

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 19 December 2012
Transcript: Agenda Item 5 – Questions to the Mayor

4045 / 2012 - Metropolitan Police Budget

Joanne McCartney

Will you join other PCCs across the country in their calls to the Home Secretary to rethink the government's dangerous strategy of imposing 20% budget cuts on police forces?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, thank you very much, Joanne. I want to pay tribute to the work that has been done by Bernard Hogan-Howe [Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] and again to Stephen [Greenhalgh, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime]. I think they are working very, very well to deal with tough times across the public sector. For the first time in recent history the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has a balanced budget and will have for the next three years. Our priority has got to be to keep numbers high, as I have said, at or around 32,000, make sure the public have access to the police as much as possible and so in our building strategy if anything to improve access for members of the public, and to keep crime coming down. I am confident that they are embarked on the right programme.

Joanne McCartney (AM): That is very nice to hear, Mr Mayor, but it is not the question I asked. I asked you: will you be joining other Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) across the country in their calls to the Home Secretary to rethink the Government's dangerous strategy of imposing a 20% budget cut on police forces?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I have said, we have already gone into bat for London repeatedly. We have secured extra funding for London for the last year and for this year. I will continue to do that as and when I think necessary. But clearly, with a big budget such as we have, we also have got to be responsible, as I am sure you as a former member of the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) would understand, and we have got to bear down on costs where we can.

Joanne McCartney (AM): No one is doubting that you have to bear down on costs. But I am asking: will you be joining other PCCs across the country in their efforts to lobby the Home Secretary to row back on the 20% cuts to policing? Will you be doing that or not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I will be doing is making the case for London, which I always do.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I take that as a no, then, and can I say --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, you cannot take that as a no. I do not see any particular reason to join other PCCs. I will be making the case for London and I will be arguing for adequate funding to achieve the objectives that we have.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, you are arguably the most powerful PCC in the country, responsible for a quarter of the country's policing. Do you not think that you at the head of a PCC alliance would actually add extra weight in support of policing in this country?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, if you want me to become the Leader of the Opposition instead of [Ed] Milliband, I can see why you might want that. It seems to be a perfectly reasonable thing for a Labour member to want at this stage. That is not my function. I am the Mayor of London.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Your function is to stand up for policing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is.

Joanne McCartney (AM): After the riots, you stated that in the end there is going to have to be an argument about money with the Home Secretary. Have you actually had that argument? From what I am hearing, your sense of responsibility does not seem to go that far.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I do not know what you are hearing or indeed which voices you hear. My position remains that it is my job, and I have good support in this from all those who work on policing in, London to lobby the Home Secretary and to lobby the Home Office for the funding that we need. We do need considerable funding. You are right to say that. However, we have also got to be efficient and to make savings where we can. It would be irresponsible of me not to tell you that.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, you also in your initial answer stated that we have to have good access to police services. I have asked you before about police front counters and you have made certain promises. However the proposals coming out of the Metropolitan Police Service do seem to me at the moment to be falling far short of your promises.

Let me give you some examples and this is why I think it is dangerous. I am glad that you have said that Tottenham will retain its police station but we are still arguing for 24 hours. In Enfield, for example, Southgate Police Station currently gives 60 hours per week. The suggestion is it now gets four hours at a local ASDA. Is that, do you think, equivalent? Newham is going to lose 296 front counter hours a week and in Kensington and Chelsea they are losing at least 148 hours a week. Is that the equivalent?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will be very happy to give an answer about counters but I am conscious that there is a question later on in the order paper, Chair.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I am happy to have it dealt with now under this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am looking at the Chair now for guidance because I am more than happy to get into this discussion now and knock that question on the head if that is your wish. I do not know whether, Chair, it is your wish.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK. You can pull it up. But have you finished, then, the matter of your original question?

Joanne McCartney (AM): No, but I think it is part of this question, too, and I think it fits in with this because it is about the cuts in the budget. The Mayor in fact raised it in his answer to me himself.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will roll these together.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): If you take the answer now, Assembly Member McCartney, then, whether you are satisfied with it or not, you are not going --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me try to give you an answer, Joanne, about counters and what we are doing. Nothing is agreed. There are no, as I am sure you are aware, plans that are set in stone to do anything yet.

The principles that I have made clear to the MPS are that whatever changes we make, Londoners should have access that is at least as good if not better than the access they had before. As I said in my election manifesto - an historic document - if there is a closure, then that facility has got to be replaced one way or another in the vicinity. Just to give you the figures about police buildings in London and police establishments, we have 497 buildings in London that are occupied by the police in one way or another. Of those, 136, Joanne, allow any kind of access by the public to the police. The total cost of those buildings is about £203 million a year.

What we are proposing to do is to increase access overall. Where we do close buildings or do make changes to the building establishment, the plan is whatever happens to increase the access by the public to police officers to about 200 places rather than 136. That I think is the way forward. It will obviously involve saving some money. However, I think most members of the public asking themselves whether they want police effectively in buildings where they are inaccessible to them or they want them out on the street, whether they want bobbies or buildings, I think most people would choose bobbies rather than buildings. That is going to be our approach.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, some of the instances I have given you are where police stations have had to close and the equivalent is not what you have promised and we want what you have promised, so I am going to ask you to look at that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Good. Well, I want what you want.

Joanne McCartney (AM): The other issue I want to raise quickly is that your Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime has said he is going to go around all 32 boroughs - which is welcome - to consult on the estate programme and the plan. But he is going to --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): He is. And what will happen? Steve [O'Connell] ----

Joanne McCartney (AM): Sorry, can I finish my question?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course.

Joanne McCartney (AM): He is actually only going to be spending one hour per borough to do this consultation. Does that equate in your mind to meaningful consultation: one hour on the Police and Crime Plan, a straight strategy of the new local policing model per borough? Does one hour seem sufficient to you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I think it is a good thing that he is going out to every one of the boroughs. By the way, just to get to --

Joanne McCartney (AM): Is one hour sufficient?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In every borough under any circumstances, there will be whatever happens, in every one of the 32 boroughs, a 24-hour police station. There will be a 24-hour police station. I have made that absolutely clear in every borough.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, is one hour sufficient?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is quite right that Stephen Greenhalgh and his team should be going out on a roadshow. Of course, I know exactly what will happen. Everywhere they go, they will come under a fusillade of politically motivated brickbats from those who say that whatever they are doing is completely wrong and unthinkable. I am afraid that is his job --

Joanne McCartney (AM): Is that why it is limited to one hour, then?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and he will do a first class job of explaining to people how we intend to make savings and yet to increase access. That is the approach.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, I must say one hour does not seem as if he is going to listen much. Thank you.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, I believe it is correct that over half of London's 150 police stations - I think it is 150 - are open for 24 hours a day and that compares to the national average of 13%. So, this comparison with accounting forces which has been made rather spurious, is it not a fact that the Metropolitan Police Service should be able to stand a 20% cut in the national police budget far better than the counties?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Our ambition for policing is really the one that I am sure Joanne, Len [Duvall] and all of them would have pursued had they been sitting around this side of the horseshoe in Government rather than in opposition. What we want to do is to make sense of the very big police estate – that is what Bernard Hogan-Howe [Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] wants to do – to make sense of the very large number of police buildings, to increase the neighbourhood policing, increase the response policing, the 999 policing, make the police more accessible and get bobbies out of buildings onto the street. What do you do in times when you have to make efficiencies in budgets? That is the right approach.

Richard Tracey (AM): Does it not make sense, too, on some of the suggestions that are coming out about police and the public having access to the police, that those access points should be in hospitals or in shops and so on rather than necessarily keeping these very expensive police buildings --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We have to be clear that most crime nowadays is reported by telephone, using the response system of one kind or another. I certainly want to have lots of publicly accessible places where people can expect to find police officers or to interact with the police in one way or another. That is the ambition. However, it is also true that a lot of the police buildings where they have counters are not much used by members of the public and we have got to be frank about this. In a great many cases, you have got people sitting behind counters, waiting for custom when the customer is elsewhere. We need to bring the police to the customers and that is what we are going to do.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Could I put to you, Mayor, an email I had from William Wellbank, who is the Chair of the Hampstead Safer Neighbourhood Panel, only this morning? He is obviously concerned about your plan to close Hampstead Police Station and replace it with a stall and cups of coffee. What he said is this:

“One hour on the evening of 22 January to do the whole Borough of Camden is outrageous and can hardly be called a consultation. Clearly it would be hard to get Hampstead’s voice heard amongst the many. Surely the wards and their Safer Neighbourhood Panels with targeted police stations should have their own consultation with options to consider and a timescale for making submissions.”

Now, I hope you will see that not as a politically motivated brickbat, as you called it earlier on, but genuine community concern. Do you agree with Mr Wellbank that an hour is insufficient and that there should be consultation with Safer Neighbourhood Panels locally?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I can certainly say, Andrew, is I have no doubt at all that the issue of the closure or non-closure of Hampstead Police Station will be one that will be well ventilated, not least by your good self, in the course of quite a long time to come. There is as yet no such plan, formally speaking.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Formally speaking?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Formally speaking. If and when there is such a plan, obviously, it will be properly consulted upon. Let me remind you of the intention. The intention is to make sense of the very considerable police estate in London and to get the police out where the public can interact with them.

Jenny Jones (AM): Mr Mayor, I wanted to get back to the budget. We are all worried about the budget and what it means for policing in London because it is a huge cut, 20%. Do you genuinely think that you can maintain frontline operational policing as it is at the moment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I do, and I think in fact, Jenny, obviously this is something that Bernard [Hogan-Howe] and I and other senior officers and Stephen Greenhalgh talk about the whole time. This is an obsession of mine, as you can well imagine, because I am very proud of what we have done on crime so far in London. I think the reduction by more than 12% in the last four years is very creditable to the MPS. I want them to have the tools, the manpower, and the staff to get on and continue their job.

By the way, the Commissioner has promised, since you ask about what our ambitions are on crime, to cut crime by a further 20% in some of the biggest crime areas in London and the things we really worry about: serious assault, robbery, burglary, theft of a motor vehicle, theft from a motor vehicle, vandalism and theft from a person. That is a great ambition. A 20% fall in those crime indicators would be a massive achievement. Bernard Hogan-Howe is convinced that he can do it with the resources that we have got, with the plan that he is putting forward and I pay tribute to their work. I am confident that they are going to do it.

Jenny Jones (AM): That is all very good news.

Tony Arbour (AM): I wondered, Mr Mayor, if you would join me in paying tribute to those people who keep open police stations, the volunteers who keep police stations open --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would.

Tony Arbour (AM): -- like the good residents of Teddington who have been doing this for many years and indeed is happening right across London. Do you not think that this is an appropriate way, for example, for those people who volunteered as [Olympic] Games Makers and all the other wonderful roles of this year which do therefore apply to policing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. I do think that, Tony, and I think we should applaud their efforts and welcome their contribution to society and thank them. I know that Members of the Assembly will want to do that, particularly those that you have encouraged in your own patch.

Andrew Boff (AM): Do help me with my confusion, Mr Mayor, because some Members are talking about the consultation period only being for an hour in each borough or something. As I understood it - and perhaps you can correct me if I am wrong - there will be an unprecedented consultation with regard to the Police and Crime Plan that will start in the New Year, last for six

weeks and will engage all Londoners. Not just in an open consultation but in an innovative, interactive survey of all Londoners as to the Police and Crime Plan. Is it the one hour, which is presumably what their mayoral candidate used to spend in each borough, or is it actually the full consultation that we have been told about to date?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is a very full consultation and I am pleased that Members of the Assembly are drawing attention to it in the way that they are. I am sure that the sessions will be lively and well attended. Let us hope - because I think that people are very commonsensical when they are faced with these choices - that these sessions generate a bit of light as well as heat.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, sir.

Roger Evans (AM): My colleague Andrew Boff was characteristically generous to your predecessor in suggesting that he had spent an hour in each borough in London. I can tell you there were a number of places where we did not see him from year to year. It is unfair of Labour colleagues to characterise this as an hour in each borough when quite often I think people who wish to make their concerns known or contribute positively could do so better by writing to the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime or by contributing in other ways where they can actually get their views down on paper in a logical way that can be examined by MOPAC and considered. Rather than just joining a crowd of people waving placards, although of course that has its place in politics as well.

Could you just reassure people that there will be other ways that they can contribute to this consultation and that they will be taken note of?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course and I know that you will be wanting to --

Roger Evans (AM): I certainly will.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- make representations yourself, Roger, to be sure that the configuration of police establishment in your patch reflects the needs of your constituents. I know all Assembly Members will want to do that. As Tony and Andrew have rightly said, there will be abundant time to do this and it is important for London that we get this right. The intention is to increase access for the public where possible and, as I will say till I am blue in the face, to get officers out on the street.

Roger Evans (AM): One of the drivers behind these changes as far as I can see seems --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The driver is the need to reduce crime and to make London safer. That is what motivates police officers. That is why they come into the job. It is because they want to make their community safer and they play a heroic role in doing it.

Roger Evans (AM): That motivates us all, even I suspect some people who are complaining about it at the moment.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is probably true, yes.

Roger Evans (AM): A lot of the experience in Scotland Yard at the moment is coming from senior managers who were chief constables outside London, where in fact many of these measures have already been implemented. Do you not think it would be a useful part of this consultation process for us actually to look at what has happened outside London and find some examples for us to study? Perhaps that would even be a good piece of work for the Police and Crime Committee to concern itself with, rather than the headlines in the *Guardian* from the week before, which is what --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I cannot remember what was in the *Guardian* from the week before. But, yes, I think that is a useful -- at the top of the Metropolitan Police Service at the moment there are some very, very distinguished police officers who have huge experience of making savings across other parts of the country. They are very confident that we can have success with the programme we are embarked on now.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Mr Mayor, I hope you would agree with me that any decisions around closures or otherwise of police stations should be based on evidence. So also should be the participation or otherwise of Assembly Members in particular campaigns around particular police stations. On that basis, will you give us all the evidence again and send every Assembly Member a copy of the footfall survey that was conducted by the Metropolitan Police Service around every single front counter, which might illustrate that Hampstead Police Station, for instance, I think from memory - I may be wrong - was getting an average of three visitors in every 24-hour period and was costing something like £90,000 a year just to maintain the building, never mind keep it open? Will you send us all a copy of the footfall survey?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot confirm those footfall figures for that particular police station, but I think your general point is well understood.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Can we have a copy of the survey circulated to everyone?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Labour Members and opposition Members generally have got to try and attack where they can. That is their constitutional duty. I do urge them in this matter to think of the logic, look at the position and do what is in the best interests of London.

Kit Malthouse (AM): But can we have a copy of the survey sent out?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I do not see why not. Absolutely.

Kit Malthouse (AM): There was a public document some time ago to remind everybody. Would you also be willing to give us --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Perhaps you could give a seminar on the survey to the Labour Members?

Kit Malthouse (AM): I am sure the MPS would be happy to give a briefing to the PCC or indeed other Members who want to participate around this. Could you also send up separate information that would show the change in pattern and method of reporting crime that has taken place over the last ten years which would illustrate the massive reduction in the reporting of crime at front counters and the enormous increase of reporting of crime online and by telephone?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That would also be, I think, helpful to inform the debate generally and amongst colleagues here in this horseshoe. Yes. Let us have the argument in public, get the facts out there; let people understand.

I accept the argument, by the way, that there can be physical reassurance in structures. I accept that and the argument is made about fire stations. We will come to that later, I am sure, and hospitals. I accept all those arguments. However there is a limit in that logic. When you look at the proposals and you look at what is actually happening in London at the moment, I think that there is an opportunity to make the case to commonsensical people about the best way forward and I hope the Labour Members will join that.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Thank you.

3951 / 2012 - Northern Line Extension

Richard Tracey

Given that the Chancellor's Autumn Statement committed the Government to a £1 billion loan to finance the Northern Line Extension, will you update the Assembly on the timeframe for this scheme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Dick. Yes, this is an amazing scheme for London. It will involve the creation of 16,000 homes and 25,000 jobs. The signing of the Transport and Works Act Order will be ready for submission in the spring of next year. The public inquiry into that is likely to take place in the autumn. We expect to begin digging, we will have boots on the ground and shovels in the ground by 2015. Both stations we think will be operational by 2020 and it will be a fantastic thing for jobs and growth in this city.

Richard Tracey (AM): This is fantastic news, Mr Mayor, and I know the people of Battersea, Nine Elms, and indeed Lambeth send you their very best wishes for Christmas for what you have done --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): And they are reciprocated.

Richard Tracey (AM): -- and indeed pay tribute to the councils in Wandsworth and in Lambeth for what they did to persuade the Chancellor to arrive at this settlement. What lessons do you think can be learned from the way the campaign was conducted over the Northern Line? What lessons can be learned for other parts of London that are asking for extensions and improvements?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): A characteristically shrewd question. I think it is very important when -- and I know that Steve [O'Connell] who has just left the room is going to ask a question later on about the Tramlink extensions to Sutton and so on, and to Crystal Palace, which I would be only too happy to do. What you need to do is to build up the argument about regeneration. You need to have the vision for the extra housing, you need to have the vision for the extra business that will be created and then you need to be able to say something about how that extra business and housing will generate funding to enable the scheme to go ahead. That is my advice to boroughs in other parts of London that are looking at things like this with their view. We are only too happy to drive it forward. The 2020 Vision is there to help us to articulate this kind of thing, but that is the thinking we need.

Richard Tracey (AM): Were there any other decisive points, do you think, that persuaded the Government to get behind this case?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I pay tribute particularly to the work of [Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor for Planning Sir] Edward Lister in this. I know the boroughs and Ravi [Govindia, Leader, Wandsworth Council] and colleagues, Jane [Ellison, MP for Battersea] and everybody did a great job down in that area and you played an important role as well. Edward really seized the negotiations and the business with the Malaysian company concerned, Setia, and showed great drive in getting this thing through. I really think it is true that that great big hulking building which has been lowering over that part of London for most of our lifetimes is going to be rebuilt very soon and that will be a fantastic achievement.

Richard Tracey (AM): We shall look forward to the opening that you mention, which of course will join the East London Line Extension which you opened to Clapham Junction a couple of weeks ago.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it will. Looking at other schemes, the critical thing is to show how the transport infrastructure that people want drives the jobs and growth, and drives the new building. Once that can be properly articulated in a vision, then we have a lot more to work with and a lot more to show the Treasury about funding.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

3967 / 2012 - Cable Car

Darren Johnson

Will you consider reducing the cost of the multi-journey boarding pass for people using the cable car during regular commuter hours?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. Actually, Darren, I think the Emirates Air Line -- as it should be properly called, not the cable car, in deference to our sponsors -- is good value if you get a ticket. It is £1.60 per journey if you get a packet of ten, I think. It has way exceeded its numbers in its first year. We will look at the pricing. Obviously, all pricing

arrangements come under review and we will be looking at that in due course. At the moment I want to say to you that £1.60 seems to me to be a good offer.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): This Assembly warned back in the summer that the cable car or the Emirates Air Line would not be a proper part of the public transport system in London unless the ticketing policy was reviewed. You talk about the value of the multi-journey boarding pass, but the figures show in the nine-week period of September and October sales of the multi-journey pass were mostly below ten a day. On two days, none at all were sold. Transport for London (TfL) did not sell a single ticket on two days. Clearly --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, they sold the full fare. Good work by TfL. If people do not want to buy the cheaper ticket, I cannot force them to.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): You are saying the cheaper ticket is providing value, but people are not using it. You have to review the ticketing policy on the cable car. Will you review the ticketing policy?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course, we always keep all ticketing policy under review. But I cannot compel people to buy the cheaper ticket. All I can do is say that I am confident that the scheme has proved extremely popular and will continue to be useful in regenerating that area. It will continue to be both an important transport link and a tourist attraction. I think it was a great credit to TfL that they got £36 million out of Emirates to help put it up.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): You cannot compel people to use the cheaper ticket option, I agree, but not many people seem to be using the more expensive ticket option either. That is the problem. TfL's figures -- I have got the latest figures in front of me showing the weekly passenger use dwindling and dwindling and dwindling. There were 47,000 on 22 September. It is now down to 20,000 on 15 December. Each week it is going down and down and down. You have got to reconsider the ticketing if you actually want people to use this as a serious public transport option and not simply a tourist attraction that again not that many people use.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I hope you all know we have had 1.6 million journeys on the Emirates Air Line since it opened in June. The projection was for 1.3 million. Next year we are projecting 1.5 million. Of course, Darren, how many times do you use it a day? Maybe you should use it more often.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): If it went from Brockley to London Bridge, I would use it every day. But it is a bit out of my way just to make a point every day.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know why you are so incensed. It is working very well. It has got a great future. If you say it is underused, people said when they built the Victoria line that it would be empty. This will be an important part of the regeneration of that part of London and it will continue to drive jobs and growth in the docks.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): While you are still waiting for that regeneration to materialise --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are not waiting; it is happening.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): But slowly. Only relatively small numbers of people are using the cable car. Why not review the ticketing policy? Have you considered the Assembly's proposal that the cable car ticketing be properly integrated into the Oyster cap, into the daily Travelcard, into the Freedom Pass? That could get more users on it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. I am interested in that. I am not at all closing my mind to what you are saying. We are interested in that. At the moment, the --

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): Could we see that announced for January as part of your new fares structure in January?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Darren, if you want to be Mayor, you can stand again.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): I could do a better job than you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Really? Go on, then. You are more than welcome to put that point to the electorate of London and have another crack. However, at the moment I am not disposed to pre-empt any review of ticketing.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): I look forward to an announcement in January. Thank you, Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You make an announcement.

3877 / 2012 - Air Quality – Particulate Matter

Stephen Knight

Following the 60th anniversary of The Great Smog of London what steps are you taking to reduce concentrations of particulate matter (i.e. PM10 and PM2.5) across London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks very much, Stephen. Actually, what we have done in this Mayoral term is reduced PM10s by 15% and for the first time London has been formally reported to be compliant with European Union (EU) PM10 levels. That is as a result of many of the initiatives that we have taken, which the Greens did absolutely nothing to bring about, including the new taxi age limits and the largest fleet of hybrid buses in Europe. We have also launched a new clean air fund to help in areas where there are exceedances.

Stephen Knight (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Are you concerned that whilst the UK Government may have by using certain data shown that London was compliant last year, the data that we now have for 2012 seems to demonstrate that there are a number of sites in

London showing that London was not compliant on PM10s in 2012? Is that a matter of concern for you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you should acknowledge that we have made great progress and, yes, of course any areas where there are exceedances we are determined to tackle. I think in Neasden Lane they have some issues and we have announced a new £20 million air quality fund to help those boroughs that are having difficulties. I just remind people that contrary to what is often asserted by the Greens and by the Labour Group and perhaps even by the Liberals, our coalition partners, London does not even have the worst air quality in Europe.

Stephen Knight (AM): Perhaps it depends what measure you use.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We perform much better than many other European cities including Paris, Rome, Barcelona and Athens, and we are going to do even better.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, I am sure everybody would expect London's air quality to get better. In fact, we have had European laws governing the level of air pollution that London should be experiencing in place since 2005 and it appears that only in 2011 that we have got the first degree of some compliance on particulates. As I have said, Mr Mayor, the evidence for this year seems to suggest that we are not in fact in compliance.

Mr Mayor, it was revealed through a freedom of information request last week that your office published over 750 pages of lobbying material, emails, correspondence, documents and so on of your lobbying activity in Brussels to water down or reduce the requirements of international law around air pollution. Would it not be better to spend your efforts and time improving London's air quality rather than lobbying Brussels to reduce the laws around air quality?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think what you should really be doing, Stephen, is using your time to congratulate all those who were involved in improving London's air quality, reducing exceedances, particularly of the most dangerous stuff, the PM10s and the PM2.5s, and that is what we have been doing. We have the cleanest, greenest new bus in Europe, contrary to the constant slurs that are peddled by the Liberals about that bus. We have massively expanded cycling in London. We have new taxi age limits for the first time, something that was completely funky by the last Labour administration. They did not have the guts to do that. We put in new taxi age limits. As a result - I repeat the point - the PM10s have come down by 15% in the last four years, 20% for PM2.5s and London has been formally reported as compliant for the first time with the EU limits. I think you should be congratulating everybody who has been involved in that effort.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, if you are so confident about the quality of London's air, why is it that the information revealed last week shows you have been lobbying for, and I quote, this is from some of the documents that were released:

"The need for more time to reach limit values. London would like opportunities to explain barriers to achieving air quality improvements."

Why is it you are putting so much effort and you have put so much effort into lobbying the EU, to reduce these requirements if you are so confident that you are meeting them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, your question, 3877, is about PM10s and PM2.5s actually and you are equivocating on different aspects of air pollution. What we are also trying to tackle --

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, I have a list here of seven or eight sites in London that are failing the PM10 requirements of European law, so we are talking about the same thing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. If you are talking about PM10s, we are not making any application to Europe. Where we are seeking greater clarity is on NOx because we think that certainly there is an issue to do with nitrous oxide. Although medical evidence is not as clear about NOx as it is on PM10s, we take it very, very seriously. We are doing everything we can to reduce it but because of the switch, particularly from petrol to diesel engines that has taken place, NOx is more of a problem in London than it should be. We want to reduce it and that is why I want to switch to hybrid vehicles like the new bus for London which, I think from memory, emits 40% or 50% of the NOx of a standard diesel bus.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, I am glad you've mentioned the new bus for London, which you have repeatedly said is going to be greenest, cleanest bus.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is and you keep slagging it off. You are slagging in your miserable whinging Liberal Democrat way, running down British industries.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, when we pointed out that the results published by TfL themselves for PM10 omissions from the new bus were indeed worse than some existing diesel buses, you described those results as an anomaly and that, in some way, the tests were contaminated. You said, I think, that you are expecting new results, so presumably you have not yet had results that show it is the cleanest bus in terms of PM10s. When are you going to get those results and when are you going to publish them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The information I have, this is the cleanest bus, the greenest bus in London. I think there is a question about this later on but I am happy to answer to it now. The test we did on PM10, which I think was picked up by the Liberal Group, did turn out to have been contaminated. From memory, what happened was when they were running the test with the battery only cycle, in other words, where theoretically there should have been no PM10s whatsoever, I think the test purported to show there were more PM10s than when it was running on the diesel cycle, so it was completely absurd. The test was faulty. As soon as we have further and better particulars, I will make sure you get them.

Stephen Knight (AM): We will look forward to reading them.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK. I have a point of order from Assembly Member Biggs.

John Biggs (AM): My point of order is very simple that you applied, what I thought, was a rather draconian and unnecessary ruling earlier about my alleged heckling or muttering or whatever. Now, I do not have any problem whatsoever with heckling or muttering. I think it is part of the political process but I think you should apply the same rule to the Mayor. He was heckling a questioner there. You should name him; you should threaten to eject him from the Chamber.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you want to eject me, I do not mind being ejected. We can all have Christmas early.

John Biggs (AM): There is a serious point here, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I apply for ejection?

John Biggs (AM): There is a serious point here, Chair, which is that the --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): There is a serious point here.

John Biggs (AM): There is a serious point here, Chair, which is that I think robust debate does allow people to exchange comments across the Chamber, that is the way the political process works in a democracy. However, if you are going to apply that rule in a draconian fashion to me, you should apply to the Mayor as well and London should judge him for his failure to behave.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): I think I am very draconian with the Mayor currently and legislation, as I read it, has him in that chair for the next two hours minimum and sadly myself. Everybody else can get up and go, which I think should be amended as soon as possible. Thank you for that point.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you, madam. Mr Mayor, is it a fact the London bus fleet is actually cleaner than any other city in Europe and indeed other cities in this country? I am pretty sure I have been told that by TfL in the past. The other thing though, is it not a fact TfL are hastening to retrofit their diesel buses and to introduce hybrids as they will be in Putney High Street in my constituency in this coming year. In fact, 85% of the buses travelling along Putney High Street, which has a pollution problem or has had in the past, 85% will be clean buses?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are basically right. There has been a massive effort to reduce pollution from London buses. I have a feeling I am going to get this wrong but it is something like from 200 tons of NOx per year to something like 17 tons of NOx per year. Those figures might not be completely accurate but there has been a very substantial reduction in pollution of all kinds caused by the modernisation -- brought about by the modernisation of the fleet. I do accept that people care about this very much and they want to see London's air quality improved, as do I as someone who cycles every day and who spends many hours a week stationed behind traffic of all kinds, inhaling fumes. I want to see our city's air as clean as possible. We are making progress. We have done well on PM10s. We have to make better

progress on NOx, as I readily accept. I think the strategy of going for hybrid buses and electric vehicles is the way forward.

Roger Evans (AM): Mr Knight, in his questions, was talking about your efforts to lobby in Europe to get the fine they plan to impose on London delayed so we can continue to take measures to improve air quality. Can I ask you, Mr Mayor, during that lobbying, what was the attitude of the Liberal Democrat politicians in Europe? Were they supportive or were they in favour of forking out £300 million of our hard earned cash to Europe in addition to all the money this country gives to Europe as well, whilst, of course, their representatives sit here in London and complain that we do not have a large enough budget?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you know, the honest truth, I cannot remember what the Liberal Democrat politicians in Europe said about this matter. Forgive me, it eluded my normal lynx-like scrutiny of Liberal Democrat complaints on every matter. I cannot remember what they said.

Roger Evans (AM): I asked the question because I genuinely do not know the answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You do not know the answer. Oh right, I see.

Roger Evans (AM): I think it is something that will bear scrutiny in the New Year.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Right, OK.

3943/2012 - Olympic Stadium

Andrew Boff

Now that West Ham has been confirmed as the preferred bidder for the Olympic Stadium, how do you plan to fund the necessary conversion costs that are required to make the Stadium fit for football?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. Andrew. There is not much, I am afraid. You will not be surprised if I say there is not much I can say here beyond that I believe the stadium has a great future. It has entered the hearts of millions of people in this country and it will do us proud whether or not it has association football in it.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, obviously a lot of money has been spent on this stadium. How much more money should be spent by London taxpayers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Tempting as it is to get into the detail of all this, as you are well aware, negotiation is going on and it would not really be right for me to comment.

Andrew Boff (AM): Is there a line in the sand however, Mr Mayor, about how much more taxpayers' money is to be spent on the Olympic Stadium?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There may or may not be such a line but what I cannot do is go into the details of the discussion now.

Andrew Boff (AM): One interesting thing about it, Mr Mayor, of course, is you expressed in the past your commitment to minimising the amount of money taxpayers will have to spend on the stadium but what would happen in the case of Newham Council's £70 million commitment to the scheme? What would happen if that went the same way and I am assuming it has confidence in the stadium in order to commit that money? Newham also had confidence in the London Pleasure Gardens and lost £4 million of its taxpayers' money in that particular investment. Do you think it is wise that Newham should be investing this kind of taxpayers' money in the scheme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I cannot give an answer about what kind of money I think is right. You are right to point out it was a very expensive investment for the taxpayer. It was done in a particular way. The stadium cost the thick end of £0.5 billion to build. We have to make sure we get value from that investment and we have to make sure the private sector interests do not, as it were, profiteer from it and we will make sure we do that.

Andrew Boff (AM): I am disappointed with your response because I think we should be now saying the money that has been invested in that park is at an end. Certainly with regard to the rest of the Olympic Park, we know it will have to pay for itself from 2015. All I am asking for is an assurance that the stadium itself should have to pay for itself.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Andrew, with great respect, I am not going to go into the details of a discussion that is currently ongoing about what we need to do to the stadium but it will have a great future with or without football.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you very much. We are not going to get much further on this line.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think so, sorry.

4043/2012 - Firefighter Posts

Andrew Dismore

How many fire fighter posts do you believe can be removed without reducing actual attendance times and effectiveness of response to fires?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Andrew, thank you very much for this. The answer really is that it is up to you in LFEPA (London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority) to submit the budget proposals to me and I will comment. As you know, our shared ambition is to make sure we keep reducing deaths by fire in London and keep improving fire cover in this city.

Andrew Dismore (AM): It is fire fighters that put out fires and it is your cuts' demand that is the problem behind this request, demanding £65 million of cuts. That means, according to the brigade officers, the loss of 1,048 fire fighters. That is sort of a double decimation. It is one in

five of our frontline fire fighting strength. Surely that is going to impact on the current attendance time and the effectiveness of the response.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I will look at the budgetary proposals as and when LFEPA – you because you are on it – put them to me in January. I imagine you will be taking a full part in that process and all I can say is the Commissioner for Fire, Ron Dobson, who I think is doing a first rate job, is committed to keeping the existing targets for how quickly fire engines get to the fires.

Andrew Dismore (AM): It is not a question of targets, it is a question of actual response times, which is what I have been asking about and what the question refers to. Of course, this is all in the context of the budget, the cuts you are demanding of £65 million. We are told in the LSB5 documents that officers have begun to think how we could quickly, emphasise ‘quickly’, give you reductions of that order ie 1,048 posts. However, only a year ago, this time last year, the brigade was writing to DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government) warning of, and I have a quote from the letter:

“A potential exodus of senior experienced officers which could lead to a significant loss of expertise which would undoubtedly have a potential impact on performance and also warning of the consequences of a rapid loss of key service personnel.”

What has changed in a year, other than your cuts’ demands, that effectively have led to that contradictory statement?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, what we want to do, and I think what you want to do, is to keep the London Fire Brigade in a position where it can deliver on its response times. That is what the Commissioner is committed to do, and I am sure will do. And to keep fires coming down and death from fire. It is a fact that compared to a decade ago, the London Fire Brigade is now attending half as many fires, 50% down on a decade ago, and fire deaths have fallen by a third. The number of fires in London is lower than at any time since the Greater London Area was established 40 years ago. That is no cause for complacency but what it assures me is it is right to build on that success, to study what works and it is the same as the argument about policing. I want to deploy fire fighters in the most effective possible way and that is what we will do.

Andrew Dismore (AM): The fact remains that it has been successful with the current level of brigade. Only 287 fire fighters expressed interest in your voluntary redundancy programme and of those, 88 could retire on long-term service anyway, the sort of senior people the brigade were warning about losing last year. With the notional ordinary staff turnover, it would take five years to achieve your demanded reduction. How is this going to be done quickly? You are not going to wait five years for that, are you? How are you going to do this without compulsory redundancy?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Andrew, as and when you and LFEPA produce proposals for a budget, I will look at them. I will make sure that we take steps to protect fire cover in

London and make sure we have the officers, the fire fighters we need that do a fantastic job and can keep incidents of fire and death from fire coming down and keep response times up.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Will you avoid compulsory redundancy?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I will look at any proposals you make and I will study them with interest.

Andrew Dismore (AM): So the answer is no.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, that is not the answer. It is up to you, frankly, to make some proposals.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, do you agree that residents need to be consulted on major cuts to frontline service provisions like the closing of fire stations and reduction in fire engines?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, of course.

Navin Shah (AM): Right. Whilst there is some provision for preliminary consideration in the draft to the London Safety Plan of a selected number of stakeholders, there is no plan to consult residents before setting the budget or at any time after the budget process. Do you think this is an acceptable situation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can tell you there will be a full public consultation, which I am sure you will participate in, Navin, before any final decision is taken on the London Safety Plan. I know this will be a consultation analogous to the one that obviously we are going to have on policing. However, I do think it would be a good thing if people approached it in a spirit of intellectual honesty and candour and what was in the best interests for London.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, the Authority meeting will be looking at producing a draft budget for your consideration on 21 January. We have not been told of any plans to consult, in any way, residents who have very strongly, in the resident attitude survey, indicated how much they appreciate the local fire stations. Given that scenario, should we not be consulting those residents of London before even a draft budget, which will no doubt have plans to close fire stations, rather than after the draft budget has been agreed? Surely it is meaningless to consult when the decision is already made to close fire stations and reduce fire appliances and massive staff cuts as Andrew [Dismore] has been indicating?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. As I said just now, at the risk of repeating myself, Chair, there will be a full public consultation before any final decisions are taken about the Plan, the London Safety Plan, or any other fire station closures.

Navin Shah (AM): Would you indicate to us the programme for the consultation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that you, as members of LFEPA, will be able to get your hands on the full programme of consultation without any problem at all. I look to

James [Cleverly AM, Chairman, LFEPA] to advise you of how that will work. I am sure there will be plenty of occasions in which you can make the points you feel you need to make.

Navin Shah (AM): Are you giving a commitment, therefore, that before making a final budget decision which you will make for LFEPA, there will be a full and meaningful consultation of residents in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I am telling you is there will be a full public consultation before any final decisions are taken on the London Safety Plan or about any closures of any fire stations.

Navin Shah (AM): Thank you.

4042/2012 - Housing Crisis

Tom Copley

Has London's housing crisis worsened this year?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Tom. London's housing crisis has been many decades in the making and obviously I think it is something where we need collectively to work ever harder but I am very proud of the work that has been done just over the last year. We have had a record number of affordable homes completed, the highest since records began in 1991. 17,240 homes completed and in spite of the difficult economic times we have been going through, I am confident we will deliver 100,000 affordable completions over my mayoralty.

Tom Copley (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor; good morning. It was a simple question. Has the crisis become worse? Yes or no.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I gave you a good answer which is we built a record number of affordable homes this year but it is certainly true we face a crisis that is many decades in the making.

Tom Copley (AM): If you look at the figures since April, of course, Mr Mayor, only 425 new affordable homes have been started since then which is a pretty worrying figure I think you would agree.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is always true that there are slow starts in the first half of the year. We are confident that we will do, as I say --

Tom Copley (AM): This is the second half of the year.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- another 55,000 homes over the course of this Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period.

Tom Copley (AM): I wanted to ask you about your London rental standard which you --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): London rental standard. Yes.

Tom Copley (AM): Yes, your London rental standard. I have it here, which you have just published. In it, you acknowledge many of the major problems there are in the private rented sector in London which now stands at 25% of all households. You sort of concede that regulation is a good thing because you say you support regulation of housing standards and management but you think it should be self-regulation. Is that correct?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I do not think, and what I think people on your side of the argument want us to apply, are rent controls and to start to set maxima, to start to set limits on rents and that, I think, is not the way forward. Jurisdictions, where they do that, find that leads to a reduction in the choice, the availability. It drives people away from the market. It is a curiosity at the moment that after years in which I remember people saying, "Oh, we should be more like the Germans. We should be more like the Continental economies and we should have a larger and more thriving private rental sector", people are now saying - now that it is, as you rightly say, a greatly increasing number - people are now saying it is a tragedy that people cannot get home ownership. We should be going for more home ownership but actually --

Tom Copley (AM): I am glad you mentioned Germany, Mr Mayor. I am glad you mentioned Germany because Germany has a system of rent regulation. You use the term 'rent control'. I do not think many people on what you describe as my side of the argument want to go back to some sort of crude system of rent capping. In Germany, they had exactly the --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I thought, sorry, that was the manifesto on which your candidate fought the last election, last mayoral election.

Tom Copley (AM): No, he did not, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, he jolly well did.

Tom Copley (AM): No, he did not. He did not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh, yes, he did.

Tom Copley (AM): That is misleading, Mr Mayor. That is very misleading. The system they have in Germany, which as you mentioned, 57% of the German housing stock is in the private rented sector, a system which you praise in your draft housing covenant which is longer tenancies and indexed linked rent increases. You acknowledge that is a positive step forward.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, what is the question?

Tom Copley (AM): The question is you seem to acknowledge that is a positive step forward because you propose a voluntary system, to trial a voluntary system of that here in London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What we want to do is to expand the private rented sector. Fundamentally, we want to build more homes and indeed more homes for private rent. That is the way forward and in a very difficult market, we want to make sure Londoners are not gouged, not victimised by their landlords and there are various approaches you can take. We think the London rental standard is a good way forward. It is going to be launched next year by us. We intend to make a big thing of it. We intend to make sure we do everything we can to increase supply whilst giving as much protection as we possibly can to tenants. That is the programme.

Tom Copley (AM): Mr Mayor, I would submit humbly to you that without any form of compulsion or statutory regulation on landlords to uphold this, the draft rental standard isn't worth the paper it is written on.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not agree with you. About the options you support - I do not quite know what you support - but the options you talk about, index link, whichever way you cut it, you are talking for some kind of coercion or compulsion in rental maxima. All the evidence I have suggests that would lead to a reduction in the choice and the availability for Londoners, and I do not think that is the way forward.

Tom Copley (AM): Mr Mayor, I think that is something you assert without evidence but I shall leave my questioning there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have no evidence; it is hard for me to know what your policy is but it seems to be a little bit obscure this morning. You say you support what is going on in Germany. From what I understand of the Germans, they have a historic tradition of a massive rental sector. We have been under continual pressure as a matter of public policy in this country to try to expand the rental sector. It is now expanding. What we want to do is to keep it expanding but in such a way as to protect the interests of those who are renting. We think the best way to achieve both things is to have the rental standards approach that we are going to be launching next year.

Tom Copley (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. I am going to leave the questioning there.

John Biggs (AM): One of the glories of London is its mixed communities and the fact that people of varying incomes live in the same boroughs together. I think a lot of liberal minded Londoners were reassured by your statement that you opposed Kosovo-style social cleansing in London. They may have even supported you on the back of that. They may have said, "This is someone who celebrates that diversity and joy of London". The reality though of the benefit changes is that many thousands of Londoners are being driven out of their neighbourhoods and this is related to the question about the housing crisis. I put it to you that your epitaph will say that although you said you oppose Kosovo-style social cleansing, in reality, your policies and the men you supported, David Cameron [Prime Minister]/Boris Johnson-style social cleansing through those policies. The question is, are you doing anything to stand up to the Government in this disastrous policy which is particularly having this effect in London where the rents are so high?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. I think it is a pretty long epitaph by the way, but I am more than happy to answer that, Jennette [Arnold], if you just clarify one thing. There is a question 4044 from Nicky [Gavron] which is exactly on that point. Do you wish me to answer that question now?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): It is linked but no, if you just answer John [Biggs] and then you can pick up Nicky's.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do both, OK. I'll end up giving I think --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, it is OK.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer to you, John, is yes, of course, I think it is right London should be mixed in the way it traditionally has been. The glory you rightly describe I think is incredibly important. It differentiates London from many other cities around the world that people on different income groups live in the same neighbourhood. It is a fantastic advantage in a great city like London. I must say I do not agree with your view that we have done it to mitigate the impact of the benefit cap. On the contrary; we have special funds for London. We have made sure there has been a delay and I am afraid I cannot yet agree with you that we are seeing anything like the exodus you describe. We are not seeing the Kosovo-style exodus or whatever, however I described it. I think most Londoners do think it right that the benefit cap only applies to those who are not in fulltime work and to set a cap at £26,000, which is the average income, would strike most people as being sensible.

John Biggs (AM): The reality though, when we burrow into the life stories of people in this position is we are talking about many single parents who cannot work, we are talking about families being disconnected, we are talking about a mass exodus. We are talking about the position where by 2020, only one in six properties in Tower Hamlets, one of the poorest boroughs in London, will be affordable to people on housing benefit. That is a scandal and you should be standing up for it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I think the single best, most effective way of dealing with the problem is to keep building more affordable homes and, by the way, are homes for social rent as well as for mixed tenure.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): You said quite rightly that London is a special case in terms of its social mix. Will you, therefore, undertake to do some independent monitoring for London of the impact of the benefit cap on Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know we are trying. There was a story on the front page of the *Guardian* a few weeks ago based on calls that London boroughs had made to other parts of the country about rehousing. However, we have not been able to substantiate, or so far been able to substantiate the assertion made by John that there is a vast exodus. It does not seem to be happening. It may be, you know, it could be down the track, but we have to be clear; it does not seem to be happening on the scale some people have prophesied.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): It is no use relying on hearsay one way or the other. We need some proper robust monitoring, particularly next year when the new regime comes in.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, it has been described as a mass exodus.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): Will you undertake to do some proper monitoring of this of the impact on Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): Thank you.

3920/2012 - Costs of Dropped Cases

Tony Arbour

What do you estimate the costs were of investigating those 16 to 18% of crimes in 2011 that were subsequently dropped before trial?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Tony. The estimate for the cost of the dropped cases is about £3.1 million. It is ludicrous that cases are dropped. It is not 16 to 18%. We think, on average, it is about 10% of cases dropped. That is still too many and this is generally because of difficulties in getting witnesses to testify or difficulty with witnesses. I am told that is the single biggest reason. We have just had a meeting of the London Crime Reduction Board at which this problem came up and we are working with the CPS (Crime Prosecution Service) and with the Ministry of Justice to make sure there is proper co-ordination and, where possible, every case is brought to court.

Tony Arbour (AM): It seems to me, Mr Mayor, that we do not actually know what the causes are of these dropped cases. You say it is a matter of witnesses who fail to turn up. I can tell you, over many years' experience sitting on these matters, frequently evidence does not turn up, frequently police do not turn up. The CPS, for some reason or another, withdraws the matter at the door. I think it would be useful for us to know precisely why these cases are dropped, why a higher percentage of cases, and indeed I have the figures before me which gives the figures for last year, which does say the number of ineffective trials in London was, in fact, 16% and that is in the Crown Court. In the Magistrates' Courts, it was 18%. £3.6 million seems to me to be a remarkably low figure.

In Scotland, however, they have actually addressed the causes of dropped cases and the failure of witnesses to turn up is indeed not the largest. There are a whole stack of figures which they give. Given that one of the most important functions of policing is after you have caught criminals, that criminals should be brought to trial and effectively punished. I think that is something which the public expect and the victims of crime expect. Will you please lean on your colleague at MOPAC to actually see why trials fail to proceed and once we know the reason, address that matter? I would also say, as I said right at the very beginning, to suggest it is only costing £3.6 million --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): £3.1 million I think I said.

Tony Arbour (AM): OK. That makes an even more ludicrous figure because, of course, that actual cost does not take into account time. I understand every hour in court in general, as far as a case is prepared, is something like eight times that figure. I suspect the figure you have been given does not take into account opportunity costs. We are talking, at a time now, about a great deal of wasted money and policing which should, we say -- this is an area which perhaps you would like to look at. Will you look at it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Tony. Yes, the London Crime Reduction Board is looking at this area. The CPS in London has said they will now aim to be the number one improver in the whole of the country in reducing unsuccessful prosecutions. They are looking at a target in reduction of dropped cases or cracked cases, as they are sometimes called, and I will be very happy to keep you in the loop about what evidence we obtain about the causes for these discontinued prosecutions.

As you rightly say, it is not just to do with witnesses. There are all sorts of reasons why they fail. Insofar as we can crack down on poor co-ordination, poor communication, loss of evidence and all that kind of thing, I am confident we will be able to make improvements through greater use of digital technology. It should be possible with modern communications really to start to iron out a lot of these problems.

Tony Arbour (AM): Thanks very much, thank you, Chairman.

3956/2012 - London Plan Parking Policy (1)

Steve O'Connell

Do you agree with the recommendations of the Outer London Commission for a more flexible parking policy for new developments in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Steve. We do want to support high streets across London and, of course, in outer London. However, we do not want to encourage excessive traffic congestion, that is the balance that needs to be struck. I do think the London Plan allows for that. The Outer London Commission, as you rightly say, has studied this matter and we think there will be some helpful stuff in the Town Centre Supplementary Planning Guidance which is going to be subject to a consultation shortly.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. The Outer London Commission, as you say, just published its report. Do you agree with the report that the current one size fits all approach, which does not actually respect the localism or the needs of local centres? Do we think we should really drop that one size fits all and adopt a more localised approach when it comes to outer London particularly?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We do think the Plan allows for some flexibility and we think the concerns on residential parking has been raised particularly by the outer boroughs and will be reflected in the new Town Centre Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Steve O'Connell (AM): We will avidly read over the period --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): One of those sensational documents everybody wants to read.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Compulsory reading.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): An international super seller.

Steve O'Connell (AM): The point is a serious one. Talking about outer London particularly, clearly we want our town centres to be successful, we want people to visit the town centres and we do not want it clogged up with congestion. We want people to use our wonderful public transport and I have a question a little bit later about public transport in outer London. Would you not agree that we really want to prise the shoppers away from those outside of London shopping malls, the Bluewaters as well? The fact of the matter is these people generally will use the car and we want to get those people with the big fat wallets from Surrey and Kent to come into Bromley and into Croydon and we need to encourage those people to come in. The fact of the matter is largely they will tend to drive, so, Mr Mayor, would you like to comment on that and how are we going to encourage these people?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. They will be encouraged by the improvements that outer London boroughs are making and have been making to their town centres. We are helping and encouraging with the outer London Fund in improving urban realm, improving the attractiveness of the offer on those high streets, whether it is with trees or benches or whatever, shop fronts that we have been improving but also judicious improvement in the parking arrangements can be useful. Obviously what we do not want to do is to cause so much traffic congestion that it becomes self-frustrating.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I am pleased that TfL will commit to spend a considerable amount of money on unblocking those blockages around London generally, in your latest plans. While we are on the subject of outer London - we have many outer London champions here, one of which I am - the outer London Fund has been a great success and thank you for your leadership in delivering that. I would urge you to look at a further tranche of outer London funding during the course of your mayoralty and I would also urge you to gear up, if it is a good word, the outer London Commission. It has been a success in those first four years but I would urge you to give it perhaps more teeth to bolster its reports because they do a good piece of work and they do represent large swathes through London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. This conversation must not let people run away with the idea that all we are going to do is let the motorcar rip in outer London. What we need to do is to have a real concerted drive on our public transport systems. You are right to keep going on about the tram link and the improvements we are trying to put in there. It is why we

are absolutely right to be pushing on with our plans for integration of the Underground and the Overground and with the rail franchises because that is where the big wins are for people in outer London. If we can get a proper turn-up-and-go Metro-style service for commuters in outer London, for shoppers in outer London, then actually, we will get people out of their cars on to mass transit, public transport in a way they are in Inner London. Some of the fascinating figures in the census recently about car usage in London; in spite of everything you will throw at me about fare rises, quite rightly, in the cost of public transport, we are seeing people go for public transport and stop using their car.

Now, we want to encourage that and we want to make sure outer London starts to be as well provided for in public transport as parts of Inner London and that is a big, big ambition. When you can look at the economic potential of outer London and all those potential areas of economic growth in outer London of which Croydon is obviously one, mass transit, public transport is a big part of the solution.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you very much, Chair.

Roger Evans (AM): Boris, I had a useful meeting earlier this week with Averil Dongworth who is the chief executive of Queen's Hospital in Romford. The Queen's is a new hospital. It was built under PFI (Private Finance Initiative), so it has a number of problems, but one of the largest problems it has is that it was built when the parking standards of your predecessor were being applied. It means they do not have enough room for even their own staff to park, let alone the patients who have to visit the hospital. Will you review the London Plan so that it recognises that medical facilities like hospitals need to have more parking because the sort of people who are going to them, who are unwell, are less likely to be able to choose cycling, walking and using public transport as an option?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will certainly make sure that TfL have a conversation with that hospital and see what we can do.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you.

4044/2012 - Low Income Families

Nicky Gavron

Should families on low incomes be able to live in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks very much, Nicky. You ask should families on low incomes be able to live in London. Of course and that is the point I was making to John [Biggs] just now. It is, as he rightly says, one of the great glories of the city that we have mixed communities here in London. We must keep that. That is why we have gone for policies like the London Living Wage, why we build more affordable homes and why I fought for mitigations and transitional arrangements for the benefit caps. I fully accept what Darren [Johnson] asks. Yes, we are monitoring, what John calls, a mass exodus. I do not have evidence to support the

view that there is a mass exodus but we will make sure we keep a very, very close eye on the numbers and we make our case to Government, as you would expect, and want me to do.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes, I am glad to hear that and hope you are going to ask for regional variation in the caps. I want to go to the heart of something else. I am very pleased you are talking about mixed communities in the way you are and about social rent as you did to John [Biggs] but I want to go to an area where you have huge power: the London Plan. You have recently introduced a new policy that requires boroughs to maximise the number of affordable rented units on any piece of land and they have to do that by charging rents up to 80% of the local market rent. This policy has managed to unite 12 very different boroughs from very different parts of London to oppose it at the London Plan Examination in Public that happened a few weeks ago. As Westminster put it, this policy leads to homes that are only accessible by wealthy members of society. The officer went on to say that to afford one of your (meaning you) affordable homes in a lower cost part of Westminster you would need to have a household income of £118,000 a year for even a very small family home. Social rental households in Westminster have an average income of £12,000 a year. Why are you blocking Westminster from building family housing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not. Under the affordable rent model, one-third of what we are proposing will be the affordable rent model, one-third will be family-sized homes at or very close to social rent levels. The average for the affordable rent model will be nothing like 80% but closer to 65% of market rents.

Nicky Gavron (AM): OK, however 65% according to these boroughs was not affordable and Kensington-Chelsea said that only 40% would be affordable. The point I want to make is your officers are saying that these boroughs cannot put these social rent capped levels in their plans. Many boroughs want to help you and build low-income family homes. They want to work with developers to do this and they want to do it with their own land in some cases and with their own resources and, like Westminster, they want to do it all without any of your money. What is not to like about that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nothing. Bully for them.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes, but your officers are saying they cannot and they have been out to Tower Hamlets --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If boroughs want to put their land in and build homes for social rent then of course that is fantastic. I just want to correct the impression that you are giving of the affordable rent programme because across the whole of 2011 to 2015 three-quarters of the new rented home will be at or close to social rent levels; 75% of the whole programme will be at or close to social rent levels.

Nicky Gavron (AM): That is so untrue. The average of 65% of market rent; that is what you are saying. I want to go back to the fact that your officers are going back to borough planning inquiries and blocking them saying that they cannot put in social rent caps which means they cannot deliver the 30% or 40% rents that they want to. This is in addition to anything your

affordable programme is going to deliver; that is just with 60 providers. Boroughs want to deliver more. You clearly do not understand the issues. You had a whole examination in public around this policy.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If I may respectfully say, Nicky, we have done a lot better in delivering affordable homes than you did when you were in power. We have done it through working sensibly with boroughs, without being confrontational and working sensibly with developers to get things done, and by making savings in other parts of the immensely wasteful budget that you used to run in order to deliver new homes for London. We have completed 17,420 new affordable homes in one year. The total number that I did in my first four years was 54,000, and we are absolutely confident we are going to go on and do 55,000. For four years you sat there saying that it was unachievable and we were not going anything. We have gone on and done it. We will continue to do it and that is why my yuletide sermon to you is do not forget that the achievements of 2012 were against the background of a lot of pessimism and gloom in which, in my view, you continue wrongly to indulge.

Nicky Gavron (AM): There is a housing crisis. Social renting housing is falling off a cliff and it is very hard if your officers are blocking boroughs. Go back and ask your officers and they will tell you why, and you will see that it is very hard to believe you want social rented housing built in London which is going to give you the mixed communities you are talking about.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are a cracked record, Nicky. You have been saying this for five years now. I think the facts of what we have achieved and what we are achieving speak for themselves. We will continue to deliver tens of thousands of affordable homes. I would like to do more, I would like to accelerate the programme, I make no secret about that. You should not underestimate the strength of our determination to do it.

4048/2012 - Universal Credit

Fiona Twycross

Is the Mayor confident that the changes to the benefit system next year will not impact disproportionately on already hard-pressed Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Fiona. Any change to the benefit system is always fraught with potential teething problems but I do think it is right to make work pay in the reform that has been proposed. We will monitor the situation and ensure London families are not unnecessarily disadvantaged. We think that 900,000 individuals will be helped by this scheme and our intention is to ensure that nobody is made worse off by ensuring that there are adequate transitional arrangements, but we will be monitoring it.

Fiona Twycross (AM): I am glad. The welfare changes are the biggest changes since the 1940s. In my view they are being rushed through and the main impact, including the possible exodus that has been mentioned by a number of people today, will not be seen before next April when most of the changes come in. These are being viewed as a time bomb by charities who are very concerned and who raised their concerns which were echoed by the Work and

Pension Select Committee about the fact that disabled claimants may end up receiving less than other claimants; that the online payments and single monthly payments could cause real dis-benefit to people. Do you agree with the charities and the Work and Pension Select Committee that the Government should consider delaying the introduction of the new benefit system?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think the Labour Party also supports the principle of welfare reform. As far as I understand it, the Universal Credit is going to be phased in between October 2013 and 2017. There will be pilots, including some in London. We will be studying the impact of those pilots but it seems to me that that is a reasonable timetable.

Fiona Twycross (AM): The question related to benefit systems more generally. We have already seen the rise of poverty and heard stories about people struggling to make ends meet this Christmas. They are struggling to pay rent, fuel bills and increasingly even struggling to pay for food. The benefit changes overall are going to affect 30,000 households in London adversely. Many of these people are in work and over half of those affected by the changes to housing benefits live in London. Are you lobbying Government actively on this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously, we have lobbied repeatedly about the impact of benefit changes on London. You will be familiar with what we have done already with the housing benefit changes on the Universal Credit. We are looking to make sure that families and individuals are not disadvantaged however so far we think that the analysis is basically correct. You should try as much as you can to remove disincentives to work, you should help people with the benefit system to get into work and that is the objective of the Universal Credit. A lot of people are not taking up the benefits to which they are entitled. 900,000 people will be better off under this scheme and our plan is to ensure that people are not unfairly disadvantaged.

Fiona Twycross (AM): What reassurances have you received that the transition will go smoothly and that the system for processing payments for work, particularly given that one of the principal reasons people give for turning to food banks is that there is a delay in receiving benefits to which they are entitled?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Clearly that is not the result of the Universal Credit system as it had not come in.

Fiona Twycross (AM): The point is that it could get worse; it is an untested system.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely, so we are ensuring that we monitor what is happening with the pilots that will take place here in London and that we have a good understanding of the impacts on London families and individuals. When you introduce a benefits change that will affect lots of vulnerable people there are going to be teething problems and difficulties. It always happens. That is not an argument against changing it if by so doing you can help people into work, help to remove barriers and improve the system. It is very important that you remain capable of reforming the benefit system. We are going to look at it as it develops and ensure that London households are not unfairly disadvantaged.

Fiona Twycross (AM): You are going to look at it, but what reassurances have you received that London households are not going to be disadvantaged?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Reassurances I have received are from the Greater London Authority who are in constant contact with the Department for Work and Pensions and they do not think see any clear evidence yet of what John [Biggs] calls a “mass exodus”. That is the information we have so far. The information I have is that 900,000 people will be listed out of poverty and there will be no dis-benefit to others because of transitional arrangements which will smooth the process. That may be too rosy a scenario and I accept that. However, that is why we are going to monitor it and intervene as appropriate. That is not an argument for failing to proceed with a benefit reform that will help hundreds of thousands of people and incentivise work. We want to encourage people to get the self-esteem that goes with work.

Fiona Twycross (AM): We will be monitoring the situation and will come back to this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You can come back to it whenever you like.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Thank you.

3945/2012 - Removing SO6 and SO14 from MPS

Roger Evans

Do you agree that removing the Diplomatic Protection Group and Royalty Protection Unit from the Metropolitan Police, so that they can focus more on local issues, would be chiefly in the interest of Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is a relic of an old argument about the constitution of the Metropolitan Police Service and it predates the settlement which is basically that there is full democratic accountability of policing in London, so I am content with arrangements as they are. I would go so far as to say that the Diplomatic Protection Group and the Royalty Protection Unit, having them in the Metropolitan Police Service and engaged on duties around the city actually has benefits for policing in London in the sense that there is collaboration between very experienced officers in those groups and other police officers around the city and is generally good for policing in London.

Roger Evans (AM): That is fair enough as long as we get reimbursed by Government for these activities and they are not being subsidised by Council taxpayers. What steps are you taking to ensure that national Government is paying for the national elements of the Metropolitan Police?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is one of the points that I raise with Government. For example the MPS bore the cost of hosting what was effectively a gigantic national event in the form of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. That is why it was right to get extra funding for London.

Roger Evans (AM): I think everybody around this table would acknowledge that the Metropolitan Police Service is facing a difficult budgetary position and a lot of cuts will have to be made which will be painful for Londoners. What steps are you taking to ensure that these types of services also bear their share of efficiencies which the rest of the police forces are having to deal with?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It goes without saying that these parts of the Metropolitan Police Service are by no means immune from the normal drive for efficiency and economy that you would expect in the current circumstances.

4046/2012 - Fuel Poverty

Murad Qureshi

Is fuel poverty getting worse in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The blunt answer is yes; in my view fuel poverty in London is getting worse. There is a problem in London because the price of fuel is increasing at a faster rate than household income. We have an increasing problem and that is why the Know Your Rights campaign is so important, the retro fitting is so important to reduce people's fuel costs. I also think that, as a city, we need to campaign against the fuel companies who are ripping off the consumer, and I have made representations, as you would expect, on that. I think we need to start thinking about security of supply in London, and indeed in the country generally.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Thank you, Mayor, for the response. I am not going to cover ground that we have covered already because I have asked you similar questions over the last two months. It has been a national issue this week. We have had two studies out suggesting that we will have 300,000 more households in fuel poverty nationally. We already have 500,000 households in London in fuel poverty. Yes, have had got a very raw deal out of our energy companies and in particular EDF Energy. Whilst the rest of the country may be hit by 7%, we are disproportionately being hit by 11% whilst there are only increasing energy prices by 2% in France. I would like to ask what lobbying you have done about London targets for future programmes? Given that Londoners have had such a raw deal from the energy companies and in particular the lack of delivery of energy efficiency programmes, have you, and are you, prepared to lobby Government to include regional requirements on that front?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, thank you. We are working constantly with the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) to ensure that London gets its fair share of all green and Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding. We want to have a memorandum of understanding with each of the top six energy suppliers to ensure that London receives its fair share, as a region, of ECO funding and we are working on this now. You are right to say that domestic retrofit has been slow and you have been very good at chasing this up month in, month out. We can do more and we will do more.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Can I ask that you join me in writing to Ed Davey [Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change] about these concerns? He has got the primary legislation to do this and I am very surprised he does not seem to see the need for it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. Murad, I am very happy to work with you on this. I also think – I do not know whether you agree – that since we have, it seems, an abundant source of relatively low carbon energy in the form of natural gas, turning up in shale gas, turning up in parts of this country, I think we should get on and get fracking. I wonder whether we can add that to the letter to Ed Davey?

Murad Qureshi (AM): I will leave that issue aside.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you going to join me in urging Ed to get fracking?

Murad Qureshi (AM): I am not convinced.

Onkar Sahota (AM): Cold homes cost the NHS £1.36 billion a year through the cost to hospitals and general practitioners. Last year there was a 12% increase in deaths in the winter months over the year previously. You already recognised that Londoners need help to protect them against the greed of the energy companies, they need to have their houses retrofitted, they need to conserve their energy so they can use their money more effectively, and yet you are ending your Re:New programme. Would you please reconsider that? Is this a good time to stop this programme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know what you mean, we are not stopping it.

Onkar Sahota (AM): I understood you were bringing the Re:New programme to an end this year.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, we want to go on and retrofit as many homes as we can. We have done 67,000 and we are going to continue to do it. ECO covers 100% of the retrofit costs. We want to ensure London gets its fair share of the ECO funding so that we can expand retrofitting.

Onkar Sahota (AM): So the Re:New programme is not coming to an end?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Certainly the programme of retrofitting is absolutely not coming to an end.

Onkar Sahota (AM): How about the Re:New programme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It was called BEEP [Building Energy Efficiency Programme], then HEEP [Home Energy Efficiency Programme], it has gone through several names already, the Re:New programme. It may be changing its name but certainly the programme of retrofitting goes on.

Onkar Sahota (AM): Is your office putting money into this programme of retrofitting houses in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are continuing with a very significant retrofitting programme. I am very happy to share the details with you at a later date but I cannot --

Onkar Sahota (AM): I know the energy companies are doing something but this was a programme run through the Mayor's Office. Are you continuing to put money into retrofitting houses for Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, Onkar, we are not a funding body for schemes across London. I would be more than happy to give you the details of how the scheme is going to be funded --

Onkar Sahota (AM): The key issue, Mr Mayor, is that you were putting money into it and you stopped putting money into it now. Are you saying you want to carry on helping people as you have done so previously?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know quite what you are talking about but we continue with our ambitions to expand our retrofitting programme which has so far covered 67,000 homes to help Londoners out of fuel poverty. I am more than happy to share with you the details of how that is to be funded, but it is vital that we get our share of funding from Government. The Carbon Emission Reduction Target (CERT) programme comes to an end this year. It is being replaced by ECO and the Green Deal and we need to ensure that London gets its fair share.

Onkar Sahota (AM): I will leave it at that at this point, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Members, if we are going to get answers to the five questions left can I ask you to agree to suspend Standing Order 2.9(b).

All: Agreed.

4047/2012 - Planning Changes

Navin Shah

Are you in favour of re-defining planning laws?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not in favour of planning changes that lead to garden grabbing. I am in favour of ensuring that we use available land to build the homes that Londoners need.

Navin Shah (AM): I am delighted to hear that, Mr Mayor. The question is, are you in accord with our Planning Minister who wants to concrete over 2 million acres of green fields to deal with the housing shortage?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it was a Labour Minister called John Prescott who once said, “The green belt is a Labour achievement and we need to build on that achievement”.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, the question is very specific: it is about the current Planning Minister. Are you in tune with him to concrete over green field sites? Yes or no?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am determined not to build on green field sites where there are good sites available in London. If you look at the map of the city and the opportunities that we have there is fantastic space for expansion in the Docks area, Battersea, Vauxhall, Nine Elms. There are areas around the city where we are confident that we can build tens of thousands of homes without garden grabbing or destroying green space.

Navin Shah (AM): I am sure that is the case but at the same time your record shows that you have allowed something like 40 applications on green belt sites so that does not quite match what you were just saying. The worry is that are you going to follow in the footsteps of the Planning Minister?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you sat in the planning meetings that I run every week, Navin, you would know that I endlessly chuck out proposals from boroughs of all political complexions to build on their green space. I do not allow it unless there is a very, very good case for a school that is on existing green space where they make even more green space, something like that, I simply do not let it happen. The population of London has expanded a great deal in the past four years, it has gone up 600,000, but we still have space to build more good homes.

Navin Shah (AM): Let me make one last point. According to the Minister, the National Trust, he has called them the latter-day luddites on this particular issue about the green belt. The National Trust accuses the Minister of making up figures on the back of a fag packet. While the Campaign to Protect Rural England says that his proposals are a licence to developers to “let rip”. Who is right?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I see no reason to interpose myself in an argument between the Minister and the National Trust because we have our own system in London where we have a very clear London Plan that forbids unnecessary construction on greenbelt land. I toughened it up when I became your Mayor. There was a lot of garden grabbing, as you know, particularly in your borough and it is right that we should stop it.

Roger Evans (AM): Mr Shah was just criticising you, Mr Mayor, for approving too many developments and yet earlier today colleagues of his were criticising you for not building enough. Can you work out what is going out up there?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is just the permissible inconsistency of opposition. They are allowed to be incoherent; it is part of their job.

3959/2012 - Croydon Tramlink

Steve O'Connell

How soon will my residents be able to benefit from the additional four trains, double tracking and an increase in frequency on the Croydon Tramlink?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. All these improvements are now being worked on and they should be in place by 2015. On the further extensions that I know we all want, this is something that we need to work with you, the boroughs, to have a clear vision of what the generation impacts are going to be.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Continuing our earlier conversation about transport in outer London I was struck by how we need to improve public transport in outer London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We do.

Steve O'Connell (AM): There are only three boroughs in London without access to either London Underground, the Overground or the Tramlink. In particular in Sutton the residents are dissatisfied with transport. What comfort can you give to my residents, particularly in Sutton, around extensions to the tram or any other improvements?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think the argument is right but it needs to be made and there needs to be a clear programme from the boroughs concerned for what exactly they have in mind in terms of the urban regeneration and growth. What housing, growth, new business they envisage and how that growth will help to fund the infrastructure that we could put in. You have to understand that these schemes are currently unfunded and we face massive pressure on our budgets. We have the whole upgrade programme to get on with. We want to do it but we need to have a clear sight of what the economic objectives are.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I think the leaders of those particular boroughs do understand that. Do you confirm and agree with me that it is the regenerative aspect of the Tramlink?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Steve O'Connell (AM): The particular thing about the St Helier Estate in Sutton where we want the tram to run past, do you agree with me that it is actually the regenerative case will be the aspect that will bring the tram to areas of outer London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, that is the case but it needs to be spelt out. When the East London line was created to hook up Croydon and Hackney, etc, there was a clear intention to link two economic areas of activity. Everybody could understand the logic and the rationale. We need to work with you and your colleagues to understand exactly how the boroughs see growth in that area: what is envisaged; what the plan is; how much growth; how high the buildings are going to be, etc.

Steve O’Connell (AM): The Overground particularly has been a great success because it links Croydon with Stratford and we need to build on that, Mr Mayor. Thank you.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you, Madam. Mr Mayor, I want to add my support to what Steve O’Connell has just been saying to you. My residents in Merton – in both Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden – are very grateful for the additional trains and the double tracking of the Tramlink which has been a great success. There is no doubt the whole Tramlink is a great success and as you have heard from Steve O’Connell. I think we do want TfL to pursue their talks with Merton and Sutton borough leaders about some further extension to St Helier and to Sutton.

Can I also say that building on the great success of the Overground completion to Clapham Junction, many of the rail campaigners in South London – where we are a bit short of good Underground – many campaigners are talking now about further extension of the East London Line and Overground perhaps to Crystal Palace and elsewhere. Can I encourage you to talk to the TfL rail planners and ask them to talk even more to the borough leaders about this because I think you will find there is a very ready ear amongst those borough leaders in South London about these sorts of developments.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I certainly shall. I think there is huge economic potential to be unlocked by public transport systems but we need to work together.

Richard Tracey (AM): I think there is undoubtedly spare rail capacity with lines that freight trains run on alone practically and it is that that needs exploring.

3952/2012 – Pocket Parks and Street Trees

James Cleverly

Which areas do you have in mind for the new 100 pocket parks and 10,000 street trees? Who will be able to access this funding and how will they be able to do so?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. The answer is it is up to the boroughs and all the interested groups who love trees to apply to the £3.5 million fund that we have created. We are going to help put another 10,000 street trees across London.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you for that, Mr Mayor. Can I ask you to try to replicate the excitement that came as a direct result of the Help A London Park scheme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, that was good.

James Cleverly (AM): Getting grass roots – excuse the pun – Londoners to feel that they have a real input in this process I think will make a real difference.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Should we do another one?

James Cleverly (AM): I think something along those lines. Not necessarily an exact replica but something which really engages and enthuses Londoners. Undoubtedly a number of the local authorities all put bids in for this and have excellent plans, but this is a real opportunity to re-engage Londoners with the open natural spaces in London and give them a genuine say in how some of this money is spent.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, we have just put another £2 million to improve six existing parks in London building on the Help A Park programme. I remember it was a very, very popular campaign. Everybody had to decide which was the park they most loved and wanted to upgrade. We could certainly look at doing that again.

James Cleverly (AM): Will you also encourage the local authorities in the areas where these pocket parks are created to please not erect signs saying, “No ball games” because the whole point in having open spaces is that people of all ages can engage in activity and take full advantage of these spaces.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, in principle. I mean, I think you have to leave a bit of local flexibility there.

James Cleverly (AM): Finally will you encourage GLA Economics to do a little bit of number crunching and give us some idea of how many copies of the previous freely distributed Londoner newspaper could have been produced with the amount of money --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you for your brilliant memory, James campaign slogans. Yes, we will try and excavate that data. I cannot remember what it was.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you.

3968/2012 - Cycling Apology

Jenny Jones

In your response to questions 2450/2012 and 3510/2012 you have refused to apologise for wrongly blaming cyclists who have been killed or injured on London's roads through no fault of their own. Will you do so now?

Jenny Jones (AM): I am asking you basically if you will apologise for your comments in May at Question Time saying that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have had a good deal of toing and froing on this question, Jenny and I have struggled to set the record straight several times.

Jenny Jones (AM): Yes, you have set the record straight but you have not apologised.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Here is my undertaking to you now. It is nonetheless true that there are still substantial numbers of cyclists who do flout the --

Jenny Jones (AM): Six percent of when cyclists are involved in collisions is it the cyclists fault. 56% of the time it is the car, taxi, bus or lorry driver's fault.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Notwithstanding that, there are still a substantial number of cyclists on the streets of London who are disobeying the Highway Code, but if you want me to apologise for anything, Jenny, I will do a deal with you. I will apologise now if you will apologise for continually asserting that cycling is getting more dangerous when it is not.

Jenny Jones (AM): Mr Mayor, you know very well that your own statistics say that it is.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): So you will not apologise?

Jenny Jones (AM): You used a figure of 62% when in fact the real figure is 6%. What was in your head when you made that figure up? You were blaming the victims.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Will you apologise?

Jenny Jones (AM): I am asking the questions. It is for you to answer. What was in your head when you made up that figure of 62%?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I have said I was informed by somebody who claimed to be, or possibly was, making a documentary about cycling in London. It was a figure that I repeated in the heat of the moment either with you or someone else. I clarify that I am disappointed though that you have failed to make use of the opportunity to apologise for your own continual misleading of Londoners.

3944/2012 - Dalston Western Curve

Andrew Boff

Your plans for the Dalston Western Curve, expressed as a planning application by TfL, seem to contradict your desire to increase public open space. Could you explain why?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This relates to a development which you have campaigned for a long time which was a scheme initiated a while back. You ask about the open space and where is it going to be. I understand that the planning application is before Hackney. There are various places, not on that site obviously, that could be improved nearby and that is the best I am afraid that I can offer you on that.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. You are not just the planning authority on this but also the developer effectively with TfL being the land owner. Bearing in mind your very heartening and positive comments to my colleague James Cleverly about the aim of greening London, why is it that the only green space within this development is going to be contained in a gated development?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This was a scheme that was cooked up before I was Mayor. I will look into it. If I am indeed the planning authority, as you say, I had better be careful what I say because I may frustrate any ability that I have to vary it.

Andrew Boff (AM): I would be grateful if you would look at it. I would be grateful also if you could meet with local Dalston campaigners who want to explain their concerns about the drift of TfL schemes in Dalston. The last time TfL got involved in Dalston we ended up demolishing heritage buildings to erect the windswept Dalston Square and built a bus stop that cost £63 million and only one bus ever stops there. This is not a very good record for TfL. I would urge that we do not go through the same process again of these crazy schemes that TfL have come forward with for Dalston because I do not think TfL really cares about Dalston.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That I cannot accept.

Andrew Boff (AM): They care about their buses but they certainly do not care about their property, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know that you dislike these schemes. I think they both antedated my tenure.

Andrew Boff (AM): We have a chance for you to change them. You could put a comment, if you like, because the deadline for comments is tomorrow for the planning application.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The difficulty I have is that you are asking me both to arbitrate on it and to comment on it. I do not think I can do both but I will have a look at it.

Andrew Boff (AM): I would be very grateful if you could see the campaigners as well so that they can explain their frustration with what TfL is doing in Dalston.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you a campaigner? I will meet you.

Andrew Boff (AM): No, there are plenty and we will not fill your office but we can provide you with some of the campaigners, especially from Open Dalston.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK, and can this be genuinely improved in time, this scheme?

Andrew Boff (AM): Yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All right, let us have a look at it then, okay.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, sir.

3977/2012 - Cycling Revolution

Caroline Pidgeon

Will your new cycling plan ensure that a higher proportion of journeys in London are completed by bike than is already the case in Hull?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Caroline, we already have I am pleased to say. In places like Hackney and Richmond we are already up to Hull-like levels.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Hackney and Richmond you are saying more than 12% of journeys are cycled, which is great, but we want to see that across London. At the moment it is only 2%. In Hull they have installed 150 20-mile-an-hour zones, introduced wide cycle lanes, have 60 km of off road cycle paths. The key thing is they have seen a reduction in those killed or seriously injured of 90% which I think is something that we would welcome in this city as well. What measures are you going to put in place to ensure London's roads are safer for cyclists and that we start to see a really serious reduction in those killed and seriously injured on London's roads?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are seeing huge increases in the number of people cycling and we are very ambitious for this. We think there are about 4.3 million potentially cycleable trips made every day in London that are not cycled and we are keen to persuade those people who could cycle to get on their bikes. We are putting in more cycle super highways. We are putting in huge investment into improving 500 junctions and roundabouts to make them safer for pedestrians, cyclists and indeed for motor vehicles. Eventually we want to reach the same trajectory for cycling growth as you saw in Amsterdam and Copenhagen in the 1970s. We are very ambitious about cycling and hope to make some new announcements about it in the New Year.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): We welcome that ambition and I am sure you will have read our Transport Committee report on this and the evidence we have given you in that. Your target is that you only want to see us reach 5% of journeys cycled in 14 years by 2026. Hull is already at 12%. Mr Mayor, are you lacking ambition in that target?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have had an increase in cycling of 15% in one year and we think there is huge potential for more cycling in London. We have put in 60,000 Sheffield stands to lash your bike up to.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Your target needs to be more ambitious.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is difficult to know what else I could possibly do. Hands up who did not cycle --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): No, no, not on my time, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me answer. Here is my target: hands up all those who did not cycle to work this morning. I want to know. You all cycled in this morning, did you?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): We will stop the clock. Mr Mayor, please.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Did you cycle in? Did you? They did not cycle in! The lazy idle shiftless -- they did not cycle in. My target is to wind them up.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): You are wasting time. Do you want to apologise to Assembly Members for that comment? You have just called Assembly Members idle and --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry, I was not thinking of everybody here and I apologise.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Is there an Assembly Member that you think is that way?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I apologise.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): It has been a long morning.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It has been a long morning but my target is to create a London which every Assembly Member cycles to --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): That is not the question. Can we have a question from the Assembly Member?

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): My final question then is you talk the talk on cycling but actually it is going to be the delivery and real vision --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I talk the talk; I bike the bike!

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): What I want to know, Mr Mayor, is to transform London --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am the only one who gets on his bike.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): -- you need to put serious cash in. Will you agree to what the Transport Committee has recommended, that we should spend £145 million every year on cycling? Will you commit to that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and what I would like you to do is to support our programme for Cycle Superhighways, to acknowledge that we have massively increased cycling and to join my exaltations to the strangely inert members of the London Assembly who have not yet got on their bikes.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): On that note can I thank you, Mr Mayor, for your questions. There is absolutely nothing you can say or there can be a sensible exchange in 26 seconds. Thank you very much for your answers here this morning and season's greetings to you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much. Happy Christmas.