

<b>MDA No.</b>	1	2	7	9
----------------	---	---	---	---

Title: Planning and Regeneration Committee – Letter to the Mayor re London high streets

### **Executive Summary**

At the Planning and Regeneration Committee on 3 March 2021 the Committee discussed an End-of-term Review of High Streets and Tall Buildings and resolved:

*That authority be delegated to the Chair in consultation with the Deputy Chair to agree any output from the meeting.*

Following consultation with the Deputy Chair, the Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee approved a letter to the Mayor in regards to London’s high streets.

### **Decision**

That the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chair, agrees the letter to the Mayor in regards to London’s high streets, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

### **Assembly Member**

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

**Signature**



**Date**

16/3/21

**Printed Name**

Andrew Boff AM, Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee

## Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Notes:

1. The Lead Officer should prepare this form for signature by relevant Members of the Assembly to record any instance where the Member proposes to take action under a specific delegated authority. The purpose of the form is to record the advice received from officers, and the decision made.
2. **The 'background' section (below) should be used to include an indication as to whether the information contained in / referred to in this Form should be considered as exempt under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA), or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). If so, the specimen Annexe (attached below) should be used. If this form does deal with exempt information, you must submit both parts of this form for approval together.**

### Background and proposed next steps:

At the Planning and Regeneration Committee on 3 March 2021 the Committee discussed an End-of-term Review of High Streets and Tall Buildings and resolved:

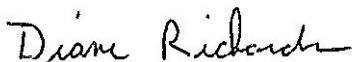
*That authority be delegated to the Chair in consultation with the Deputy Chair to agree any output from the meeting.*

Following consultation with the Deputy Chair, the Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee approved a letter to the Mayor in regards to London's high streets.

The terms of reference for this meeting were approved by the Chair under delegated authority. Officers confirm that the letter and its recommendations fall within these terms of reference.

### Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision

Signed by Committee Services



Date 16/3/21

Print Name: Diane Richards

Tel: 07925 353 478

### Financial implications

**NOT REQUIRED**

Signed by Finance

N/A

Date .....

Print Name

N/A

Tel: .....

### Legal implications

The Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signed by Legal



Date 16/3/21

Print Name

Emma Strain, Monitoring Officer

Tel:

X 4399

Additional information should be provided supported by background papers. These could include for example the business case, a project report or the results of procurement evaluation.

**Supporting detail/List of Consultees:**

Nicky Gavron AM (Deputy Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee)

**Public Access to Information**

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

**Part 1 – Deferral**

**Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? No**

Until what date: (a date is required if deferring)

**Part 2 – Sensitive information**

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

**Is there a part 2 form - No**

**Lead Officer/Author**

Signed



Date: 16.3.21

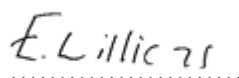
Print Name

**Steph Griffiths**

Tel: x1328

Job Title

Countersigned by  
Director



Date: 16.3.21

Print Name

**Ed Williams**

Tel: x4399

**City Hall**

The Queen's Walk

More London

London SE1 2AA

Tel: 020 7983 4000

[www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk)

# LONDON ASSEMBLY



**Andrew Boff AM**  
**Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee**

Sadiq Khan  
Mayor of London  
(Sent by email)

16 March 2021

**Re: High streets**

Dear Sadiq,

I am writing to you in my position as Chair, on behalf of the London Assembly's cross-party Planning & Regeneration Committee with regard to your recovery plan for London's high streets and the risks posed by the proposed Class E permitted development rights (PDR).

The Committee has long been interested in the future of high streets. They are vital to the liveability of London's neighbourhoods, serve diverse communities and are essential for a thriving economy. Even before the pandemic, high street businesses were at a risk from stressors including a rise in online shopping and the costs involved with maintaining physical premises. Many retail shops and other high street facilities are simply not surviving, and the impacts of the pandemic are now compounding this decline. For example, the High Streets Taskforce found that, in England, high street footfall fell dramatically (89.86 per cent) during the first lockdown.<sup>1</sup> However, the pandemic has also highlighted the importance of high streets, with district and local high streets providing essential services during the pandemic. Whilst the situation is still in flux, it might be expected that these local areas continue to have increased importance if people continue spending more time closer to home in future.

---

<sup>1</sup> High Streets Taskforce [2020 Footfall report](#)

On 3 March 2021, the Committee heard testimonies from expert guests:

- Jules Pipe CBE, Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills;
- Rob McNicol, London Plan Manager, GLA;
- Michael Bach, Chair, Planning and Transport Committee, London Forum of Amenity & Civic Societies;
- Ziona Strelitz, Founder Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments ;
- Nick Plumb, Policy Manager, Power to Change Trust; and
- Simon Quin, Co-Chair of the Institute of Place Management and Executive Director of the High Streets Task Force.

We were pleased to hear from Deputy Mayor Jules Pipe CBE about the GLA's adaptive strategies work and the high streets recovery mission, and the goal to deliver enhanced public spaces and exciting new uses for underused high street buildings in every borough by 2025. We agree that high streets are more than retail centres for Londoners; the social and wellbeing aspects are also critical. We will be interested to follow the progress on this mission, and what can be done in the short-term, specifically once London opens after this lockdown. High street businesses have been through an extraordinary period of uncertainty, and will be looking for support and advice to navigate the next steps toward recovering from the pandemic. The Economy Committee has also been exploring wider options for high street recovery; members suggest that your mission should be backed by a London High Streets Board which would allow for regular consultation to analyse short and long-term threats, as well as immediate remedies for high street survival. A diverse, representative board would be key in making sure that even small businesses can adapt.

The Deputy Mayor also elaborated on the work that the GLA is doing with boroughs and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to improve data collection on the current footfall on high streets across London, as part of your High Streets Data Partnership. We hope you will share the results of this project with Londoners in the coming months. In the meantime, we are writing to provide evidence from our investigation, which we believe could further build on the work of the recovery mission.

We heard from Simon Quin, Executive Director of the High Streets taskforce which was commissioned by the Government in 2019 and is based on Scotland's Town Partnerships - an agency set up by the Scottish Government. The idea of the of high streets task force is *"an alliance of place making experts working to redefine the high street"*<sup>2</sup>, which produces research and provides guidance on high streets and town centres. We heard in this committee meeting that the high-street task force has produced a 'transformation route map' which is a four-stage route map for strategic renewal. The stages are: Repositioning, Rebranding, Reinventing and Restructuring. The high-street task force also can provide experts for those local authorities with highstreets that have really been struggling. We were also told about the 25 top priorities<sup>3</sup> for vitality and viability in our high streets and town centres. These frameworks can help encourage healthy, vibrant and forward-looking high streets and town centres.

---

<sup>2</sup> High Street Task Force [Who are the Task Force](#)

<sup>3</sup> High Street Task Force [High Streets Task Force Frameworks](#)

Coming up with innovative and original ways to improve the high-street experience might be key to saving it. Nick Plumb told us about the value of community-led initiatives, including community businesses. Nick highlighted Peckham Vision as an example; a residents-led citizens' association of individuals who live, work and run businesses in Peckham, which exists "to develop an integrated approach to Peckham town centre".<sup>4</sup> This provides local stakeholders the opportunity to steer strategic decision making for their local centres and might prove a unique and positive example in a post-pandemic situation and for your recovery mission. As well as this, they act as a high street destination, encouraging increased footfall. Nick also mentioned the Fonthill Road development in Finsbury: "in part led by the local Council, which has leases on a number of shopfronts, which it then lets to providers that have a community angle to them, which in turn provide affordable workspaces for local micro-enterprises."

We also discussed Community Improvement Districts (CID), "a new form of local governance to provide opportunities for community stakeholders to participate in operational and strategic decision-making for their neighbourhoods".<sup>5</sup> These should be "non-political, democratic and inclusive, concerned with the economic, social and environmental development of neighbourhoods, open to residents, businesses and other local stakeholders, including the local authority; and designed to complement other mechanisms" such as Businesses Improvement Districts.<sup>6</sup> Nick told us about legislation in Scotland enabling greater community involvement in high streets, such as the Community Empowerment Act which promotes greater community involvement at the local level. Landlords also play a crucial role by agreeing progressive leasing models that encourage community involvement.

Nick stated that community businesses are less common in London than the rest of the country, with one of the barriers being transparency of ownership on the high street. A community business might have a great idea, but they need to know who to contact to make their ideas a reality. The Committee encourages you to look into how you can assist in reducing barriers for community-led initiatives.

Another promising idea is the introduction of more localised, community-owned workspace and 'third place working'. During the first lockdown over half of Londoners (57.2 per cent) did some form of work from home, and after a limited return to offices over the summer, by January 2021, 45 per cent of adults were working from home again across the country.<sup>7</sup> We heard from Ziona Strelitz that even before the pandemic, many people wanted to work away from their employers but not in their homes.<sup>8</sup> Nick Plumb further highlighted the role of community business in this idea:

*"Many community businesses already host shared workspace. Many of them in the past will have had meeting rooms and more permanent office space that they leased to other small*

---

<sup>4</sup> Transcript 3 March 2021

<sup>5</sup> Nick Plumb, Transcript 3 March 2021

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> [UK sees surge in empty shops and offices amid pandemic – RICS](#), Reuters, 28 January 2021 Reuters, 28 January 2021

<sup>8</sup> Transcript 3 March 2021

*businesses to act as real community hubs. Some of the community businesses we have spoken to have talked about how they can maybe repurpose some of that space to shared workspace in the local place, which, again, could be supported by the GLA's Workspace Accreditation Scheme to ensure that the shared workspace we do have really has that community-led angle to it."*

Finally, there was some consensus that innovative mixed-uses can provide and offer "social multiplier effects".<sup>9</sup> Ziona presented an example that even if we enter a Student Union for one reason, we may be presented with other things that allow us to stay in that place a little longer. "There is now increasing evidence from the world of neuroscience about how being able to dip into micro contexts, even for a limited exposure, is so important to people's wellbeing".<sup>10</sup>

We encourage you to take some of these ideas forward in the work you are doing under your recovery mission. We are pleased to see that concepts of community interest and innovation, as well as near-to-home working, already feature in the opportunities for this mission.<sup>11</sup> The Committee will watch with interest over the coming months, as London emerges from the pandemic and your recovery mission is put into action, to see how these principles operate in practice.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Now that the country's reopening roadmap has been announced, the Mayor should convene a roundtable to meet with representatives working on innovative approaches to the high streets.
2. The Mayor should put community-led innovation at the heart of the high streets recovery mission. As well as actively supporting community-led initiatives, resource should also be directed to identifying and working to reduce any barriers.

#### **Permitted Development Rights (PDR)**

You will be aware of the Committee's long-standing concerns that various expansions of PDR are bypassing the planning system and that conversions to residential uses without planning oversight risk undermining the recovery of high streets. Whilst we recognise the need for new homes and flexibility in planning, we know you will share our concern that the newly proposed Class E PDR will negatively affect the economy of local high streets and neighbourhood centres. We expressed our concerns in our response to the consultation on the proposed Class E PDR.<sup>12</sup> We are also in the process of submitting a response to the new consultation which worryingly seeks to reduce the operation of Article 4 directions, which currently provide local authorities with an option for limiting existing PDRs.<sup>13</sup>

We were encouraged to hear from guests at our Committee meeting that there was a great deal of consensus amongst participants about the unintended consequences of PDR, and shared concerns

---

<sup>9</sup> Ziona Strelitz, Transcript 3 March 2021

<sup>10</sup> Transcript 3 March 2021

<sup>11</sup> London.gov.uk [High Streets recovery](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Planning & Regeneration Committee](#), 28 January 2021

<sup>13</sup> [National Planning Policy Framework and National Model Design Code: consultation proposals](#), 8 February 2021

about the impact expansions of PDR would have on post-pandemic recovery of the high street. Michael Bach clearly articulated many of the Committee's concerns:

*"[Local centres] are extremely vulnerable to change of use because the ground-floor shops could easily be turned into flats... It is going to undermine our concerns about local communities and whether neighbourhoods will have the facilities they need in the future. A successful PDR policy could spell the death of those local centres."*

*"The one thing you have to remember is that a move to housing is a one-way trip. Once you have stripped it out, you have reduced the attraction of that centre. Having odd housing units - pepper-potting, if you like - reduces the attractiveness, the vitality, the footfall and the expenditure. It does not, as the Government claims, support those town centres. Yes, there will be places that you can lose shops but it ought to be done in a more controlled way rather than a blanket across-the-board relaxation."*

We welcome the efforts you have made to raise your concerns and we urge you to continue to advocate to the Government not to adopt the newly proposed Class E PDR and the amendments to Article 4 directions.

#### **Recommendation**

3. The Committee reiterates the concerns it has laid out previously in the response to the consultation on the proposed Class E PDR, specifically those that would impact on the economy of the high street. The Mayor should continue to strongly advocate to Government not to adopt the newly proposed Class E PDR and the amendments to Article 4 directions.

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by 30 June 2021. Please address your response to Stephanie Griffiths, Senior Policy Adviser, at [Stephanie.Griffiths@london.gov.uk](mailto:Stephanie.Griffiths@london.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,



**Andrew Boff AM**  
**Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee**