Marion will continue to act as Road Stewards for Old Perry Street.

Tony McClarty has been standing in as Membership Secretary since Keith's resignation. Tony can be contacted on 01689 824380.

Four Road Stewards have resigned recently: Lesley Reynolds (part Elmstead Lane), Evelyn Morgan (part Mainridge Road), Peter Munns (Westhurst Drive), and Jean Taylor (Heathfield). We thank them for their support, and wished them well for the future.

Nine new Road Stewards have been appointed: Miriam O'Shea (part Elmstead Lane), Lawrence Wallace/Peter Selby jointly (Greatwood), Larry Chrisfield (The Meadow and Heathley End), Terri Westwood (Holmdale Road), Christine Bloomfield (part Sandy Ridge), Margaret Kent (part Elmstead Lane and Croft Close), Una White (Ashfield Place and Farrington Place), Tony Wells (Heathfield), and Alan Porter (Westhurst Drive). Welcome on board!

Road Stewards' meeting. *The next meeting for Road Stewards will be on 30 June at 10.30am in our offices behind the Methodist Church. The subject will be Improving Chislehurst High Street. Please note in your diaries!*

Meetings for Society members

The second of our members' meetings in 2012 - Keith Baldwin's talk on 'Is it an emergency?' was well attended, extremely interesting, and huge fun.

The next meeting will be on 5 July, at 2.30 pm, at our meeting room at the Methodist Church. Marie-Louise Kerr, Curator of Bromley Museum will talk about 'Building over Bromley'. This talk explores how the borough has changed over the past 200 years, with paintings and old photographs. Many of the old buildings featured have been swallowed up by the houses and shops that make up suburbia today.

On 6 September, local resident Joanna Friel will be talking on 'Sir John Lubbock, 1834 - 1913, local unsung hero', using extracts from her forthcoming book on Lubbock Road.

Refreshments will be provided. There is no need to book, although if you let us know in advance we have a better idea of how many members to cater for.

You can contact the Chislehurst Society

by phone: 020 8467 0900 or email: membership@chislehurst-society.org.uk

or by post: PO Box 82, Chislehurst, Kent. BR7 5TT