

MAYOR OF LONDON

Night Surgery
Richmond upon
Thames



THE WHITE CROSS



Night Surgery: Richmond upon Thames

London's Night Czar Amy Lamé describes her recent visit to the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, where she visited Richmond and Twickenham town centres. Night Surgeries are part of her work with London boroughs, businesses and community groups to put in place night time strategies, test new night time initiatives and improve life at night in London.

I was delighted to visit Richmond following their recent commitment to developing a night time strategy. I heard from councillors, officers, businesses and other stakeholders first-hand about the challenges and aspirations that a night time strategy could help address.

Richmond Town Centre

At the Angel and Crown pub in Richmond town centre, I sat down with local business owners, the Be Richmond Business Improvement District (BID) and local councillors. While daytime footfall has been slow to recover, with businesses expecting a further two years to return to pre-pandemic levels, I heard how the town centre's night time character differs between weekdays and weekends. The park and riverside attract many weekend visitors, making the area feel, as one attendee put it, like a seaside resort. The work from home trend has also impacted sales and activity. These comments only reinforced the importance of analysing and planning for town centres geographically and temporally.

Councillors were keen to better understand night time employment figures in the borough. The London at Night report was transformative in helping our understanding at City Hall of the size and make up of London's night time workforce. Using such data will help inform the borough's night time strategy and what policy decisions can be made to support night workers, who currently find it hard to access shops and services when they finish their shift.

The Angel and Crown prides itself on being a community-focussed venue, which saw it feed homeless people during the pandemic. But staff shortages, the rising costs of utilities and supply chain delays have had a huge effect on the pub. Some pre-pandemic regulars, mainly older people, had also been hesitant to return due to fears of Covid-19. In response to these challenges, the pub has chosen to increase its live music offer. A Brazilian themed night, inspired by the co-owner's heritage, is differentiating and diversifying the venue's appeal.

While the pub was recently successful in securing a pavement licence to allow them to trade outside, I heard about the difficulties in navigating what proved to be a very time-consuming application process. Helping businesses navigate licensing and regulatory processes and cutting 'red tape' is a key role local authorities can play. It's vital that licensing and economic development teams work together closely in supporting the recovery of local economies, jobs and businesses from the effects of Covid-19.



The Old Ship pub in Richmond Town Centre



Church Lane

Night Time Safety

A key topic throughout our discussions was safety at night. Despite low levels of reported crime in the borough, suggesting it is one of the safest in London, there's a perception that policing is under-resourced – in fact, the borough has only one police station, in Twickenham. It was good to hear the evidence base for the borough's night time strategy will include crime statistics alongside perceptions of crime, which are often a major barrier to people participating in an area's life after 6pm.

They BID has invested in street wardens to provide a visible security presence in the public realm at night and to support staff in night time businesses deal with issues that might arise. They are also looking at ways to improve perceptions of safety in alleyways and other paths that form important routes home at night. We discussed how sensitive lighting design and time-based dimming of lights could provide the flexibility to balance competing demands of those wanting to retain the residential character of the area and those wanting to improve safety on their route home.

We also discussed the importance of places feeling 'active' at night to help alleviate safety concerns. "Places that are open at night are places of safety", said one attendee. Women's refuges in the area are working with late night, fast food restaurants to provide safe spaces late at night for women seeking help. It was an important reminder that late night and 24 hour businesses don't just serve party-goers, but are often the only spaces available to support night workers and those who don't feel safe at home.



Brewers Lane



Richmond riverside path

Richmond's Outdoor Spaces

The BID has been trialling activity in a council-owned riverside car park to test its potential as an events space. They see the potential for the space to form part of a wider programme that encourages residents and workers to explore and stay in the town centre into the evening. Funding from the Mayor's High Streets for All programme has allowed for some pilot activity to take place, with more planned for the summer. The impact of this will help refine any future events and public realm designs and could create a new civic space for the town centre, improving its connection to the river.

Like many green spaces in London, Richmond Green is currently only lit around its perimeter. There is a path that forms a convenient pedestrian cut through by day, but many people feel unsafe walking through it after dark. People gathering for drinks on the green after surrounding venues close also deters people from walking through.

Engaging with those who live and work in the area could help to gauge opinions about safety, accessibility and stewardship of the green. Sensitive lighting design and new technologies could help alleviate the issues by framing a clear and attractive path that tracks through the green, while offering flexibility to balance requirements for safety, dark skies and biodiversity.



The riverside car park towards Hill Street



The riverside car park with views to the Thames and Richmond Bridge in the background

Twickenham Town Centre

As we arrived into Twickenham town centre, the recently redeveloped station felt very new but somewhat isolated. While there was a supermarket that was open until 11pm, it felt like there was a need to create an ecosystem of uses and amenities here to serve commuters by day, evening and night.

The Cabbage Patch, a music venue and pub that prides itself on welcoming performers and audiences with disabilities, was the first venue I encountered after leaving the station down London Road. The pub has supported a local state school for children with learning disabilities and has funded The Sensory Patch, a sensory room designed to promote motor skills and engagement. This exemplifies the social role that many pubs in London play and why City Hall encourages local authorities to help protect and support them as community assets.

The recently pedestrianised Church Street was bustling with activity and had a real community feel to it – festoon lights zigzagging overhead and Ukrainian flags hung outside windows give the street a strong sense of place and unity. It was great to see a variety of age groups out and about and it was hard to imagine that the street had been open to cars. Church Street's scale and active uses really make it work well as a car-free street at night. The tight-knit business community is supported by the Discover Twickenham BID, which supported many in pivoting and adapting their operations to bounce back after Covid-19's lockdowns.

Ricardo's wine shop introduced seating and now operates as a wine bar, hosting wine tasting evenings. At the back of Ricardo's I was surprised and thrilled to find Eel Pie Records, a record shop named after the nearby Eel Pie Island. The owners also curate the High Tide Festival, an annual free festival of music and spoken word. I heard from the record shop owner and wine bar manager how the crossover of customers has helped boost both businesses. This is such a great example of how retail and hospitality can coexist and support each other.

Further along Church Street, I spoke to the bar manager at Brewery Market, which describes itself as a shop, tasting room and community space. The family-friendly appeal was evident, with hundreds of craft beers on offer and twelve on tap in a cosy room stacked with board games.

Business owners expressed a desire to see the success of Church Street's pedestrianisation extended to other streets to support special events, such as music festivals celebrating the area's culture and heritage. I heard from the council how the costs of road closures can quickly add up, including paying for rerouting TfL bus services and pruning trees on diversion routes. Closures are put in place when major games are played at Twickenham and business owners asked whether these principles could be applied to other events that contribute more directly to the local businesses and communities.



The Cabbage Patch on London Road



Eel Pie Records and Ricardo's



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Final thoughts

My visit to Richmond really highlighted the vital importance of understanding the ways businesses, places and their uses change over 24 hours, across the week and across the seasons. A robust evidence base, grounded in data and engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders, will be critical to establish priorities and generate ideas across council departments.

There are great opportunities to build upon the architectural, natural and cultural heritage of the borough's town centres to create unique destinations after 6pm. Over the course of the evening, we talked about ways underused spaces could form beautiful settings for cultural and community uses in the evening and at night. A night time strategy will help to identify how these sites can complement existing uses, walking routes and transport networks. Pilot projects and events are great for testing ideas and it will be important to gather data and evidence from those trials to feed into a case for investment and briefs for designs, uses and events.

I look forward to supporting Richmond in the development of their night time strategy and I'm sure we'll be back to see how life at night in the borough evolves.

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