

Dearth of Evidence of Economic Development

The Queen's Crescent Improvements funded by GLA Good Growth Fund (£1.9m)

1. GOOD GROWTH FUNDING

- 1.1. The GLA awarded £1.1m to LB Camden from the Mayor's Good Growth Fund in 2018 to develop and implement a co-designed public realm strategy for the Queen's Crescent.
- 1.2. An additional Good Growth Accelerator Fund award of £812,000 (2021) and funding from the Department for Transport Active Travel Fund to trial an area wide traffic management scheme in the area around Queen's Crescent increased the spending on Queen's Crescent
- 1.3. According to a GLA monitoring document, the total expenditure on QC will be £ 3,002,120 as a result of match funding (assume Camden)

2. VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY

- 2.1. Queen's Crescent is the target of Good Growth funding because it's a key site of economic activity in a defined London neighbourhood.
- 2.2. The Mayor of London says there are three pillars of Good Growth funding: "Growing Prosperity", "Empowering People" and "Making Better Places"
- 2.3. This comment from the [GLA Design Review Panel](#)'s report on Camden's QC proposals stresses "a vibrant local economy" is an objective
"A street market project is often led by a strong business case whilst these proposals focus on physical interventions. Both are important to the success of the scheme and need to go hand in hand to ensure quality spaces that support and are supported by a vibrant local economy"
- 2.4. The review panel sought a "more ambitious" approach to QC from Camden. Camden responded with its road closures on the basis it was *"Supporting Camden's growth and regeneration, enhancing economic and community development"*¹
- 2.5. The announcement of the original £1.1m Good Growth grant in 2018 was accompanied by this wording:
"Queen's Crescent: the heart of Gospel Oak - A range of high street improvement works in Camden will help better serve the Gospel Oak community through public realm improvements. These will support existing shops and markets, and provide green infrastructure"
- 2.6. Between 2021 and 2023, Mastercard data supplied by the GLA was used by Camden officers to "mythbust" the view that the road closures hurt local business. In other words, officers were sensitive about negative economic impacts because "growing prosperity" was and is a goal of Good Growth funded work

¹ APPENDIX D: Queen's Crescent Car Motor Traffic Free Environment and restrictions on Weedington Road and Grafton Road Trial Scheme Equality Impact Assessment (2021)

3. THE GLA COMMITMENT TO EVIDENCE GATHERING

- 3.1. The Good Growth Fund is committed to getting evidence:
"We view the collection of evidence on project performance and impact as an integral part of the delivery process. This is why we require all projects funded by the Good Growth Fund to identify a set of indicators against which performance can be tracked"
- 3.2. In 2018, the [GLA set out a programme of "milestones"](#) linked to funding for QC public realm work. It required Camden to *"Appoint independent evaluators to establish pre-project baseline and conduct post-project evaluation"*
- 3.3. For example, there are no publicly shared figures for QC retail employment for 2018 – a completely puzzling omission.
- 3.4. Camden's chief officer for "Inclusive Economy" wrote to us in September 2022 and stated no independent evaluator had been appointed.
- 3.5. They stated at the same time: *"We are currently working across Council services and with our partners at the GLA to agree practical, appropriate metrics and our shared approach to evaluation"*.
- 3.6. An evaluation framework should be decided before work begins, not after when there's an obvious risk it will be adapted to facts on the ground.
- 3.7. In relation to that risk, the [Evaluation And Impact Handbook](#) states:
"As a formal requirement of the funding, you will need to develop an Evaluation Strategy before Grant Agreements are signed, which sets out your baseline position and a clear approach to collecting evidence".
- 3.8. In May 2022, Camden told us it had discarded the economic improvement targets in their 2018 Good Growth application e.g 20% increases in footfall, business turnover and market stalls. It did so without public discussion.
- 3.9. No replacement quantitative economic improvement KPIs or "indicators" or "outcomes" have been publicly announced
- 3.10. Without detailed baseline work on business turnover and activities before introducing the traffic restrictions and the GLA funded public realm "improvements" e.g parklets, street painting and planter boxes, it is now hard to reach evidence-based conclusions which relate the public realm "improvements" to the local economy.
- 3.11. No figure for employment on Queen's Crescent is cited in public Camden documents about the street improvements.
- 3.12. The omission undermines the GLA's commitment to evidence collection:
*"Collection of evidence will help you and your partners to better understand the difference your project has made in practice to the local economy, communities and beneficiary groups"*²
- 3.13. Worse, the Good Growth programme in general will lose a properly evidenced case-study based on a "major" Good Growth scheme. There won't be
*"Evidence collected (that) will also provide valuable information for the GLA and the LEAP to understand the impact of our programme of investment across London as a whole, providing learning to help us shape and design future investment programmes"*³.

² GOOD GROWTH FUND: EVALUATION AND IMPACT HANDBOOK

³ *ibid*

4. MASTERCARD

- 4.1. The only econometrics used by Camden to evaluate the QC improvements are Mastercard data supplied by the GLA itself.
- 4.2. It was used in a local ward councillor briefing (September 2021), a publicly distributed 'Factsheet' (December 2021) and the street market development strategy document funded by the GLA (September 2023)
- 4.3. Dr Abigail Hill has explored Camden's handling of MC data around the time in question in her PhD thesis accepted by UCL and dated October 2022.
- 4.4. Hill raised concerns about contextualisation:
"The overarching theme of the recommendations provided to Camden council at the end of the knowledge exchange was that single sources of data can only provide information about one aspect of high streets, but that a more in-depth understanding can be acquired by combining and triangulating different data sources."
- 4.5. Hill noted: *"The council were particularly eager to use the Mastercard spend data. However, the dataset had some inherent disadvantages, including the exclusion of physical cash or data from other companies, and a lack of scaling to account for other payment tenders"*
- 4.6. Hill identified in-house analytical weakness
*"This perhaps suggests that the local council does not conduct much in-house analysis **on the validity and reliability of external data sources**, but instead relies on third parties or data providers/brokers such as the GLA to assess their potential application"*
- 4.7. The so-called "mythbusting factsheet" distributed by Camden officers on 2nd December 2021 at a [street event](#) states that Mastercard transactions quintupled since 2019 without any disambiguation
- 4.8. The MC information was used to give an impression the Queen's Crescent Safe & Healthy Streets Scheme helped to strengthen the local economy. It became misinformation betraying a principle of Good Growth funded projects: *"We expect that larger and more complex projects should devote more effort to understanding the attribution of impacts, **demonstrating causality between impacts recorded and the activities of the project**"⁴*



5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. The GLA funded work to Queen's Crescent was fused with Healthy Street or Safe Travel funded interventions. One result is the partial pedestrianisation of the street and vehicle movement restrictions on surrounding streets
- 5.2. In determining to make the traffic scheme permanent in 2021, Camden carried out an [equality impact assessment](#)
- 5.3. The assessment did not recognise retail workers and their supply chain colleagues (van-drivers) share the protected characteristic of race and were and are disproportionately exposed to the potential downsides of the road closures on Queen's Crescent and around it.

⁴ ibid

- 5.4. Camden has not supported its view that QC workers will not be disproportionately disadvantaged by the changes to local road connectivity (and the new parking regime) with evidence
- 5.5. Shopkeepers have complained at intervals about the loss of trade due to the road changes. At a meeting with a local councillor in November, they complained about reduced takings and stated they had been forced to reduce their workforce over the last two years.
- 5.6. The shopkeepers petition with around 30 names dating from 2021 was ignored by the council.
- 5.7. Such impacts don't "*advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't*". The risk of their materialising in a way relatable to the road restrictions could have been evaluated by carrying out an EIA process correctly

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