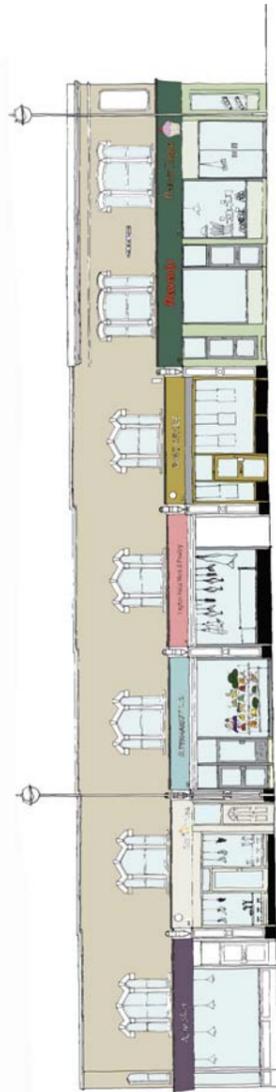


The High Road Leyton Shopfront Project

April 2012



Mary Portas's Review of British High Streets spells out the crisis point that Britain's town centres have reached and the urgency by which we have to act if this social and cultural asset is to be protected from irreparable decline. While the Portas Review was being written, Waltham Forest Council and the Waltham Forest Business Board with support by Design for London commissioned their own strategy to enliven it's high streets, *The High Street Life Strategy*. The document presents a comprehensive survey of the high streets up and down the borough and proposes a number of measures designed to support local retailers, enhance the public realm and augment the status of the high street in the eyes of the public.

The *High Road Leyton Pilot Shopfront Project* is Waltham Forest's first large-scale shopfront project that trials the Council's vision. In the shadow of Europe's largest indoor shopping mall that has just been completed in Stratford, we spoke to retailers, interviewed the public, carried out historic research and prepared photographic surveys to devise a strategy that would enhance the standing of local retailers and create a thriving High Road Leyton. We found that what's unique about the high street is its distinct local identity. The high street can offer something that is foreign to supermarkets, shopping centres and large chains; a unique character and a celebration of public local life.

With this in mind, Jan Kattein Architects advanced the design in close collaboration with the traders, and across the Environment & Regeneration Directorate, with the Public realm, Spatial Planning and the Economic Development team working together. The result of this progressive approach is a design proposal that responds to the constraints of the existing buildings and the needs of a contemporary retail environment. The success of the project is due to the collaborative working method and the communal effort that was put in by all parties involved. We are proud that our design strategy developed for High Road Leyton has helped to cement the Council's policy and has since found application in the Wood Street and Walthamstow town centre shopfront projects.

The high street is a fluctuant entity. Shops change ownership, vendors change business models, new services are offered and old lines of trade are discontinued. A sustainable shopfront strategy needs to be able to accommodate change. Our design avoids specialist materials or products in favour of simple, modern construction techniques and finishes that allow for re-branding, are adaptable and can be repaired and up-graded by local tradesmen. If maintained well, the new shopfronts will last more than 3 decades.

Clearly, the council's ability to improve the public realm in this way only reaches as far as the vendor's commitment to respect and maintain their new shopfronts and signage. Early signs are encouraging. Half of the 9 shops completed during phase 1 have since seen additional, privately funded improvement works implemented. It is great to see that the shopfront project has acted as a catalyst to encourage local businesses to invest in their high street.

Works are now underway to upgrade three more terraces before the Olympics. In addition, funds have been set aside to set-up a Branding Lab that will link local design students with shop owners to enhance window displays and devise specific marketing strategies.

The high street is the lifeblood of the neighbourhood. We hope that all these works will help to instill a sense of civic pride and bring about a turn of fortunes for local traders once and for all.



BEFORE



AFTER



from top to bottom: Nos. 230 to 236 HRL before the works, Nos. 230 to 236 after the works, Nos. 269 to 273 contribute to a vibrant high street at night

"I fundamentally believe that once we invest in and create social capital in the heart of our communities, the economic capital will follow."



267 HRL- Leyton Mini Market

The design strategy needed to respond to the constraints of the existing buildings but it also had to satisfy the immediate needs of a contemporary retail environment on the high street. The first task we undertook when we came to site is to map all the existing architectural features that we wanted to keep. The resulting catalogue contained original features from the late 19th century when the buildings were built, but also more recent additions. Historic photographs of the high street which we found in Council's historic collection and the London Metropolitan archives helped us to understand how the shopfronts had looked when they were built 140 years ago.

"No. 267 is a Victorian bank building with an ornate facade. It was our ambition to remove the existing signboards to reveal the fine stone detailing behind. The shop owners were happy to trade their signboards against the illuminated fruit and now they are probably the only fruit shop in London with a giant illuminated apple over their entrance." [Jan, Architect]



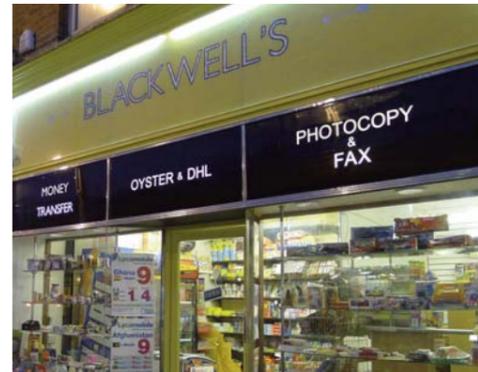
273 HRL - Blackwell's



"Our shop is just behind the bus stop. We are concerned about security and have had our shutters graffitied before. We can imagine having an internal shutter but would want laminated security glass fitted to our shop front. We sell a lot of things from our window display. Proper illumination would advertise the merchandise better." [Shamima & Mohammed @ Blackwells]

There is no generic solution for a high street.

Every trade has different needs that have to be built into the design proposal. Some of the concerns raised by vendors cannot be solved with architecture. The officers from the Met's neighbourhood team attended many of our meetings and planning enforcement will need to have an eye on the terraces to ensure that no unauthorised alterations are made. The new Branding Lab project will bring designers and shopkeepers together to



make best use of the new window displays. *"I cannot believe it, people come in off the street and tell me how beautiful my shop is."* [Shamima @Blackwells]



279 HRL- Princess

"I would like a new shopfront and entrance and an internal shutter so that one can look into the shop at night. I think that lighting is important. The Olympics will bring lots of people to Leyton High Road and it would be good to trade at night." [Penny @ Princess]

Keeping everyone informed and involved in the process was



essential to the successful implementation of the project. We consulted with people in a number of ways. Public meetings were held to update everyone of the overall progress of the project and individual meetings with each shop

owner helped us to understand individual needs and aspirations for the project. Information leaflets were printed to explain the process to everyone and also to provide telephone numbers of the design team in case shop owners wanted to get in touch. During the construction phase the site manager was in constant dialogue with the traders to ensure that the impact of the works on their business was minimised. The project architect visited the site 2 to 3 times per week so that any design decisions could be made there and than without causing any delays.

The shop owner at no. 279 took the works as an initiative to also upgrade the interior of their shop fitting new lighting, wallpaper and display units.



JAN KATTEIN ARCHITECTS

277 New North Road
London N1 7AA
UK

+44 (0)20 7704 0604
mail@jankattein.com
www.jankattein.com