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Breadstall
in Northcote Road



Our amazing Clapham Junction

Roz Lloyd-Williams outlines the creativity of local shops, businesses and the work of The Junction BID throughout the COVID-19 pandemic...

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 is clearly unlike anything we have ever experienced and, as The Junction businesses have adapted and evolved, I am continually amazed by the innovation, resilience, generosity and fortitude they have shown in these unprecedented times. As businesses begin to open in greater numbers, the coming weeks and months will continue to be unbelievably challenging, particularly for the hospitality sector: the cafés, restaurants, bars and entertainment venues, which await official confirmation from the government on their reopening.

The not-for-profit Clapham Junction Business Improvement District (BID) Ltd was formed in late spring last year and is run by a voluntary board of directors who are responsible for supporting more than 420 businesses across Clapham Junction. It delivers strategies and innovative projects

to improve the trading environment for businesses, the shopping experience for residents and visitors, and to drive tourism in the Clapham Junction area. The BID also works with the Council's Economic Development Office.

As the pandemic unfolded, we quickly refocused our core strategies to ensure we were doing everything in our power to support these fantastic businesses, the owners, managers and staff – reassuring them that we were by their side. During this unparalleled period, we have continued to champion as many businesses as possible (which remain open or are trading online), reminding all of those in our community and beyond why Clapham Junction is so special. We have promoted their new takeaway and delivery services, the diversification of many restaurants into mini supermarkets, and other marketing and sales initiatives such as online classes and the sale of redemption vouchers.

In addition to providing vital marketing support we have been working hard to share and communicate all relevant critical business support, advice and links, also offering online Q&A seminars to help businesses navigate their way through lockdown. Security advice and regular interactions with our police have also been vital – both the BID and Lavender Hill Police Station have been monitoring and responding to incidents across the BID footprint and we work closely with the Council's Community Safety Team on advising businesses on how to secure their premises.

In the initial stages, we set up a dedicated COVID-19 business advice page on The Junction website with pertinent links and guidelines, including vital information on relief grant applications; and sent out critical business support, advice and links on breaking governmental news. I personally visited local businesses on foot to offer help and support from the beginning of the outbreak and talked by phone to those who had concerns about grant applications and landlord issues – conveying businesses' fears to our local MP, Marsha de Cordova, on behalf of businesses, urging her to write to the Treasury.

We have also been working with our HR and legal advisory partners to deliver a series of invaluable online Zoom seminars to businesses, covering a range of topics from HR, finance and technology to insurance, legal and staffing issues.

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Quite rapidly we have started to witness the incredible determination and resilience displayed by many of our local businesses as they adapt to a new way of trading, and their amazing generosity during such challenging times – creating a true sense of community. Café Parisienne, Taverna Travestere, Kaosarn, Made in Italy, Buona Sera, Banana Tree, Rosa's Thai, Indian Moment, Edward James London and The London Cycle Workshop are just some of the companies offering discounts to NHS staff – offering a simple 'thank you' to our key workers which, undoubtedly, will be most appreciated.

Our fantastic supermarkets are also stepping up to support the NHS with priority access in-store, keeping daily essentials aside and giving NHS staff priority at checkout, distributing care packages for frontline workers and giving generous donations to food banks during lockdown, as well as support for the elderly. Meanwhile our banks and chemists continue to provide outstanding service and help to customers during the pandemic alongside their local and national charitable initiatives.

In turn, we have heard of remarkable stories from businesses on how residents have helped them by paying numerous trips to their shops, buying restaurant tokens and a year's worth of haircuts in advance! Others in the community have kindly offered their spare rooms to house business staff so they don't have to journey to work.

An impressive number of restaurants have adapted to bring their delicious offerings to local doorsteps through new takeaway and delivery services – from Italian, Greek, Spanish, Thai and Indian cuisine to traditional fish & chips and hearty pies. Residents are also spoilt for choice with drink delivery services from shops and bars such as Humble Grape, Philglas & Swiggot, Vagabond Wines, BrewDog and Four Thieves. However, currently unable to trade to full capacity, the hospitality industry needs our vital support for it to survive. We urge everyone to sign the national 'Raise the Bar' petition to help those businesses in our community that are currently unable to access government grants, putting hundreds of jobs at risk – please visit www.raisethebarcampaign.com

Our local day care nursery, Abacus Ark, opened its doors to care for children of key workers and owner Anthony Ioannou and his team have also turned their hand to working



Killik & Co Estate Agents
in Northcote Road

with a company that creates a nutritious range of frozen, ready meals for children, called Free Range Kids. A great initiative that will certainly help busy parents who are juggling the demands of working from home, along with home schooling! Customers can order through the Clapham Junction page on the website ShopAppy.com – a new initiative launched by The Junction BID in conjunction with ShopAppy – which has created a 'local online marketplace' platform for the area, with door-to-door delivery (within a two-mile radius of Clapham Junction Station), enabling loyal and new customers to show businesses their support during the current climate.

We have also seen local independent food and grocery stores – such as Macellaio, The Source Bulk Foods, Hamish Johnston, Bayley & Sage, Hetu and Windfall Natural – adapting to offer click and collect. With the wonders of social media, many are now promoting heart-warming lockdown recipes to create at home.

For those businesses that don't offer physical products – such as local gyms and fitness studios – focusing on their online presence to promote health and wellbeing

has been key during the pandemic. Examples include DW Fitness First, Psycole London, Milo and the Bull, Sadhana Yoga & Wellbeing and Northcote Chiropractic Clinic – all of which have created resourceful and inspiring online fitness and health programmes for members of the local community and further afield.

Our beloved institution, the Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), is cleverly utilising the surge in demand for online content to showcase its wonderful and historical entertainment venue on BBC iPlayer. For example, the brilliant BBC documentary The Way Out – featuring the BAC – narrates a journey through the labyrinthine corridors of Battersea Arts Centre, which for the programme has become a rabbit hole of live acts in this bewitching single-take film – a 40-minute drama shot in one continuous sequence. The Grand has supported the NHS with a beautiful display of rainbow paintings in its windows, created by pupils from The Sacred Heart, Heathbrook, Ark John Archer and John Burns primary schools. Northcote Road's Breadstall has also demonstrated its support with a beautifully painted rainbow on the side of its stall.



We're already working on several new initiatives to help our business community throughout and post lockdown, including a B2B app... in addition, a new B2C mobile app.

Alessandro Ambrosi Grappelli –
Taverna Travestere on St John's Hill
(Photograph: Rick Truscott)

Of course, it's not possible to mention every business in this article, so you might like to visit our blog page, Open Businesses in Clapham Junction at www.visitclaphamjunction.com. It contains a comprehensive, live list of open businesses, detailing their services and a range of entertaining blogs such as: A World of Flavours at The Junction, Sizzling BBQ Recipes, Essential Services During Lockdown, Keep Your Kids Busy, A Guide to Wellbeing and Working from Home, Home Cooking Recipes, Movie Night and Delivering to Your Doorstep.

We're already working on several new initiatives to help our business community throughout and post lockdown, including a B2B app that will facilitate the development of loyalty schemes and exclusive details at local shops, restaurants and services (when operating or online) for The Junction employees. In addition, a new B2C mobile app will feature geo-push notifications that will enable residents and visitors to discover our BID businesses, their promotions, events and competitions. We're working closely with NappyValley.com and have signed up to myvirtualneighbourhood.com

and nextdoor.com to provide additional platforms on which to highlight our incredible businesses. The local press – including Riverside Radio, Hot Dinners, London News Online, Battersea Matters, Yahoo, Families SW Magazine and SW Londoner – has also kindly reported on our businesses. Social media across our platforms has also been key to showcase businesses' news and events.

In addition, we've created a short film 'Local, The New Normal?' and eight 'shorts', highlighting the themes of community, shopping local and supporting our small independents, featuring our local independents.

Produced by residents – among them British Academy Award-winning cinematographers, producers, photographers and a director of photography – they generously offered their services, free of charge, to help the BID and the businesses community. These films will be used across our marketing and social media channels to showcase our wonderful BID businesses and Clapham Junction.

The BID recently produced a COVID-19 risk assessment report for the council detailing an array of issues (regarding social distancing) for consideration – i.e. road widening, suspension of parking bays, pinch points, cycle storage, signage and the introduction of a 20mph speed limit across the BID footprint (as this article goes to press we hear that this new speed limit will soon be introduced). We have also highlighted initiatives to businesses such as the introduction of queue marshalls, appointment schemes and PPE advice, and have produced BID-customised social distancing pavement stickers.

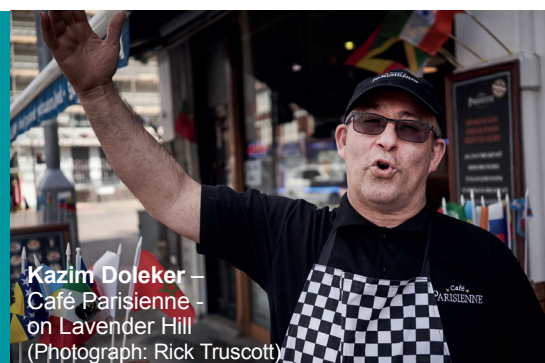
We decided soon after the announcement of the pandemic that BID events – the new month-long June 'Lavender in Bloom'; the bar & restaurant promotion 'Eat & Drink The Junction' (June 15-30) and The Junction Festival on Northcote Road (renamed) (July 12th) would be cancelled. However, in these challenging times, I was heartened to hear that the renowned author, JK Rowling, revealed that our national hero Harry Potter was indeed 'born' in a flat above a business in Clapham Junction (all those years ago). This is tremendous news and, going forward, will be a fantastic promotional vehicle to highlight The Junction. I'm already thinking Harry Potter trails; where would Harry, Hermione and Ron eat, drink, see, buy and experience at The Junction? The marketing and PR opportunities are limitless. Every cloud has a silver lining and we can turn this into gold.

The next few months will be critical for our businesses. Now, more than ever, we need to pull together. The BID will continue to work hard to promote them, and we have asked our Battersea residents, wherever possible, to show their solidarity to the business community. The local economy and small independents underpin the infrastructure of our area – they give The Junction its distinct identity and rich character. They support our local employment, community, and our charitable institutions. We would sorely miss them if they were to disappear.

For further information, please visit www.visitclaphamjunction.com

Roz Lloyd-Williams is the Executive BID Director of The Junction BID.

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Kazim Doleker –
Café Parisienne –
on Lavender Hill
(Photograph: Rick Truscott)