

## Portas Pilots in Southwark

### A Proposal – an outline

Peckham town centre is a prime candidate for a Portas pilot. Some major pieces needed to revitalize the town centre are now in place as detailed below. But there are two missing elements. The first is the absence of an integrated cross sector approach to town centre matters, and the second is the relative lack of participation by the traders and businesses in the work to improve and revive the town centre. The Portas pilot gives us the opportunity to remedy these missing elements. We need a resilient cross-sector town centre team, and also dedicated development work with traders and businesses. The Portas pilot could help fund the skills and resources needed to do this skilled work to underpin the effect of bringing the Portas approach to the improvement of the businesses, and to realise the full potential of the achievements already made, and the developments to come.

### 1 Lead organisations name and contact

The priority for such a project in Peckham town centre would be to develop an effective cross-sector town centre team involving:

- the businesses and traders of the varying types in the town centre,
- the residents' community groups already working in the town centre,
- the voluntary sector groups that have a significant interest in the town centre, and
- the public agencies with a significant day-to-day role in the town centre in particular the Council, the police, and the transport bodies including railway companies.

This team effort would need lead organisations, with a town centre role, from these different sectors.

For the residents' sector, the lead organisation would be Peckham Vision [www.peckhamvision.org](http://www.peckhamvision.org) which is a consortium of residents' groups including the Peckham Society, Rye Lane & Station Action Group, and the Bellenden Residents Group, some businesses and enterprises in central Rye Lane, and active individuals. Peckham Vision facilitates the Peckham Town Centre Forum see: [www.peckhamvision.org/wiki/Peckham\\_Town\\_Centre\\_Forum](http://www.peckhamvision.org/wiki/Peckham_Town_Centre_Forum) This has been a step towards developing a cross-sector team approach, and has led to some initial development work in two parts of Rye Lane where we are working with the small businesses to develop links for mutual support and improvement of their immediate surroundings.

The Portas proposal takes forward this work, using a community development approach to creating and nurturing links between enterprises with mutual interests. It could provide the worker capacity not available to us as a non funded, non staffed community consortium. We are working closely with the Peckham Settlement on the future support system for this residents-led town centre work. We and they see this proposal as potentially part of the same work. They are willing to consider hosting any worker employed or contracted to support the cross sector team, and the business development work. The contact details are:

Peckham Vision Eileen Conn <e.conn@nutbrook.demon.co.uk>

Peckham Settlement Tim Reith <tim.reith@peckhamsettlement.org.uk>

If this proposal is developed by the Council, we can contribute suggestions of organisations from each of the other sectors, which have a significant role to play.

A local traders' business organisation would of course be an obvious overall lead organisation, but there isn't one, although there have been several attempts to establish one over the last few decades. None have taken firm root. Indeed it is a main outcome from this proposal that a new kind of town centre business structure would be established that was so well rooted in the local community that it would survive this time, and as part of a long term cross-sector team. In the meantime in the absence of such an organisation for the town centre, the neighbouring and adjacent areas of Bellenden, East Dulwich Road and Lordship Lane are all covered by the South Southwark Business Association (SSBA) which should be invited to be part of the core team to contribute a local business perspective and to link with their own member business interests.

## **2 Proposal coverage area**

The core area needs to be Peckham High St and the High St end of Peckham Hill St, Rye Lane and Peckham Rye as the end of the Rye Lane commercial area, and immediately adjacent commercial parts of side roads. This is the same as the new Rye Lane Conservation Area plus the Peckham Rye retail area, and is a major part of the PNAAP core area. The town centre though has to function in good balance with the neighbouring shopping areas of Bellenden, Lordship Lane, Nunhead Lane, East Dulwich Rd, & Queens Rd east. There would need to be excellent working with those areas as well, so they all go forward together in a complementary way.

## **3 Prospective partners**

Prospective partners would include all those in the sectors listed in item 1 under the lead organisations:

- businesses and traders both independents & multiples, landlords and prospective developers,
- residents' community groups, voluntary sector groups, faith groups, arts groups and others that have a significant interest in the town centre,
- all the public agencies with a significant role in the town centre including the Council, the police, and the transport bodies including the railway companies, and public health bodies.
- the elected representatives for the area - cllrs from the several wards affected by the town centre, Val Shawcross AM, and Harriet Harman MP.

## **4 Vision for the High Street or {Town Centre}**

The vision, which is in line with the PNAAP –

- A more cohesive and safe town centre with a vibrant, more diverse and wider retail offer appealing to the varied communities, of all ages, in the local catchment area, and with less money leaking out of the local economy to other town centres like SQ, Lewisham, Croydon, Bromley.
- A concerted effort to utilise the assets of the historic buildings in the new Conservation Area by restoring them to their former glory, and using them to raise the standards of new development and the adaptations and development of other existing buildings.
- Less vacant units, with landlords investing in their properties and upper floors brought back into use as rental values improve.
- Greater level of active participation of independent traders, with more understanding of and compliance with waste and H&S regulations resulting in a cleaner, more pleasant town centre.
- Improved design of shop fronts and shop displays, and of street furniture.
- Some development of new retail units helping to attract major multiples to "anchor" the town centre (attracting greater footfall to the town centre as a whole) whilst retaining and diversifying smaller independent retail avoiding a clone town feel.
- Building on some unique Peckham current offerings - a well known and popular destination for arts, culture and leisure, and attractive specialist retail.
- More integrated management of the Council town centre day-to-day functions
- An active, resilient and enthusiastic community network of residents and businesses working together in reviving the town centre.

## **5 Why this would work as a Town Team Pilot for Southwark**

This proposal would work because it is at just the right moment to realise the full potential of the work done by the Council and the community over the last several years. A range of substantial projects are now coming together in Peckham town centre:

- Restoration of Peckham Rye Station and the Old Waiting Room
- Restoration of Peckham Rye Station Square and redesign of adjacent public realm

- PNAAP and increased developer interest in building new retail
- Arts, Culture & Leisure enterprises burgeoning
- potential HLF funding for a Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)
- Council funding via Community Restoration Fund
- post riots energy and enthusiasm for change amongst residents, businesses, voluntary sector, council and other public agencies

But Peckham currently lacks capacity to pull these energies together and realise their full integrated potential, especially amongst the business community. Expertise from Mary Portas could really help local independent retailers to raise their game and tap into local buying power in a way they are not at the moment. We understand that Council funding (via community restoration fund) could more than match fund government funding and combining with capital funding for physical regeneration could drive a major transformation of Peckham.

A key missing element in the work so far is the active participation of the local traders and businesses (large, medium and small). We believe, learning from the lessons of past failed attempts to bring the businesses together, and the successful experience we have had so far from using a community networking approach, the priority is for a patient sensitive community development approach. This is a promising way to achieve continuing involvement by the businesses and traders in the collective work we are all doing, and to nurture the working relationships between the different sectors with a stake in the town sector (items 1 and 3 above).

The community has already been for several years working to improve the town centre from the grass roots. A few businesses are involved in this but this project would enable us together to have much more successful work to bring the other businesses and traders properly into a networked set of relationships in the town centre.

A focused effort directed at nurturing and strengthening the whole team, businesses and residents working together with the public agencies, has significant potential.

This Portas pilot would give the community – businesses and residents together - a powerful stake in this effort and make it much more likely that the Council's good intentions were used to much better effect. To bring the variety of businesses and traders we have in Peckham into a collective effort takes the right community and business oriented skills that have to be paid for - this project could buy them in. Several of us have the ideas, understanding and enthusiasm but no spare capacity. We could however make a significant contribution to steering it.

The resident-led community groups with active work in the town centre are already fully engaged and would contribute to this project. This is linked to the voluntary sector organisations which have joined us in the Peckham Heritage Regeneration Partnership. Peckham town centre would really benefit from a grounded community development project focused on the businesses as an essential part of our local community, and nurturing their effective participation in the future in the cross sector team.

In summary, the core of this proposal is a community development approach to:

- \* create a cross-sector team for the town centre, (business, residents groups, vol sector organisations, and public agencies), and
- \* detailed work with the traders and businesses to develop small localised networks to provide the basis for sustainable continuing town centre business participation.

This would provide the basis for the Portas approach to be applied with great effect in Peckham town centre, and ensure that we develop a firm base for an integrated approach long into the future.

Eileen Conn  
 Peckham Vision / Peckham Town Centre Forum  
<http://www.peckhamvision.org>

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