

Peckham Town Centre Parallel Economies and Connections?

**Report on a workshop on Monday 8th July 2013 in Peckham,
London SE15, at All Saints Church hall, Blenheim Grove.**

**Organised and produced by Peckham Vision
in association with LSE Cities Research.**



Report by Eileen Conn, Peckham Vision, with thanks to:

LSE Cities for funding the light lunch provided by local business Bar Story | All Saints Church for generously providing their excellent facilities | Corinne, Michael and Eileen from the Peckham Vision team, and all who attended.

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Workshop

Index to the report and web links

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Workshop purpose

The workshop was arranged to reflect on these questions:

- *Are there parallel economies and communities locally?*
- *What are the connections or potential connections between them?*
- *What actions could develop connections to benefit Peckham's economy & community?*

People present

A mixture of people from different local economies, and some people from external bodies with an interest in re-imagining the high street, attended the workshop, see below.

Name	Organisation	Economy Type*
Akeem Diko	Rye Lane Chapel	religion
Anna Plodowski	Peckham Power	community
Ann-Marie Yannis	Pecan	community
Ben Sassoon	Bar Story	culture+trader
Bradley Zero Phillip	Peckham DJ	culture
Clyde Watson	Peckham Vision	heritage
Corinne Turner	Peckham Vision	community
Debbie Curtis	HSBC Rye Lane	business
Eileen Conn	Peckham Vision	community
Elaine Carrigan	Rye Lane market stall	trader
Elizabeth Cox	New Economics Foundation	external
Fran Beckett	Peckham Vision	community
Grace Adejuwon	Grace's Creation	trader
Gurpreet Tank	Network Rail Peckham Property	business
Iain Johncock	local resident	community
Jeremy Waterfield	student enterprise	culture
Kay Nooney	local resident	community
Kiera Blakey	LSE Theatrum Mundi	external
Lori Wilson	Copeland Park	business
Maria Anderson	Atwell Rd shop	trader
Michael Mohamed	local resident	community
Moira Lascelles	Architecture Foundation	external
Paul Collier	Copleston Centre	religion
Paula Orr	Transition Town Peckham	community
Sophie Yetton	film maker	external
Suzi Hall	LSE Cities	external
Will Jarvis	The Sunday Painter	culture

* not mutually exclusive categories for individuals.

Welcome and introductions

Eileen Conn welcomed everyone and said that the workshop was the latest stage in Peckham Vision's work to connect local people keen to work together to improve the town centre. This

had developed from the [Peckham Town Centre Forum](#) set up in 2009. After everyone introduced themselves, Eileen presented a [slide show of views and images of Peckham town centre](#) (6.6mb) from six broad categories of economic and social activities:

- trader small independent local trader/businesses
- business mainstream businesses
- culture creative enterprises
- heritage heritage buildings + restoration projects
- religion faith worlds in Peckham
- community local people & town centre activities

These were a simple means for looking at town centre activities, and not mutually exclusive categories for individuals. Background papers circulated before the workshop gave some insight into ways that could bring diverse interests together in reimagining the town centre focus and functions. These papers are available here:

- [A New Vision for Our High Streets](#): Urban Pollinators' report.
- [Extracts from Urban Pollinators' report](#) summarised by Eileen Conn.
- [Future of London's town centres](#): paper by Dr Suzanne Hall.

Rye Lane Economies

Rye Lane research

Dr Suzanne Hall from the 'Ordinary Streets' project at LSE Cities presented some of the material from the year and a half research in Rye Lane. The research has focused on the retail economies on the street, and the spatial and social textures emerging from the intersections of diverse cultures and ethnicities; link to research data: <http://lsecities.net/objects/research-projects/ordinary-streets>

Some findings:

- There are over twenty different countries of origin amongst the proprietors trading in the shops along Rye Lane, including: Pakistan, UK, Afghanistan, Nigeria, India, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Kashmir, Kenya, Nepal, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam and Yemen.
- The proprietors along Rye lane have high language proficiencies: 11% speak one language; 61% speak 2 to 3 languages, and 28% speak four languages or more. Multi-lingualism is not simply in regional dialects, but in a wide spectrum of languages that allow traders to communicate with a diverse clientele as well as participate in a wide global network of supplies and services.
- The capacity of Peckham Town Centre (in which Rye Lane sits) to perform as a diverse cultural hub of business opportunities and private and public sector employment is significant. Using the analysis of Peckham's Town Centre in the *High Street London* report (Gort Scott and UCL, 2010) and available data on Westfield Stratford, the following is of comparative use: Peckham's Town Centre accommodates 2,100 businesses and 13,400 employees, whilst Westfield Stratford accommodates 300 retail units and 8,500 jobs.
- A quarter of the shops along Rye Lane (excluding the market stalls) practice a 'mutualism' or reciprocal sharing of floor space in which subdivisions are created, generating the street's own version of 'pop up shops' with flexible terms of rental and access to micro

retail space. This is both a tactic to respond to the pressures generated by the global economic crisis, as well as a way of innovating new retail practices in money remittance economies, mobile phone sales and software manipulations, as well as hair and nail services.

- Interviews with both proprietors and officers over the research period highlight the challenges of how individuals who live and work on this rapidly changing street communicate with the local authority. Questions raised are: what mediates between individuals and authorities in rapidly changing cities; and how can the vitality of the street be further enhanced and made visible to a wider public.

Trading in Rye Lane

Elaine Carrigan (stall holder), Maria Anderson (small general shop), and Grace Adejuwon (internet based printing business) gave a brief introduction to their local businesses, and Eileen Conn mentioned Khan's Bargain Ltd (large general store) on behalf of Akbar Khan. All are members of the [Rye Lane Traders' Association](#) set up in 2012, with the support of Peckham Vision, when traders knew they needed to work together on solving some of the issues in the town centre getting in the way of trade and business. The recession is reducing local trade which has added to the problems caused by the major road disruptions for over a year in 2011-12.

Cultural & creative industries

Will Jarvis, Ben Sassoon, Jeremy Waterfield and Bradley Zero Phillip gave a brief introduction to some of the extensive cultural activities which have developed over the last few years including Bold Tendencies, Hannah Barry Gallery, The Sunday Painter, the Canavan Pool Hall and music events, Bar Story & Sassoon Gallery, and some proposed new ventures. There was also the now regular dance music and theatre and other events at the CLF Art Café in the Bussey building, and in other parts of the Copeland site.

Some of these now have regular recognition on the underground scene and are very popular. The Peckham Restaurant just opened and the Hannah Barry Gallery and restaurant due to open in the autumn were direct off shoots of the HB Gallery. Notable features of all this were that 80,000 visitors were expected this summer to Bold Tendencies alone; professional and experimental theatre, and dance, are now established in the Copeland site; Bar story has become an incubator for new creative enterprises. These developments have led to quite different kinds of people in large numbers using Rye Lane at different times of day, evening and night. This is a sign of some of the parallel economies and communities.

Historic restorations

Clyde Watson from Peckham Vision gave a brief account of the three major heritage restoration projects:

- The Old Waiting Room which has had resident-led preliminary works to restore windows, doors, and floor and electricity and light installed. Peckham Vision is discussing with Network Rail plans for interim uses as a multi purpose space for the town centre, and long term restoration. Substantial funds need to be raised for this.
- The Gateway project, stimulated by local campaigning, and led by Southwark Council with Network Rail to recreate the square in front of the station, and regenerate the

Network Rail land and property around the station. The Council has funding of over £11m for this.

- The Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) project, initiated by Peckham Vision, and now led by the Council, which is applying for funding of about £2m from the Heritage Lottery Fund for grants to owners of historic buildings in Peckham High St and Rye Lane to restore their buildings.

All these will come to fruition and have a big effect on the town centre over the next few years up to 2018. Then there is the Peckham & Nunhead Area Action Plan which may lead to re-development of some major Peckham town centre sites over the next 10 years.

Religious & faith worlds

Rev Paul Collier vicar of the Copleston Centre reported on the significance of religion for many thousands of people who live and work in Peckham, and of others who come to Peckham to visit their church or mosque. A recent report [*Being Built Together*](#) showed the scale and significance of these activities, especially in Peckham. The emphasis in the report was the need for the new black majority churches to work together in alliance on their mutual interests. Paul also described how last January he had arranged a well supported interfaith walk through the town centre with the Peckham Islamic Centre in Choumert Road. The Islamic Centre, one of several Peckham mosques, has 2000 members and 500 regularly worship there on Fridays. They have raised £1.5m themselves to build their new mosque with its recent extension and minarets designed by local architect Benedict O'Looney, who also works on the rail station restoration.

Making Connections

Small group discussions

The participants divided themselves into three groups each containing a mix of the different economic sectors we had identified. The discussion focused on what connections exist or could be encouraged to happen between the different activities in the town centre. Some key points from the groups included:

- There are very poor and richer, and everything in-between, socio-economic populations in Peckham with different interests, and they have different retail and service needs, but the town centre is not serving all the needs well enough. The cash economy is a dominant one and this needs to be taken into account.
- Need to find ways to influence the lack of variety in commercial offer by eg Council rates policy and other means to stimulate and support micro and small business; and support trials in vacant shops and meanwhile uses. Need also proactive dialogue with landlords, property owners and Network Rail as well as Council. The indoor markets need to have new imaginative approaches to get them into good use.
- Need to bridge the communication gap between different population groups especially between creative arts and the rest, would it be useful for shops to have an 'arts corner'?
- Need to improve information and communication between all the parallel communities - using all means including notice boards and social media for understanding & facilitating access.

- Specialist art and cultural niches should not be diluted to widen access, but be celebrated to enable people to experience the new.
- Economic pressures on small traders are now intense from the recession and after effects of year-long road works. Changing demographics are reducing customer numbers, and there is need to help traders to think about new goods and services to offer the new kinds of people living in and visiting the area.
- For some marginal businesses in a subdivided shop, rents can be as high as west end properties per sq metre. Location is very important – near the station good, south of Rye Lane less so. This could be helped by tidying up the shop burnt out in the riots – a hoarding with a painted shop on it for example. Could this be funded by the Community Restoration Fund?
- Need for public health education to remove anti social behaviour such as urinating and spitting in the street.
- Great need for listening and facilitation skills in the town centre in a variety of dimensions.

Reflections on the issues arising

Elizabeth Cox from the [New Economics Foundation](#) (nef) said there are a range of challenges facing local areas, from the threat of clone towns, and gentrification, to the challenge of climate change. Nef's [approach 'Re-imagine your High Street'](#) aims to enable local people to get involved in planning and actions to develop their high street - into one that supports people's wellbeing and helps them to live within environmental limits. Key aspects:

- Using a 'design frame of well-being' helps people to imagine different uses of the public space alongside the economic use, and highlights the importance of the assets already in the area (eg heritage buildings, green space, market vibrancy). [Further Information from nef.](#)
- Need to look at how money is spent in the area by residents, local businesses & the public sector, and identify new local enterprise opportunities to develop the diversity and distinctiveness of the area; eg Brixton will soon be releasing their study, and the [Totness blueprint](#) is available.
- Traditional approaches - eg lavish public improvements, name-brand business recruitment, or endless promotional events - can revitalise the High Street in the short-term. But sustainable, long-term transformation of the local economy and social activity in the high street is essential. Successful approaches begin with basic, simple activities that demonstrate "new things happening" on the High Street.
- It takes local residents, business and public sector coming together with a shared vision/intent to successfully develop a high street – but the drive and inspiration for changing the high street may originate with local groups of residents and businesses.

Moira Lascelles from the [Architecture Foundation](#) said the discussions showed that Peckham had immense potential (creatives, traders, residents). Appetite for creating change is there, but better connections and communications are required between different groups and between community and council. Some small catalyst initiatives might be effective before embarking on

larger scale projects. Rents are too high and it won't be long until some of the traditional stall holders on the high street will start seriously struggling.

Diversity was a key word mentioned - this was referred to both positively in the sense that there is a diverse community of people using/living in Peckham but then also negatively in the sense that the high street does not have a diverse enough offer to attract all user groups to it. More cafes and evening economy was mentioned as a desirable. It appears that a neutral 'place of exchange' would be good in Peckham where all groups feel they are entitled to be in that space (not religious, not trendy, not business focused) - building on the momentum of what has been created will be key now.

Conclusions and actions

Some ideas for town centre action which emerged in the plenary discussion included:

- **Information system:** A collectively agreed communications process in the local grassroots, using all forms of media, is needed. There is unmet need for a good information dissemination system for (i) news of events and activities, and for (ii) accommodation availability for events, and for trading and creative enterprises. How can we encourage the development of an effective information system as an enterprise opportunity?
- **English lessons:** it could be helpful to create a system for English language lessons designed for traders and their staff in Rye Lane who need it. Can we connect with ESOL providers to develop this?
- **Everything food:** Peckham is a great base for a wide variety of food; there is scope for creative and imaginative thinking. Need to use and promote local food. How can the Peckham community drive for maximising local food growing be linked in? Might Peckham be the next 'Borough Market' in ethnic form? Copeland Park are trialling a night street food market. What else?
- **Health:** the town centre environment is dirty and unpleasant. Good Rye Lane public toilets are essential to help educate people in public cleanliness. Public health education is also needed and there could be town centre initiatives, linked with cleaner public realm and healthy eating.
- **Sustainability:** there is need to link in ideas and actions for sustainable environment into all the other town centre aspects. Transition Town Peckham & Peckham Power are working on this.
- **Town centre forum:** need to encourage continuing cross sector discussions and working collaboratively as in this workshop. Other local areas are now experimenting with town centre forums linked with but not restricted to the new Localism neighbourhood forums, eg Brixton. This could be a natural development of Peckham Vision's Town Centre Forum set up in 2009 see: www.peckhamvision.org/wiki/Peckham_Town_Centre_Forum.

The next relevant action is the Public Hearings into the PNAAP (Area Action Plan for town centre) 23 July – 1 August. These will cover many of the matters discussed at the workshop, and raised by some residents in their formal comments on the PNAAP last year which has led to the Public Hearings. Following the Public Hearings, Peckham Vision will contact workshop participants & others to take forward ideas from the workshop. This workshop report is posted on the [Town Centre Forum web page](#).

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