

October 2011 – March 2012

New Windows On Willesden Green

TRIMMED SHORT

The New Windows on
Willesden Green project
was brought to you by:

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New Windows on Willesden Green is one of many projects across London supported by the Mayor's Outer London Fund (OLF). Launched in 2011, the OLF was set up as a three-year initiative dedicated to strengthening the vibrancy and growth of the capital's high streets and their environs.

Working for Brent Council and Design for London, The Architecture Foundation, Meanwhile Space and Blue Consulting delivered an intensive programme that sought to revive and improve Willesden Green, bringing new energy, audience and positive change to the High Road and beyond.

First, a curated series of window displays and shop front improvements was created to mark the twenty-five days leading up to Christmas. Following the theme of an advent calendar, a new Willesden window was revealed each day by one of the twenty-five promising young designers that had been paired with an independent business on the High Road.

At the same time a vacant retail unit was transformed into our 'Pilot Shop', which distributed project information at street level. A curated series of events was held in mid-December to attract further customers to the high street on the busiest shopping weekend of the year.

From January onwards the project activated an eight-unit retail outlet that had been out of use for over five months, despite its prime high street location. This property, 'Queens Parade', was given a new look and became a temporary home to twelve start-up businesses that were given the chance to develop their offers for a high street location. Ranging from designer children's wear and vintage clothing to art galleries, creative workshops for those with learning difficulties and a public events company, the tenants each pledged to take up a space at a greatly reduced rent and 'give back' to the community.

In March 2012 the first round of OLF funding ended, though Queens Parade continues as an active presence on the High Road.

As a legacy of New Windows on Willesden Green, a new Town Team has been established to build upon the project's momentum and a new Willesden Green directory promoting local businesses has been published.

"The Willesden Green initiative is superb. It is well judged, uplifting and bold. It is part of the great blossoming of projects that are helping to reinvigorate high streets across London. That phenomenon is being supported by the Mayor of London, and we are thrilled to be playing our part in the big collaborative effort."

Mark Brearley
Head of Design
for London

"We were delighted to work with Meanwhile Space and Blue Consulting to inject new life into Willesden Green and its local High Road. Working with a diverse group of designers and architects, we were able to showcase the important role that good design plays in place making and bringing positive change to an area."

Sarah Ichioka
The Architecture
Foundation



About Willesden Green

One of the London Borough of Brent's most diverse, but socially and economically polarised wards, Willesden Green has a rich history of settled migration and small business entrepreneurship. Its local 'high street' – Willesden High Road and Walm Lane – comprises over 90% independent businesses, with an ethnic mix of proprietors representing a microcosm of the local population.

There are over 100 shops but no Starbucks or McDonald's, no WH Smith, Boots or Superdrug – just a richly diverse mix of resilient local traders. Set in a conservation area of fine, but sometimes neglected, Victorian architecture, these shops and cafés offer the quaint and quirky retail range that has long vanished elsewhere.

An intriguing Polish deli, the Red Pig, sits between Glorious Beginnings, a British-African Christian bookshop, and directly opposite a Caribbean ladies' hair salon, is Food for Thought, a Brazilian-owned café serving a European menu. Myriad countries and most continents are represented here, reflecting Willesden's history of settled and integrated in-migration.

"There's a real sense of community here. People have lived here for a significant amount of time and know a lot of their neighbours."

Willesden resident

"Having previously spent some time as town centre manager in Willesden, I was delighted at the chance to be part of the team to deliver this exciting and imaginative project. Willesden Green's struggling high street of independent traders has many hidden gems, and the first phase of design lead animations helped showcase some of those, and excited businesses and customers alike."

Peter Paddon
Blue Consulting



An Advent Calendar of Shop Front Improvements

Over the Christmas period twenty-five designers worked with twenty-five independent shops along Walm Lane and the High Road to create a series of innovative window displays and legacy improvements, ranging from redesigned shop signs, repainted shop fronts or new display furniture.

Selected through an open call, the designers were matched with businesses that were keen to engage and improve their shopfronts. All shops were independently owned and unique to the high street. From bakers and cafes, to opticians and barbers, a whole range of shops were transformed over the festive period and beyond.

To celebrate the completion of all the windows a specially curated events weekend took place, offering guided walks, hands-on workshops and a treasure hunt to find all of the transformed businesses.

Please see the centrefold map for list of participating shops and designers.

“What made this project different was that it put the designers in direct contact with clients who wouldn’t usually think of commissioning architects and designers to improve their shop displays. The shop’s owners have embraced the new display units, which we all agree has given the shop a much better profile from the street.”

Dallas Pierce Quintero
Architecture Practice

“By revamping these 25 shop fronts, the designers have given each business a stronger, more appealing identity, but more importantly they’ve brought a renewed dynamism to the street.”

Justin McGuirk
The Guardian

“It is wonderful, I am very pleased. I have had people come in and ask if the shop is new!”

Owner
Glorious Beginnings



Pilot Shop

Previously a juice bar, but left empty for months, this run-down shop was transformed by designer Kieren Jones, with the help of trainees from the College of North West London, into the project's public-facing information centre. Located at 45 Walm Lane, the shop was a prime spot for passing traffic.

The space also acted as the project's first New Window, opening on 1 December 2011 with a Vegas-inspired lighting display spelling out the word 'Willesden'.

The Pilot Shop also played host to a series of designer-led workshops over our public weekend of events and was open for community-led meetings and events as desired.

We are pleased to say that the reactivation of this empty space has resulted in the premises being let to a commercial tenant and is now a fully functioning hairdressing salon. The new business has kept the exterior transformations carried out during the New Windows project.

"I wanted to add some fun and lightness to what had been an empty shop, and create something that would make people smile. I worked with Brent-based trainees in the installation. In this age of austerity, it was really wonderful to be involved in such a vibrant, hands-on regeneration project."

Kieren Jones
Designer

"It's great to be able to work on site in a real-life situation, to put what we're learning in the classroom to practice."

Painting &
Decorating trainee
College of
North West London



Meanwhile Use in Queens Parade

In the second phase the challenge was to put to use some of the empty shops that were starting to dominate the local area. These were to be put to ‘meanwhile’ use – the temporary use of empty or underused space for economic or cultural use until it secures a commercial tenant or alternative, active future.

Typical of most high streets, there were a number of visibly empty shops. Investigation identified some were genuinely under negotiation for new tenancies and others were in the hands of receivers. A shortlist of potential properties was emerging and direct contact with landlords was made.

Following negotiations, a ‘meanwhile’ lease was secured on 1-12 Queens Parade – an eight-unit building previously home to a textile business, which had been empty for five months and out of retail use for years. An initial meanwhile lease of three months was negotiated, which, due to the success of the project, has been extended indefinitely, until the landlord identifies an alternative use for the property.

The interior of Queens Parade was made good with the help of local trainees, and designer Kieren Jones was commissioned to make over the building’s facade and create a bespoke new sign for the premises. During this time, projects, businesses and individuals were invited to submit expressions of interest to occupy the units of the building. A series of bespoke development workshops was run to help people refine their ideas and meet potential collaborators. Following a proposal process, the final thirteen participants were appointed by interview.

This diverse mix of start-ups and community organisations was selected to take up residency and bring new life and new audiences to the high street. All tenants were asked to ‘give back’, delivering a steady series of workshops and events for people to enjoy.

Queens Parade is still managed by Meanwhile Space, supporting the tenants as they drive forward their ideas, and encouraging them to collaborate with each other to maintain momentum and links to the high street.

“Students gained valuable real-life experience in a working environment with real-time working constraints, which has helped them to enhance their knowledge and qualification status.”

Alan Phelan

Acting Curriculum Manager, College of North West London

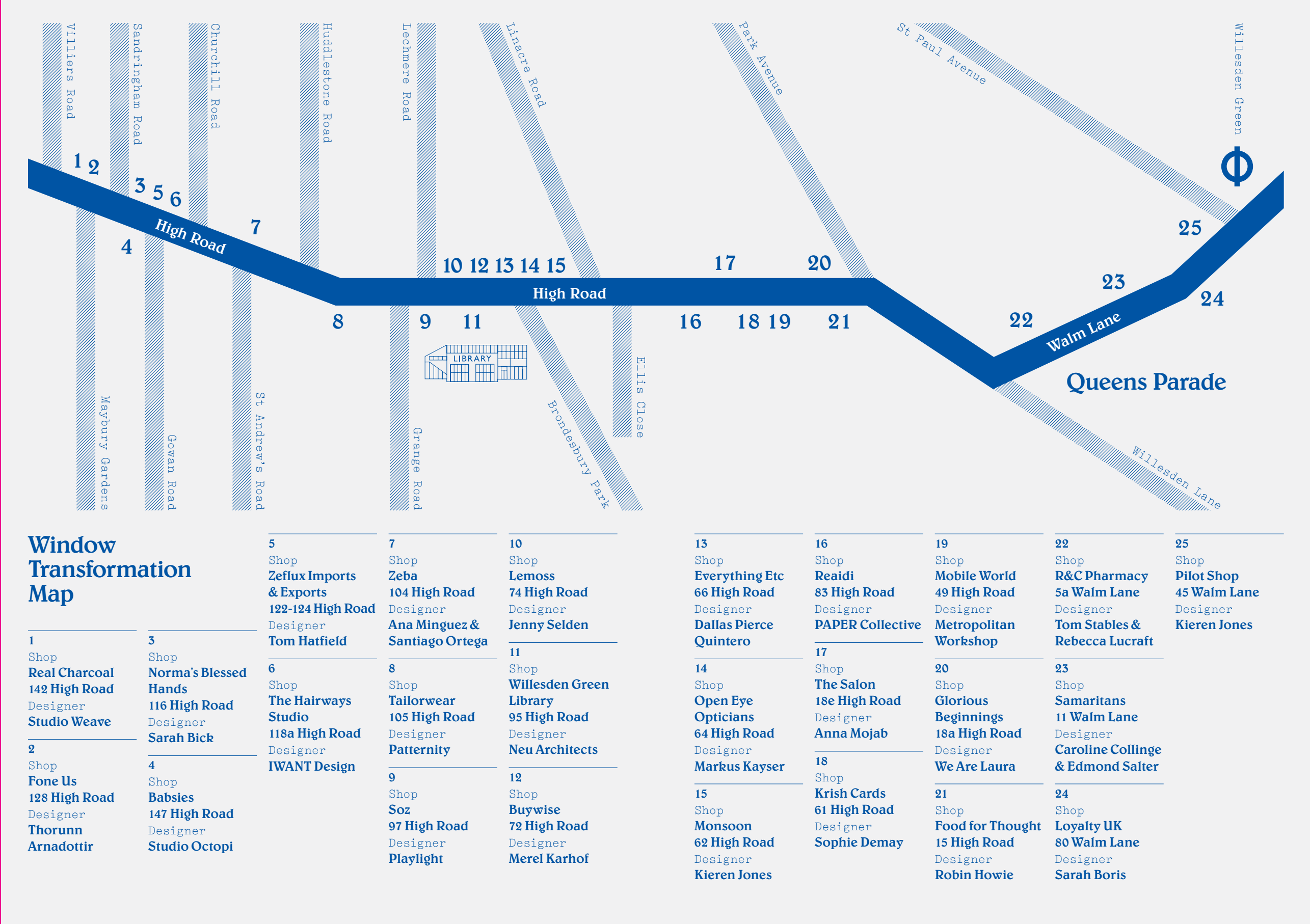
“Queens Parade is meanwhile use at its best. An otherwise underused property has brought to life a blighted corner of the high street, and provided opportunities for people to try out their ideas and create their own employment, while providing the local community with an interesting new resource.”

Eddie Bridgeman
Meanwhile Space

“This project has been a brilliant opportunity for local start-ups to try something new. I was thrilled to see that over 90% of the businesses are led by female entrepreneurs and are local to Brent.”

Cllr. Ann John
Leader of the Council





Queens Parade Tenants

One of the considerations while assessing the proposals for the participants of Queens Parade was how they fitted with existing businesses along the high street. The new businesses needed to bring diversity and enhance the offer, rather than compete with existing traders. There were also restraints regarding activity. Queens Parade has an A1 use class rating. While the new users were encouraged to think creatively about how they could fall within this category, it was not possible to take on all of the numerous applicants for coffee shops or pop-up restaurants. Since the project began, the government has loosened planning laws to allow more flexibility for temporary uses in the context of use classes.

Unit 1
Art Lobby
Public art gallery

Unit 2
Jardins D'EDEN
100% natural, beauty & bath products made on site

Unit 3
Roses & String
Locally crafted gifts & accessories

Unit 4
Vintage Green
Vintage fashion & photography, clothes upcycling
Paint Mine
Website hosting & building, graphics studio

Unit 5
My Pop Up Design Shop
Designed homewares & styling consultations

Unit 6
The Unlimited Print Shop
Screenprinting workshops & sales, art club

Unit 7
Indikidual
Organic kids' clothing & creative play
Ariane Prin
Upcycled designer products

Unit 8
Punch & Juicy
Liquid & whole food bar, healthy living workshops
The Wise Owl Venue
Events and workshop hub

“This has been the most exciting thing to happen in Willesden since I moved here six years ago. You’ve given us all an incredible opportunity to shine and without all of your work it wouldn’t have happened.”
Corbin Featherstone
Paint Mine – QP, Unit 4

“Since attending the launch event for Queens Parade I know much more about Willesden Green and have explored my high street more, discovering some useful shops and great places to eat and drink. Instead of just automatically driving to Tesco’s, I now check the high street first and normally find I can get what I want there cheaper and closer to home.”
Vicky S
Local resident



The Library Lab

In partnership with New Windows on Willesden Green, Architecture 00:/ created the Library Lab, from what was a previously underused space, within the Willesden Green Library Centre.

The Library Lab was an experimental space that evolved with the ideas of the local community. It attracted people of all ages, cultures and those within the immediate area, as well as drawing people from further afield.

The space was open from February – July 2012 and offered free workshops, lectures, and a temporary co-working space, aimed at accelerating local entrepreneurship in the Brent community. All workshops were free and open to all. The events ranged from how to build a website, entertaining accounting to harnessing social media.

The Library Lab also piloted a ‘mobile’ crèche space, offering childcare services to parents who wished to pursue career options, introducing them back into the community and offering them a space to work. Within the first week this was covered by the BBC and reaching almost full capacity.

In the most diverse borough in London, the Library Lab successfully attracted people from all parts of the community, offering a space to exchange information and help push forward new ideas.

“I have learnt so much and it really motivated me to start my own business with confidence.”

Visitor to Library Lab

“The Library Lab has evolved from week to week, ever-changing and growing. The local people who come here make the space and demonstrate the real potential of the people in Brent.”

Joanna Steele

Library Lab

Programme Manager



The Willesden Green Urban Pioneers

In the run up to the launch of Queens Parade, a group of ten young people aged 16–18 from Brent explored the Willesden Green area, taking part in design-led workshops examining issues relating to the high street and its regeneration.

Walk

Eddie Bridgeman
Meanwhile Space
Alex Hearn
LB Brent

Photography Workshop

Photographer
Gemma Thorpe

Architecture Workshop

Tim Ahrensback
and Debbie So
Architecture 00:/

Illustration Workshop

Illustrator
Kerry Lemon

Publishing Workshop

James Pallister
The Architect's
Journal

Celebration Event

Urban Pioneers

Aftab Ahmed
Kareem Buckley
Bethany Chickah
Kate Colley
Udara David
Fatima El Gawish
Sarah Esprit
Wardah Khan
Camilla Small
Mona Yahye

“The programme has made me feel like there are more options for me than I thought.”
Brent-based
Urban Pioneer

“The Willesden Green Urban Pioneers has built on the success of the past four years of The AF’s education programming, this time focusing on the high street in this area of Brent. The group explored Willesden Green and generated new ideas, working with exciting professionals from across art, design, architecture and publishing. The result was a snapshot of a time and a place, studying a much-loved symbol of our urban and cultural infrastructure, and generating new ideas for its future.”
Tom Keeley
Education Manager
The Architecture
Foundation



Key Facts and Figures

20+

local trainees involved in the project

5,000

visitors to the Christmas events programme

25

independent shops involved and revamped

120+

public workshops run

25

international creatives commissioned

300

attended the Queens Parade launch event

13

start-up businesses given meanwhile leases

30+

articles in both national and local press

8

new units on the high street created

1

Pilot Shop revamped and subsequently let in the long term

Headline Figures

- £100k local business shopfront improvements
- £50k vacant property improvements
- £40k local business capacity and skills building
- £18k publicity and place marketing
- £6.5k public workshops and events



The Willesden Green Town Team

The Willesden Green Town Team is a community-led body of residents, businesses and community organisations, who will work together with Brent Council to initiate, support and deliver projects that look to build upon the momentum created by New Windows on Willesden Green and continue to improve the Willesden Green area.

The Town Team will carry on the spirit of working collaboratively with creative practitioners, local residents and businesses to facilitate positive change. It has already engaged local people in a ‘Sketch-up’ day event where a local artist and cartoonist helped visualise ideas to enliven and animate the town centre. These ideas were developed and incorporated into a second round Portas Pilot bid for Greater London Authority funding.

At the time of printing the Town Team had held its fifth meeting to consider a draft constitution to formalise its status ready to drive initiatives to make Willesden Green town centre a more exciting and attractive place to meet the needs of local people and boost its economy.

“The Outer London Fund project, New Windows on Willesden Green, has provided Brent Council with the opportunity to rethink the offer in our town centres. From events to art galleries, to work experience, we hope this project has something for everyone and encourages people to support their local high street.”
Jane Harrison
Regeneration Officer
Brent Council



Photography

Mike Massaro

Graphic Design

Barry Smith and
Peter Bruce

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank
all of the shopkeepers,
designers, tenants
of Queens Parade, and
residents and trainees
of Willesden Green who
have contributed to
making this project
a great success.

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and Gerrie van Noord
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THE OUTER LONDON FUND
MAYOR OF LONDON



Delivered by



blue consulting

"It is heartening to see so many different strands of action, with dozens of collaborative projects, to increase the vibrancy of high streets across London."

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London

"The project has been a catalyst in developing the creative and cultural economy in Willesden Green. These economies will be further strengthened by Brent Council's proposal to redevelop Willesden Green Cultural Centre."

Andy Donald
Director of
Regeneration
Brent Council

"Thanks for bringing a sparkle back into Willesden."

Local resident

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