

London Assembly Planning Committee
Combined Evidence Received

Investigation: The Future of London's Town Centres

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London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Officer Response from London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to the London Assembly Planning Committee's consultation on the 'Proposed Review of the Future of London's Town Centres'.

1. What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

The majority of centres in Richmond upon Thames are relatively buoyant compared to the national and regional average. There are also limited opportunities to provide additional retail floorspace in town centres. Although national trends might suggest an approach of greater diversification of use in town centres, **it should be recognised in the forthcoming SPG that different approaches will be necessary reflecting the characteristics of individual town centres.**

Encouragement for **temporary use** would ideally be seen as mainstream and positive. We are testing whether incentivising use of temporary shops for pop-up and potentially permanent uses works. We're providing a small grant scheme to support those that may consider taking on an empty shop temporarily. The **challenge remains the engagement of landlords and their perception of pop-up retail, along with the role of agents as 'gatekeepers' to landlords.** We're also making explicit connections between our tourism and cultural strategies. This will strengthen the role of cultural events in supporting town centres.

Other suggestions include:

- Flexible policies for upper floors.
- Testing whether health and other 'services' such as new forms of educational use (short period tutoring) will work in town centre locations, in secondary frontages and other town centre locations.
- Consider whether Council and other "public" services could be persuaded to locate in town centres any uses which will increase footfall.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

A key point is the **ability of town centres to compete on a level playing field**, or at least one that is not skewed by policies. Whilst it is recognised that the GLA's town centre network should be flexible, allowing for growth and managed decline, **consideration should be given to the impacts on surrounding centres of supporting very large scale town centre development in metropolitan centres** in particular. For example, the gravitational pull of Kingston, if developed too far, could have consequences for other centres that would exacerbate the impact of structural changes taking place.

Town centres can compete because they offer more than a limited number of multiple retail stores, but are a destination for a day out, having a variety of shopping, places to eat and drink, museums, parks and events to visit, things to do etc This multi-functional use is their strength. The social and community benefits of a lively local centre are also very important – even with internet shopping there is still a role for a centre, particularly a local one, as a meeting place, to mitigate against social isolation

Other ideas that boroughs should be supported to promote include:

- Varying **opening hours** so that trading times match higher footfall times. For instance, shops are often closed when commuters are returning home through high streets.
- Trialling of libraries and other **public services** being delivered from high streets.
- Local promotional activities are important but our own resources can only go so far.
- Sensitivity to local desires and needs in relation to the **application of transport policy**. Sometimes local areas are best placed to understand what will work for their communities and flexibility should be considered.

Support could be through London-wide awareness-raising which could raise key messages to a higher profile than we can individually.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

Effective transport and parking policies that take account of how people live their lives. Do we take enough account of how other countries succeed with this? For instance, to reduce traffic, we could follow the example of the Netherlands in their accommodation and promotion of cycling – much of London is flat. Giving over more space to cycle parking; providing financial incentives to use your own bike and addressing dangerous junction design are examples. Innovative parking schemes have a strong role – such as our own free residents parking initiative for first half hour of parking. Recent research also highlights the need for retailers to understand the actual significance of parking on their bottom line – this being less important than many other factors in relation to town centre vitality.

Maintaining the right mix of shopping is critical. However, we should be able to respond to local knowledge and local demands.

The point about encouraging cultural events and markets is also relevant here, as is encouraging later opening hours where there is evidence that centres are still busy at times outside of traditional 'office hours'.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

More **powers to force property owners to maintain an attractive shop front** and forecourt, not just a safe one. The impact of an uncared for unit can impact the whole high street, conversely a good environment can encourage people to visit their centre. This could also be encouraged by a London wide campaign, possibly supported by grants.

In this context, it would also be good to **review the policies of insurance** companies on empty units in terms of what criteria they enforce as part of their cover – e.g. some insist on unattractive whitewashed windows !

Could there be a **London wide initiative** to encourage landowners to let their premises on a temporary basis?

Provision of support and **funding for the introduction of BIDs** where necessary so that local businesses communities can be empowered.

Support more mixed activities which could **encourage training alongside retail** and catering, for example – following the Jamie Oliver type model – bringing more young people into the centres.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

Policies also need to be applied flexibly on a site by site basis. Policies in the borough have supported town centres and furthered the overall aim of the LDF's retail strategy of

providing top-up shopping within 400 metres of most residents homes. They have largely been successful with centres in the borough being relatively buoyant. It is important to get the balance of uses right in town centres so that retailing is protected where needed and diversification encouraged to an appropriate level. The level of designated frontages can be tailored to each centre, bearing in mind the need for retail growth set out in retail capacity studies.

Securing RSL's interest in converting underused commercial property, such as that above shops, is a challenge. The available space may be perceived as unsuitable for a 'lifetime home'. Is there the opportunity to provide financial incentives to help RSL's take on and convert such premises?

Financial incentives for landlords to consider alternative uses on upper floors could also help.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

Planning powers can be limited in practice. Could the CPO procedures be streamlined to make it easier and quicker to assemble smaller sites in multiple ownership? The funding of such developments can also be an issue.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

The principles of existing policy are already supportive of town centres. Some suggestions include:

☐ Ensure sufficient flexibility of approach so that local authorities and local town centre managers and groups can develop centres locally.

☐ It is important to **retain the firm line on out of centre development**. There is some evidence that discount stores will favour an out-of-centre position, which could impact on district centres which struggle to attract a quality anchor. In addition, it is likely that click & collect will grow, meaning that car parking could be even more of a premium to retailers. Here, out of centre developments are often seen as giving an advantage.

- Provide examples of good practice , perhaps introduce an officer group to specifically consider town centres

☐ **Encourage policies which can be specific to use classes, or even allow for division of use classes** where justified. An example might be where an authority wishes to specifically protect key shops and services.

☐ Ensure that regional policies are produced using up-to-date quantitative assessments.

☐ Perhaps foster **more collaboration rather than competition** between centres of different sizes by in the same area by, for example, attractive transport fare policies linking centres and other types of incentives for mutual benefit?

TC002_RTPI vers 070113

Royal Town Planning Institute

Sent to: Alexandra.beer@london.gov.uk

7 January 2013

Dear Alexandra,

Re. Future of London's town centres – call for evidence

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above call for evidence. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the largest professional institute for planners in Europe, representing over 23,000 spatial planners. The Institute seeks to advance the science and art of spatial planning for the benefit of the public. As well as promoting spatial planning, the RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, training and development.

The Institute supports the proposed review, particularly the requirement for diversification of London's town centres, not just in terms of the need for a mix of retail outlets, but rather through the provision of well located public services, entertainment and culture.

The RTPI supports the recognition that town centres are being given at this time most notably in the support that the Westminster government has given to them through the Portas Review¹ into the future of Britain's high streets. However, the Portas analysis was heavily based in the retail aspects of high streets, and neglected the role that other sectors can play in the regeneration of our high streets.

The Institute fully concurs with the viewpoint cited in the consultation document from the Outer London Commission, stating that it is town centres need to diversify their offer and become less dependent on retail if they are to survive. In particular, we support their recommendation that town centres should look to be renewed via the development of what the commission terms 'lifetime neighbourhoods' – eg that town centres become the 'main locations for delivery of public as well as private services e.g. education, health, civic,

¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) *The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets* BIS: London

voluntary and reinvent these e.g. through 'one-stop shops' or libraries as resources for local businesses as well as residents.'²

Encouraging public services to relocate to town and district centres is a positive step for a number of reasons in the drive to reducing health inequalities and promoting regeneration of a town centre. This is not just an issue for the public sector, but also the private and voluntary sectors, who are as equally likely to be providers of such services. Firstly, these areas are in many cases already the focal point for a well-serviced local public transport network. By not placing services in out of town areas which are heavily dependent on a car being the mode of travel, providers would be increasing the accessibility of their services to the whole population. The Marmot review³ into health inequalities in England, highlighted that car dependency was a greater issue for those in lower-income groups, who wouldn't have access to, or means to upkeep, such a mode of travel, and would be dependent on public transport or active travel (e.g. walking and cycling). It was also highlighted that better public transport has been shown to result in significant changes in travel patterns and improving health. In addition, wider use of public transport and well-planned active travel routes will not only help to reduce health inequalities, but also benefit the wider sustainability agenda.

Secondly, good provision of well-located public services will have a positive economic effect on a community. In fact, taking healthcare provision as an example, The Marmot Review states that 'The health sector can directly reduce poverty and unemployment by harnessing the NHS's purchasing power and position as a major employer. The premise on which this initiative is built is the recognition that the NHS and the public sector have tremendous economic weight. If this purchasing power were harnessed to support local businesses in the most hard-pressed communities, then the benefits might extend to greater social inclusion and equity, as well as improving the health of the community served.'⁴ In the system of health service commissioning, this may need some further nuancing, and dialogue across the public and private sectors to enable such opportunities to exist, but there is no doubt that employment opportunities are the key factors behind higher health inequalities of an area.

Finally, there is wider evidence to suggest that good planning for public services with wider community involvement has positive effects on mental health and wellbeing of individuals, as well as promoting community cohesion. In this respect, the Institute welcomes the emphasis placed upon on the importance of neighbourhood involvement as part of the revitalisation and reshaping process. It has been noted by the Healthy Urban Development Unit, based in London, who have advised that 'opportunities for the community to participate in the planning of such services [public services] has the potential not only for positive effects on mental health and wellbeing but also can lead to greater community cohesion.' Whilst these are outcomes which are difficult to quantify, the Department for Communities and Local

2 The Outer London Commission (2012) *Second Report* Available at <http://www.london.gov.uk/olc/docs/OLC-Second-report-Nov2012.pdf>

3 UCL Institute of Health Inequality (2010) *Fair society, healthy lives* Available at <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review>

4 The Marmot Review (2010) Page 155.

Government has stated that the most positive estimate for crime reduction in the UK as a whole due to increased community cohesion stands at £530 million⁵.

In order to fully maximise these opportunities, it is important for a town centre to be an attractive place to visit, and the Institute supports the work of the Mayor's Outer London £50m fund to 'rejuvenate town centres through the improvement of retail, leisure, culture and arts provision'⁶ as a welcome step in revitalising our town centres. By going further to recognise the important part that public services could play in both revitalising town centres and reducing health inequalities in an area, the remit described by the Outer London Fund would echo the Marmot Review's⁷ call to fully integrate healthcare policy with transport, housing and environmental policy.

Much of what is being described above is already taking place in measures taken by local planning authorities. These bodies are bound by the National Planning Policy Framework to 'take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs' when formulating their Local Plans. It is vital that any changes in the planning of public services, be they managed by the public, private or voluntary sector, take into account the ongoing work that is being taken through these processes, and look to actively work with planning authorities to plan for the economic regeneration of a local community.

In terms of entertainment and culture at the heart of a vibrant town centre, the Institute would draw your attention to the research undertaken by economic research consultants TBR and MAKE⁸ regarding the value and reach of the UK's evening and night-time economy. The research highlights that this aspect of the economy is often overlooked, however it is considered a crucial driver for tourism, leisure and business growth, and has an estimated potential worth of £66bn to UK plc.⁹ By creating a safe and vibrant night-time economy, councils can also help to reduce crime in their local centres – or, perhaps more importantly, the perception of crime in an area.

Finally, we consider that a review should also consider the challenges brought about as a result of new patterns of retail shopping, including the location and scale of new retail development, i.e. large inner-urban shopping centres, versus the 'traditional' high street, also how the internet is not only a threat to traditional shopping units, but also an opportunity, i.e. there is much happening in using the internet to 'enhance' the bricks and mortar experience, for e.g. through 'twitter' mirrors in changing rooms and other links to social networking sites.

[]

Registered charity number 262865 Scottish registered charity number SC 037841

Yours faithfully

(unsigned email copy)

Marie-Louise Gray

Networks Manager

⁵ Department of Communities and Local Government (2009) *The Economic Case for Cohesion* DCLG: London

⁶ London Assembly (2012) *Proposed review of the future of London's town centres* available at:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/05a%20Final%20town%20centres%20scoping%20271112%20v4.pdf> London: London Assembly

- 7 UCL Institute of Health Inequality (2010) *Fair society, healthy lives* Available at <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review>
- 8 <http://www.tbr.co.uk/pages/tbr-observatory/night-time-economy.php>
- 9 *ibid*

TC003_Future Town Centres Letter

Planning Aid for London

Ms. Nicky Gavron AM
City Hall
The Queens Walk
London SE1 2AA

7th January 2013

Dear Ms. Gavron AM,

FUTURE OF LONDON'S TOWN CENTRES

Thank you for your letter dated 22 November regarding the review of the future of London's town centres. Below we provide our comments relating to the seven questions posed.

1. What new ideas and existing best practice could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres.

Lots of good ideas have come forward in recent years. These include promoting niche retailers (eg. Tower Hamlets' Quirky Shopping Guide), providing loyalty cards for independents (eg. the Wedge Card) encouraging pop-up shops (eg Sydenham, Kirkdale & Forest Hill). Good town centre management, with marketing and events, public realm improvements, transport improvements and business advice has helped many centres. Street markets have been improved or revived in many areas in recent years. Some town centres have become Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), with businesses paying an additional levy which is then used for projects and services to benefit the trading environment.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

We point to the success factors set out in the Portas Review (December 2011) at p42 in relation to small shopkeepers:

- Experience – a three dimensional brand experience is by far the best way to engage with customers and build loyalty = a place I feel so happy to be in that it's a given I'll buy something.
- Service – from connecting with, really knowing and caring for your customers, to have in-depth knowledge that guides and advises them.
- Specialism – one thing most of us understand is the value of a real expert. Most of the better examples of new British retailing are guided by the hand of a specialist in one form or another. Town centres, especially the smaller ones, need to diversify to create destinations. For example cafes and restaurants can keep people in centres longer and niche shops create places which people want to visit. Councils can help by providing town centre management, marketing and business advice and viewing change of use favourably where appropriate.

In our view it is important to note that a “successful” town centre is not necessarily one with upmarket shops and services. Local shops providing value for money products for people on lower incomes are vital and are often thriving just as much as more expensive, specialist shops.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

Access by public transport is important. It is also important to consider parking because traditional town centres are often competing with shopping malls or supermarkets where there is free parking. However in our experience perception of lack of parking and high charges do not always match the reality. So Councils need to make people aware of parking locations and provide good signage.

Good pedestrian access to town centres is vital because they provide local shops and services for people who do not own cars and are less mobile, including the elderly and parents of young children. Improvements to the public realm, pedestrian connections and safe road crossings are therefore important.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

A key issue is control it can be difficult to achieve change when a centre is in multiple ownerships. Where local Councils own town centre property they are in a good position to plan for regeneration. Where there is multiple-ownership, they must be prepared to work with and negotiate with local landowners. Some Councils are negotiating with developers of new supermarkets/shopping malls for the provision of some smaller units which can be occupied by local independents (eg. Wards Corner, Haringey). This is in line with London Plan Policy 4.9. Public realm improvements, marketing and good town centre management can raise the profile of town centres and encourage more businesses to move there.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

Existing planning policies promote vitality and viability by requiring proposals for new edge or out of centre developments to meet the sequential and impact tests. These tests are vital in protecting town centres. However planning policies could be more proactive in identifying town centres for improvement and stating what measures will be undertaken.

Londoners can be encouraged to live in town centres by providing good quality housing schemes, a good quality public realm, safe streets and assurances that residents’ amenity is important.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

Where they are landowners, Councils have the ability to play an active part in the ownership and control of town centres and can drive regeneration schemes.

As planning authorities they identify town centre frontages/boundaries and policies regarding the sequential and impact tests, and usage. Where development is permitted they can attach planning

conditions to, for example, control the comparison/convenience split of new development or limit unit sizes (to encourage independents and prevent monopoly).

Some Councils use planning obligations to require developers of supermarkets/shopping malls to provide some smaller town centre units which can be occupied by independents, or to pay towards centre improvements.

As sponsors of town centre management Councils have an ongoing role in funding the various management initiatives and events, marketing and business support.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging town Centres SPG best support town centres?

The London Plan defines a network of town centres and provides guidance for local authorities, which is important. The SPG could highlight best practice and ideas for good town centre management.

Nancy Astley - Director

TC004_Renaishi response

Renaishi

PROPOSED REVIEW OF THE FUTURE OF LONDONS TOWN CENTRES – A CONTRIBUTION BY RENAISHI

The future of London's town centres – a contribution by Renaishi

This short paper offers some thoughts to the London Assembly's Planning Committee on the future of London's town centres. It is based on Renaishi's experience (current and historical) of working in urban neighbourhoods and town centres, primarily in London but also elsewhere in England.

Big Local is one current programme we are involved in that has relevance to this town centre discussion. Led by Local Trust, this BIG Lottery funded programme is seeing 150 local areas around the country each receive £1m to be invested into local community development and regeneration priorities as determined and governed by local resident-led partnerships. The investment is long-term (over 10 years) and the aim is to build social capital and engender selfsufficiency

(rather than focusing on grants). There is a long way to go on the programme which will run to beyond 2023, but the approach is putting voluntary resident-led partnerships in the driving seat of local communities – working in partnership with statutory agencies.

Further details of Renaishi's relevant experience are at the end of this paper.

Proposed review of the future of London's town centres

The transcript of the Planning Committee meeting of December 11 2012 included a number of interesting and important observations, messages and ideas on the future of London's town centres. This included discussion on issues of design, the wider economy, accessibility, marketing and issues of governance, to name but a few. Renaishi has a significant track record of working

with town centres and addressing these issues and more, at both strategic and operational levels. However for the purposes of this short paper and of immediate interest to Renaishi were the observations of the wider functions that town centres provide beyond core retailing purposes (Ziona Strelitz), including providing a place for social contact (John Burton) and being a place to balance leisure and social services (William McKee).

This paper focuses on three main points to stimulate debate, drawing primarily on our current work on Big Local, but nevertheless drawing on our wider experience of local economic and social

regeneration. We focus on the role of residents in shaping the future of town centres. Our discussion points are also by their very nature most valid for smaller town centres where mixed use (and mixed tenancy) is most prevalent.

1. The role of local residents

Firstly, we agree with James Miller that town centres need to be multi-functional spaces with mixed-use developments where people both live and work. This is echoed by the thoughts of Malcolm Fraser in his current review of Scottish town centres who emphasizes the need to bring residents back to the high street¹. In order to achieve this, the discussion moves onto issues of

accountability and governance, and more specifically, as discussed by Julian Dobson, with the challenge to humanize town centres by creating local, community ownership that people are proud of (James Miller). We would therefore like to raise the importance of local residents as key agents in driving the future of town centres. To address specific issues discussed by the panel by doing this the Big Local is creating community ownership and encouraging local pride in placemaking by beginning with people who live in local places.

2. Local leadership and local solutions

Secondly, the issue of leadership was discussed initially by Henrietta Green – specifically as people with a local vision are needed to drive through local change. The approach of Big Local is to use the drive of Big Local reps (community development professionals) to help determine local visions and foster leadership through engaging, facilitating and inspiring local people (residents and otherwise) to make a difference in their local community. Long-term they will make the decisions and lead the programme. Additionally, as highlighted by Sir Terry Farrell, all places are essentially different and consequently each area (in Big Local) or each town centre in London

1 <http://www.cles.org.uk/features/taking-town-centres-beyond-retail/>

should have a locally defined unique approach to its defining and delivering its future. A recent article in New Start2 gives some ideas from the Scottish town centre taskforce that could inspire individual local solutions to London's local town centres.

3. Big Society and Localism

Big Local (and Local Trust) is apolitical. However the programme sits within BIG Lottery's People

Powered Change programme that aims to use the talents and passions of local people to drive local change. This can be considered close to the Big Society and Localism agenda as discussed

by Tony Travers (LSE) and others in Engaging London's Communities³, who perhaps rightly questioned the capacity of local and voluntary organizations to take a leading role in place shaping – specifically delivering local services.

To counter this position (but not debate at length), the Big Local approach may offer some ideas on how town centres could be driven strategically and indeed operationally by local people. As discussed by Travers, the ideas around Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) as a variation of BIDs adds further ideas as to how this could be organized practically.

Thoughts for the Planning Committee

What new ideas and existing best practice could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

- ☐ Find a valuable role for local residents as architects of their local communities – both strategically and operationally – such as through small town teams
- ☐ Look at the approach of Big Local and or CIDs to inspire some alternative methods of delivering place-making

What strategies for regeneration of town centre and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity?

- ☐ By focusing on the local consumer (local residents), town centres will find a market based on local geography and convenience (irrespective of public transport links)
- ☐ Putting residents in control (and utilizing the voluntary and community sector) will engender local pride and accountability for local town centre performance

How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

- ☐ Create locally distinctive places and features
- ☐ Encourage local ownership and accountability

About Renaisi

Renaisi is a leading social enterprise and regeneration agency based in East London. Since we began in 1998, we have successfully developed and delivered social and economic regeneration

programmes and projects for a wide range of organisations including central and local government, public sector agencies, voluntary and community sector organisations and private clients across London and the South East. We are proud to have acquired the reputation of being

experts in the field of urban regeneration and renewal, providing the specialist skills and services

that are required to help deliver successful, sustainable and cohesive communities.

Our relevant experience ranges from delivering area-based regeneration programmes (such as the £52m EC1 NDC programme in South Islington, £33m Tower Hamlets WNF and numerous multimillion SRB programmes in Hackney and elsewhere), to local economic strategy development (including LEAs, town centre strategies and community visioning exercises), for example in Lambeth, Tower Hamlets and Croydon respectively.

For more information see the Renaisi website at www.renaisi.com or visit that of Local Trust at www.localtrust.org.uk for detailed information on Big Local. Alternatively please contact Matt Davies, Senior Consultant,[]

2 <http://www.cles.org.uk/yourblogs/imagining-the-town-centres-of-the-future/>

3 'Engaging London's Communities: the Big Society and Localism', Tony Travers, LSE for London

Councils and the City of London Corporation, October 2011.

TC005_RBKC

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

In response to the proposed review of the future of London's Town Centres I would like to make the following comments on behalf of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Background

In giving emphasis to outer London this review should not lose sight of inner London. Parts of Central London are very different from outer London and different issues apply.

Visitors to London, whether from the UK or overseas, are a very important component of central London's economy so the rise of supermarkets, internet sales and m-commerce are less significant. We know that shopping is an important part of why people visit London and the main reason people visit this borough. Research has shown Harrods is this borough's biggest tourist destination, followed by boutiques and restaurants generally and Portobello Road is the second named destination.

Empty shops are less of an issue in the Higher Order Centres of inner London. Shops do become vacant but generally in this borough they do not remain vacant for long, unless there is a specific reason.

Issues for consideration should include the importance of tourism in central London and what can be done to enhance tourist's experience of shopping in London.

Data and information

- What new ideas and existing best practice could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres in the future?

RBKC's innovative mobile phone friendly shopping web pages and detailed shopping maps www.rbkc.gov.uk/visit (based on the same design principles as Legible London signage) could be rolled across central London to provide seamless shopping guidance for visitors via the internet, mobile phone and posters at underground stations.

In Kensington High Street there is an innovative business centre offering a street facing cafe on the ground floor, serviced offices, single person office pods and virtual offices, lounges, a meeting room and a screening room on upper floors, lockers, concierge service and chauffeur drive service. <http://www.dryland.com/>

- How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail? Do they need a greater emphasis on providing for local communities?

RBKC has established City Living Local Life <http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/subsites/citylivinglocallife.aspx> to support people to develop practical

solutions that make their area a better place to live. This allows people to submit ideas, apply for funding and post news and information on a community webpage.

The major museums should be encouraged to develop touring pop up collections to make use of short term shop vacancies. This would promote the museum's main collections and help them to reach a wider audience. For example a pop up dinosaur exhibition could be a major draw for any high street.

- How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres?

This Council endorsed the current "Town Centre First" approach to new retail development articulated within the current London Plan and within the NPPF. This is seen as being essential for any approach which seeks to enhance the viability of centres, be these in central or outer London.

The Council endorses approaches to encourage diversity. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that the retail function of a centre is protected. In Kensington and Chelsea shops remain the lifeblood of our centres, and are the key attractors of visitors. Diversity should not be at the expense of viable retail floorspace. It should complement it.

Planning policy cannot protect the unique and special retail characteristics of places like the antiques arcades of Portobello Road which are in danger of being replaced by mainstream retailers that can afford higher rents.

Regards

Jo Hammond
Neighbourhood Planning Team Leader

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Planning and Borough Development, Policy and Design

TC006 Peter Brett Associates

Peter Brett Associates

Response from Peter Brett Associates

9th January 2013

Dear Ms Beer

I refer to your invitation with various questions set out in your letter of 22nd November. We are a major development and infrastructure consultancy, which now incorporates Roger Tym & Partners, planners and economists. We advised GLA on small shops policy for inclusion in the London Plan and act for many local authorities in London on retail policy and the future of their town centres.

In response to your invitation, mainly questions 4 and 6, I set out below a proposal for what we have called Town Centre Investment Management; we are developing this concept and will let you have fuller details once it is a completed paper. This proposal focusses on a way of securing new investment by overcoming one of the greatest constraints on town centre change – fragmented ownership. We would be happy to address the committee on its potential.

In relation to the role of the Mayor, we would point out that, in addition to his planning and funding powers, the Mayor needs to integrate:

1. Transport policy and investment, as many centres' performance is damaged by through traffic (eg Wandsworth and Catford); and/or that often new transport investment decisions currently have possibly insufficient regard to the performance benefits to town centres; and
2. The activities of Design for London, who seem to have some odd ideas about town centres (eg that town centres do not include shopping centres within them). We have heard this secondhand from local authority clients.

yours

John Parmiter

John Parmiter FRICS FRSA MRTPI

Partner

For and on behalf of Peter Brett Associates LLP

Town Centre Investment Management

- 1.1 Town centre retailers are in retreat, investors are reducing their exposure local authorities feel powerless and consumers continue to spend elsewhere. The Portas Review: The Future of the High Street spelt out the problems, however, the recommendations had a mixed reception and – a year on – seem to be delivering very little on the ground. Not surprising given the limited tools available to those who can effect change. Meanwhile the pundits tell us the position for town centres is getting worse with:
- Town centre share of expenditures falling
 - Total investment falling
 - Shop and business closures continue
 - Vacancies remain high
 - Footfall falling
 - Floorspace development falling
- 1.2 Meanwhile the opposite is true for out of centre developments (and supermarkets).

The need for investment

- 1.3 Following the first anniversary of the Portas Review, we at Peter Brett, Berwin Leighton Paisner and FSP have come together to promote a bold new approach to securing investment back in town centres. We call this Town Centre Investment Management. It is not a one-size-fits-all solution, how will it work in every situation. But we believe it will help reverse or halt decline in many centres where there is potential retail demand but a structural barrier to investment: the fragmented ownership structure.

The problem of fragmented ownership

- 1.4 The fragmented ownership of many traditional town centres needs to be tackled head on. It is often the main constraint on structural change – the configuration of units and the overall tenant mix. Fragmented ownership, especially where there is market failure, is a major inhibiting factor and that, without overall control, many struggling high street cannot adapt to the fast moving market conditions. Our solution is not an all-size-fits-all for all centres, but we suspect may suit many caught “in the middle”, where such an intervention can turn the tide.
- 1.5 We agree with the Portas analysis that fragmented ownership is one of the main disadvantages of the conventional high street. For many, it is actually, the primary constraint on change; in her words:
- “If the High Street was in single ownership, like a department store, it would have a vision, a high level strategy and direction, it would choose what it wanted in a particular space to fit with a vision and proactively target the businesses and services that were missing” (Portas Review).*
- 1.6 Where we differ is on the extent of the solution. We believe that town centre management techniques, BIDS and Town Teams, valuable as they are, cannot always

rectify this fundamental inhibitor sufficiently, nor is the compulsory acquisition of just key sites – Portas Recommendation 21 - going to be enough in most cases.

- 1.7 For many high streets the most effective means of securing fundamental change is to bring the core under single ownership and to manage the future strategically:

“If our streets are to have a role tomorrow, then we will need to ensure their management is a match for the sophisticated alternatives” (Portas Review).

- 1.8 The town centre investment management investors will invest where they can see a return in the context of an acceptable risk. In a climate of limited capital availability the investment opportunity afforded by town centres, where enough of the stock is brought under single control, is that of a significant increase in rents and a decrease in yields. This increase is brought about by active asset management and a holistic approach to marketing and optimisation of retail stock sizes and mix.

- 1.9 The aim is to secure the dynamic retail management that fragmented ownership prevents. TCIM creates the conditions for:

- An overall approach to retail mix
- Whole-centre management
- Rapid response to market conditions
- Destination marketing

- 1.10 Successful retail destinations have been created in Marylebone High Street, Regent Street and elsewhere because of the ability to control the entire stock. The same techniques can be applied where fragmentation is overcome.

- 1.11 We call our approach Town Centre Investment Management (in contrast to Town Centre Redevelopment), while using many of the same processes and principles -

- A planning framework for regeneration and ‘managed change’
- Selection of an investor partner, to fund CPO and future investment
- Compulsory acquisition of existing assets and improvements to leasehold structures;
- Change effected by investment partner to meet the agreed objectives set out in a Management and Development Agreement.

Partnership

- 1.12 The investor partner would be selected on their management skills and their ability to invest further in the centre. They would be obligated under a Management and Development Agreement to transform the performance of the centre through a tenant mix strategy, reconfigurations, better management and strategic marketing initiatives.
- 1.13 For the investor, they would be incentivized by buying a standing investment, with real potential to improve rental values and yields. Unlike town centre redevelopment schemes it would require far less capital to be deployed up-front and without all the consequent delays and risks in waiting for a return during construction.
- 1.14 Retailers are drawn to successful high streets; so reversing decline should see a reduction in the rate of retailer departures. Though some will leave their portfolio. Retailers in TCIM schemes may be able to share in the success, perhaps moving onto

turnover rents, with shorter leases and greater flexibility in maintaining their presence in a centre (much like in a shopping centre).

Existing land lords and investors may loss out, as their interests are acquired. Or they might be able to exchange their investment for a bond or some other form of share is the new ownership structure of the town centre.

Concept

Local authority		Public ownership (freehold)
	:	Vision; planning framework
Investor partner	:	Dynamic management
		Long-term control
Retailers	:	Active partners, not passive tenants.

Process

TC007 LB Hillingdon Ltr

London Borough of Hillingdon

9th January 2013

Dear Ms Gavron

RE: Future of London's town centres

Thank you for your letter of the 22nd November with supporting information on the London Assembly's Planning Committee review of the future role of London's town centres. Promoting appropriate growth, viability and regeneration of town and neighbourhood centres is a key focus for Hillingdon Council, which is why we welcome the opportunity to contribute to the review.

Hillingdon has adopted a 'Total Approach' to town centres which differs in key respects from the approach taken in other London boroughs.

☐ Hillingdon pioneered 'Stop and Shop' schemes offering free short-term parking in London.

☐ All libraries in Hillingdon are not only being kept open, but are also being creatively revitalised through new build or full refurbishment, with radical and innovative investment and design.

☐ Our approach recognises that regeneration initiatives in some local neighbourhood town centres need to be focussed on sustainability and understand local day, night and weekend usage.

More information on Hillingdon's approach is given below in our response to the particular questions set out in your letter.

1. What new ideas and existing best practice could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

1.1 'Sustain, Renew and Prosper' the Hillingdon approach to regeneration 2011-2016 was endorsed by Cabinet in June 2011. This aimed to encourage a total approach to appropriate growth, viability and regeneration of town and neighbourhood centres in Hillingdon. The 'Total Approach' to town centres was also intended to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to maximising the value of Council and external investment to deliver improvements to our town centres.

1.2 The 'Total Approach' is intended to support independent traders by bringing together all the elements of a successful town centre such as:

- ☐ A raised profile and an improved public image;
- ☐ Wider use and increased spending within local centres;
- ☐ Lower crime and anti-social behaviour;
- ☐ A more successful mixed-use economy with a range of goods and services;
- ☐ Easy access to parking, especially short-stay such as Stop and Shop.

1.3 There are four key elements to the 'Total Approach' which are:-

- ☐ investment in the public realm, which may include new parking measures, and/or improvements to footpaths and streets, street signage, street lighting and landscaping;
- ☐ improvements to shop fronts (by means of grant assistance to independent traders). This was successfully piloted in Hayes town centre and has now been rolled out to Ruislip Manor and Northwood Hills town centres;
- ☐ providing commercial expertise to independent traders, such as on visual merchandising and customer service through the council's partnership with International Visual who are specialists in this area, and
- ☐ 'High Street Careers' providing an apprenticeship scheme for traders through the Uxbridge College Employer services unit and recognising the range of career opportunities, much wider than retail, from legal services to health and beauty, property and hospitality located on the high street.

1.4 Access to the Greater London Authority funding such as the Outer London Fund and the Mayor's Regeneration fund has been invaluable, not just in terms of financial resources particularly for smaller district town centres such as Ruislip Manor and Northwood Hills epitomising London's 'metro-land' commuter suburbs but also in terms of design expertise and support through Design for London and their Specialist Team 'menu' of skilled and creative consultants.

1.5 We feel it is fair to say that the consultants who listened to the views of the people who live and own businesses within Hillingdon, and their council representatives and who appreciated the character and history provided more imaginative and intelligent design solutions to transform the town centres.

1.6 Learning from our Outer London Fund Round 1 shop front grant programme within Hayes has firmly shaped our approach in rolling out the programme within Northwood Hills and Ruislip Manor town centres and we have shared that learning with other London boroughs.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

2.1 Our job is to work with local business, shoppers and local residents to find the best way to preserve and enhance these centres. Each town centres has its own 'unique selling point' and we need to exploit the comparative advantage of each area.

2.2 In developing our approach to town centre regeneration we recognise the need to ensure our town centres provide for a mixed economy with a stronger focus for the communities they serve – drawing in office workers during the day, but with a wellmanaged and mature night time economy and weekend leisure attractions. Town centres and local parades continue to perform a role in providing essential daytoday goods and services, as well as social contact.

2.3 Examples of how this has enabled our town centres to compete over and above a standard retail offer include:-

- Maximising value from our own investment in leisure and cultural facilities in order to enhance the footfall into our district centres. Re-thinking how our residents want to use their local town centres in the current 2010 decade. Hillingdon is bucking the trend both in London and across the UK understanding the important role libraries play in the community and has taken radical and innovative steps to make sure they continue to stay that way while at the same time reducing running costs and increasing facilities. Hillingdon's libraries announced record visitor numbers - more than 80,000 in some libraries - and book loans at the end of last year.
- Recognising that home-working and self-employment are likely to expand, we have initiated successful models such as Hayes Business Studios, providing affordable business start-up and growth accommodation supported by easily accessible business support services. This has now been expanded to bring empty shops back into use particularly within Ruislip Manor and Northwood Hills town centres and enabling burgeoning local entrepreneurs to promote their goods and services.
- HillingdonFirst free privilege card, launched in June 2009 offering residents preferential rates at council leisure and parking facilities, access to libraries and waste centres, as well as discounts at participating businesses.
- Town Centre events and promotions including fun days, best-dressed window competitions, music events etc. For example, the Bandstand Marathon event held in Shenley Park, Ruislip Manor as part of the National Bandstand Marathon end of London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics celebrations and which attracted some 4,000 visitors to the town centre on a Sunday afternoon.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

3.1 Our aspiration is to create town centres that are safe, accessible and easy to get to and move through. In terms of overall accessibility we have introduced measures across public realm, cycling, pedestrians and parking, such as:-

- adjustments to the road layout to allow for better traffic flow and access by buses
- stop and shop parking provision free to everyone for first 30 minutes

- improved signage to and access arrangement to existing off street parking
- upgrading of cycle parking provision and facilities in the right locations
- public realm improvements including better lighting, unified street furniture and planting.

3.2 The council first introduced a 'stop and shop' half-hour free parking scheme in Ruislip High Street, in April 2005. Since then 'Hillingdon' has become synonymous with innovative parking schemes supporting local traders.

3.3 Hillingdon Council emerged as the big winner at the British Parking Awards 2010, recognising best practice and innovation in the management, design and enforcement of parking. Hillingdon was named Overall Winner after being short listed for four awards and winning two; the Innovation Award and the Back Office Team of the Year. The Innovation Award recognised the work in launching the HillingdonFirst smart card; that gives residents preferential parking rates while the Back Office Team of the Year award was for professionalism in dealing with appeals and permit matters, and for developing training for parking staff.

3.4 The Brown Badge scheme, initially launched in 2008, was the first in the country, and it has proved so popular other councils have taken our lead and introduced similar schemes.

□ Motorists over 65 with a brown badge are eligible to use dedicated parking spaces in council owned car parks and in some privately operated car parks in Hillingdon. This programme is part of the council's ongoing effort to improve parking facilities for local residents and provide easy-access parking for older motorists who may have mobility problems.

□ Designated spaces are marked close to exit points and where possible, nearest to the pay and display machines.

□ It is one way we are supporting our older residents to lead active and full lives and make the most of the borough's many amenities, including leisure facilities, shopping centres and now, with the on-street bays, we can introduce these spaces into our towns."

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high street would best encourage growth and potential in times of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

4.1 In December 2012, Cabinet endorsed a new approach to refresh and reboot Hillingdon's approach to economic development and regeneration in light of the changing economic situation and changes to local government finance. Hillingdon is well placed to achieve business growth going forward. Its geographical location combined with the physical capacity for growth and our good transport links make the borough an attractive proposition for business.

4.2 It is proposed that a proportionate Hillingdon approach to business growth is developed most of which can largely be delivered within existing resources. Potential work streams, that collectively would be capable of delivering this approach, and of direct relevance to town centre growth are summarised as:-

1. Intelligence: To develop much greater intelligence on the local economy, key

development sites (where most of the business growth is likely to come from) and the Council's rating base. Heathrow Airport skews analysis of the Council's rating base with some 56% of business rates originating from companies based on or in close proximity to the airport. However some 10% stem from businesses based within Uxbridge town centre and 9% from businesses within Hayes, evidence of the importance of ensuring continued growth and regeneration within our town centres. Work has started to divide the rating base into key business areas so that fluctuations can be tracked by business type as well as geographical locations.

2. Supporting development of major sites: In the future, the most significant increases in rating income will come from major development sites. The Council will determine up to twenty key sites and be proactive about their promotion and capacity for development, recognising the need for a flexible approach towards mixed use determined on a site by site basis.

3. The Council will also look for ways to improve the way it handles interest or applications from business going forward by bolstering the resources available to handle pre-applications with a newly created dedicated post to manage and coordinate pre-applications and relationships between prospective developers and the Council. A review, already underway will determine whether it is possible to reduce the number of pre-commencement conditions (especially where they unnecessarily duplicate other legislation).

4. Reviewing support to small business: the Council will be undertaking a review of the potential flexibilities it can offer in terms of adjusting rating liabilities and other incentives to encourage economic growth and employment in the Borough.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

5.1 Planning policies have been effectively applied to increase residential uses within town centres where it is considered that a scheme would result in significant benefits to the town centre for example by bringing redundant buildings back into a use particularly those which have been a long-standing eyesore.

5.2 A successful example of this would be the redevelopment of two existing five storey office blocks (Armstrong House and Middlesex House) above the Mall Pavilions shopping centre providing 160 residential units. The office blocks had been vacant for some twenty years and aspirations for redevelopment as a hotel had not materialised.

5.3 The redevelopment was appropriate for Uxbridge Town Centre, fitting well with what was then national planning policy guidance in Planning Policy Statement 6 (Planning for Town Centres), where residential and other mixed uses were recognised as assisting in maintaining a vital and vibrant town centre. The development is close to public transport links from Uxbridge underground and bus station and it was approved in July 2007 with 100% car free housing on the site

specified within the section 106 agreement.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

6.1 The report to the London Assembly Planning Committee on the proposed review notes that the Mayor sees two main ways of supporting and shaping London's town centres: through planning policy and funding measures. This Council's approach is broadly similar; the funding measures in the Council's "Total Approach" initiative are outlined above at paragraph 1.3, whilst its strategic planning policy approach has just been confirmed with the adoption of Part 1 of the Hillingdon Local Plan in November 2012.

6.2 The Council's starting points for its retail and town centre planning strategy and policies are Government guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the policies and regional guidance in the London Plan. Strategic Objectives SO16 and SO20 in Part 1 of the Local Plan set out the Council's objectives on town centres and retailing. They promote appropriate growth, vitality and regeneration within the borough's town and neighbourhood centres and seek to improve bus and underground/rail interchanges to promote sustainable growth in Uxbridge, Heathrow, the Hayes/West Drayton corridor and accessibility to other town centres. (This latter objective reflects the London Plan at policy 4.8 which looks to promote better sustainable access to goods and services for Londoners.)

6.5 The Council's overall planning approach to its town centres follows the lead given by the London Plan (at policy 2.15, Map 2.6 and Annex 2) and its strategic aims of encouraging retail, commercial, cultural and leisure development appropriate to the size, role and function of individual centres. For example, policy E5 seeks to ensure that Hillingdon's town centres should be the primary focus for the location of new retail/other appropriate commercial development, having regard to the distribution of future retail growth and the local hierarchy of centres identified in the Plan (at Map 5.3). The emphasis in the Local Plan is on a planning policy approach which seeks the enhancement and protection of our town centres, focusing growth in areas in need of renewal and investment, contributing to our vision of Hillingdon taking full advantage of its distinctive strengths with regard to its places, communities and heritage.

6.6 When adopting Part 1 of the Hillingdon Local Plan the Council also confirmed that it would continue to use the relevant Saved Unitary Development Plan policies from 2007. These effectively form "Part 2" of the Local Plan until new replacement policies and proposals are drawn up and adopted. In particular this will involve a review of existing town centres, their designated shopping frontages and site allocations. Through this work the Council will be looking to secure and anchor future economic growth and regeneration in our local centres.

6.7 Alongside this use of its planning policies and proposals, Hillingdon will use its Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Plan and development of a Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule to seek to ensure that planned infrastructure is deliverable in a timely fashion in the borough's town centres.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town Centres?

7.1 Hillingdon is generally supportive of the Mayor's London Plan. The document covers over 120 policies in 320 pages and provides sufficient strategic-level information to assist boroughs in the development of Local Plan policies and the determination of planning applications. It also provides some flexibility to apply policies to local circumstances and from Hillingdon's perspective, attempts to take some account of the main planning issues in outer London.

7.2 Hillingdon officers are concerned that the forthcoming SPG on town centres will add a further level of complexity where officers will be required to cross reference between an ever increasing number of Mayoral policy documents. This is at odds with the position in the rest of the UK where the number of Development Plan documents is decreasing in accordance with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) where paragraph 153 states that:

'Any additional development plan documents should only be used where clearly justified. Supplementary planning documents should be used where they can help applicants make successful applications or aid infrastructure delivery, and should not be used to add unnecessarily to the financial burdens on development.'

7.3 Hillingdon officers would prefer to see the Mayor bringing forward the new research proposed as part of the evidence base for the next review of the London Plan. If the forthcoming SPG is overly prescriptive or inflexible it will constrain the extent to which boroughs are able to respond to local circumstances and not help to bring forward sustainable development.

We look forward to hearing the outcomes and recommendations from your review into the future of London's town centres and would be happy to expand on any points raised within our feedback, as appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

Jales Tippell

Head of Transportation, Planning Policy and Community Engagement

TC008 LB Waltham Forest

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Date: 10 January 2013

Dear Alexandra,

Future of London's Town Centres

I refer to your consultation letter of 22 November 2012 regarding the above matter and wish to thank you for the opportunity to contribute to future policy on London's town centres. With regard to the consultation questions, Council officers wish to respond as below.

Q1. What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

The challenges and reasons for town centre decline are now relatively well understood. These include changing shopping habits, growth in internet shopping and crucially the on-going economic recession. These have significantly contributed to the current state of London's town centres as characterised by shop closures and vacancies. However an underlying issue undermining efforts to support town centre vitality and viability is the proliferation of commercial activities in long lengths along the main road corridors in this borough and indeed in many other London boroughs. This spatial pattern has been inherited from historical times.

In London, we tend to have long high street than town centres and it has been difficult over the years to manage growth and change to create a sustainable and cohesive cluster of retail and town centre uses. In Waltham Forest, evidence of such proliferation is seen along the main road corridors of Forest Road, Hoe Street, High Road Leyton, Lea Bridge Road, Leytonstone High Road and Chingford Road. Such pattern of development is a constraint it has affected efforts to create spatial outcomes that support the development of sustainable town centres.

Over the years the Council's planning policy has sought to redress this by establishing a hierarchy of centres and using both national and London planning policy drivers to protect designated centres. Outside the designated centres, the Council has sought to manage retail decline where demand for retail premises no longer exists and encouraging alternative replacement uses such as residential. However such planning policy initiatives have been constrained by land and property conditions which particularly (in the current recession) requires significant incentives to encourage the relocation of retail and other commercial uses into designated centres.

A range of incentives and support mechanisms on the business side are therefore necessary to encourage the development of sustainable spatial outcomes. These include relocation grants, entrepreneurial support for businesses e.g. Online Business Forums, Business fixer schemes etc. These should be targeted to facilitate and support the creation of spatial outcomes that reinforce the long term vitality and viability of town centres.

In Waltham Forest, we have recently successfully delivered a series of shop front improvements in Leyton, along a key route into the Olympic Park and in Walthamstow, our Major town centre. We have re-designed and rejuvenated our street market in Walthamstow and have developed a series of interventions in Wood Street (including art interventions, events, Shop Front Improvements, establishment of a business forum and highway works).

Funding programmes have an important role to play. Since 2011, Wood Street has benefited from funding from both Transport for London (£1.8m) and the Mayor's Outer London Fund (£310k in round 1 and £1.5m in round 2). This funding has enabled Public Realm improvements to be made to the length of Wood Street and the Plaza as well as investment in the shop fronts and windows of local businesses, local business support and training (especially around visual merchandising and marketing), art interventions, rejuvenation of the Wood Street Indoor Market and lighting features. The Neighbourhood Challenge funding scheme (The Mill, Walthamstow themill-coppermill.org/) has also proved successful in showing how community organisations – when equipped with the right skills, practical tools and small, catalytic amounts of money can galvanise local people to work together, to create innovative responses to local priorities, particularly in neighbourhoods with low levels of social capital.

Other initiatives such as the 'Shoppportunity' scheme have proved successful in supporting town centre regeneration. Shoppportunity pairs up artist/ makers and designers with a trader - with the intention of developing business-specific light touch, low cost but high impact shop improvement interventions. This may be new signage, furniture, display design, window displays, lighting features, merchandising advice, new uniforms or events. In Waltham Forest, the project has been low cost (£2,500-£5k per shop) but has significant impact on high streets.

Seemingly light touch improvements could also make significant contribution to town centre vitality and viability. A recent improvement scheme in Wood Street Indoor Market saw a rejuvenation of the business. Interventions included the provision of wi-fi, new toilets, internal painting and other refurbishments, an offer of 3 months free rent and 3 months half price, targeting of traders such as Arts and Crafts and vintage sellers, establishment of a website and the use of social media to promote the market. These have been positively received and have given confidence to existing traders and encouraged new visitors/ shoppers to the area. It provides incubator units at a low cost for new/ start up businesses and this approach could be rolled out in the form of 'pop up shops', provide temporary occupation for artists in vacant properties.

Environmental improvement schemes have also an important role to play in reimagining town centres. The Council's High Road Leyton Shop Front Improvement pilot scheme was intended to support the economic success of Leyton town centre, improve both the retail and physical environment in Leyton High Road and provide a model of excellence in town centre and high street improvement(s). The project has seen the installation of jolly new shopfronts, colourful facades and animated lighting. The overwhelming response to the scheme has been positive, and it has become evident that both the vendors and landowners involved in the scheme have recognised the potential benefits of the shop front improvement scheme.

Q2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

Evidence at a national level suggests that while town centre retail sales have fallen as a proportion of total sales, out-of-town sales have been growing. As it has become apparent, some of London's town centres are simply less attractive locations for both consumers and businesses compared to the large format out of town shops which offer easy access to and from car parks and provide a modern retailing environment with better convenience, cleanliness and security.

Clearly, plan making based on a greater understanding of the market has an important role to play. Controls and regulations such as the Town Centre First Policy (National Planning Policy Framework) have helped to curtail the growth of out of centre shopping. However, other measures are needed. Some of these include realistic pricing of car parking charges in town centres to encourage shoppers, promoting a different offer from the established out of centre locations and more active town centre management. The development of town centre malls could also have real benefits. Malls continue to be popular destinations because they tend to be one of the friendliest places for shopping. Redevelopment of parts of the traditional High Street as covered shopping streets or mini malls could be one of the many ways to reimagine London's town centres.

Q3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

Given the spatial spread or distribution of shops and other town centre uses throughout London, it is fair to say that accessibility is not a key issue in London. There may however be pocket areas where the existence of low PTAL levels would appear to compromise residents' access to town centres service or facilities. However, in general, nearly all centres are well connected by public transport. In Waltham Forest, many town centres are located and surrounded by a large catchment of residential occupiers living within walking distance of a town centre, neighbourhood centre or local retail parade. Crucially, the issue is how to generate much needed footfall and spending.

Careful location of transport and parking facilities will be necessary to ensure that public transport users are not only commuters to places of work, but have reason to be drawn into the town centre to provide footfall to support shopping activity. Lack of parking facilities has often been cited as an important issue affecting the use of town centres by both visitors and developers. Whether this is a matter of perception or not, in general, limited town centre parking coupled with higher parking fees can only make traditional town centres unfavourable destinations when compared with out of town and supermarket locations, which cater for private transport. Innovative transport and parking schemes should be based on a careful understanding of the profile of customers and offer better choice and convenience. With the projected growth in the elderly population, support for shop mobility schemes and new payment methods for transportation systems will be required e.g. electronic payments.

Q4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

Diversification is perhaps the key to unlock growth in town centres. Diversifying the role of town centres more for entertainment and leisure purposes could also be another way forward in re-

inventing town centres. A wide range of commercial, residential, cultural, civic, and recreational uses should be located in town centres so that the town centre's offer becomes less dependent on retail but is built on effective linkages and synergy between different activities. Town centres for the future should offer an experience that goes beyond retail – becoming more of a destination for socialising, culture, health, wellbeing, creativity and learning etc, with doctors' surgeries and offices along with shops and homes. They should be social places that make creative use of public spaces and with a vibrant evening economy. The night time economy very often tends to be overlooked, yet this can drive tourism, leisure and business growth. Strategies to develop the night time economy should be planned to target potential users - both the young and elderly population. For example in Wood Street there have been a series of film screening events both in the new Plaza and with a projection onto the flank wall of a dentist. These events were well received, as were a fiesta and Big Dance Bus events that brought young people and their parents into Wood Street and created additional businesses especially for cafes. These events can be run at very low costs once the infrastructure is in place (i.e. £150 to screen a recent blockbuster movie) and can therefore be organised and managed by local community groups.

Understanding the needs and aspirations of customers/visitors to the town centre is also crucial. Researching the competition, shopping patterns of customers and visitors to the town centre will help to understand the gaps in the market and how to best to meet needs.

In developing strategies, it has often been standard practice to incorporate collaboration with community and stakeholders. Development can create great places to live, work, and play if it responds to a community's sense and vision for growth. Working with residents, stakeholders businesses early and often will help define and implement the community's vision and goals. Meaningful community participation and leadership in land use decision-making should ensure that revitalisation of town centres is a community-based process that builds on local values and assets and brings forward the town centre uses and facilities that people need. New community engagement strategies will be required.

Q5 How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

The 'town centre first' policy as reaffirmed by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has had a key central role in regulating the growth of town centre uses at less central locations. However, in practice, the application of the government's rules on the sequential test have not completely ruled out the development of town centre uses at less central locations. In this regard, it may be helpful to consider imposing more severe restrictions on new out-of-town retail developments to save town centres. Furthermore, while also acknowledging the government's aspirations for growth, the rules on the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' advocating the grant of planning permission where the development plan is absent, silent or out of date could work against local objectives to support town centre vitality and viability.

As noted above, the Council's planning policy has sought to manage the proliferation of commercial activities in long lengths along the main road corridors but with limited success, as

this requires significant incentives to address constraints associated with land and property conditions. The ineffectiveness of the current use classes order in managing changes of use particularly within the A2 class has continued to be challenge in developing a sustainable mix of uses in the borough's town centres. For example, there has been a current tendency for Betting shops (as permitted changes of use) to set up in retail frontages under the current rules of the use classes order. Lack effective controls on such changes of use continue to impact on the retail appeal of local centres and their long term sustainability.

To encourage people to live and populate London's town centres, it will be important to improve the quality of such living environments with regard to residential amenity, noise levels, the provision of safer streets, personal security etc. This will require creative design solutions. Where high rise buildings may be inappropriate, medium rise buildings (4-6 storey blocks) could add significant residential numbers to many town centres that were previously predominantly ground floor shops with a single storey above. In addition, the application of various supporting initiatives/measures factors can also combine to support town centre living such as CCTV, 'Shop Watch', 'Pub Watch' or 'Town Watch' schemes as well as the professional management of town environments.

Q6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

While acknowledging the government's intentions through the Localism Bill to give local government a stronger financial role in the local economy, the current rules and regulations for example on business rates do not go far enough. It is noted that the government has recently extended business rate relief for small shops. However, allowing local authorities to grant discretionary business rate discounts to struggling businesses or to support new business start-ups directly would be a major step forward. Local authorities with a locally agreed plan for the development and management of their town centres should also be allowed such powers. Generally, it should be possible to allow local authorities the flexibility to provide financial incentives to directly tackle planning and regeneration issues in town centres.

Where other powers exist for example with regard to compulsory purchase of land and property, practicable constraints associated with the process very often make this option the last resort.

A review of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1954 is also necessary. The current system appears to make it more profitable for a landlord to keep a property empty rather to find a new tenant or seek temporary occupation. Furthermore, due to the complexity of commercial property ownership, in many instances the landlord or owner is difficult to identify and therefore engage with.

Q7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

The London Plan provides an important strategic driver for creating sustainable town centres. However planning at such level has remained a highly political and contested process with

winners and losers. Decision making at such strategic level often ignores the harmful consequences or ripple effects of development on other areas - e.g. the impact of large scale shopping developments such as White City/Stratford City on smaller nearby town centres. The Council acknowledges the role of the Mayor's Outer London Fund in encouraging investment and boosting local high streets. However such funding has been insufficient to make long lasting impacts.

The role of the emerging Town Centres SPD should be to provide a framework for action, not another restatement of local planning policies that the Boroughs would be normally expected to undertake. It should draw on experiences from successful implementation of town centre schemes and provide innovative approaches to town centre revitalisation that can be delivered in a more joined up way throughout London.

I hope the above comments and examples of practice we are currently implementing in the borough are helpful.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Glenday
Head of Planning Policy and Regeneration

TC009 LB Croydon

London Borough of Croydon

Proposed Review of the future of London's town centres

Croydon Council (Officer-Level) Response

Officers welcome the London Assembly interest in town centres and consider it a worthwhile exercise. However, the review should explicitly recognise that the state of the wider economy is the most significant factor relating to town centre activity. Therefore, any strategies to promote town centre vibrancy need to be based on an understanding of the local, regional and national economic situation.

What new ideas and existing best practise could help reimagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

Recognising that services aimed at both younger people and older people can be in short supply in town centres, Croydon has sought to address this in its planning documents. For example, the 'BMX to Bowls' concept is embedded in the Croydon Local Plan – Strategic Policies and is informing emerging documents such as the Fairfield Masterplan; the area known as College Green is used by pupils at Croydon College, but has been identified as a multi-use space serving a much more diverse audience than is currently the case.

Whilst the metropolitan centre has a number of large, attractive parks within walking distance, it lacks in-town spaces for children to play. Accordingly, the various masterplans for central Croydon and the Croydon Opportunity Area Planning Framework (COAPF) place a far greater emphasis on play space provision.

The Croydon Local Plan – Strategic Policies also seeks to create greater economic diversity within town centres by protecting industrial/warehousing capacity within the boundaries and also encouraging new industrial/warehousing development in peripheral locations. Not only will this help to address the predicted shortfall of employment land in Croydon, it will encourage developers of mixed-use developments in non-shopping frontage locations to design in studio/workshop space at the ground floor rather than retail or office which, by virtue of the less prominent position within the town centre, can struggle to find tenants.

As part of preparing the Croydon Local Plan – Detailed Policies and Proposals, the Council has recently visited all its town centres and assessed the existing boundaries and the designated frontages. In order to provide greater flexibility, officers have sought to reduce the extent of Main Retail Frontages (which limits the amount of non-A1 Class uses in these locations) and increase the extent of the Primary Shopping Area. Theoretically this should make it easier for landlords to find tenants and also encourage greater diversity outside the core retail areas. Mindful, of the unintended consequences, the Council also proposes to consult upon policies which limit the proliferation of take-aways.

Other issues facing our high streets result from the changes in shopping patterns and wider reliance on internet shopping which necessitate planning for the contraction of local and district centres. This process is being managed and planned through consolidation of retail frontage. It is important that improved guidance is developed to enable sensitive conversion from retail to

residential and other uses and strategies for meanwhile or temporary uses to be developed to avoid large numbers of vacancies becoming prevalent.

How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

Local employment opportunities are created not just in town centres and out-of-town retail locations, but also in relation to online retail businesses. Boroughs should be encouraged to formulate strategies that seek to create complementary relationships between these 3 elements of the retail marketplace.

Alongside the growth in homes, new Local Centres are likely to be needed in the future. Similarly, other centres affected by online retail/out-of-town retail will probably need to contract or perhaps identify a new role. For example, the growth in online retail has increased the demand for mailbox services, couriers, banks of package deposit lockers in convenience stores etc. Town centres are natural places to host these facilities and could help to reduce excessive vacancy rates.

Following on from this point, traditional measures of town centre vitality such as footfall and turnover could be supplemented with a measure of town centre activity that captures increased take up of non-retail activity. This will provide a deeper understanding of individual town centres and the role they perform.

Retail is a fast moving sector and town centres may need to specialise in order to remain competitive. For example, a town centre with a relatively high representation of independent retailers could seek to build on this distinctiveness by encouraging complementary activities, such as 'a people's supermarket' (a cooperative model where hours worked in the shop are translated into discounts for groceries), retailers selling locally produced goods, repair services etc. It's a well worn cliché, but London is a series of villages and residents can be fiercely loyal to their 'village' or town centre if they can see the benefits of doing so.

How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

One way to increase footfall to local shops is to promote edge of centre parking areas. There is a risk that shoppers will favour town centres where they can park in more central locations, but this needs to be balanced against the support it brings to peripheral retail locations.

Ensuring car parking facilities feel safe to use (including during the evening where the car park remains open) and also meet the requirements of special needs users is also important. Together with providing direct pedestrian routes from parking areas to destination and improving the quality and legibility the public realm that comprises these connecting routes.

What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres including publicly owned land and properties?

Enabled by the Mayor's Regeneration Fund, Croydon has been able to undertake significant public realm improvements in the Metropolitan Centre and the high streets. For example, Croydon's 'in-town' motorway, Wellesley Road acted as a barrier between the main office quarter and the retail core. A number of subways connect the two elements, but these are not ideal. Currently, a series of street level crossings are being provided. This fundamentally

affects the way the centre operates and creates many opportunities to unlock potential development sites and creates much enhanced direct linkages between transport interchanges and the retail core.

The Croydon Opportunity Area Planning Framework is an effective way of providing clarity to landowners, investors, existing businesses etc. The various masterplans (either adopted or in production) relating to Croydon Metropolitan Centre provide greater detail and crucially, provide a forum within which stakeholders can coordinate their actions for the benefit of the wider area.

The borough is also fortunate to be represented by Develop Croydon, a private sector-led body promoting development and economic renewal in Croydon. Their website provides a wide range of up to date information for the development industry and their annual conference is well attended by the key agencies and developers.

How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

Generally speaking, existing planning policies represent a good toolkit to promote vitality and viability of town centres and in Croydon's experience, do not act as a brake on town centre regeneration. A firm yet pragmatic approach to the application of policy alongside Croydon's Development Team Service (for pre-application advice) is employed.

Croydon plans to meet a significant proportion of its requirement for new homes by growing a residential community in the Croydon Opportunity Area where currently, there are relatively few residents. Alongside identifying specific locations for this growth, a series of complementary actions such as improvements to East Croydon Station, improvements to public realm, increase in quantity and quality of public open space and development of appropriate community infrastructure will be needed.

The metropolitan centre currently has unacceptably high levels of office vacancy which provides opportunities for conversion/redevelopment to provide new homes. However, the Council is mindful that the absence of an office protection policy and the encouragement for conversion/redevelopment of outmoded stock to provide new residential accommodation should not lead to a worsening of the dependency ratio (the number of residents compared to the number of local jobs) and will balance the growth in residents with the provision of employment opportunities, especially around 'New Town' area to the west of East Croydon station.

Croydon is seeking to ensure that this new residential community is not overly represented by young professionals and is supplemented by families and older people such as 'empty nesters' and those looking for care home accommodation. Proposed measures including limiting the over representation of take aways, strong protection of community facilities, provision of improved public realm/public open space and requiring significant numbers of 3+ bed homes will contribute to this aim.

There is also an important role for non-council champions. For instance, spurred on by the civil unrest of summer 2011, a local entrepreneur has established a business centre in a long-term vacant building close to Surrey Street market. In a short period of time 'Matthew's Yard' has become a valued economic and community asset and resulted in numerous, beneficial spin-out activities. This type of activity is the perfect complement to the council's efforts to improve the

infrastructure/local environment and will help to make the town centre a more attractive place to live.

What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

Masterplanning can be a useful mechanism to stimulate development activity and attract inward investment. For example, the delivery of a new footbridge across the platforms at East Croydon Station (which not only meets the needs of rail passengers, but also improves access to key development sites in the metropolitan centre) points to the effectiveness of the masterplanning process to deliver benefits which have a positive effect beyond the immediate locality.

Alongside measures such as increasing the tram network capacity and delivering public realm improvements, this type of activity has raised the profile of the metropolitan centre. Arguably, this has led to the current strong market interest in bringing a major destination shopping development to the town.

There is also a need to understand the reasons behind town centre vacancy as it is not always simply a case of a lack of demand. There can be numerous reasons such as an owner not entertaining short-term lets, sites acquired by and subsequently held-off the market by a retailer seeking to reduce opportunities for a rival retailer, an absent landlord where the vacant site is a low priority, etc.

Vacant premises and underused spaces should be utilised by meanwhile uses. This type of activity is usually more successful where an organisation like the Meanwhile Trust is able to act as an intermediary between the owners and end users and remove the obstacles which can often occur.

How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres supplementary planning guidance (SPG), best support town centres?

Croydon is fortunate in being the subject of a soon to be published London Plan SPG, Croydon Opportunity Area Planning Framework. A member of staff from the GLA was based in Croydon and worked alongside officers to produce this in-depth document to help shape the pattern of growth. Without the resources of the Mayor, it is unlikely Croydon would have had the capacity to produce this guidance.

In order to promote policy clarity and give Local Planning Authorities the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances, the emerging Town Centres SPG should be as concise as possible and only provide supplementary guidance where it is clearly required.

15 January 2013

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Barking and Dagenham response to London Assembly Review of London's Town Centres

1) Introduction

Thank you for seeking views on the future of London's High Streets. High Streets/Town Centres are good barometers of the health of the local economy but also can either add or diminish wider economic confidence by how they perform and appear. Therefore LB Barking and Dagenham places particular importance on supporting the prosperity of town and district centres and has invested heavily in recent years.

This response sets out some background to the town/district centres in Barking and Dagenham and what the Council and partners are doing to support vibrancy and growth. Following on from this the specific questions raised by the Committee are answered although most issues raised are addressed in the preceding sections.

2) High Streets/Town Centres in Barking and Dagenham

Barking Town Centre is the largest retail area in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and the only Major Centre as designated by the London Plan. There are also three District Centres - Dagenham Heathway, Chadwell Heathway and Green Lane all of which follow the traditional linear High Street format. This response focuses particularly on Barking Town Centre which is a large retail and commercial centre with a range of shops, businesses, offices, civic buildings, leisure centre, a bustling four day market, a successful library and a theatre. The main traditional high street frontage is located along East Street and Station Parade. East Street caters for the local outdoor street market whilst Station Parade provides access to the purpose built indoor shopping centre, Vicarage Field. The town centre is well served by train, tube and bus services and is less than 20 minutes away from the City.

The town centre is located in the most deprived areas of Barking. Some neighbourhoods in the Abbey and Gascoigne wards are within the top 10% most deprived in the country (2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation). Over the years, Barking town centre has previously struggled to compete with nearby centres such as Stratford, Ilford and Romford and out of town centres such as Lakeside and suffers from a poor perception from visitors, retailers, businesses and investors. The problems currently faced by the town centre are evident from statistics which shows the wards suffer from low education, skills and income levels, a limited retailing sector with a strong

emphasis on 'value' goods and low property rents and yields. New shopping schemes in nearby town centres mean that the borough's retail competitiveness would need to be raised if it is to make a substantial difference to the local economy. There are aspirations for the town centre retail offer to move away from its dependency on fast food outlets and low value goods and encourage some chains, specialist shops, restaurants and other leisure attractions. There is also recognition that the evening economy is extremely limited and that an improved food and beverage offer could significantly enhance the attractiveness of Barking as a destination and boost the local economy.

The town centre has benefited from extensive regeneration during the last decade which has transformed the area through award winning buildings and housing of high quality design. It has started to change people's perceptions of Barking. Appendix 1 – Barking Town Centre's Road to Recovery – visually shows some of the milestones achieved over the last 10 years and proposed for the years ahead.

There are a number of demographic changes taking place of relevance to Barking Town Centre's future:

- 1) New residential development - Both within the Major Centre and within a few minutes walk there will be significant new housing developments with thousands of new dwellings. In addition Barking Town Centre will also be the nearest and best connected Major Centre to the 10,800 development of Barking Riverside around 2 miles away.
- 2) Changing ethnicity – it is very clear that substantial change in the ethnic make up of the borough's population over the last decade has resulted in new retail businesses establishing to serve the needs of new communities. This has contributed to the relatively low vacancy rate in the borough.
- 3) Rising birth rate - Barking and Dagenham has the highest birth rate in the country offering scope for retailers and service providers to benefit from increased trade if they address the needs of young families and the Town Team ensure the town centre is welcoming to young families.¹

These factors offer scope for Barking to benefit from increased footfall against national trends of decline however it cannot be complacently assumed that Barking Town Centre will benefit

¹ During Summer 2012 Barking Town Square hosted a beach with various activities – the amount of young families utilising the facility (especially in the early evening) was striking. The Ice rink in December 2012 was also well attended by young families. The private sector need to step up to the opportunities available.

unless the Town Team work to ensure Barking has an offer which attracts the new residents. To a lesser extent these opportunities also apply to the borough's three district centres.

3) Barking Town Team

For a couple of years Barking Town Centre has had a Barking Town Centre Working Group – a bi-monthly meeting of key stakeholders with an interest in the prosperity of the town centre. Membership includes the Vicarage Field shopping centre manager, the market managers, other representatives of retailers, a representative for hotels, office occupiers, developers, property agents, the theatre, the leisure centre, the Police, the Chamber of Commerce and different Council Departments and Councillors. Following the Portas Review and the Government's funding for unsuccessful Portas Pilot bids, the Working Group has been refocused and renamed Barking Town Team. The ATCM representative attended the last meeting.

Appetite for a Business Improvement District appears very limited – partly due to existing concerns over the burden of business rates but also that the Council has been able to secure funding for a range of improvements sought by the most pro-active business representatives over recent years. Whether with reduced public funding the situation changes is yet to be seen. The Council would support a BID however only on the basis of strong private sector leadership of any campaign.

4) Views of Town Centre Users and businesses

Understanding the views of retailers and shoppers (and particularly those who don't currently come to Barking) is important to guide the work of the Town Team. In June 2012 the Town Team commissioned market research consisting of on-street surveys of town centre users in Barking, on-street surveys of town centre users in nearby centres (Ilford and Romford) and a telephone survey of BTC businesses. This has helped the Town Team understand who the current users of the town centre are, what they like and don't like about the town centre as well as understand what prevents shoppers in neighbouring centres from visiting Barking.

5) Current Position

Vacancy rates in Barking Town Centre are around 6% although official statistics still include 30 units which have been demolished which gives a 12% figure. However over the last couple of months (due mostly to national closures of specific chains relocation) there has been an increase in vacancy units and in particular it has resulted in a row of 4 retail units becoming vacant along the main retail street. The Council is in discussion with the different letting agents

and will seek to work with them but as marketing has only just commenced they are at the 'lets wait and see' stage rather than wanting to consider any interim uses.

Whilst vacancy rates are starting to become more of a concern, the primary concern of the Barking Town Team and from shoppers and retailers surveyed is the lack of range/variety of shops and of 'big name' shops. In relation to mix of uses, shopping Centres do have an advantage in that the management can control (subject to demand) the range of different outlets whilst town centres with a very wide range of ownerships mean it is practically impossible to achieve this.

Barking recognises it cannot and should not directly compete with Westfield Stratford City or Lakeside however it does need to continue to grow to serve the needs to the increasing local population and prevent leakage to other centres.

6) Barking Town Centre Strategy

The Barking Town Team have developed a Strategy with a number of objectives to address the strengths and weaknesses of the local economy. The Strategy's objectives are:

1. **Retail and Prosperity:** Develop a strong and resilient retail core to help revitalise the town centre.

Vacancy rates are below national averages but there is concern that they may creep up (mostly as a result of national chain closures). However greater concern is that the centre's offer is becoming increased focussed on a 'Value Offer' with limited chains which help draw customers in. The Town Team is looking at an incremental approach to improving the centre's offer recognising the challenging environment for retailers. Vicarage Field Shopping Centre has planning approval for enlargement alongside significant residential development however the scheme appears unlikely to be taken forward due to viability issues.

2. **Accommodation and the Evening Economy:** Increase overnight stay, catering and the leisure offer.

The lack of any significant evening economy is recognised as a key scope for growth linked to the current poor catering offer. There are some opportunities to establish a restaurant cluster and the Town Team are considering how this can be unlocked. The town centre has some edge of centre budget hotels whose guests need to be attracted into the town centre and recent

permission of a major town centre hotel and a new leisure centre offers further opportunities to support a new evening economy.

3. **Housing and Place Making:** Promote residential living and attract inward investment through creating high quality spaces.

Significant new residential development in and around the town centre will help boost footfall and support the growth of the evening economy. Dwellings which attract higher income occupiers will further support widening of the retail offer. As set out above Barking town centre will also be heavily influenced by new residential development opportunities created in the area such as Barking Riverside. This location is expected to see 11,000 new homes provided over the next 20 years creating a new community of some 25,000 people. The potential for Barking town centre to be the primary commercial centre for this new community is therefore considerable and this is seen as a key driver for further development of the town centre.

In relation to place making, high quality public realm and architecture has been a key feature of town centre development over the last 10 years with the implementation of the 'Barking Code' which helps bolsters the attractiveness of the town centre to new residents and businesses.

4. **Office Space:** Encourage the upgrade of existing and new provision of office stock to support the local economy.

Barking and Dagenham residents have one of the lowest average incomes in London and therefore to help support non-value retailers and services it is important to support the town centre as a place to work. The Council delivered the Barking Enterprise Centre providing 'easy-in, easy-out' small office accommodation which has been very successful however the capital costs of construction make it unviable as a commercial operation. Much of the town centre's vacant office accommodation does not meet modern occupiers' requirements and over the last six months has suffered a reduction of office staff with the abolition of the PCT and decline in number of Council employees. Whilst recognising Barking will not be able to compete with Stratford and Canary Wharf in terms of office accommodation it can nevertheless provide an accessible, more affordable office environment for a number of businesses which help support the town centre economy. The Council would also use its powers to support the concept of 'Eastminster' (relocation of Westminster Civil servants to a more cost effective location to support regeneration) should a proposal come forward.

5. **Transport and Accessibility:** Continuously enhance and improve accessibility in and around the town centre.

Significant progress has been made on this in recent years with the implementation of the first phases of East London Transit (ELT) and the station forecourt improvements. Whilst ELT provides a direct linkage with Barking Riverside a rail link would boost this significantly. Improvements to the station forecourt area have significantly improved conditions for pedestrians and public transport users. The key next priority identified by the Barking Town Team is the internal layout and facilities within Barking station itself which currently presents a very poor gateway into the town centre. This is tied up with the future of the East Thameside franchise.

6. **Attractiveness and Safety of the Environment:** To enhance the appearance and character of the town centre and create a safer environment.

Whether visitors and shoppers to a town centre feel safe is very important. The Police form an important part of the Barking Town Team and specific initiatives (eg addressing thefts from people at cashpoints) are helping improve safety. Addressing anti-social behaviour is also critical in making an environment where people want to spend time.

7. **Marketing and Promotion:** To effectively establish a clear strong message of the town centre's offer.

The Up! Barking project and Shutter artwork (described more fully in section 7) are part of creating a vibrant identity to the town centre involving young people. Shopping centres benefit from a single management (and service charge) structure which helps with funding marketing campaigns. In the pre-Christmas period Lakeside shopping centre had billboards in Barking Town Centre, adverts in local papers and had people handing out leaflets outside Barking station all seeking to draw shoppers away from the town centre. A co-ordinated Barking approach for Barking Town Centre has yet to be taken. A BID would clearly be mechanism for achieving this but in the interim the Barking Town Team will consider how different partners marketing efforts can be pooled or at least better co-ordinated to more fully market the town centre. A first step in this direction (funded by OLF) was the production of a Barking Town Centre App which is now live but being gradually improved and will be more vigorously promoted in 2013. There is scope for greater use of social media reflecting the increasingly young population.

Various initiatives are underway on most of these objectives however there is significantly more which can be done.

7) Outer London Fund in Barking Town Centre

The Council is very supportive of the Outer London Fund as a funding stream which recognises local people know best about which initiatives would most support the town centre. The Council has been successful in both rounds (although only for Barking Town Centre) and delivered a range of projects summarized below:

Round 1

- 1) Implementation of Barking Station forecourt public realm improvements to improve the environment for pedestrians and public transport users and create a much more attractive gateway into the town centre.
- 2) Up! Barking Project.
(www.facebook.com/pages/UPbarking/227169450686870) This initially started as an art project to create attractive hoardings around the numerous town centre development sites but with local young people heavily involved in learning new design skills and engaging in the future of the town centre it has widened to more broadly consider the image and identity of the town centre.
- 3) Molten Festival Christmas 2011 - Best expressed in a three minute video:
<http://vimeo.com/35155000>
- 4) Christmas lighting as part of Molten festival.
- 5) Barking Town Centre App - an app highlighting what Barking has to offer.
- 6) Short Blue Place Design work - design work for a major piece of public realm linking the new Technical Skills Academy (TSA) and future new supermarket to East Street (see section 8 for more details).
- 7) Security system for retailers – Alert Box system for town centre retailers.

A detailed evaluation report is available on the impact of the Round 1 projects.

Round 2

- 1) Implementation of Short Blue Place designs to create attractive new public realm which attracts and retains shoppers and encourages students and staff at the TSA to walk to the main retail area.
- 2) Molten Festival September 2012 – events and activities to boost footfall
- 3) Shutter Artwork project - Key project for engaging retailers looking at the appearance of shutters
- 4) Barking Bathhouse (see section 8 and www.barkingbathhouse.com)

5) Identity signage – alongside some Legible London signage will be number of striking identity features for the town Centre including a striking welcome sign and a ‘pub style’ sign for Short Blue Place.

6) Cycling for all project – provision of cycles for disabled people located in the Vicarage Field Shopping centre.

8) **Key initiatives to boost town centre prosperity**

Building on its good accessibility and growing reputation for high quality public realm and the investment made in new facilities which grow footfall and widen the town centre’s offer, the Town Team is taking forward the following key projects and initiatives as part of the Town Centre Strategy:

***London Road/North Street development (Short Blue Place):** A two phase development. The first phase consists of a £14m Technical Skills Academy (TSA) (www.techskillsacademy.com) which formally opened in September 2012. The Academy is run by Barking and Dagenham College and provides a real-work environment with vocational training in a range of fields including catering/hospitality, hairdressing and beauty, IT and multi media, entrepreneurship and construction and engineering. At full capacity over 650 students and 120 staff will help boost town centre footfall as well as offering services for town centre users (hairdressing, catering etc). Alongside the TSA is the first part of Short Blue Place - a high quality public space named after the historic fishing fleet whose owner lived in an adjacent building. The space furthers Barking’s reputation for high quality, quirky public space with strong landscaping and high quality materials. It encourages walking and provides attractive outside space for eating and relaxing. The second phase of development has commenced and consists of the remaining part of Short Blue Place and a development consisting of a new supermarket (8,000 sq m), 350 parking spaces, 100 residential flats and a number of smaller retail/kiosk units. The Council secured the land utilising CPO powers and entered into a development agreement with Bouygues following a competitive tender process. A supermarket was selected on the basis of identified need and the recognition that supermarkets are increasingly modern day department stores.

***Investment in new leisure centre.** A new leisure centre in Dagenham has exceeded expectations in terms of usage, popularity and the local economic impact for retailers. A new

leisure centre in Barking has just started construction and should help boost town centre footfall and in particular support the growth of the evening economy.

* Harnessing the qualities and strengths of **Barking Street market** but improving its appearance and layout. Barking market attracts significant footfall to the town centre and surveys suggest it is supported by retailers however there are also concerns about its appearance and layout and how its current appearance detracts from the town centre. A design brief has been produced and designs will be worked up in consultation over the coming months seeking a design solution which provides a strong future for an improved market as part of a regenerated main shopping street. A High Street X Fund bid has been submitted for the implementation of the designs. The short video can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZT4x3pl2GYM which showcases the vibrancy of the market but also some of the valid concerns raised.

* A key problem raised by visitors to Barking and station users is the poor **internal layout of Barking station** which results in overcrowding and very poor conditions for people with accessibility issues. It presents a very negative gateway into the town centre which has been exacerbated by the improvements made to the station forecourt which highlight the poorer conditions inside. The Council is seeking to address this with the bidding franchisees for the East Thameside rail franchise which offers the scope to see improvement works implemented.

* **New housing.** Helping to increase the local footfall and raise average local incomes through provision of new private housing and in particular new modes of affordable rent for people in work.

*Support the private sector reuse and redevelopment of the prominent **former Magistrates Court** for upper floor residential and ground floor commercial. This scheme can form the key focus of supporting a restaurant cluster and unlocking the evening economy.

* **The Barking Bathhouse** was a pop up spa, bar and cultural facility located on a town centre development site during the summer/autumn 2012 as part of the CREATE festival. It proved very successful in changing perceptions of Barking and both drawing in new visitors to the town centre as well as providing a facility existing residents felt was lacking. The Council is keen to work with Something & Son (the designers) and the therapists who established themselves as a viable business to create a new more permanent facility which learns the lessons of the summer Bathhouse and provides something that further enhances Barking's offer. The Council has produced a High Street X Fund bid and the video can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0F5bv362a8I>

*** Utilise the attractive assets of Abbey Green open space and the River Roding.** As shown on the cover of the Investing in Barking Town Centre within minutes walk from the core retail area lies a very attractive green space (including ruins of Barking Abbey and the church where Captain Cook married) as well as Town Quay and the River Roding. These are assets many competing centres cannot offer. The development of the Creative Industries Quarter and Abbey Retail park (one side of the Roding) and Freshwharf (a large site on the opposite bank of the Roding) providing new housing, business and commercial space will help draw people to the west of the town centre.

Appendix 2 provides a visual representation of some of the key elements of the Barking Town Team approach.

The next sections briefly summarize some of the issues in the Borough's district centres:

Dagenham Heathway

Since its creation in the late 20s/early 30s Dagenham Heathway has lacked a civic facility. The Council used its compulsory purchase order powers to acquire an eyesore public house and adjacent land on a prominent gateway site into the retail area. The site was redeveloped for a new library and one stop shop, a modern retail unit and 80 residential apartments. The scheme has significantly supported the district centre – bringing in significant additional footfall to the area. A decision was made not to include a cafe in the library to encourage use of High Street facilities. The residential units above as well as providing additional footfall for shops and services also made the area feel safer at night and provide a higher flagship building on the prominent corner. The facility also addresses simple needs like providing public toilets for the High Street.

Vacancy rates at the Heathway are very low and a Heathway Retail and Business Partnership has been set up for key stakeholders to work together to further boost prosperity and address issues of concern.

Chadwell Heathway

Utilising Council and Local Implementation Plan (TfL) funding a package of environmental improvements was carried out. Alongside this a Chadwell Heath Retail and Business Partnership Forum was established. Vacancy rates at Chadwell Heath are relatively low and numerous businesses are trading very well. Parking is a particular for retailers despite the availability of short term free parking at a supermarket.

Green Lane

In early 2013 the Council is investing in new lighting along the linear Green Lane which includes a significant evening economy. Identity banners for Green Lane will also be included following a model successfully used at Chadwell Heath. The first meeting of the Green Lane Retail and Business Partnership was held in November 2012.

Questions raised by the Committee

- **What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?**

As expressed in the Portas Review – High Streets and Town Centres are not just retail uses but a whole host of functions which potentially can provide differentiation from out of town centres and encourage greater variation between town centres. As set out in Section 6 above the Council and Town Team are taking a broad approach considering the wide range of town centre functions and how they are complement each other to support the growth of the local economy. The approach includes town centres as a place to learn, work/do business, exercise, eat/drink, relax and live as well as to shop. Alongside this is an approach to deliver a very high quality public realm and create a place people want to spend time. Details of each element of the strategy are set out above and form part of a recognition that Barking will not be a direct retail competitor with Westfield Stratford City or out of town centres but that such a wider focus is the best means of actually delivering better and broader retail provision.

There is also recognition of the importance in serving needs locally – most visits to Barking are from local people and there is scope to further promote the benefits of local services and facilities.

- **How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail? Do they need a greater emphasis of providing services for local communities?**

The evidence shows Barking serves primarily a local population which, with the significant new development proposals within its catchment areas, offers good prospects for Barking however this cannot be complacently assumed. The full benefits of local provision need to be realised acknowledging that people will make an occasional trip to a larger centre particularly for leisure shopping. It needs to be considered how more local trips can be encouraged to address

specific shopping and other needs and help reduce the frequency of leisure shopping elsewhere.

- **How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops?**

What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

Surveys regularly show that most people visiting Barking travel by public transport (60% in 2012 survey) or foot (23%) with only 16% by motor vehicle. Yet parking often comes out as a major issue especially for retailers. In relation to addressing the majority's needs, the Council and TfL have invested heavily in improving conditions for pedestrians and bus users including the implementation of the East London Transit facility and improvements to the station forecourt

The point made in section 2 about demographic change needs to be considered ensuring that the town centre is accessible and with the facilities required for people with young children.

In relation to parking provision, the new 350 space parking provided in the London Road/North Street development will address needs in the medium term. Barking has a multi-storey car park which is under-utilised by shoppers – it is felt it is more its environment and location rather than its pricing which reduces its usage however low cost solutions to address this are limited. Reducing prices further would simply mean extra strain on limited local authority finances. Pricing is tailored to support shoppers and resist commuter parking.

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In recent years improvements to the pedestrians environment at Dagenham Heathway has made crossing much easier and safer - although there was significant concern from people pre-implementation about the removal of pedestrian barriers.

- **What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres including publicly owned land and properties?**

Over the last 10 years the Council has been able to unlock development potential through utilising its land holdings and the values created by residential development. The Council has

used its powers to unlock complex development opportunities and ensure very high quality public realm alongside striking architecture. However with the lowest residential values in London the housing market currently makes such development in the Borough unviable. The major scheme currently under construction has required the financial underpinning of a supermarket development. Discussions with developers about unlocking further development potential in the town centre have all revolved around a supermarket as the only use currently generating the values required to make development possible.

Barking and Dagenham's healthy Housing Revenue Account has meant the Council has been in the position to carry out significant residential development itself as well as purchasing new development properties to make schemes viable. The Council will increasingly look at how it can further wider economic development through its housing investment activities as well as being open to new innovative models of development financing and considering Public Works Loan Board loans and other affordable financing for schemes which have a key regeneration impact.

Clearly a 'business friendly' planning system linked to an inward investment 'hand holding' service can provide support to getting development proposals delivered.

• How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

The debate regarding planning and town centres seems to be split between those who believe planning restricts flexibility which in turns prevents the economic use of land and premises and those that believe planning does not go far enough in securing a mix of uses. In Barking we believe there is no evidence that is planning is a restriction on empty sites/properties coming back into use - the primary issue is viability or lack of demand. Whilst planning should not rigidly control the precise mix of High Street uses it is felt there needs to be specific Use class amendments to prevent over supply of 'problem' uses which diminish the town centre's attractiveness (ie betting shops and pawnbrokers/pay day loans).

Local Plans should focus on the wider functions which make a town centre vibrant and encouraging those uses which could give it vitality. Maintaining a strict retail percentage-based planning policy approach to our high streets only serves to replicate the historic approach to the development of such centres. Local Plans must be more flexible when considering such space,

looking at their overall economic and social function they have within the community. To sustain town centres in the future planning policy must therefore go beyond taking a prescribed and controlling retail percentage based approach to their evolution. We would suggest that any revisions to and development of Local Plans should be looking to move away from prescriptive and restrictive percentage based retail policies which do seem to limit scope without actually achieving the aspirations behind the policies.

The Government should also seek to introduce more controls on 'problem' uses such as betting shops by making the use classes order more flexible. You could achieve this by widening the A1 use to include those A2 uses which contribute to the vitality and viability of the high street leaving those that don't such as Betting Shops in A2. You could also add Hot Food Takeaways into A2. This would result in 4 'A' use classes and not 5. In effect, the A2 use class would therefore become the problem use class.

Barking Town Team's concerns over betting shops is their increasing prevalence and whilst they may attract some people they deter many more. A number of betting shops in Barking attract groups of people who hang around outside. They are committing no offences but nevertheless are often quoted as a reason shoppers do not like the town centre and feel unsafe.

In relation to the debate concerning shrinking the size town centres by designating retail area - LBBD did do this in its LDF however it appears the retail units at the far edges of town centres in the borough are the most desirable for a section of the community who are looking for the most affordable premises to start a business – therefore despite policy changes the units remain in retail use.

• What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

LPAs have an important role in ensuring a high quality of development which supports the revitalisation of town centres alongside resisting developments which weaken town centres. In Barking, the Barking Code has enabled the Council to deliver a high quality consistent treatment across the town centre including securing S106 funding from developments.

Setting up the Barking Town Team and involving the LPA is one means of ensuring key town centre stakeholders views are taken account of in planning policy development and development management (planning decisions).

Please refer to other answers in relation to development powers the LPA has utilised.

• **How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres supplementary planning guidance (SPG), best support town centres?**

Whilst we would welcome strategic guidance provided by the GLA, we would urge that the new Town Centres SPG is a concise document. Whilst the Government has been decisive in distilling national policy, the London Plan and its associated SPGs run to many pages of guidance which applicants and boroughs must consider when seeking to invest and develop in the Capital's town centres. We recognise that a strategic approach for London's town centres is imperative; and that there is a fundamental need to consider these areas as integrated networks of economic hubs. As such, we support the London Plan function of providing a clear vision and a consistent approach for London's town centres. However, we would ask that the new SPG is a clear, strategic and succinct document.

As set out in section 7 above we strongly support the Mayor's Outer London Fund approach and the associated resources in seeking to boost town centres in outer London. A continuation of such a fund with further rounds would be very welcome. We also support the High Street network established by Design for London alongside the OLF as a means of boroughs and partnerships to learn from each other experiences and spread best practice. Finally the Mayor of London owns significant amounts of land in Barking and Dagenham and it is essential the approach taken to this land (and particularly associated transport infrastructure) helps to support town centre revitalisation.

Appendix 1 – BTC Road to Recovery

Appendix 2 – Actions to address vacancy/attract particular stores

Appendix 3 – Investing in Barking Town Centre brochure

Response produced by David Harley (Group Manager – Economic Development and Sustainable Communities), for London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

TC011 Living Streets

Living Streets

Living Streets response to the London Assembly's Planning Committee review of the role of London's town centres

About Living Streets

We are the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk. We work with professionals and politicians to make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces. We started life in 1929 as the Pedestrians Association and have been the national voice for pedestrians throughout our history. In the early years, our campaigning led to the introduction of the driving test, pedestrian crossings and 30mph speed limits. Since then our ambition has grown. Today we influence decision makers nationally and locally, run successful projects to encourage people to walk and provide specialist consultancy services to help reduce congestion and carbon emissions, improve public health, and make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces.

In addition to a strong London presence amongst our supporters and a track record of working with London authorities, Living Streets is represented on the Specialist Assistance Team for the Outer London Fund.

Introduction

Living Streets welcomes this opportunity to contribute to a long term vision for the role of London's town centres and ways in which planning policy can support this. Indeed, the last couple of years have seen a welcome focus on high streets and town centres after years of gradual decline as market forces have taken investment and people elsewhere. At Living Streets, we are committed to turning this tide from boarded up shopping fronts, fast food takeaways and cloned streets towards reinvigorating town centres as places that people of all ages and abilities can access and enjoy.

In exploring the future role of London's town centres, the London Assembly's Planning Committee poses the following questions:

- ☐ Can they remain centres for retail and employment in light of the rise of supermarkets, internet sales and growth in „m-commerce“ which provide robust competition to the traditional high street offer?
- ☐ Could town centre locations be more successful in focussing on culture, entertainment and services? Or
- ☐ Do policy makers, planners and businesses have to fundamentally re-evaluate the purpose and appearance of London's town centres?

Our answer to each of these questions is a resounding „Yes!“ However, it is a mistake to simply look at town centres in terms of their separate functions (e.g. retail, services, culture and entertainment) or to reinvent them as „multi-functional“ spaces. Town centres and high streets are places that have always been used for multiple purposes by the communities they serve. Since community is at the heart of healthy and sustainable town centres, policy makers, planners and businesses alike should re-evaluate how best London's towns can best serve people as places to live, as well as visit to work and shop.

Towns centres as places to live

High streets are not just about retail, but about the communities in which we live: where we socialise, access civic infrastructure, enjoy heritage and participate in the world. Walking is the obvious way to experience centres and increasing footfall can only benefit shops, which is why Living Streets is involved in several campaigns to promote better high streets and delivering projects that make them better places – for example, Step out in London below. However, the bigger picture we would like the Planning Committee to address is how to encourage more people – young people, families and older people, across all income brackets – to live in London's high streets. These lifetime neighbourhoods would automatically generate demand for a range of services that can be provided conveniently in their locality. Reducing people's need to travel encourages walking with the added benefits of improving health, increasing social interaction (and perceptions of safety), as well benefiting the environment. And with local services on their doorstep, there is more incentive for communities to „own them“ and get involved in partnership with local authorities and businesses to ensure their upkeep.

Town centres as places to visit

Despite the move towards out of town outlets, internet shopping and now „m“ commerce, people still like to get together, socialise and be part of a community. This is why physical improvements to the public realm matter. Too many high streets are currently treated as corridors for motor traffic rather than places for people. Pedestrians have insufficient space, despite often making up the majority of the „traffic“ on the street, and are put off by poor air quality and the speed and density of motor traffic. Street management – including litter collection, street cleaning, maintenance and road works, managing temporary clutter such as A-boards and more – is often uncoordinated and impedes pedestrians. **This is despite the evidence that pedestrians visit more shops and spend more money than people travelling by other modes.**

Living Streets' [Making the Case](http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/makingthecase) report (<http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/makingthecase>) highlights a study in Bristol which found that retailers on a local high street overestimated the proportion of shoppers arriving by car by almost double at 41%, compared with the actual proportion of 22%. In fact, over half of the shoppers had arrived there by foot, and greater proportions had arrived by bus and cycle than estimated by retailers. Pedestrians also tended to visit more shops than those arriving by car. Similarly, Transport for London's Town Centres Survey 2003-4 found that people walking to a town centre spent an average of £91 per week in the area, as compared to £64 for car drivers or passengers, while bus users spent just £1 less per week than those arriving by car. Living Streets' own experience in carrying out community street audits and surveying shoppers on Sydenham High Street, South East London (see http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/index.php/download_file/-/view/889/) discovered very similar results.

A Community Street Audit is one of Living Streets' key approaches to community engagement and street assessment. Small groups of local residents, traders, councillors and council officers, including vulnerable street users, are brought together to assess a route on foot and identify barriers to walking and potential improvements. Improvement activity varies widely between projects according to the key needs identified by communities. They tend to fall into three main categories: community-led improvements such as litter picking, clean ups and planting; more in-depth improvements such as resurfacing or lighting improvements led by the local authority, and; awareness-raising activities such as led walks, the design of maps and street parties.

This suggests that a focus on local schemes to improve the walking environment is the way forward. Taking this a step further, Living Streets' Step Out in London (SOL) project promotes a range of activities to complement and publicise public realm schemes, by encouraging people to spend more time (and money) walking in their local town centre. We worked with local people to use this better environment as a catalyst for making other things happen in the area – activities that get people out and about enjoying their streets. For example, in Chippenham Gardens in Kilburn, Brent, we supported local residents and shopkeepers to work together to set up street parties, and outdoor Zumba and Tai Chi in a shopping precinct known as much for dealing and drinking as doing the weekly shop. The turnaround in fortunes has been noticeable, with more people shopping and spending time.

In Herne Hill, we worked with the Herne Hill Forum to support the creation of a new market in the semi-pedestrianised space that is now the heart of the community. There has been a fantastic transformation!

Not only do people flock to visit on a Sunday for the market, but they just enjoy spending more time in the area.

"The original scheme was an improvement but the area was still dead", said one local resident. "What has really made a difference is the different activities. The piano was brilliant and putting tables and chairs outside is great – much easier with the buggy and you feel safer too."

The Herne Hill Shop Local loyalty card scheme has ensured that benefits are not only felt by market traders, but long suffering shopkeepers, with 57% of residents surveyed saying they spent more in the market, and 35% more in shops and an average £16 more per week. A third of shopkeepers also agreed that people were spending more time and money, with others remaining neutral. But this certainly bucks the national trend and demonstrates what a rallying impact this work can have. Indeed, almost half of stalls had employed local people to work there.

Surveys carried out after the SOL project activities found that on average almost 90% of people felt that the investment in their streets was worth the money spent. People reported walking more (47%), shopping more (52%), feeling safer and more part of a community (both 58%).

Almost three quarters felt the street was more like a „living street“. Community engagement in the design phase and subsequently promoting the physical changes is essential.

The same principle - that improving places (physical improvements and social activities) for pedestrians delivers economic, social, health and environmental dividends – applies to the bigger streets as well as the smaller ones. Oxford Street, the nation's biggest and busiest high street was closed to motorised traffic one Saturday last November for the eighth year for VIP (Very Important Pedestrian) Day. Sales on the day were up by £50m suggesting that a safer, more pleasant shopping environment encourages people to spend more. Of the people we polled on the day, 90% said they wanted Oxford Street to have reductions in traffic.

Conclusions

The Mayor's proposed Supplementary Planning Guidance should focus on:

- ☐ Considering town centres as the best location for development and growth of a mix of land uses besides retail, **with a particular focus on the building lifetime communities**
- ☐ Improving local service provision (leisure, arts, cultural, consumer and public services) first and foremost from the perspective of the people who live there, and then with a view to inviting more people in
- ☐ Recognising the importance **and sustainability** of accessibility, walkability and the lifetime neighbourhoods approach in town centres
- ☐ Identifying ways to strengthen and develop town centres **with the involvement of their communities** to respond to changing circumstances and demands

For more details please contact:

Tom Platt – London Manager

1) Challenges – What are the main challenges facing London's roads, over the short, medium and long term?

☐ **London's Transport** – There is increasing pressure on London's roads and limited opportunity to increase road capacity whilst public transport is already operating at capacity. Therefore, there is an urgent need to encourage modal shift from motor traffic and public transport to active travel modes such as walking and cycling.

☐ **London's Economy** – In the current financial climate it is vital that the funding for transport projects deliver high returns on investment. The 2006 Eddington Report¹ noted that active travel has „the potential to provide benefits to the economy and welfare through both reduced congestion and the associated likely reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants, and improved health“. Furthermore, independent research undertaken by the University of the West England on behalf of Living Streets concluded that investment in the walking environment is likely to be of equal or better value for money than other transport projects and showed positive cost-benefit ratios of up to 37.6 compared to other transport projects². This is particularly relevant for ensuring London maintains a vibrant network of local high streets during this challenging economic period.

1 HM Treasury and Department for Transport. 2006. *The Eddington Transport Study*, p.157 para 3.44. London: The Stationery Office.

2 Making the Case for Investment in the Walking Environment -

http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_attach/Making%20the%20case%20full%20report%20%28web%29.pdf

3 City University of New York and London Metropolitan University. 2009. *A Tale of two ObesCities: comparing responses to childhood obesity in London and New York City*. Available at <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/fms/MRSite/acad/fls/npu/ObesCities.pdf> , accessed on 20 August 2010

☐ **Quality of Life** – The places we live in shape our lives. Ask any citizen of any great city, town and village what makes it great, and you will find issues that affect the walking environment at the top of the list: how safe they feel when walking around their area; how attractive their local streets are; the quality and proximity of their local shops and services; and the care taken to maintain the basic quality of the street. Our streets are the one public service everyone uses every day, but this is often overlooked when considering where public and private investment and attention should be directed.

☐ **Public Health** – The Mayor is right to identify in the London Health Inequalities Strategy that „As with the rest of the country, London is facing an obesity epidemic“ (p9). 30,000 people die every year due to obesity related diseases in the UK alone, with 60.8% of adults and 31.1% of children being overweight and of these 24% of adults and 16.8% of children being obese. Obese children are twice as likely to become obese adults and it is estimated that the costs to the NHS of treating obesity related conditions will more than double by 2050³. This is a health crisis and Living Streets would strongly support a strategic role for the Mayor in tackling obesity in London.

1 HM Treasury and Department for Transport. 2006. *The Eddington Transport Study*, p.157 para 3.44. London: The Stationery Office.

2 Making the Case for Investment in the Walking Environment -

http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_attach/Making%20the%20case%20full%20report%20%28web%29.pdf

3 City University of New York and London Metropolitan University. 2009. *A Tale of two ObesCities: comparing responses to childhood obesity in London and New York City*. Available at

<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/fms/MRSite/acad/fls/npu/ObesCities.pdf> , accessed on 20 August 2010

• **Improving the environment and tackling climate change** - Improving the environment and tackling climate change as one of the key challenges facing London. The last Mayor estimated that more than 1000 people died prematurely in 2005 from particulate pollution. Air pollution averages well over twice WHO recommended maximum levels occur in busy London streets such as Marylebone Road, Kings Road, Earls Court Road and Brompton Road. According to the Mayor's Climate Change Action Plan (2007), ground-based transport accounts for 22% of London's carbon dioxide emissions. The Roads Taskforce must acknowledge the role that London's street network can play in helping to reduce the resources used by transport and the harmful emissions from transport. Only a limited amount of progress is possible in making cars more energy efficient, so planning policy should aim to reduce journey lengths and shift travel from the car to active travel modes such as walking. Encouraging a modal shift to walking, as well as managing transport demand (e.g. through the sophisticated co-delivery of land use and transport planning to exploit reverse commuting capacity in the capital, for example), can clearly make a significant contribution

2) Approach – How should the competing demands on road space be defined and managed? For example the balance between the competing demands of different road users or between the role of London's roads as corridors for the movement of goods and people and their role as public space.

It is important that the Task Force recognises the movement and place function of streets as outlined in Manual for Streets. The place function distinguishes a street from a road and comes from creating a relationship between the street and the surrounding buildings and spaces. The movement function of streets is important but needs to be considered in the context of the street's multiple functions. Different locations across London will have differing levels of movement or place function which will determine their management and choices regarding allocation of road space for road traffic v pedestrians.

Furthermore, any definition or management of road space must take account of the user hierarchy outlined in Manual for Streets which states that the design of any road scheme should put pedestrians first followed by cyclists, public transport users, specialist service vehicles and other motor traffic last. Whilst pedestrians are the most vulnerable group of road users in the transport hierarchy they are also the most numerous.

Innovation will also play a key role in reducing demands on road space through measures such as the travel demand management brought in during the Olympics which encouraged deliveries to take place at night.

3) Solutions – what are the range of policy and investment options available to meet the short, medium and long term challenges facing London's road network and how might these vary across London?

We believe the key to meeting the challenges facing London's road network is the implementation of proven measures that will make London's roads better places to travel and spend time in. Our key policy and investment options are described below under the four guiding principles of:

Leadership and long-term vision - Ambitious modal shift targets, strong political leadership and a visionary outlook

Effective Delivery - Boroughs need to be innovative and effective in their delivery of schemes, enabled and supported by TfL

Activities and interventions on the ground - Specific schemes, projects and interventions on the ground.

Promotion and marketing - Marketing and promotion of walking as an overarching public facing campaign.

Proposed measures include:

Raising the bar for London

- ☐ We need an ambitious, long-term vision statement on walking and public realm improvements that sets out commitment to achieving a transformation in the number of walking trips. Currently half of trips between 0.5–2km in length in London are made by car, but only 29% of them on foot;
- ☐ We want to see these numbers reversed as a first step to making walking the natural choice for short journeys in the capital and this should be adopted as a central plank of the Mayor's transport strategy.
- ☐ A greater proportion of the TfL budget should be invested in walking, with a specific objective to "invest to save" as part of managing demand for private and public transport travel. Health budgets must also be more actively targeted to support walking project delivery, reflecting the huge positive impact that active travel has on public health.
- ☐ We need to use the Olympics to establish a true legacy for Londoners- Regular and prolonged car-free events and festivals should become the norm, with trial pedestrianised areas showing how our city can be improved for everyone.
- ☐ The strategy need to invest and extend existing schemes which we already know work, such as Living Streets' Walk to School campaign and Walking Works campaign.
- ☐ A strong multi-stakeholder steering group on walking and public realm should be created to advise and support the vision of London as a world class walking city, and support delivery partners such as voluntary sector organisations.

Realising central London's potential

- ☐ The staged pedestrianisation of Oxford Street, transforming it into a world class destination befitting its status as the country's most famous shopping street.
- ☐ We need to connect the islands of great public space in central London by developing a network of pedestrian-friendly streets and public spaces, free of barriers to walking and free of traffic domination. The network could be built up on a step-by-step basis, starting with a central hub such as Leicester Square, and linking it to important nearby destinations like Trafalgar Square, Covent Garden, and Chinatown. From there, the network would extend outwards to take in the busy pedestrian highways, the main tourist attractions, the great parks, the river, and central London's mainline stations.

Thriving town centre and neighbourhoods

- ☐ Outside central London, our town centres and high streets should be well designed, liveable and welcoming places. We need to transform the quality of the pedestrian environment and revitalise our village and town centres all across Greater London.
- ☐ We need to assess the walkability and permeability of local neighbourhoods and town centres and put in place improvements so that more people walk for local trips, supporting local shops and services.
- ☐ We need to support the establishment of car free developments in London- not simply preventing tenants and residents in some developments from obtaining parking permits, but developing or retrofitting developments which are truly car free.

Creating space for people

- ☐ Flagship initiatives to re-allocate space to pedestrians should become principles firmly embedded in both TfL and Borough maintenance and improvement schedules.
- ☐ „Naked streets“ principles should be part of an ambitious and staged programme of de-cluttering, and a better balance between different

transport modes. These could vary from high profile flagship projects such as Exhibition Road) to more localised schemes on Dagenham Heathway and Walworth Road

☐ The principle of “smoothing the flow” must be about people flow, not simply motor vehicle flow.

☐ Changes made on this basis must be empirically informed and proportionate between modes.

- Pedestrian pinch-points must be addressed as a specific part of “smoothing the flow”- reallocating space away from the carriageway (characterised by low rates of people flow) to the footway (characterised by high rates of people flow). Pedestrian space should not be sacrificed to accommodate more cycling- this should be done by re-allocating space within the carriageway.

4) Delivery – which of these options would you prioritise given the inevitable constraints in terms of physical space, funding and delivery capacity?

The options above range from high cost, long term solutions to activities and interventions which could be delivered relatively quickly across London are highlighted below:

Living Streets operates the national Walk to School (WtS) campaign which has existed since 1995 and aims to encourage all parents and young people to make walking to school part of their daily routine, emphasising the benefits to physical and mental health and wellbeing, the social aspects and the potential to address congestion, improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions. WtS reaches over 1.6 million young people at over 6000 schools throughout the UK. The best known element of the campaign, and the element around which much of Living Streets’ evidence gathering has focused, is the Walk Once a Week (WoW) programme, which has nearly 2000 primary schools and 250,000 young people now taking part across the UK. Walk to School interventions have been found to increase average walking rates in participating schools by 15% and in some instance by 40%.

We also believe our experience in running Community Street Audits – one of Living Streets’ key approaches to community engagement and street assessment could be useful in creating spaces. CSAs is where small groups of local residents, traders, councillors and council officers, including vulnerable street users, are involved to assess a route on foot and identify problems and potential improvements. Improvement activity varied widely between projects according to the key needs identified by communities, and fell into three main categories: community-led improvements such as litter picking, clean ups and planting; more in-depth improvements such as resurfacing or lighting improvements led by the local authority, and awareness-raising activities.

Finally, our Walking Works project has engaged with adults in employment to encourage more walking to, from and at work. Funded by BIG Lottery’s Health and Wellbeing Fund as part of the Travel Actively consortium, the campaign has raised awareness of the benefits of walking more to over 28,000 individuals so far, through walking pledges, regular digital campaigns and the annual Walk to Work Week challenge. Walking Works includes a programme of more in-depth support for workplaces, including helping establish „walking champions“, running bespoke walking challenges and activities and helping workplaces to integrate walking activity with their workplace travel plan.

Walk to Work Week is the aspect of the Walk to Work programme with the widest participation and the most significant evaluation data.

☐ Since participating in Walk to Work Week, 57% of respondents felt that their overall level of walking had increased.

☐ All respondents were asked how they felt after taking part in the project. The top three responses were „I feel fitter“ (45%), „I feel more healthy“ (41%) and „I am more active“ (39%).

☐ Individuals achieving 30 minutes or more physical activity on five or more days per week increased from 29% at registration to 50% at follow up.

5) Any other issues

We believe it is important to map out the underlying principles for a strategy for the development, design and management of London's road network which has modal shift towards active travel at its heart. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our options in further detail as part of the process of developing the strategy.

Tom Platt

TC012 British BIDs

BRITISH BIDs RESPONSE

LONDON ASSEMBLY FUTURE OF LONDON'S TOWN CENTRES

ABOUT BIDs

The Business Improvement District (BID) model now has a proven track record in delivering improved management and leadership, and has made a significant contribution to the wider economic performance of many locations.

There has been steep growth in the number of BIDs, much of which has taken place in benign conditions. We are still facing an uncertain economic climate, and public sector finances are under extreme pressure with historic investment being unlikely to be maintained as a consequence. Moreover, as the BID industry evolves, expectations are growing. Stakeholder organisations like the British Retail Consortium (BRC), the Inter Bank Rating Forum (IBRF) and the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) have published far reaching criteria and guidance in conjunction with British BIDs, which sets out their requirements for the support of BIDs. These organisations similarly have worked together to support British BIDs in establishing the only Industry Accreditation for BIDs focusing on ensuring quality in terms of management systems and service delivery.

British BIDs (Bb) is the organisation dedicated to the BID industry focused on thought leadership, research and market commentary. Through its extensive activity and experience it is leading the way on the development, management, renewal and evolution of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in Britain.

British BIDs operates in a collaborative manner bringing in a breadth of experience and knowledge from many sectors to strengthen the understanding across the industry. Our Commercial Partners are Jones Lang Lasalle and Alliance Boots. JLL are a leading global real estate business and Alliance Boots are a significant retail player on the High Street, both add a real breadth of knowledge and expertise to our offer. Our Communications Partner is The Green Brain, providing important communications, business engagement and public affairs support to the industry. Our Marketing Partner is Footfall123, who provide an all-in-one marketing tool, incorporating loyalty marketing & customer loyalty functionality, for high street businesses. Our Research Partners are the University of Ulster and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). Adding academic rigour and professionalism to our research work is critical to ensure our messages are well articulated and heard.

British BID's far-reaching agenda covers all elements of the BID industry bringing together views and expertise from: the BIDs themselves; the

businesses who pay the levies; investors and agents who shape the places where BIDs exist; central government who were the originators of the legislation and still regulate its application; local government who act as custodians for the legislation; and representative organisations who touch the BID industry.

There are currently 148 BIDs representing almost 55,000 businesses with a total investment in BID areas of over £91 million annually, and the number is continuing to grow rapidly . The landscape around BIDs has changed significantly over the past couple of years, not least with the government's decentralisation agenda, the demise of the Regional Development Agencies, the localism Act, the squeeze on public finances and resultant expectation on the private sector, the forthcoming local government finance reforms, plus the high profile Portas Review and subsequent Portas Pilots/Town Teams. This activity is coupled with the developments within the industry including maturity of the BID concept – the first third term BIDs in place; the first merger of two BIDs; and alliances developing across BID companies – together with ongoing debates on Tourism BIDs, Super BIDs and Property Owner BIDs.

The BID industry has become mature and complex over the past eight years and British BIDs have been right at the heart of it's evolution.

BRITISH BIDs IN LONDON

The British BIDs team is fully immersed in the London BID scene.

The team were responsible for running the first UK BID pilot programme, The Circle Initiative (2001 to 2006), that used £4.6m of Single Regeneration Budget from the Government Office for London (GOL) to trial the concept of BIDs across five areas of Central London. Once the London Development Agency took over the SRB fund from GOL, it expanded the BID activity across London by creating a regional programme called the London BIDs programme. The British BIDs team were the authors of that programme and successfully delivered it, having won through open tender three times, over its entire seven year life to 2011.

During the decade from 2001 to 2011, extensive BID activity took place across London led by members of the British BIDs team. Starting with discussions around the basic concept, bringing the private and public sectors around the table, co-authoring the legislation, trialling the principles in a variety of locations right through to the formalities of BID feasibility, development, ballot, set up, review and renewal.

The London BIDs programme led the way both in London and nationally on crafting the BID language and processes; standardising methods of development through the only award-winning BID toolkit; creating generic legal templates for all aspect of BID development; showcasing best practice and disseminating lessons learnt; running a variety of networks to exchange ideas and expertise; developing tailored training for BID personnel; briefing and representing the LDA on policy affairs; and leading the way on early industry research.

An important part of the London BIDs programme was the creation of the award-winning London BIDs Toolkit that focused on the 25 incremental steps to developing a BID plus a further five that covered the renewal process. Developing a BID involves a series of stages of development grounded in BID legislation and technical requirements but crucially being motivated and supported by the business community from the outset. BIDs are business-led whilst being public-sector enabled.

The evolution of BIDs in London has been rapid with an initial focus on the basic foundations of clean, green and safe as per their North American forefathers. The agenda expanded very quickly in many locations across London where it became clear that there was scope for joint procurement for cost savings; innovations in marketing and destination management; creative business engagement; vision and stakeholder leadership and ultimately being seen as the trusted and reliable 'can-do' organisation in a location.

As part of the London BIDs programme the team hosted annual events including showcasing best practice; an International BIDs Week bringing over experts from Canada, USA and South Africa; and latterly the Mayor's Awards in 2009 and 2010. Much has been learnt from overseas regarding the continued evolution and advancement of the BID model.

It is no coincidence that as a result of the immense activity of the London BIDs Programme, London is the region of the country with by far the highest number of BIDs and more importantly until the end of the London BIDs programme maintained a 100% track record at ballot. Between 2004 and 2011, 24 BIDs went to first ballot and 13 of these were successfully renewed to a second term.

Having said this, BID levies are based upon occupiers not owners as is the case in North America. For this reason, BIDs tend to develop in locations where there is sufficient occupier interest and commitment to make that place better as opposed to being a strong regeneration tool for highly run-down locations. Additionally for London, the absence of cross-borough BID regulations has inhibited the development of BIDs in commercial districts that span administrative boundaries. Waterloo Quarter BID has been the

only BID to successfully achieve a cross-borough operation but it relies on running two distinct BID ballots and systems and combining them together.

Beyond the formal programmes delivered, the British BIDs team have direct consultancy experience in 27 of the 30 BIDs across London and therefore knowledge of and relationships with these organisations is very strong. The consultancy work has ensured a deeper understanding of many aspects of the BIDs across the capital and often has involved leading the way for new ideas and innovations. Our relationships across London have been maintained to the present day with 28 of the 30 BIDs in London being British BIDs members.

Clearly London needs to be able to compete on the world stage on attractiveness, liveability, and efficiency and needs to organise districts to project strong identities. BIDs are well placed to create the conditions in localities to achieve this. Much has already been achieved across the BIDs in London and there is real evidence of impact on the ground and value to their locations.

However with the success of the BID levy concept comes a threat. Such is the interest and recognition of the success of levy model, new initiatives are now being designed by Government to emulate this principle. Two of these such initiatives – the TBID, which seeks to collect funds from tourism operators across a region; and the Late Night Levy, which provides the opportunity for funds to be collected from licensed premises – raise concerns for the BID model and those that fund it. The BID principle has worked because it is a single predictable levy charge collected within a relatively small defined locality for a pre-agreed business plan that serves to deliver benefits directly back to its investors. The exclusivity and commitment to this model will become eroded if businesses are compelled to pay other levies in the same location for activities that do not necessarily provide and direct benefits and indeed are not governed locally.

It is an important time for London to capitalise on the opportunities that the BID model affords and to ensure the concept is extended and broadened across the City.

British BIDs is perfectly placed to support the Mayor in this endeavour.

OUR APPROACH TO TOWN CENTRES

To understand and plan for the future of our town centres we must have a clear appreciation of current and forecast consumer spending and behaviour.

The past century has seen a significant evolution in retailing from the local independent retailer, through to the combination of goods within a department store, the combination of stores under one roof in the form of the shopping centre initially in town centres, the combination of goods and services within single brand supermarkets initially in town centres, and up to the present day with the capacity to buy anything anytime via the internet.

It is a fact that technology has been the game-changer whilst mobility remains a major factor in influencing consumer behaviour. The proportion of consumer spending is firmly spread across a number of offerings – supermarkets, out of town centres, online and town centres. And importantly, consumers are not loyal to just one channel, most consumers use some or all of the channels most or all of the time.

The 'affection' for town centres may still exist for many but the 'love' has gradually been switching to offerings that create an 'emotional bond' with their consumers and are more often than not creatively brand-led. Equally, town centres can no longer claim to uniquely hold the 'sense of place' title, many alternative centres now provide this with a cleaner, safer, more dynamic, more convenient and more contemporary approach. And moreover the rich heritage associated with our more historic town centres no longer has a monopoly as increasing numbers of historic locations out of centre provide host to events and attractions.

So what is the USP for our town centres in the future?

The answer lies in understanding the intricacies of each location, its catchment and its hinterland. No one size fits all solution will work.

Consumers are king

We know that consumers are less loyal, more mobile, more price-sensitive, less time-rich and more adventurous than ever before.

Consumers do take advantage of creative and innovative ideas if presented well and are thoroughly thought through – New West End Company's VIP days are phenomenally successful when focusing the already established Christmas shopping activity into a user-friendly

format; Newcastle NE1's 'Alive After Five' campaign to extend 'opening' hours into the early evening has made a significant impact; Pop-up shops are having a short term positive affect to enliven interest in a location and to encourage more creative and innovative approaches to selling; and the Click and Collect revolution is driving customers back into stores after the convenience of 'bagging' your goods online from the comfort of your home or smartphone or tablet. Many retailers are embracing this approach with stores such as John Lewis effectively greatly increasing their reach by enabling 'John Lewis' purchases to be collected from 'Waitrose' stores.

Town Centres must adapt

We know that our town centres have bricks and mortar of a greatly varied quantity and quality with often poor facilities to match. Just because these locations have a history in retailing may not dictate they have a future of the same nature.

Town centres must focus on being current and adaptable and fit for their own consumer catchment having due regard to where consumers spend their money not just where they spend their time. Town centres must not become accommodating 'venues' at a cost for events and outdoor theatre if they only serve to increase footfall at times and locations where consumer spending in the incumbent

establishments will not follow. As part of a wider strategy that recognises the scope for consumer spending and proves the value of event-led activity this works, but as a stand-alone it probably doesn't. Town centres must recognise the dynamic between 'captive audience', ie. those on site for work purposes, unable or unwilling to travel/spend in alternative ways versus 'flights of fancy' who will buy from whoever and wherever the mood takes them.

Alongside this must be an appreciation of the mix of uses that have a greater capacity to work together 'in the flesh' and those that can locate and operate anywhere. Thinking more broadly about the various uses that could or should be located in a town centre including leisure, commercial and residential for an example is critical. Many engine of some town centres will not be driven by retail in future.

Ultimately, we cannot just paper over the retail cracks in our town centres as this will merely make the decline slightly more attractive as the town fails.

MANAGED PLACES ARE ESSENTIAL

We know from decades of experience in the UK that managing places is essential. Consumers expect a coordinated and branded offer whilst locations benefit from a holistic and efficient approach.

BIDs have proved their ability to achieve this through a commercial multi-skilled approach. We wouldn't expect a department store, a supermarket or a shopping centre to be unmanaged so why in this highly competitive marketplace should we expect a town centre to survive without an effective management regime.

OUR RESPONSE TO YOUR QUESTIONS

1. What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and

develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

Innovation from all 'places' must be investigated not just from town centres. The latest initiatives including marketing, social media and sustainability being delivered in shopping centres, supermarkets and online all may have application in town centres. Adjusting formats including PopUps, adjusting hours such as 'Alive after Five' and adjusting uses are all important to the strategy.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

As introduced earlier in this response, it will not just be about town centres competing for retail. Not all retail places will survive and not all places are competing directly. Understanding the dynamic between 'captive audience' and 'flights of fancy' is critical.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

The historical and dense nature of town centres means they will never compete favourably in a straight competition with out of town or supermarkets to car borne shoppers. Sometimes local is preferable, sometimes breadth of offer and heritage is preferable but again it is essential to understand the catchment and hinterland. Nevertheless one key widespread concern in town centres remains the inflexible nature of car parking – often inconvenient, unpleasant and costly. It is not merely the cost as consumers are willing to pay countless delivery fees to countless retailers when shopping online. The total package of car parking must be agreeable and local authorities should have the commercial motivation and freedom to invest in their car parks.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

The future of many locations will not lie with the dependence on retail

and therefore taking a broader and more flexible view of each centre will be critical to achieving appropriate futures for regions and sub regions. Encouraging commercial and/or residential into redundant retail space will reinvigorate locations and give them a different dynamic to draw on.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

Planning policies must be current and must understand what consumers want then make it commercially viable in town centres. Do not attempt to underpin outmoded formats that won't stack up financially.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

With the advent of localism local authorities should now be better placed to understand and initiate activity locally. However, powers and finances have not significantly changed therefore it is questionable what level of activity is possible. Business rate retention may have some beneficial effect on the finances and requisite motivation to understand the dynamics of their area. The most productive course of action is likely to be focused around embracing the 'place management' approach and encouraging a

commercial understanding through BIDs. An informed division of responsibility and activity between council and BID then ensures a demand-led effective delivery as is the case in Kingston.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

The London BIDs programme that ran from 2004 to 2011 provided wide-ranging partnership development support for local authorities, businesses and partnerships. It is no coincidence that as a result of this immense BID activity, London is the region of the country with by far the highest number of BIDs and more importantly until the end of the London BIDs programme maintained a 100% track record at ballot. Reinstatement of a regional BID development programme alongside a BID loan fund would support the Mayor's commitment to achieve 50 BIDs across London and serve to support the management of London's town centres in a commercially astute manner.

Submitted by:

British BIDs

www.britishbids.info

January 2013

TC013 LB Wandsworth

London Borough of Wandsworth

Dear Nicky,

The London Borough of Wandsworth is pleased to respond to this call for evidence to the London Assembly's Planning Committee. The response has pulled together expertise from across the Council's Economic Development, Planning and Transportation units. We have, where possible, tried to address the Committee questions but have also provided some additional information where we consider appropriate. One overriding point we would like to make is that the key focus for the Mayor and the GLA should be key strategic issues such as transport and investment - rather than the detail of local policies.

1. What new ideas and existing best practice could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

Wandsworth's Town Centres have been fairly successful despite the economic climate of the past two to three years. We have identified the following factors as important to the success:

- Character town centres with a balance of niche shopping offers as well as mainstream shops
- Successful Town Centre policies both planning and economic development
- Positive Town Centre Management sustained over a long period of time this included a successful Shop Front Improvement Scheme for 20 years;
- Supportive Environmental Health and regulatory services who provide training and advice wherever possible and use their powers only where really required
- Current and forecast population and per capita expenditure increases supporting demand and growth

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

We believe that town centres can compete by developing a rounded town centre leisure experience, including shopping i.e. seeing real products, but also meeting friends, having coffeellunch, doing other things such as visiting the library, cinema, etc. This needs to become a key part of the Town Centre experience, a more authentic and attractive place to visit than bland shopping malls and more compelling than targeted catalogue shopping and the online offer.

There is a strong perception that putting back the business rate revaluation (currently based on the artificially high rental levels in 2008) has hampered high street recovery. Our experience is that this a particular issue for growing independent businesses and that revaluing in 2014 to reflect falling rental values (as was originally intended) could have provided a welcome reduction in local business rate bills and help make the town centre more affordable. While not a GLA responsibility it is important that this issue is aired more widely.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

Good planning, great transport connections, appropriate parking regimes, well designed disabled and buggy accessible shops and transport, enjoyable public spaces as well as buildings, good lighting, etc all make town centres work.

Transport is critical to this and for example, Wandsworth Town Centre has a one-way gyratory running through it and this is a real inhibitor to the ongoing success of the Town Centre. A householder survey undertaken as part of the forthcoming Retail Needs Assessment (RNA) 2012 revealed just over 17% disliked the traffic and congestion running through the centre. Wandsworth has long held the removal of the gyratory as a key transport project as it would deliver considerable regeneration benefits to the area. We intend to support this scheme and will be seeking GLA TfL to support and match fund the project. In Putney we think there is scope for greater benefit to be made of the River as a feature of the Town Centre and again we will be looking to improved river transport and connectivity between the river and the town centre to support the growth there. The audit of the centre carried out as part of the RNA identified the attractive Thames waterfront as one of the centre's strengths, which increases the distinctive ambience of the centre. The RNA's householder survey revealed that fewer than 20% said they disliked the traffic through the centre, and 13% disliked the amount of car parking provided within the centre. Improving river transport services and their use will therefore be an important factor.

Projects such as Crossrail 2 can also help our town centres and we are working at a strategic level to ensure this is the case, in particular for Clapham Junction but also other locations in the borough.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

The EDO is developing a series of Vision strategies for our Town Centres to ensure they can compete in the economic climate and against multi - channel retailing and major centre competition . The Portas review noted;

The one - perhaps the only - thing everybody I have spoken to is agreed on is that for a high street to survive and grow it must have a very clear vision of where it wants to get to. If

the High street was in single ownership, like a department store, it would have a vision, a high level strategy and direction, it would choose what it wanted in a particular space to fit with a vision and proactively target the business and services that were missing'. The intention is to establish such a clear vision owned by all of the town centre stakeholders. We have well established Town centre partnerships to facilitate this and we are providing them with the resource to carry out the essential strategic thinking to guide the town centres.

This work will commence in March 2013 and will mesh with the work which has just been commissioned in Balham under the Outer London Fund (OLF) to provide a strong design identity for and upgrade 5 key public spaces and bring more people into explore enjoy and invest in the town centre.

We would strongly promote additional investment in culture and leisure activities in town centres such as in Tooting where there is scope to create the infrastructure to develop a better sense of place and purpose for the heart of Tooting. The actions identified in the Council's £700,000 OLF2 bid aimed to capture Tooting's strengths and the potential for its artisan, creative, independent retail and business activity to create economic growth for the area. This modest investment could have increased the space for artists and galleries at relatively affordable rents compared to other more central London town centres and this would provide interest and vitality to the area.

See also comments on residential developments in/adjacent to town centres under 5. below, which will help stimulate town centre footfall.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

Over the past year or so some 20 or so major high street brands have disappeared from our high streets affecting over 5,400 stores and 71,000 jobs nationally. Begbies Traynor, the insolvency practitioners, estimate that a further 140 retailers are in a financially critical situation. It is inevitable that we will see major changes to our high streets and we need to have robust but flexible policies to deal with these changes positively. There is a need perhaps to focus on key centres and recognise that some locations will not survive as traditional shopping locations.

Wandsworth Planning Policies identify a hierarchy of protected shopping frontages, and promote and protect a high (though decreased) proportion of A1 uses within Core Frontages. We consider this critical to ensuring a minimum critical mass of retail offer but outside of these areas flexibility is key to enable a broad range of town centre uses that can enliven and support the core shopping offer by providing footfall and economic activity, and helps to extend the town centre day and support the establishment of an active evening economy. It is important to also have flexible policies that can accommodate changing retail offers as well as support pop up and meanwhile uses which may arise.

The Council has also supported the redevelopment of a number of major town centre and edge of centre sites for residential led mixed-use developments in all of the town centres but particularly in Clapham Junction, Putney and Wandsworth which will lead to a significant increase in the number of people living within or directly adjacent to the Borough's town centres. These schemes also provide the opportunity to improve connectivity within town centres and to adjoining areas and improvements to local environment quality and public realm, providing a more attractive town centre environment.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

Clear visions for the Town Centres

Appropriate flexible Planning policies and supportive Economic Development policies

Effective Town Centre Management - reflecting well understood local needs and characteristics

Transport and infrastructure investment

Supportive approach from Regulatory Services with an aim of prevention in the first instance eg through Food Hygiene Training Courses, Trading Standards advice etc

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

At the regional level we consider the transport planning and town centre hierarchy issues should be set. These are the most critical factors that if developed in a supportive way can allow the growth and continued success of London's Town Centres, For LB Wandsworth we will want to see policies that support:

the removal of Wandsworth gyratory

new transport infrastructure and improved transport nodes in our key town centres especially Clapham Junction

improved transport linkages to our most isolated local centre at Roehampton (also high on the deprivation index)

ongoing support for the new major Town Centre (CAZ Frontage) at Battersea

continuing support for investment in our town centres

Promote the SME economy

We are happy for this response to be made public,

Yours sincerely,

Seema Manchanda

Assistant Director Planning & Environmental Services

Nick Smales

Economic Development Officer

Response from LB Enfield - the London Assembly Planning Committee's request for comments to support their review of the future of London's town centre

1. What new ideas and existing best practice could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

- 1.1 While the heart of town centre activity is retail, they are much more than a place to shop. Town centres also need to be places to socialise, be entertained and access leisure, libraries, health care and advice and information services.
- 1.2 The future balance of retail and other functions in town centres needs to take into account market demand and supply and the needs and expectations of customers.
- 1.3 Effective structures to engage with businesses and local communities, ensures regeneration policies and plans are relevant, informed by local needs and supported by the people they aim to serve. It could be helpful to consider how different boroughs approach town centre management and the structures they have in place.
- 1.4 Enfield has a Town Centre Management team with 4 Town Centre Managers employed by the Enfield Business & Retail Association (EBRA). EBRA's overall role provides a bridge between local authority functions and town centre businesses. The Town Centre Managers support local town centre business associations across Enfield, voice the needs of businesses at a range of fora, including local CAPE's, and manage the delivery of projects to support our town centres.
- 1.5 The EBRA team is currently supporting the development of the borough's Area Action Plans and Master Plans by co-ordinating engagement with local businesses.
- 1.6 Under Enfield's Outer London Fund 2 programme in North East Enfield a Town Team is being set-up to support the regeneration of Ponders End and the A1010 corridor to achieve a comprehensive uplift of the Ponders End area.
- 1.7 Area-based partnerships with local residents inform and support the development of Area Action Plans regeneration plans, including the development of community services in town centres and on high streets. Some of Enfield's local area partnerships have asked town centre businesses to join as it is recognised that many are also residents and have a longstanding commitment to the area.
- 1.8 Libraries in town centres and high streets generate footfall to support local business and provide a range of valuable services for the community. Enfield Libraries Team is developing a working relationship with Enterprise Enfield (business start-up agency) to enable access to business advice for local residents at libraries on our high streets. This approach will help nurture entrepreneurship and invest in increasing household income, thereby adding to spending power of our town centres' customer base.

1.9 Enfield's Outer London Round 1 programme delivered a range of projects to support town centres which captured people's imagination and proved successful:

- the Enfield Kitchen, a mobile vehicle managed by Barnet & Southgate College, delivering live cooking demonstrates using ingredients bought on the high street.
- the Libraries and Museum Team installed a Vitrine at Fore Street Library, creating a museum window bringing heritage and culture to the high street. This project adds to the Museum and Enfield Life Gallery in Enfield Town.
- a new creative market is helping to generate additional footfall

1.10 Enfield is taking forward the following projects under the High Street Innovation Fund:

- Improvements to the historic market in Enfield Town to lift the look of the charter market and enhance Enfield Town's market town identity.
- Dressing long-term vacant shops to lift the look of the high street and generate letting enquiries.
- Developing the We Love Enfield website to promote our town centres offer across the borough and communicating to customers what is on offer on their high streets.
- A programme of arts and entertainment events in our town centres to entertain and enhance the shopping experience.
- Increasing the size of our creative market (developed under OLF1)
- Taking a number of long-term vacant shops in high streets to create 'pop-up shops' for new entrepreneurs to enable them to market test their business.

2. How can town centres compete, in the new age of consumerism, and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

2.1 Ensuring town centres have a broad balanced offer, not only for shopping but to meet the wider needs of its customer-base, will contribute towards generating footfall and enable high streets to compete with out-of-town retail centres.

2.2 Emerging AAPs include plans for multi-service centres, which will contribute towards generating footfall and add to the high street offer.

2.3 Enfield's Leisure & Culture Team are developing plans for a conference facility on our Tourist Information Centre in Enfield Town, which will add to the town offer and contribute to increasing footfall.

2.4 Hotels located in town centres offer the opportunity to support the night time economy and add to the tourism offer.

2.5 Competing for consumers spend is a key challenge for the foreseeable future, particularly given the rise in household bills, customers shopping around for best prices and intensive competition between national brands.

2.6 Promoting what is on offer on the high street and offering customers an experience when they visit town centres will help generate footfall.

- 2.7 Enfield Council is working with North London Chamber of Commerce to profile businesses across the borough, including those in town centres to enable business-to-business and marketing to customers.
- 2.8 With funding from the High Street Innovation Fund EBRA is developing the We Love Enfield website and optimising social media outlets to promote footfall.
- 2.9 Nationally e-commerce activity has grown by 140% in the past 10 years compared to 5% growth for town centres and 20% for out-of town centres.
- 2.10 Ensuring our town centres have good Wifi and broadband infrastructure, which meets businesses current and future needs, is essential as many high street businesses carry out on-line sales. Consistency in their service is essential to retain customers and generate repeat orders.
- 2.11 We understand the GLA is addressing gaps in broadband coverage across London. Enfield has locations where broadband needs to be strengthened and service standards for addressing issues improved. Enfield Council is very keen to work with the GLA on their broadband improvement project.
- 2.12 Also mobile phone applications offer new ways for people to shop and arrange pick-up or delivery. The app market is estimated to grow by £30billion by 2015.
- 2.13 While national brands have the resources to develop their own applications, most independent businesses are unlikely to have the resource to finance their own app, which typically costs £20K and takes 2 months to create.
- 2.14 However, businesses working together could develop apps to capitalise on this growing M-Commerce market trend and promote what is in offer in their town, area or borough.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

- 3.1 Gateways and access routes into town centres offer an opportunity for people to see what is on offer on the high street and be encouraged to stop and shop. When traffic routes or walking routes take people away from the town centre or visual connections with the town centre are limited, the opportunity to encourage shopping is reduced.
- 3.2 Enfield's emerging Area Action Plans and Master Plans will explore how gateways can be improved to maximise footfall in our town centres and support the evening economy.
- 3.3 Parking offered in town centres and high streets needs to enable stop and shop and be competitive with neighbouring retail centres. Enfield Council reviewed its parking charges and has recently introduced a package of parking measures to boost trade and support high street businesses.
- 3.4 Access to town centres by all modes of transport is an important factor affecting the attractiveness and viability of town centres. To encourage cycling, Enfield Town has been identified as a focus for a number of initiatives to encourage more people in the borough to cycle including: new cycle routes, cycle parking and training promotion.

- 3.5 Ensuring transport infrastructure meets current and future needs is important. Enfield Council is working with TfL and Network Rail to improve the frequency of trains in our town centres. Network Rail has committed £50million investment to improve Enfield's rail transport offer.
- 3.6 Also in Edmonton Green station, the Council has been working with Network Rail to secure funding for a lift to improve accessibility of rail station not only for disabled people but also families with pushchairs.
- 3.7 Electric vehicle charging points are growing in number and will be an integral part of our town centres. Enfield is investing in new charging points and adapt our town centres to meet future needs.
- 3.8 Voids in town centres, particularly long-term voids, brings down the look of the high street and can deter shoppers. In Enfield EBRA managed a project to dress the windows of vacant shops with vinyl under a Working Neighbourhoods Fund project in 2011. This approach attracted enquiries from potential tenants and feedback from local residents was very positive as they appreciated the improved look of the street.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

- 4.1 Enfield is committed to 'Town Centre first' approach to new development and is actively working with investors and partners to progress town centre developments. Network Rail's Enfield Town station site is now progressing at a pace and will create 10K sqft commercial space and 500 new residential units.
- 4.2 Taking a pro-active approach to unlocking commercial and housing developments can make a significant different to the progress of regeneration projects. Enfield is working in partnership with St Modwen, the owners of Edmonton Green shopping centre, to improve the quality of the shopping space. Progress to date has resulted in a significant increase in footfall.
- 4.3 Addressing market weaknesses can unlock investment in town centres. The size of footprint of units on the high street in Edmonton Green did not meet the needs of national retailers. Enfield Council is including 1,092 commercial space in the Highmead regeneration project on Fore Street. This approach will help attract national brands and in-turn contributes towards increasing footfall.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

- 5.1 The proliferation of the same types of businesses in an area dilutes the local market and increases competition among existing businesses. Restricting changes of use classifications can help address this market weakness. (Also see response to Q6).
- 5.2 Enfield has the 6th largest population in London, with 60% of residents travelling out of the borough to work, particularly central London, and 40% travelling within the

borough. Enfield is taking forward plans for new housing regeneration plans, including 5,000 new homes and 3,000 jobs in Meridian Water.

- 5.3 Factors influencing where people choose to live include housing prices, the quality of local transport and the lifestyle offer. Achieving improvements to the frequency of local rail services will ensure Enfield attracts higher skilled people to live in the borough, as they are very likely to travel into London to work.
- 5.4 Attracting people with disposable income to live in the borough and growing the local customer-base will support our town centres.
- 5.5 Enfield's Consumer Protection Team are actively working with local food businesses to improve their food hygiene rating and support the development of the night-time economy and café culture in Enfield's town centres.
- 5.6 Discussions with LB Haringey regarding a joint Food Festival along Green Lanes are very positive and will further support the development of our night time economy, a key factor in marketing Enfield as a locations to live, work and play.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

- 6.1 Voids in town centres bring down the look of the high street and can deter shoppers. While long-term voids can indicate a struggling economy, other factors such as the use classification and the size of unit may not meet market demand could be an issue.
- 6.2 The Development Management Document and Area Action Plans (AAPs) are important frameworks to guide development in town centres and set out where change of use classification could be allowed, thereby enabling a more flexible response to changing demand and supply markets.
- 6.3 Enfield is looking at change of use classifications in the emerging Area Action Plans. Engagement with property agents and businesses to identify market demand and supply issues is part of the development process for the AAPs.
- 6.4 Our emerging AAPs are also considering the boundary of town centres and how to enable the concentration of business activity in our town centres.
- 6.5 Dialogue with neighbouring boroughs also supports town centres development. Enfield is in dialogue with Haringey regarding their Tottenham development plans and Broxbourne's regarding their town centre development plans for Waltham Cross, particularly given out overlapping markets for customer base and the potential for positive knock-on impact of developments plans.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

- 7.1 Addressing voids in town centres, taking a strategic approach to address declining centres and strengthening local transport and other infrastructure are key areas the Mayor's role can help address, through strategic policy and funding mechanisms.

- 7.2 The Mayors Outer London Fund is an important resource to unlock sites for development and re-shape failing town centres. Enfield has secured OLF2 funding to purchase sites around the former Middlesex University site in Ponders End and unlock development to revitalise a declining town centre. This fund should be continued in the future.
- 7.3 Funding for business support tends to focus on non-retail businesses and often states this sector is excluded. The OLF1 programme in Enfield provided retail businesses with point of sale and marketing advice, resulting in attracting new customers and improvements in sale. Exploring how business advice and support for the town centre businesses, particularly the retail sector should be included in future funding programmes.

TC015 RB Kingston

Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

From: Andrew Lynch

Sent: 11 January 2013 08:30

To: Alexandra Beer

Cc:

Subject: RE: Future of London's town centres - Assembly review

Alex

Please find an revised response below that, in answer to Q1 provides more information on the operation of Kingstonfirst.

Do let me know if anything in the response is unclear, or if we can be of further assistance to the Assembly in respect of this matter.

Regards

Andrew

1. What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

Town centres need to compete to attract visitors and spend, they compete with one another and with other retail and leisure destinations such as out-of-centre retail parks. Kingston town centre is the best performing of London's 11 Metropolitan Centres, and works hard to continually refresh its offer and attraction. In recent years the town has added the Rotunda Leisure complex, the Rose Theatre and enhanced riverside to its leisure and cultural attractions, and was the first location in the country to introduce a Business Improvement District in 2005. Kingstonfirst operates the BID and aims to promote the town centre to attract more visitors; secure a safer, cleaner environment with added security; better transport and access; and support for small independent businesses in the commercial sector. Over the lifetime of the BID, Kingstonfirst have achieved an increase in footfall to Kingston town centre of more than 2.45 million additional customers a year, and have increased standards in cleansing and security, including a reduction in violent crime of over 38%. Kingstonfirst provides a very successful management of town centre events and destination marketing in order to attract visitors and enhance their experience whilst in the town centre. The improvements to the town's cultural and leisure provision diversifies the offer in the centre and benefits retailers by attracting visitors for reasons other than shopping, but also by increasing visitor 'dwell time' which encourages more spend.

Kingston continues to work to improve the offer and attraction of the town centre. Work has commenced to revisit the Plan for comprehensive town centre renewal – the 2008 K+20 Area Action Plan. The substantial growth identified in the Plan has not come forward, and the Council is now working with its landowning and major business partners in the town centre to look again at the potential scale of growth that could be supported, and this is being taken forward through an initiative called Kingston Futures. Working in partnership to deliver change and growth in our town centres is an approach advocated by the Mayor of London and the Government, and RB Kingston is taking a proactive approach to pushing this agenda forward in

Kingston town centre and in the Borough's three district centres – Surbiton, New Malden and Tolworth.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

Town centres enjoy a number of competitive advantages over other shopping locations, and these include:

- town centres are places of social interaction – the importance of providing the opportunity for people to meet and mix should not be underestimated particularly in view of shopping's leisure activity function. Provision of an attractive environment with activities for social interaction is a significant advantage for town centres.
- town centres offer a mix of activities that cannot be matched online or in retail parks – the opportunity to combine a variety of shopping, leisure and cultural activity on the one trip is a significant advantage.
- Many goods, particularly those at the high value end, are seldom purchased without being tried on / tried out in a store, and retailers will continue to require floorspace / showrooms. Retailers such as John Lewis (the key anchor store in Kingston) are combating the rise of the solely internet based retailer by offering store based collection for goods purchased via the internet, which avoids the not insignificant internet purchase shipping costs.

Thus, investing in the public realm is a key and necessary intervention to support the continued vitality and viability of town centres. Kingston has and continues to plan significant investment in the public realm of its three district centres and Kingston town centre. Investment in the public realm of Surbiton and New Malden district centres has in recent years involved RBK and TfL match funding, and successful partnership working between the funders and the local community and businesses. Significant new investment, again jointly funded by RBK and TfL will shortly come forward in both Tolworth and Kingston town centres, through the 'Greenway' project in the former centre, and a project to revitalise the Ancient Market Place in the case of Kingston town centre.

We are working with the key business and landowning stakeholders on the Kingston Futures project to identify and deliver significant new town centre floorspace so that Kingston retail, leisure and business offer can be refreshed through new retailers/businesses occupying floorspace that provides for modern trading requirements.

Access and parking are also factors affecting competitiveness, particularly the issue of free versus paid for parking, and we note that the Planning Committee will be considering the parking issue in their review. However, we consider that the quality of the retail and other uses in a centre and the quality of the public realm are more important factors in attracting shoppers. It is particularly important to ensure that out-of-centre retail is restricted to forms of bulky goods retailing that are neither suitable or appropriate to accommodate in our town centres. Restricting the retail 'offer' in this way will help ensure that out-of-centre retailing complements (by providing different types of retailing such as DIY goods) rather than competes with town centres. Kingston has for many years been successful in resisting the location of non-bulky goods retailing out-of-centre, and this helped to sustain and enhance the town centres.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops?

What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

Increasing footfall is certainly key to increasing centre viability, and this can be achieved by planning for more residential development in our town centres, but also in Kingston's case by significant improvements in public transport access, and rail transport in particular.

Improving access and reorganising parking are likely to be major strands of the Kingston Futures work. Kingston town centre is constrained by the relief road and river, and the K+20 Area Action Plan identified the need to reorganise parking and public transport access. The current distribution of parking facilities does not serve the town centre very well and at times create significant shopper traffic congestion on the routes into the town centre, and the rail and bus stations are located on the opposite side of the relief road from the town centre and improved linkages are required. The Council will seek to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public transport and parking provision in the town centre by working in partnership with the key town centre stakeholders and TfL.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

Kingston's approach is to work in partnership with the key agents of delivery – the main land owners and key businesses in the town centres through the Kingston Futures project. We have and continue to work with the key stakeholders to identify future need and site capacity to accommodate the growth. However, in locations like Kingston town centre (a successful Metropolitan centre), there is very little undeveloped or under-developed land available, and it is necessary to assemble sites in different ownerships and to enter development agreements to take sites forward. Identifying opportunities for site assembly to meet established need and bringing landowning stakeholders together is a key development facilitating activity for local authorities, and is linked to another key activity - identifying development potential in Development Plans and/or site briefs.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres?

How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

Policies to promote town centres and to direct new retail development into the Borough's centres have been effectively applied in Kingston for many years. Out-of-centre retailing in the Borough is largely restricted to bulky comparison goods and convenience goods stores, with proposals for non-bulky goods retailing directed into the Borough's centres. The town centres first policy and the sequential approach to site selection remain central tenants of the Borough's Core Strategy echoing national and regional policy. Whilst the Borough's policies to promote new retail development in town centres are robust we reserve judgement as to how the NPPF's "*presumption in favour of sustainable development*" will affect decision-making.

To encourage more people to live in town centres requires the provision of attractive living environments as well as providing work, leisure and cultural opportunities. It is certainly the case that for centres to thrive it is no longer sufficient for towns to focus predominantly on retail. Kingston town centre has the key ingredients for a successful town centre living environment. It has an attractive Medieval core, Thames riverside and access to significant areas of open space for recreation and leisure in addition to a healthy mix of cultural (eg museum and theatre), leisure (cinemas, clubs, bars and restaurants) and the substantial retail offer. Getting the right balance of provision to suit all social groups is not easy, and the Council developed an After Dark Strategy to identify and promote opportunity and attractions for all social groups and

how to manage and maintain the town centre in the evening and at night. The Kingston Futures project recognises the importance and opportunity that creating more residential space in the town centre provides. Residential above retail or commercial uses in the town centre will bring added vitality and spend potential. The quality of the public realm is an important component of attractive place, and Kingston Futures recognises this and seeks to refresh and improve some of Kingston's public spaces.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

As referred to above, the Council recognises that it does not have powers to effect change on its own, and positive planned change to address the needs of residents, businesses and visitors is best delivered through partnership with the key agents of delivery. The Council is a key landowner in the Borough's centres and is therefore able to work with other landowners to assemble sites to accommodate the growth needed to sustain the centres.

The Kingston Futures project sees the Council working with other stakeholders to develop a strategy to address the needs of the town centre. This strategy will be a review of the development plan for Kingston – the K+20 Area Action Plan – and will be underpinned by a rigorous assessment of the need for new floorspace in the town centre. It will identify the type, scale and location of new development.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

- Firm affirmation of i) town centres first and ii) the sequential test policy position.
- Firm stance against non-bulky comparison goods retail proposals for locations outside of town centres.
- The Mayor should encourage Councils to assemble sites for retail development in town centres through the provision of specialist advice.
- The Mayor should co-ordinate regular town centre health check reviews to ensure consistency of approach across London.
- The Mayor should support the development of new innovative employment opportunities in Outer London's town centres. Recent evidence (eg the London Office Policy Review) indicates there are opportunities to promote and attract new innovative types of commercial activity into town centres – activity requiring managed start-up flexible “incubator” space. Kingston are seeking to explore how knowledge and creative industries businesses that are currently located in sub-optimal space on for eg industrial parks could be encouraged to relocate into the Borough's centres. The University also presents a potential resource of new business start ups, that would benefit from suitably managed flexible town centre business space.
- A commitment from the Mayor to actively support improvements to public transport provision in South London would be welcomed, and in particular a commitment to support the Crossrail 2 proposal terminating at Kingston would be very welcome.
- The Mayor should support, encourage and invest in public transport initiatives designed to improve access to town centres, and measures to improve movement within centres. Kingston has proposals to improve key public transport access points, such as the Kingston Station Gateway crossing, which aim to improve the linkages between the railway station and the other areas within the town centre.

TC016 LSE Cities

LSE Cities

Future of London's town centres

Submission to the London Assembly's Planning Committee

Dr Suzanne Hall, LSE Cities, 10 January 2012

Research background: a different kind of centre?

A team at LSE Cities have been involved in two in-depth studies of two inner London streets and how they fit within their respective urban centres. The Walworth Road links to the Elephant and Castle, while Rye Lane is a primary element in Peckham's town centre. What is instructive about these streets in the context of the London Assembly's review of London's town centres, is that they are comparatively 'ordinary': they fall outside of London's prestigious landscape. Also of importance, is that these streets exhibit a relative economic and cultural vibrancy despite being located within areas with high indices of deprivation. Yet in planning terms, neither of these streets are officially recognised for their economic and cultural vibrancy; their value is not necessarily legible to the lens of power. We would therefore like to raise the realities of increases in ethnic and cultural diversity and how these urban trends have a role to play in the reshaping and planning of some of London's town centres.

1. What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

Part of the task of imagining London's high streets and town centres of the future, is to understand how its ordinary as well as prestigious urban landscapes are changing. Similarly, it is crucial to recognise key differences within London's retail geographies, as well as how these vary from national ones¹. For example, while small independent shops have substantially declined across the UK, quite the opposite is true for London²: there has been a 78,5% increase in independent retail in London from 2000 to 2006, a trend that has not been curtailed by the economic crisis. A primary consideration in the re-imagination of London's high street and town centres is therefore to develop a disaggregated view informed by the particular cultural and economic practices that are distinctive to place.

¹ For a recent overview of varied national trends see the presentations from the 'Expert Scoping Panel Workshop', 25-26 September, 2012, <http://www.highstreetfutures.co.uk/events/>

² Neil Wrigley, Julia Branson, Andrew Murdoch and Graham Clarke (2009) 'Extending the Competition Commission's Findings on Entry and Exit of Small Stores in Britain's High Streets: Implications for Competition and Planning Policy', *Environment and Planning A*, 41: 2063-85.

Across these distinctive streets and centres, a broadly adopted maxim is that the social and cultural dimensions of high streets and town centres are key to their economic vitality (NEF3, Portas4). It is crucial within this maxim to adopt the best practice of ‘particularity’: to understand the failures and successes that are key to urban locality, as well as the new trends associated with changing economies. The requirement for local authorities to actively engage in the planning of town centres outlined in *Planning Policy Statement 4*5 includes both the need to audit decline or growth of existing town centres and to develop a strategic framework for the management and growth of centres. However, measures of ‘vitality’ and ‘viability’ are frequently based on economic norms, and in our research experience, the emerging cultures and economies on Peckham Rye Lane and Walworth Road that grow out of diverse ethnic enterprise, tend to remain poorly understood in the official assessments of these areas. How audits are conducted, and by whom, and how changing trends are recognised by appropriate measures of value, is therefore key to the understanding of particularity and ultimately to the support, planning and renewal of London’s high streets and town centres.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

High streets and town centres in ‘ordinary’ urban settings are often activated by patterns of convenience – places to buy milk, post a letter and top up an oyster card. These elements of convenience and day-to-day utilities are essential to their vitality and should not be underestimated, while complementary activities like GP and dentist surgeries, libraries and schools all add to the social value. Vibrant and convenient town centres are also able to attract a number of complementary business activities. The *High Street London*6 report, for

3 New Economics Foundation (2002) *Ghost Town Britain: The threat from economic globalisation to livelihoods, liberty and local economic freedom*, London: NEF.

4 Mary Portas (2011) *The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets*, <https://www.gov.uk/.../11-1434-portas-review-future-of-highstreets>

5 DCLG, Department for Communities and Local Government, London:

2009a *Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for sustainable economic growth*.

2009b *Planning for Town Centres: Practice Guidance on need, Impact, and the sequential approach*.

6 Gort Scott and UCL (2010) *High Street London*, Great London Authority, London.

example, recorded 2100 businesses in Peckham Town Centre, and 13,400 employees. By way of comparison, Westfield Stratford has 300 retail units and 8500 permanent jobs⁷. A significant advantage that out-of-town retail centres have is 'a view of the whole'. Ownership and management is not often fragmented, and unlike inner city high streets and town centres, out-of-town retail centres are able to benefit from orchestrated planning and management strategies. 'A view of the whole' needs to be re-established in the planning and management of high streets and town centres, without necessarily undermining the smaller scale and varied patterns of ownership and individual endeavour that make for rich and adaptive urban environments.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

Urban high streets and town centres in inner London depend on high thresholds of footfall, largely from people who have not arrived by car. Convenience of access is therefore paramount, as is a density of bus routes with a frequency of stops and the ease of pedestrian passage. The combination of high levels of road-based public transport together with a convenient and pleasant street environment is in part an urban design concern, and pragmatic but attractive projects that increase sidewalks, allow for bus movement to be prioritised over cars, and that allow for designated loading and quick drop offs, all add to the physical 'usability' of streets.

The success of a basic design reconfiguration of the street profile is well evidenced in the 'Walworth Project',⁸ where sidewalks widths were increased, seating amenities were added, and bus lanes were privileged, all within an attractive streetscape design. Rather than explicitly branding the street experience, investment was put into maximising the pragmatic and social space of the street.

⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2011/may/21/westfield-stratford-city>

⁸ The 'Walworth Project' saw an increase in bus patronage and a decrease in parking ticketing. The project won the 'Living Streets' award:

<http://www.nsl.co.uk/case-studies/transformation-of-walworth-road>

If these design measures increase physical accessibility, perceptual accessibility could be enhanced through using transport infrastructure at bus stops, tube stops and stations, for a street or centre 'notice boards', in either electronic or standard form, and incorporating basic orienting information, news about the street/centre and social media platform information including website addresses, twitter hash tags, and app download information, all increasing e-information about the street/centre.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

In comparatively ordinary streets and centres where investor confidence is not necessarily high, other means of raising the profile and vitality of streets and centres needs consideration. *The Portas Review*⁹ highlights the potentiality of 'pop-up' shops and generally the ambit of interim use could certainly be further pursued. Part of the project of interim use is to make value – social, cultural, and economic – tangible to existing and prospective users. More standard practices in interim use involve markets, pop-up shops, festivals and events of various sorts. But given London's immense cultural and institutional wealth and capacity, prospects for innovative partnerships could be more fully explored and developed: art colleges and business schools, for example, could 'adopt a shop', linking local initiatives and innovations into a wider framework of testing and promoting the role of London's streets and centres.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

A further, crucial means to increasing footfall and thresholds of support to streets and centres is to increase residential density within easy walking distances of centres. In Walworth, for example, the Walworth Road is located within a high density residential area and has approximately 15,000 people within walking distance or square kilometre of the street, thereby helping to sustain its retail life (CABE)¹⁰: in comparative London terms, the Walworth Road is surrounded by a less affluent population, but because of the population density in

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ CABE (2007) *Paved with Gold: The real value of good street design*.

proximity to it, the total weekly expenditure estimated for the street was £4.3 million compared with £4.8 million on High Street Hampstead.

High streets and centres are also potentially concentrations of public assets such as clinics and libraries, as well as spaces to meet up. The *High Street London*¹¹ report reveals that two-thirds of Londoners live within 500 meters of a high street, and that two-thirds of the trips to the local street are made to access forms of exchange and interaction other than shopping. In planning terms, this highlights how both residential and cultural densities are required to sustain the vitality of high streets and town centres.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

The *Association of Town Centres Manifesto*¹² and the *Portas Review* both highlight the need for the agile management of high streets and town centres to maintain and update the crucial balance between large and small operators, permanent and temporary uses, and cultural and economic activities. As reported to the London Assembly's Economy Committee¹³ our research at LSE Cities strongly suggests the need for stewardship. However, a variety of coordination mechanisms need consideration, as the BID mechanism, while valuable in certain contexts, is not universally suitable. In ordinary high streets, a range of stewardship issues require consideration, most explicitly, how proprietors are given a voice, and what role these individuals, who are economically and intellectually invested in these streets, have in collective discussions around their street's current and future vitality. The role of high street and town centre associations, and their relationship to local authorities, requires further consideration.

11 *ibid.*

12 ATCM (2012) *Association of Town Centre Management Manifesto*, ATCM, London.

13 Suzanne Hall (2012) *London's High streets: Bringing empty shops back into use*, LSE Cities, submitted by invitation to the London Authorities Economy Committee.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

In summary, this report has outlined three areas for planning consideration in the support of high

streets and town centres:

i) Physical: public transport, including ease of pedestrian access is key to sustaining the convenient

aspect of urban streets and centres. In addition, a density of residential stock within walking distance of high streets and centres adds to the thresholds of local support.

ii) Cultural: as significant as residential density is to the day-to-day activation of streets and centres,

so too is a 'cultural density', including hard components like public institutions, and soft or interim

components like events and festivals. A more concerted interim use programme twinned to cultural

and educational institutions could be initiated to focus public interest and imagination more positively on the role of London's high streets and town centres.

iii) Managerial: a range of managerial options that have 'a view of the whole' need to be explored,

and in particular, the role of local interest groups and proprietors needs to be considered, including

an involvement in the auditing, imagining and management of ordinary streets and centres.

LSE Cities current research on London's 'Ordinary Streets':

<http://lsecities.net/objects/research-projects/ordinary-streets>

The Ordinary Streets project is an ethnographic and visual exploration of the spaces, economies and cultures of 'street'. It engages with the policy and planning of town centres and high streets, and with issues of ethnic and cultural diversity in the context of global cities. The primary case study is Peckham Rye Lane, a multi-ethnic street in south London

Publications resulting from this research can found at:

Hall Suzanne (2012) *London's High Streets: Bringing empty shops back into use*, report to the Economy Committee, London Assembly, 31 August 2012. London Assembly Summary published:

http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-londonassembly/assembly_investigation/empty-shops

Hall, Suzanne, 2012 *City, Street and Citizen: The measure of the ordinary*, London: Routledge. <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415688659/>

Hall, Suzanne, 2012 'For the future good of our high streets we need a better understanding of the social and economic life of local worlds in the context of global change', *British Politics and Policy at LSE* (14 Feb 2012) Blog Entry.

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/2012/02/14/localism-high-street/>

Hall, Suzanne, 2011 'High Street Adaptations: Ethnicity, independent retail practices and Localism in London's urban margins', in *Environment and Planning A* vol. 43, no. 11, pp. 2571-2588 <http://www.envplan.com/abstract.cgi?id=a4494>

TC017 ATCM

Association of Town & City Management

Future of London's town centres

Report for London Assembly's Planning Committee

By

Association of Town & City Management (ATCM)

January 2013

Future of London's town centres

“The high street should be at the heart of every local community, bringing people together, providing essential services and creating jobs and investment, so it is vital that we do all that we can to ensure they thrive.”

David Cameron, May 2011

1. What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

• **Business accelerator for the High Street.**

With the funding, advice and contacts they possess, business growth accelerators could be the key to unlocking a start-up's potential. But most entrepreneurs have little or no idea what a business accelerator is – let alone how such a scheme can be utilised.

Essentially, the business growth accelerator model originated in America, where a number of seed accelerator programmes have sprouted over the last six years. Many US accelerator programmes have also created 'boot camp'-style training programmes, where promising entrepreneurs are put through a gruelling programme of education and testing, to prepare them for the realities of business life and equip them with skills such as pitching and marketing.

The accelerator model first came to prominence in the UK in 2007, when Saul Klein and Reshma Sohoni set up Seedcamp in London. The Seedcamp model, which combines intensive coaching with seed funding and access to additional investors, has since given rise to similar business accelerators in other parts of the UK.

We now think that there should be a programme specifically aimed at the High Street, perhaps combined with a Pop-Up programme.

• **Pop Up London**

Think outside your usual pop up formula. Touring museum collections to go into vacant shops – what would a pop up dinosaur exhibition do for footfall? Also delivers museum's target to engage a wider audience.

Next year ACM will be working with PopUp Britain, whose experience shows that Pop Up shops are able to deliver benefits to:

- small business tenants - who trade for 2 weeks and Crowdfund the rent (paying an average of £150 for 2 weeks trading)
- landlords - who fill empty shops with entrepreneurial business owners, receive a contribution to rent/rate utilities and reduce their insurance payments
- the local town - as new customers are attracted to the High Street.

In their flagship store in Richmond, the Local Authority were so pleased with the PopUp, they launched a grant scheme to help more small businesses enjoy a PopUp experience

- **Mentoring support provide support for entrepreneurs**

Perhaps something like the Fixer TV programme that tackles what is wrong with family run businesses. Provides CSR delivery for big businesses and help for small ones. Perhaps advice could be provided on line as shops find it difficult to leave the business. The Nat Skills Academy for Retail does this very well See <http://www.nsaforretail.com/running-and-managing-a-retail-business/businessmentoring/Pages/welcome.aspx> but is not well known and the minimum charge of £240 might be off putting

- **A Virtual Retail Forum for small businesses in London**

This could provide a platform to share information and identify priorities and may result in B2B trade and collaborations. One of the lessons from the Pop Up Britain experience is that businesses that are put together in Crowdfunding the rent often go on to collaborate in different ways.

- **Crowdfunding**

The ATCM Crowdfunding platform, in association with Spacehive, has already seem some small projects in London funded, and some larger projects elsewhere. Raising £36k For Mansfield to install free Wi-Fi in the town centre for example. See <https://spacehive.com/initiatives/towncentres>

- **Housing Accelerator**

There is a huge amount of under used space above ground floor businesses. The Housing Accelerator would be a mirror of the Business

Accelerator but with the focus on facilitating the conversion of space to living accommodation.

- **Retail technology in the High Street**

There is an opportunity to turn the internet from a threat to an opportunity by bringing mobile commerce to the UK High Street, and within reach of independent and Tier 2 retailers, as well as town centre partnerships or BIDs.

Mobile internet is a game-changer and playing field leveller for town centres. As we have started to see from our emerging partnerships in the Technology in the High Street discussions, there is significant industry interest in evolving the uptake of this technology by town centre stakeholders, including but not limited to retail; consumers are becoming increasingly capable of interrogating mobile devices for service discovery, retail & leisure transactions and a variety of other mobile-delivered functions including transport and parking. The ATCM is well positioned to bridge the gap, by virtue of the established partnerships with both national and independent retailers, and the emerging partnerships in the multichannel marketing m-commerce field.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

- **A good understanding of the location, quantitative and qualitative is important.**

Knowing what people think and feel about a place is as important as know the numbers. The ATCM has now made is HealthCheck programme freely available to members (until now there has been a cost).

At the same time having a clear understanding of what's the Town Centre for? People are vague about what they are and what they are

for. Town centres:

- provide a sense of place/identity/history
- provide a focus for the community
- is a focus for the (public) transport network
- is the driver of the local economy - most importantly but forgotten
- is the focus for economic transactions
- is the focus for public administration and public services
- is the focus for shopping, leisure, entertainment, culture, tourism,....

- but you know that – don't you?

- that is the way you look at it – isn't it?

Perhaps not?

We recognise **the** town centre – the high-level centres – but not really the local centres. These centres are a fundamental part of the network – where we get our everyday needs for goods and services – but there is seldom a vision or strategy for their development and management. We have often just taken our local centres for granted – it was unthinkable that they should stop being at the centre of things. We often did not think they needed planning let alone management. We now know that is no longer true.

• **Management scheme in every centre**

One that is a co-ordinated, pro-active and energetic initiative designed to ensure that our town and city centres are desirable, attractive and competitive places. This mechanism for co-ordinated action is fundamental if any plan is to be delivered.

Right now, the experience of effective partnership working is being eroded, as TCM post are withdrawn and local authorities disengage from public/private sector working because of short term financial issues; the “Baby and the Bathwater” syndrome.

There is a need for locally-developed initiatives working across centres of different scales, naturally varied in terms of their remit and activities. Their common goal is their increasing effectiveness in promoting the vitality and viability of a centre and maintaining its key role at the heart of its community offering local solutions for local problems. Some Boroughs have done this very well. A mapping exercise would tease out the gaps.

It is important that centre management adequately resourced from both public and private sectors. Town and city centre partnerships have demonstrated their ability to energise the creation of successful local partnerships and bring scarce resources together in a focused manner. The danger is that, with the current squeeze on local authority spending, the Town Centre Manager (TCM) post or funding toward partnership arrangements will be cut at a time when it is the very thing that is needed to galvanise action.

• **An expansion of the BIDs model.**

The ATCM has worked with Government for some years to bring about the introduction of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) into the UK and operates the National BIDs Advisory Service through UKBIDs. This funding mechanism allows for a local levy to be raised from

businesses in a specific area in order to fund improvements and activities agreed by the businesses themselves. Though BID's can operate in any commercial area, town and city centre management initiatives have been at the forefront in developing UK BID proposals. The key difference from other funding approaches is that once a majority of businesses within an area vote in favour of a BID, all businesses in the area are committed to contribute throughout the life of the BID, a maximum of five years. More BID's will enable many town and city centre management initiatives to deliver on their Strategic Plans effectively and with more certainty. More resources, local knowledge and greater business engagement will also be brought to bear over a guaranteed period of time.

Since the introduction of legislation in 2004, BID's have become a recognised driver for change in a number of towns and cities across the UK. This model provides the local business community with the opportunity to be proactive and self-reliant through an effective delivery mechanism. Already we are seeing the development of thematic BID's and the expansion of many BID's products and services.

Support for the BID development process is important to ensure that it is easily accessible to all locations wishing to develop a BID and to establish a greater understanding of how the BID model can provide additional services and play a more central role in delivering sustainable trading environments, increased employment and more cohesive communities.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

• **Converting footfall of commuters into dwell time and spend**

Accessibility is not a major issue in most parts of London except for the disabled. Most town centres have tube stations or good bus services. Footfall is not the issue either, the problem is converting footfall of commuters into dwell time and spend. Could be through later opening hours, special events and connecting the day, evening and night time economies better.

The ATCM's report into Retail Hours, for the Key Cities Group highlighted the key success factors in trading outside the 9-5.

• ***“Parking is of concern to retailers and developers”***

Evidence based on consumers does not back this up – we need to get this message across. Evidence from an ATCM/BPA report suggests that the key driver is perceived value for money, not the absolute cost.

- The key issue is strengthening the offer. Get the offer right and they will come.
- London's town centres are mainly High Streets – long and linear so parking requirement is very localised, there are good bus services on most High Streets and this is the best way to shop them
- Aging population – requirement for more shop mobility and age friendly parking.
- Is there more that TfL can do to make High Streets more accessible and promote them. Example: Teddington High Street was bursting with people when it was closed on the evening of 29 Nov for Teddington Lights Up. It was reported to be a fantastic event but TfL had resisted road closure for many years because it is a bus route.

Integrating parking payments and travel smartcards into retail technology

ATCM is exploring new ways of linking Oyster/Freedom Pass to local shop vouchers through a contactless NFC application. There is the potential for the UK, and London, to be a world leader in the application of this technology. The established contactless elements of Oyster/Freedom Pass allow these widely held cards to connect users to town centre retail loyalty and rewards, delivering added value to the transport operators and connecting a large customer base to local retailers.

Under an ATCM-MoLo Rewards(UK) Ltd joint-venture agreement, we have established a network of member locations using the MoLo Rewards loyalty and couponing platform and leveraging the proprietary NFC contactless technology to enable town and city centre retailers to compete with out-of-town retail parks. In an exciting development it looks as if the MoLo Rewards system can be linked to parking and “validation” effectively allowing retailers to contribute to the cost of a consumer's parking and thus deliver loyalty value directly. Any town centre operating a consumer parking validation scheme would be able to add this into their marketing messaging. Parking operators would experience no loss of revenue, and retailers have the choice of being able to reward their loyal customers.

This validation and reward process can also extend beyond parking, to include other modes of travel, effectively rewarding modal

shift, including the popular “Boris Bikes” scheme.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity?
How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

• Leisure should certainly be considered as a key element of town centre strategies.

Analysing and understanding the economy after dark. TBR and night-time economy specialists MAKE have undertaken the first research ever to look at the value and reach of the UK's evening and night-time economy (NTE). This aspect of the economy is often overlooked, yet is a crucial driver of tourism, leisure and business growth, employing 1.3m people and is worth £66bn to UK plc (2009 stats).

In a detailed economic analysis of the Lambeth Night Time Economy (Dec 2012. ATCM, TBR, MAKE) the importance of the NTE became clear. Given its relative size (3 times bigger than UK average) and its resilience over 2001 to 2011 the NT Economy is a primary target for Lambeth to facilitate improved employment levels in the borough.

• Work with Residents

Residential uses weren't felt to be crucial to regeneration strategies. Some modern urban residential units are geared to a population who download their music and books, don't cook (very small kitchen areas – very little storage). The experience from Woolwich town centre is that many urban dwellers simply don't use the traditional town centre, favouring instead to take the tube out of the local area. It is important to understand the needs and aspirations of urban dwellers and build this into Town Centre strategies. Moving and redirecting people should be considered when devising Town Centre strategies – how to knit them into the fabric of a location.

Linkages with established residential areas should not be taken for granted. Neighbourliness may have been a feature of communities 20 years ago, but greater dependence of technology can have the effect of cocooning households in their own environment. Pedestrian links, signage and events could help to reconnect communities with their towns.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

- ***“How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres?”***

The answer is we don't know! Does anybody?

If Londoners aren't populating town centres (any evidence for this?) then providing affordable accommodation which targets a wide range of households would encourage more citizens to locate in town centres. Safety, clean, well maintained, buzzy environment, etc. etc. Attempts should be made to create a sense of belonging – essential to know who Londoners are. Creating places where people learn behaviours which bring them together and create civilised respectful and tolerant societies.

On the question of Planning, there needs to be much more transparency around what planning policies are, who is making them and communicating them within local authorities themselves as well as externally to the wider community.

Greater involvement with the RTPI would be welcomed – events, shared learning activities perhaps? Involving young people in the process of governance. There is anecdotal evidence at least that young people are more optimistic than their elders . This enthusiasm should be harnessed.

- **A well-managed local programme of activity and events**

One that entertains and informs the public by encouraging the use of the streets and venues by community or performance groups and local businesses. We also support the contribution that food and other street markets can make to our centres.

- **Business Crime Initiatives.**

Low-level crime not only makes the life of staff a misery, but drives away shoppers. Through local partnerships between police, retailers and local authorities, and backed up by the courts, a zero-tolerance approach to crime and disorder is vital. Various factors combine to help town centres create a sense of safety and security for business and visitors at all times of the day and night. These are combated through CCTV, Shop Watch, Pub Watch etc., effective data sharing, and professional management but they need to be properly funded.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

While the efforts of Government in terms of extending rate relief to small businesses are to be commended, historically the high rentals, which SMEs are exposed to means many have not benefited from this relief. The current system isn't a “Small Business Rate Relief” system but a small “Business Rate” rate relief scheme. If you are an SME with high rates i.e. in a town centre, it doesn't help. It is also

true to say that many businesses will not have the resources or knowledge to deal with a complex system of rates and rents; hence we believe there is a need for mentoring support for this crucially important sector within our town centres.

We hope that the Localism Bill will genuinely give local government a stronger financial stake in the local economy. Local authorities are allowed to grant discretionary business rate discounts (but none have done so that we are aware of), as is currently available for charities, and this could be a major step forward, provided a locally agreed plan for development and management is in place. It has the potential to be a major opportunity for local authorities to make a small investment and reap the rewards through growth and Business Rate Retention from April 2013

Sensible financial incentives, such as retaining a proportion of business rates growth, will encourage local authorities to undertake sound economic development which, in turn, will allow them to build their revenue streams. The necessary mechanisms must be put in place to ensure all economic development is sustainable and not based purely on short-term gains. If this is done, there will be a natural inclination for local government to give our high streets a greater priority. Awarding councils the flexibility to vary and retain the business rate provides a powerful incentive to foster the right local conditions for businesses to prosper and jobs retained or created.

- **Review of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1954**

All this means re-thinking our relationship with commercial property. We have identified a growing number of instances where retailers have vacated prime retail space because a change in market circumstances no longer makes the unit viable, but due to long-term contracts they are still fiscally bound to the property. The current rates and rental system makes it more profitable for landlords to keep the property empty rather than find a new tenant or seek temporary occupation during tough economic conditions which are likely to be followed by a fall in the market value of the property. Where property owners are engaged and working with town centres businesses, they have become excellent additions to the local partnership. However, due to the complexity of commercial property ownership, in too many instances the landlord is difficult to identify or contact, never mind engaging with them.

We would therefore like to see a review of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1954 to ensure it meets the contemporary and future needs of property ownership and tenancy across the country.

- **Active management of vacant retail premises.**

We must establish better engagement with property owners who have been distant and divorced from the current troubles on the high street. There are numerous, innovative examples that show how town centre partnerships are facilitating new cultural or educational uses for vacant retail premises. In a few places vacant units are being used for promotional posters or maps; while other centres are developing initiatives to enable local businesses or start-ups to be supported in void units. Third Sector partners can and are being involved in some instances as well.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

- **Provide a framework for action**

In inevitably, there will be a number of actions that emerge from this consultation. While each Borough must construct its own local strategy, there is a need for an overarching framework of support. The ATCM its self has a role to play in sharing ideas, best practice and information across the network, which includes the vast majority of London Boroughs.

TC018 LB Brent

London Borough of Brent

Brent Council Regeneration and Major Projects January 2013

The London Assembly: Future of London's Town Centres 1

The Future of London's Town Centres: Brent Council officer response

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the London Assembly request for evidence regarding the future of London's Town Centres. This response is the result of a discussion between planning and regeneration officers in the council. Due to time constraints we have not been able to canvass the views of members and this response has not been subject to member approval.

We recognise that the impact of the economic climate on household spending and structural changes in shopping patterns have placed high streets and empty shops high on the political agenda. The future performance, function and appearance of town centres is now very topical.

The British Retail Consortium estimates that on average 11.3% of high street shops now sit empty (November 2012) and anecdotal evidence of the number of business closures suggests that 40,000 jobs have been lost on the high street so far this year. The long term vacancy of sections of high street has led some policy makers and commentators to suggest that the supply of retail floorspace must be greater than demand, and that contraction of designated town centres could support their vitality and release land for other uses.

There are counter arguments to this position, including that vacancy is not down to a structural lack of demand, but the specific local circumstances of ownership and condition of, and access to retail spaces.

Additionally, some cite that business rates are excessive and estimated on the basis of historic and unrealistic rateable values. As of April 2013, local authorities will be able to retain business rates receipts (in London share these with the Mayor) however the ability of local authorities to make reductions in charges is clearly affected by their ability absorb a loss of revenue.

Traders themselves often cite that parking supply and excessive charges are driving customers away from their shops. Research commissioned by London Councils (November 2012) suggests that there is no relationship between increased parking supply and trade and that pedestrians and visitors by bus spend more money than motorists and visit town centres more frequently.

As a general point, we find that each of the questions raised within the request address substantial issues and are each worthy of in-depth research. Nonetheless, where we have been able to, we have provided some commentary that could be useful in exploring a possible answer to the questions.

We also believe that the issues raised within the letter and discussion paper are not solely the domain of planning policy. To assume that planning policy on its own can affect significant change assumes a properly functioning retail and commercial property market.

As well as planning, it would be worth exploring the impact of tenancy law and policy such as rent reviews; dilapidations and the condition of stock; greater penalties or incentives to landlords who just seem not to be interested in letting or investing in their property portfolio; and business rates, particularly in relation to new build shell and core ground floor commercial space.

Regarding statistical evidence, we have not been able to extract additional data over and above the GLA GOAD plan town centres data that you yourselves have access to. However, we have discussed that it may be possible to cross reference changes of retail occupier (through the planning process) against town centre locations and income levels sourced at Super Output Area. This may be a useful way of examining the role that centres play relative to their local catchment area, particularly in outer London.

1. What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

Within Brent we have embarked on a series of local initiatives to complement more capital intensive regeneration and development. We have delivered these in areas that have experienced persistent vacancy.

Through the Outer London Fund, we delivered the award winning New Windows of Willesden Green project that assisted shop keepers with visual merchandising, secured and used empty high street units and supported the formation of the Willesden Green Team – the town team that was not successful in its Portas Pilot application.

Within Wembley, we have delivered the Coming Soon Club, which helps to match local people and their ideas to empty spaces that exist in the town centre. This has a 5 year programme of projects and is developing real momentum in an area that has somewhat struggled for identity outside of major events. The Coming Soon Club is based in a retail unit that has been vacant since 1987 because a tenant has been paying rent on a 25 year lease without ever occupying the space.

Both initiatives have helped to reduce vacancy, grow interest, support business start ups and helped to redefine the offer towards culture and entertainment on the high street and supporting new business and community ideas.

We have also delivered 2 similar projects in South Kilburn, although these have not strictly been on the high street. Overall, our experience is that helping people gain access to long term vacant space provides people with something tangible to attach to.

However, these interventions can require an unsustainable level of support to resource and programme spaces unless there is an inherent demand or interest in the local catchment area for such activities. Not everywhere has the critical mass of interest and creativity to attack the barriers to securing empty spaces without resourced intervention from the local authority.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

Within our experience of outer London centres, we discussed that the alternative offers that town centres can provide are not uniform and depend on and are a reflection of the demography and socio-economic profile of local catchment areas. Much of Wembley High Road is active and in use but the offer is for value shopping. Over the years, large retail units have been subdivided into smaller shops. Small shops themselves have been converted into micro units.

Poor areas of London generally have high rates of business starts (and closures) and retail space could be used to support micro enterprise – securing meanwhile spaces does not provide tenancy certainty for these activities and would require longer term space – there is a question to ask as to whether space for enterprise is supported by town centre policy over and above retail within the policy hierarchy.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

For this question, we discussed that improved orbital links around London; particularly north-west London could help to improve access to centres. This would need to be properly examined because it could lead to more people travelling away from local centres to shopping centres. We also refer you to the London Council's research mentioned above.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

In Brent we do not employ town centre managers and do not have experience of Business Improvement Districts.

Regarding “key development sites” we discussed that it is worth having the debate about the role of planning in seeking the most comprehensive development that is

possible which may no longer be appropriate to the role of town centres, market demand or the experience that people wish to have with their town centres.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

We believe that the town centres first policy approach works to support high streets and should be retained.

We also discussed whether the relative length of primary vs secondary frontages would need to be reconsidered to reflect changes to town centre activity away from core retail towards culture and entertainment on the high street and supporting new business and community ideas

We discussed (and did not agree on) the issue above as to whether the supply of retail space is greater than demand and that some high streets could contract. We feel this is an issue that requires in depth analysis that includes matters outside of planning policy, as referred to above.

With reference to Wembley, we discussed the issue of the proximity of 2 or 3 very different retail area offers (Ealing Road>Wembley High Road>Wembley City) and if and how links (in planning terms) should be retained or improved or whether they are indeed helpful.

We discussed that areas undergoing long term transition such as Wembley can benefit from a planning policy that encourages temporary uses so that planning and investment decisions do not blight areas. We have a draft policy such as this within the emerging Wembley Area Action Plan.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

Local planning authorities have long prepared development briefs and SPD and include positive statements on Compulsory Purchase within documents to encourage development but that this requires interest from the development market.

Council's could be supported to use eyesore powers to help make improvements to premises that could make them more likely to be delivered.

There is likely to be member support for limiting particular types of uses – hot food takeaways, betting shops, gambling/arcade shops.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

Assuming the policy would be of a strategic nature, we would urge such policy to fully explore and address the issues and arguments around supply and demand, but consider in depth factors outside of the realm of the planning policy framework.

TC019 City of London

City of London

Future of London's Town Centres

Below are the City of London's responses to the questions posed by the London Assembly Planning Committee regarding the future of town centre development in the capital.

The City does not have a traditional town centre as it is identified to be within the Central Activities Zone but we work on a wider basis to attract residents and workers from beyond our boundaries. The listed examples may answer a number of questions but to save repetition, only selected questions have been answered and some answers given will also apply to other questions.

1. New Ideas and Existing Best Practice

- The City of London Corporation has worked with developers, landowners and retail providers to manage a coordinated approach to the development of the retail environment on Cheapside. This has been brought together in the Cheapside Initiative; an area strategy which includes a variety of transport and environmental improvements to create a vibrant and attractive shopping destination for workers, residents and tourists. The Cheapside Initiative was established as a partnership between the City of London, private companies and religious groups.
- A forum has been created, hosted by the Corporation, where developers, land owners and occupiers of Cheapside can work together to discuss issues facing the area and develop proposals for the townscape and to improve viability and vitality.
- The City used S106 money from the 1 New Change development to enhance the public realm at Cheapside in three phases over a number of years. Physical improvements to the Cheapside public realm were completed in summer 2012 and have facilitated the development of a high quality retail environment.

2. Competition in a New Age of Consumerism

- An attractive town centre environment which is conducive for all disabilities. Improvements to the Cheapside environment have increased retail footfall.
- Making the town centre a destination for shoppers and encouraging shopping as a leisure activity (particularly by accepting an element of A3 and A4 uses in town centres), can help compete against the internet and out of town shopping centres.
- Other Principal Shopping Centres in the City, particularly Cheapside and Leadenhall Market hold special events focussing on alternative food markets/stalls and music events to attract shoppers.

3. Accessibility, Footfall and Innovative Transport

- It is important to make town centres a shopping destination rather than a thoroughfare; a place where people want to visit and stay rather than go through. The Cheapside Initiative has facilitated the development of Cheapside and subsequently the area is open seven days a week. The PSC has become a shopping destination to compete with other nearby shopping areas.

- One innovative transport initiative the City has employed is to offer free parking at weekends. This utilises parking spaces that otherwise would be empty on Saturdays and Sundays. It provides convenience to shoppers and a different facility that other central London retail destinations are unable to offer.

4. Regeneration and Austerity

N/A

5. Planning Policies and Town Centres

- The City has developed planning policies as part of the Local Development Framework. The Core Strategy, adopted in September 2011, outlines five Principal Shopping Centres, which aim to achieve 75% of A1 retail frontage. These are highest in the City's retail hierarchy and are given the greatest concern when considering the effects of new proposals on the vitality and vibrancy of the PSC.
- In addition, Retail Links have been established which connect PSCs, transport nodes and other land uses and are located along areas of high footfall. In these areas there is less restriction on A1 uses and instead, a range of retail uses are encouraged. However, a significant retention of A1 frontage is needed to ensure that the Retail Links maintain their usefulness and attractiveness to shoppers.

6. Powers and Mechanisms for Revitalising

N/A

7. Mayoral Planning Policy

- Supplementary Planning Guidance and Mayoral Policy needs to be supportive but not prescriptive. Any policies need to allow for local authorities to exercise their own power and expertise on town centre regeneration, working to each town centres' identified strengths.
- Investment from the Mayor and Transport for London to fund projects would be welcomed.
- The hierarchy of town centres should be maintained and expanded to include other smaller town centres which are of borough importance.

TC020 London Councils

London Councils

The future of London's town centres – A London Councils Response

This response is submitted by London Councils, representing the 32 London boroughs and the City of London. We lobby key stakeholders, develop policy and do all we can to help boroughs improve the services they deliver. We also run a range of services ourselves, all designed to make life better for Londoners.

1. What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

1.1 New business - Encouraging new businesses and retaining existing business is a vital part of the future of London's high streets.

1.1.1 LQC (Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper) business space - Existing high street businesses are struggling owing to a combination of postponing the revaluation of business rates until 2017, high barriers in accessing finance and a series of upward only rent reviews. Consequently new enterprise may not consider the high street an affordable place to start-up. Boroughs can encourage lighter, quicker and cheaper business space. Lighter touch access, shorter term leases and affordable spaces would encourage new business to the high street. Borough-led innovative models to support new high street businesses by providing them with LQC spaces already exist. For example Brent Council is funding two projects in town centres, The Coming Soon Club (Wembley) and Queens Parade (Willesden Green) which have created affordable space for new local businesses to trial ideas, via the subsidisation of business rates and negotiations with the landlord for peppercorn rent. These projects require pump priming and the majority would not have started without grant funding from the GLA in the form of Outer London Funding or Mayors Regeneration Funding. Consequently the longevity of these schemes is uncertain.

Boroughs are starting to consider financial implications of business rate retention by evaluating whether it would pay off to incentivise growth in their high streets by applying short term business rate relief in return for long term gain. However the levels of expected return (after payments to central government and the GLA) suggest this may not be financially viable. The costs of declining high streets are clear, for example London Councils estimates the cost of empty units on London's high streets at £500 million per annum. However, without evidence of long term success of LQC strategies, such as business rate reliefs, boroughs will struggle to fund this type of support.

Key recommendation – structured financial support from the GLA or Government to provide boroughs with the sustained funding needed to encourage new enterprise to their local high streets. Businesses in receipt of support could be required to meet wider regenerative outcomes for the local area.

1.1.2 Business accelerator for the high street - Business accelerator models exist for a number of industries but one has yet to be developed for retail. The benefits of business accelerators are that they provide entrepreneurs a small amount of investment, space and utilities, and exposure to a wide range of professionals as mentors to help them grow their ideas and their startups. High streets would benefit from this type of support both to raise their profile as an innovative place to do business and also to increase business capacity.

1.2 New uses - The problems high streets are facing are structural. Calls for the high street to diversify its offer have come from a number of areas, for example, The Portas Review², Association

² Portas, M (2011) 'The Portas Review An independent review into the future of our high streets' [Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31797/11-1434-portas-review-future-of-high-streets.pdf]

of Town Centre Managers³ and the Urban Pollinators⁴. There are a number of ways diversification can help to support high streets – boroughs are already involved in a number of these strategies:

1.2.1 Cultural institutions - The relationship between the high street and culture is symbiotic. Academics⁵ demonstrate there is a spatial preference for locating cultural facilities in town centres. Many strategies for high streets are aiming to develop cultural facilities in town centres to try and increase footfall, for example London Borough of Havering has used their empty shops in Romford to develop 'Romford Contemporary Arts Programme'. Cultural uses can also help to improve the night time economy.

A new way of encouraging culture into the high street could be to tap into London's vast cultural offer. Touring dance is a relatively well established tactic for national institutions to gain better levels of outreach, is there a way this could be rolled out to include other cultural institutions, for example pop-up satellite exhibitions from London's major museums located in vacant shops? The Showtime project of the 2012 Games provides a good model for locating cultural, arts and events in London boroughs.

Key recommendation – new cultural development schemes, local or national, could be encouraged to take place with a town centre focus. Businesses should receive support to understand how they can develop their business models to maximise on the benefits of having such institutions nearby. The GLA is well placed to broker deals from organisations such as Federation of Small Businesses and Business in the Community which could develop packages of support to be delivered locally.

1.2.2 Civic/public uses - Civic uses are a key way of populating spaces that have lost some of their previous functions as places of commerce and retailing. Town centres and high streets often have the infrastructure needed to serve civic services. London boroughs are already considering the impact of placing more public services in high streets, for example Lambeth Council has recently undertaken an initiative called 'The Work Shop' which is located in a previously vacant retail unit on West Norwood High Street. The Work Shop aims to support the council's co-operative vision.

1.2.3 Conversion to residential - Boroughs may want to consider conversion to residential on certain sites. However there are a number of considerations that boroughs need to take into account, for example the 'hollowing out' (losing income from office workers) and the fact a variety of activities produce the dynamism needed to support local economies.

1.3 New Management - Animation doesn't just happen. It requires brokers, enablers, troubles shooters and network builders and often these key officers or the funding to support them comes from London local government.

Boroughs are under funding pressures and are coping with reduced capacity. Therefore collaboration with local management teams to develop and implement a vision for local town centres is becoming increasingly important. Whilst the government seems to favour Town Teams and the GLA favours business improvement districts, these will not always be the best form of representation; other centres will have successful town centre management organisations which will suit local needs better. Funding streams and support for different types of management should take this into account and also recognise many would not exist without local government input.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

³ ATCM (2011) 'A Manifesto for Town Centres and High Streets' [Available at: http://www.atcm.org/policy/files/600-ATCM_Manifesto_A4_2.pdf]

⁴ Urban Pollinators et al. (2012) 'The 21st century agora: a new and better vision for town centres' [Available at: http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=urban+pollinators&sourceid=ie7&rls=com.microsoft:en-gb:IE-SearchBox&ie=&oe=&redir_esc=&ei=p_HOUJiPHqrQ0QXK74DgBg]

⁵ Evans, G. (2005) 'Measure for Measure: Evaluating the Evidence of Culture's Contribution to Regeneration' [Available at: <http://usj.sagepub.com/content/42/5-6/959.short>]

2.1 It is important to consider that large managed retail estates may be vital to a thriving local economy, for example after the closure of Alders in Croydon and the subsequent loss of local jobs and income it is likely the site will be retained for retail in the hope this would lead to wider regeneration. The following strategies for high streets may help to harness the benefits of new consumerism (mobile and electronic) and 'compete' (or at least complement) alongside large managed retail estates:

2.2 High streets as incubator spaces - Large managed retail estates are likely to be an unaffordable space for new businesses to start-up. As mentioned in response to question 1 high streets and town centres can use LQC strategies to become a space for incubation of new business. There is a cost associated with this and boroughs will need funding to support business in their high streets.

2.3 Experiential high streets - Local centres and high streets can learn lessons from managed estates to understand how the business and leisure offer can complement each other. The response to question 1 considers diversification of town centres. It is vital that this offer is different to that provided by large managed retailer estates, for example focussing on a made locally or artisan theme.

2.4 Civic future - Boroughs have the option and power to place new services, for example libraries, housing services or youth provision, on their high streets and in their town centres. An example is the Library Lab in Brent which has placed a co-working space and business development clinic in a library located on the high street.

2.5 Technology - Out-of-town retail is good at making use of new technology, for example Westfield provides free Wifi and an app which communicates deals and up to date information about the stores. High streets can do more, either through the local authority, business improvement districts or other high street management organisations, to use technology to full advantage. 'Nice One' Dundalk is an initiative providing 'tap and go' technology which allows customers to redeem local vouchers. Town centres can learn from these schemes. However, fragmented ownership can make this difficult to co-ordinate. A central resource will be needed, and this comes at a cost.

2.6 Flexible business models and business support - In order to help high street businesses compete in a new age of consumerism more can be done to provide them with relevant business support. For example social media training or workshops in how to develop new business models could help to provide businesses with the tools they need to adapt and survive. The GLA is well placed to develop specialist workshops for high street businesses and broker support from organisations such as Business in the Community which can be delivered locally as per local circumstance and need dictates.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

3.1 TfL - Good relationships already exist between TfL and boroughs, however more can be done to harmonise upgrading work and infrastructure projects with the needs of the high street. London Councils would like to see commitment from the Mayor and TfL to work with boroughs in piloting new approaches to the public realm which place high streets at the centre of development.

Key Recommendation - A set of pilots between TfL and boroughs which have identified distinct areas which are negatively impacted by certain public realm problems or where development could unlock growth through a high street focused approach. Boroughs and TfL working together in a place based approach with high streets at the centre will hopefully improve town centre performance

3.2 Utility companies - London Councils backs the LGA's report 'Holes in our pockets' which considers the costs of poor streetworks for local government and business. We will support the LGA in their lobbying around this and would recommend the GLA group also offers its commitment to the

report and looks at ways to harmonise any openings it may incur via transport upgrading work from TfL.

3.3 Linking a town centre together - Many of London's high streets are long linear roads which can be inconvenient for shoppers. Innovative transport which helps to link a high street together or with transport hubs may help to increase footfall, an example may be a shuttle bus service between different points on a high street, especially on core or busy shopping days.

3.4 Borrowing existing facilities - Whilst parking demand is not as critical an issue in London for consumers as many high street businesses think, there are some centres where additional parking would be beneficial. One consideration is to make use of existing parking facilities in institutions which may not need them over the weekend for example schools.

3.5 Meeting demographic needs - A recent report by Experian⁶ looks at the way that town centres will need to adapt to meet the needs of an ageing population. Accessibility will be a core part of this. Disabled parking bays, shop mobility and public realm which allows time for people to sit and rest as well as move around safely will be vital.

3.6 Parking - London Councils has recently commissioned research into the relevance of parking for success in London's urban centres. It found:

- More parking does not necessarily mean greater commercial success: A well-managed parking scheme, where spaces 'turn over' frequently can help to increase the number of visitors coming to a town centre and thereby help business.
- There is no such thing as free parking: The costs of developing and maintaining parking spaces and then enforcing proper use to ensure good traffic flow have to be borne by somebody. In the case of local authority operated parking (on street or off street) any costs that are not covered by parking revenue falls to local Council Tax payers.
- Shopkeepers consistently overestimate the share of their customers coming by car: In some cases, this is by a factor of as much as 400%. In London, as well as other cities, the share of those accessing urban centres on foot or by public transport is much greater. Walking is the most important mode for accessing local town centres; public transport is the most important mode for travel to international centres, such as Oxford Street.
- A good mix of shops and services and a quality environment are some of the most important factors in attracting visitors to town centres. If both these are poor, then changes to parking or accessibility are very unlikely to make a town centre more attractive.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

4.1 Local control - The key strategy for regeneration of town centres is to provide boroughs with the tools, resources and powers they need to unlock the development sites in their local areas. Boroughs also need greater planning powers to create the right mix of uses in town centres. These are outlined in our response to questions 5, 6 and 7.

4.2 Public realm improvement – Businesses want to invest in areas which have good transport links. London's local authorities have a strategic role to play in public realm and infrastructure investment. Via the London Growth Fund boroughs have identified a number of key infrastructure projects which would release the potential of surrounding economic areas. Boroughs are awaiting the outcome of these bids to the LEP.

⁶ Experian (2012) 'Town Centre Futures 2020' Available at: <http://www.experian.co.uk/assets/business-strategies/white-papers/town-centre-futures-whitepaper.pdf>

4.3 Inward investment strategies - Harrow Council has worked with banks and property agents to develop investment guides to its local district centres. These highlight population, transport routes, travel to shop patterns, retail composition, available empty properties, business rates, planning policy and Experian Customer Insights. They have also worked with the Harrow Chamber of Commerce to develop a guide to new businesses to make sure they understand all the regulations and avoid any unnecessary fines. London Councils has also promoted joint working between London and Partners to encourage inward investment into boroughs.

4.4 Mainstreaming – the GLA is well placed to encourage key stakeholders to take a ‘town centre first’ approach in their thinking. Landlords, high street businesses and public sector bodies (such as TfL) should all be encouraged to consider a well maintained and animated high street as an asset for economic development (on an individual, business and structural level).

4.5 Other measures - As outlined previously, greater and targeted business support and exploration of targets business rate relief could also help bring economic growth to London’s high streets.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

5.1 Planning policies - the National Planning Policy Framework (paras 23-27) is clear about the importance of town centres. Boroughs are correspondingly keen to see economically sustainable and socially vibrant town centres that contribute to both a local sense of place as well as meeting the range of social, commercial and civic needs of an area. As indicated in answers above, high streets are facing significant challenges from changing shopping habits, which are compounding the effects of the recession, and these are having sometimes profound impacts on town centre vitality and viability, especially in some outer London locations. Planning policies are only one of the tools available to counter these trends, and cannot reverse them on their own. Their effectiveness will rely on a range of other factors, for example, accessibility, borough commitment, and the willingness of the private sector to invest (all of these factors are of course interrelated, and it can be hard to disentangle cause and effect).

London’s town centres are generally very well populated already. New development, including residential development, is directed towards areas with high public transport accessibility (PTAL) ratings by the London Plan and, therefore, by borough plans, and these will generally be in town centre locations. Where there are vacant commercial premises, boroughs will seek to balance the need to protect this employment space for the whole period of the economic cycle with the pressing need for new homes. Depending on local priorities, they may use planning policies to replace commercial uses with residential or mixed-use developments, and this can both meet local housing need and add to local economic viability. The existing planning system broadly allows for policy to point development in the desired direction, and in the desired way, subject to the answers given to questions 6 and 7 below. In this context, it would be good practice for boroughs to keep percentage-based use class policies (i.e. requiring a certain amount of street frontages to be of a designated use class) under review.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

6.1 – The range of powers/mechanisms - local authorities already possess a range of planning and other powers to revitalise their town centres. Some recent additions to these are relatively untested (for example the general power of competence) while others are competing for increasingly limited funds, so it is always helpful to spread examples of good practice between boroughs. Many of the tools available are planning ones. Some relate to the funding that the planning process can draw in

(such as s106 agreements or, more indirectly, CIL) while others, such as planning conditions attached to the grant of planning permission can also place specific obligations on developers.

6.2 – The Use Class Order System - boroughs are also able to use the Use Class Order (UCO) system to stimulate town centre viability, and direct development to those uses that are most appropriate. The Government recently consulted on changes to the UCO system, and London Councils responded to this consultation raising concerns about the specific, proposed changes but suggesting alternative ones, which are listed below. London Councils believes that adding to the range of powers at boroughs' disposal would allow them to ensure that more balanced and appropriate development would take place, which would in turn allow them to help build town centres that are more attractive to both work and live.

6.2.1 – Betting shops - several London Boroughs have expressed concern at the increasing proliferation of betting shops in certain areas (clustering). They effectively restrict choice on the high street, add to perceptions of 'declining' or 'poor' areas, and in some cases have had a more profound impact through increased levels of anti-social behaviour and crime. As both the Assembly and the Mary Portas Review of High Streets have said, although classed as A2 (Financial Services), betting shops are quite different in fact and operation to a solicitor's or accountants. London Councils therefore believes that they should be recognised as distinct in the use class system and should be put into a sui generis use class of their own (from their current A2 use).

6.2.2 – Pubs - the NPPF explicitly recognised the value of pubs as community assets and directs local authorities to protect them (paragraph 70). However, they are able to move from A4 to other 'A' use classes without requiring planning permission, meaning that their loss cannot be a matter of public action. While there may be cases in which it is appropriate to allow a change of use, the loss of pubs in localities is of such concern that there should be greater restrictions against their change of use. Therefore, planning permission should be required for changes of use from A4 to any other 'A' use class.

6.2.3 – Cafes & restaurants - as with betting shops, proliferation of certain types of cafes and restaurants in one locality can also act as a deterrent on other uses of buildings, leading to high streets or shopping parades that are perceived as of low value and quality. Giving boroughs greater protection over this and control of their high streets would enable them to build a more diverse and prosperous local community. Therefore, planning permission should be required for any change of use to an A3 or A5 use class.

6.3 – Neighbourhood and Local Development Orders - the UCO system is one way in which boroughs can direct certain types of development in their town centres. A more longstanding but little used tool that can also be employed is the development order, either initiated by the borough or by the local community (i.e either, respectively, a local development order [LDO] or a neighbourhood development order [NDO]). There are currently few examples of LDOs being used, and while it may be that NDOs became more popular as the process of neighbourhood planning takes shape, there seems to be little appetite for their introduction. It may be that this is because they are, or are seen to be, overly bureaucratic to implement and/or are insufficiently flexible for the purpose of promoting economic activity. The Assembly may wish to consider the reasons for their relative lack of popularity.

6.4 Rationalise CPO - There may also be scope to rationalise the process of securing a compulsory purchase order (CPO). Where a borough is seeking to regenerate an area, it will often be the case that ownership of the land is held by several different parties, making it harder and slower to secure a comprehensive improvement of a site. As with the Development Order regime, London Councils would like to see the CPO mechanisms assessed to ensure that the process is as rapid and straightforward as possible for boroughs.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

The Mayor has already demonstrated a welcome commitment to outer London town centres in his Outer London Commission, which was led by borough leaders, and in various funding that has been directed to outer London town centres. In general, the most effective way to help town centres is to ensure that forthcoming and future Mayoral policy works with boroughs, incorporating local priorities as much as possible given his pan-London responsibilities.

One key area in which this might happen relates to the large amount of public land that the Mayor now owns. London Councils and the boroughs are working with the GLA to ensure that publicly held land, whether owned by the Mayor or by boroughs, is brought forward in such a way as to meet both local and regional priorities, especially for meeting housing need. The Mayor is in a position to align transport and housing investment, as has been seen at the Dalston Junction development, but this can be most effective when it works alongside borough priorities.

Finally, taking the lead from the NPPF London Councils is keen to ensure that any future SPG, on either Town centres or on any other subject, seeks to be as succinct and concise as possible, so that both the lay reader and the planning practitioner can use the document with ease and in a way that does not slow down the planning process. In this context, we are pleased to see that the draft Mayoral Planning Statement currently out for consultation, achieves this objective.

TC021 Ben Kochan

Ben Kochan, Journalist and Researcher

From: Ben Kochan

Sent: 16 January 2013 12:07

To: Alexandra Beer

Subject: town centres inquiry

Dear Alexandra,

I'm attaching a copy of an article that I wrote for Planning Magazine that appeared on 13th August 2010 about planning and small shops in town centres - mainly in London. I thought this might be useful having heard the discussion at the committee yesterday - which raised questions of use class orders etc and small shops - they are likely to be the key to the survival of smaller town centres. I think the way Hammersmith & Fulham manage the shops they own is quite interesting - such strategies could be applied more widely. I'm also attaching another piece I wrote about the management of town centres suffering decline - it appeared in Planning Magazine in 2009 (10/07/2009) but has some ideas - about councils allocating space for innovative retail uses and refocusing their centres - which came from a useful academic in Scotland Leigh Sparks at Stirling University.

Hope this is useful - give me a call on [] if you want to talk about this further.

Ben Kochan

TC021 Ben Kochan – Related Article

Affordable shopping could play a strong role in future planning gain negotiations alongside housing as councils seek to protect and broaden their retail offer but wider retail issues would need to be addressed to stop the loss of existing smaller stores.

Policies in the Mayor's draft London Plan and Kensington & Chelsea's LDF core strategy could require developers to provide small affordable shops for independent retailers in their schemes or to support existing centres. Political will has been central to these initiatives. The GLA's London Plan head Andrew Barry Pursell told last month's (July) Examination in Public that promoting supporting small shops had been one of Mayor Boris Johnson's manifesto commitments. "The Mayor saw the policy as a resource for localism," Barry Pursell also pointed to the Coalition Government's agreement which seeks to ensure a level playing field between small and large retailers by enabling councils to take competition issues into account when drawing up their local plans to shape the direction and type of new retail development.

Demonstrating need for small shops and defining affordability could be even more difficult than for affordable housing. The business organization London First questioned whether need would be defined by retailers seeking premises or consumer demand and how affordability would be measured taking into account the profitability levels for different kinds of small enterprises.

A background paper to the London Plan small shops policy by Roger Tym & Partners highlights a decline in London which is "having an impact on choice and on the vibrancy, economy, sustainability and character of some town centres." The consultants did not find any examples where s106 agreements or planning conditions had been used to promote independent operators.

The policies would help create lifetime neighbourhoods with easy access to a range of services and avoid clone town centres, according to retail planning consultant Michael Bach, appearing at the EiP for the London Forum of Civic and Amenity Societies.

Planning conditions requiring small shop units to be occupied by an independent retailer would be problematic. Roger Tym & Partners retail planning associate Suzanne Asher suggested that new schemes could identify areas for smaller independent stores such as courtyards or clusters. "These would probably be the less valuable units and could be leased at rents affordable to smaller independent stores," she suggested.

Kensington & Chelsea is hoping that section 106 agreements can be more specific about the occupiers. Its initiative to promote diverse shopping arose from concerns about the loss of a large independent store to a Tesco supermarket in 2007 – that led to a retail commission which produced a range of recommendations. These included a policy included in its draft LDF core strategy to secure a contribution to smaller shops, defined as less than 80sqm on all new retail schemes of more than 1,000 sqm. "The extent of the contribution will be subject to negotiation and the need for particular shops in the specific area," explained the council's town centre initiatives manager Jo Hammond. To support the policy, the council has drawn up retail strategies for each of its centres as part of the draft LDF, she pointed out. The developer might continue to own and manage the premises, or they could be transferred to the council. The council's neighbourhoods retail policy guides how the shops in its ownership are managed. "The council uses its ownership of around 100 shops to deliver its planning objectives. Rather than maximizing rental income, rents are set to suit the kind of shopping seen as necessary within the neighbourhood," said Hammond. At the London EiP, the London Forum and others argued that off-site contributions towards mitigating the impact of a new shopping development could be more beneficial than the provision of a few smaller shops within it. "This could help continue provision of essential social infrastructure such as a post office or pharmacy," said Bach.

The idea of offsite contributions was supported by the London Assembly's Planning and Housing Committee, which in its report on corner shops published last month (July) suggests that the funds could be administered by the local authority, but directed by a board of local business people, residents, community groups and other relevant stakeholders who decide what improvements they would like to see, provided the money went towards neighbourhood shopping area rejuvenation.

The Roger Tym study says that some developers are already being required to support local centres.

Westfield provided some small units and kiosks on the edge of its Shepherds Bush development and funded

a grant scheme for shopkeepers in the nearby centre to improve their shop fronts. The London Plan small shops policy is intended to bring some consistency and strengthen local authority negotiations with developers.

However a rethink of wider retail planning policies is required to support small independent shops, argues Cardiff University Retail Planning Professor Cliff Guy. "Major town centre schemes are given priority and approved, without consideration of their impact on existing smaller shops in the vicinity," he points out. Guy also presses councils to draw up town centre strategies which could identify areas for smaller independent shops. "This could then lead to improvements in access or the general environments so helping the smaller shops," he said. Guy is concerned that town centre managers have too short time horizons. "They should be involved in the overall directions of their centres."

Stopping the loss of independent small shop units is a challenge, which Kensington & Chelsea is seeking to address by calling for changes to the Use Classes Order. "It is very difficult for us to resist developers amalgamating small shops or changing the use because in many cases a planning application is not required," pointed out Hammond. An application is not required if a shop changes use from a post office or pharmacy to a coffee shop. The council's proposals would create a new use class for coffee shops and internet cafes and small shops – with planning permission being unnecessary if shops are broken up into smaller units, but not vice versa. Kensington & Chelsea put up a petition on the 10 Downing Street website calling for a review of the Use Classes Order which has attracted 500 signatories. Perhaps the government will listen and include proposals to give greater control over local shopping in the forthcoming decentralisation and localism bill.

TC021 Ben Kochan Article 2

The high profile collapse of several high street retailers has turned the government spotlight on the future of many smaller town centres suffering from rising vacancies.

The Westminster government is looking for better town centre management and alternative uses for empty units and the Scottish Government has set up a £60m fund to promote better access and to encourage existing units to be adapted.

Launching its revival plan at a high profile conference in Stockport in April, communities secretary Hazel Blears emphasized that “town centres are the heartbeat of every community and businesses are the foundation so it is vital that they remain vibrant places for people to meet and shop throughout the downturn.” There are concerns however that a more long term review is necessary involving both town centre managers and planners.

Town centre management initiatives have been in existence for at least the last 15 years and most towns have one, but on their own they cannot take on the big issues, says Association of Town Centre Management chief executive Simon Quin. In recent years, retailers have shown a greater commitment to the environment with their support for Business Improvement Districts in many towns. They are set up with short term horizons to achieve immediate benefits. “There is a vote on the levy every two or three years so they have to show short term results,” says Quin.

A guide to looking after our town centres, launched at the Stockport conference, includes the ATCM’s top tips for responding to the downturn. Like many of the ideas in the booklet it emphasizes the importance of marketing, crime reduction and facilitating access. He says however that key to fundamental solutions is the relationship between the town centre manager and the local authority planning officers and senior council officers. Quin says that many planning officers are not aware that there is a town centre manager in their district, let alone have good knowledge about where their town centres are going. Some of the more effective local authorities have town centre partnership groups, which bring senior officers and retailers together to plan the town centre. “Planning officers must make a greater effort to get to know and work with their town centre managers and business improvement districts,” Quin urges.

In Scotland, 30 per cent of the population lives in small towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants, many of which suffer from neglect. The Scottish government’s initiative is seeking to improve these centres by giving capital grants to local partnerships for improving pedestrian access, remediating vacant and derelict sites, using vacant sites for car parking, or structural remodelling of business premises. However, hard decisions are needed about the future of sites within some town centre which can only be taken if local authorities take ownership of their town centres and are attuned to their needs. There is a nostalgic view about the town centre which has inhibited change, says Leigh Sparks, retail studies professor at Stirling University. He suggests that the high street has not adapted to changing retail patterns.

Town centres are likely to get far smaller and compact following the recession. Planners need to review their boundaries and help to find new uses for streets where retailing no longer works, urges Sparks, who carried out background work for the Scottish Government’s initiative. Projections suggest that by the end of this year about 135,000 stores will stand empty across the UK, about 15 per cent of all shops. Sparks says there is turnover with new tenants being found as units become empty, and others are being merged to create larger floor spaces for new occupiers. But there are some units, which will never get taken up. Most affected by the recession have been the secondary shopping streets, whose designation should be reviewed, he suggests.

There are a wide range of ideas emerging for alternative uses for empty units and the Westminster government has set up a £3m fund to promote them. This however should be part of a planned process of refocusing declining areas, rather than in some cases literally window-dressing. Sparks suggests that they could be designated as entrepreneurial zones where a very broad range of activities could take place and business start ups encouraged.

CBRE retail planning director Nick Diment suggests that the government’s promotion of alternative uses for vacant shops as an art gallery or a youth centre can work as a stop gap measure or even as part of the remodeling of a town centre. He urges councils to see the introduction of new uses as part of a planned process – and the owners have to see some benefit from it. The private sector owner will only support it if

he can see absolutely no possibility of renting out the property in the short term. They will always want to get a proper long term tenant in place. Diment also says "The new uses cannot be pepper potted across a high street." He urges councils to incorporate the idea of interim uses when parts of a town centre being replanned. "An area might be identified for redevelopment which could take ten years and you might seek some interim uses for the empty units pending the redevelopment." He suggests that if those uses actually take off they could be integrated into the new development. A variation on this approach has been successful in the US, according to Bill Boler, director of Business in the Community's underserved market project who previously headed up the regeneration of Harlem in New York. "Areas where the market failed were abandoned allowing creative and other bohemian people to move in, who introduced innovation," he pointed out. "You then saw life coming back to the area and a new market took off," he added. Boler suggests that this is not an ideal approach and good long term management of the retail offer can avoid the collapse of areas. Fragmented ownership in many town centres however poses a challenge. "Councils need to make every effort to find out who owns all the buildings, so that they can understand what is happening on the ground and work with them to bring in new retailers, or new uses." He highlighted the need for retail impact studies which would consider the contribution different incoming retailers would have on the wider offer. "Bringing a large retailer into an area can support a range of smaller shops necessary for a diverse offer, on the other hand it can also drive them out," he points out. This approach would be supported by a business manager for every high street, Boler proposes.

A recent report from the British Council of Shopping Centres about the future of smaller town centres, suggests that a key strategy for local authorities is to bring in other social uses, which could increase the footfall to support new retail development. One example is Skelmersdale where the new town's centre never achieved its potential. As part of the redevelopment plans, the local authority is proposing to locate a local college, swimming pool and a library as part of the new scheme alongside a planned new foodstore.

New incentives are required to encourage councils and property owners to take a greater interest in the well being of town centres. "In the US, councils benefit in rates income if their town centres are doing well," points out Boler. The recent shop closures have prompted a campaign led by the British Property Federation against empty property rates which it says penalizes landlords who are already suffering from the loss of tenants. "The regulations were introduced to deter landlords from leaving their premises empty but now the Treasury sees the empty rates as a source of income and is unconcerned that there is a shortage of tenants," said a BPF spokesman. The exemption of empty properties with a rateable value of less than #15,000 is irrelevant for the vast majority of shops. The BPF believes that landlords should have a greater interest in the well being of the areas where their properties are located. The legislation setting up Business Improvement Districts did not require the property owners to contribute to the supplementary rates levy, which funds their activities. The landlords benefit from the work of the BID in improving the quality of the location, without contributing. BPF is optimistic that the legislation will be changed this year locking the private sector into the BID system giving them both a vote and requirement to pay the levy.

The headlines have been stolen by the retailers who have closed down affecting the future of the high streets. Management of the environment is only part of the solution. It falls to local authorities to develop a long term vision for their centres and the retail offer they might have so that when the upturn comes, they are well positioned.

London Borough of Southwark

18 January 2013

Dear Nicky Gavron,

Thank you for consulting Southwark Council on the London Assembly's 'Future of London's town centres' paper. We have provided a response below under each of the questions set out in the scoping paper.

In summary, our response has highlighted several best practice examples of where partnership working between local authorities, businesses and the community has resulted in physical changes to the functioning of town centres and high streets located in Southwark. We have also emphasised how the agreement of clear local authority objectives, set out in planning policy and strategies are crucially important to enact and promote change, particularly in the current economic climate. We have reiterated our concern over the Use Classes Order and particularly on the proliferation of betting shops and pay day loan shops on our high streets which are impacting on the vitality of areas and the local community.

1. What new ideas and existing best practise could help re-imagine and develop London's high streets and town centres of the future?

Promote partnership working within town centres

1.1. Fostering partnerships with existing businesses, institutions, organisations and community groups in town centres will help to strengthen links and help to attract new employment, visitors and create new opportunities for training and learning. Southwark's Economic Well-being Strategy (2012) sets out the ambition for thriving town centres and high streets. It highlights the council's objective to work with partners to develop their own networks and establish a voice in localities, along with increasing engagement between cabinet members and businesses at a local level in order to increase business participation in community engagement and representation.

1.2. A best practice example in Southwark is the creation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) which have proven to be very successful in helping to revitalise these areas and promote new growth. These include the Waterloo Quarter (joint Southwark and Lambeth), Better Bankside and Team London Bridge

BIDs. The levy funds which are raised are used to fund services additional to those provided by the council and others, such as:

- Physical improvements, such as lighting, graffiti removal, greening and cleaning projects;
- Extra security measures for streets and businesses such as warden schemes;
- Improving open spaces for employees and visitors;
- Marketing promotions through increased local networking and business opportunities;
- Public events and expansion of tourism.

1.3. The BIDs' have longer term aspirations to increase the diversity on offer by attracting more retail shops and amenities into the town centres. However, lessons of the BIDs or knowledge transfer from BIDs can now be applied through town teams or newly emerging business networks. A structured approach by the GLA to supporting and facilitating the expansion of the BID model, with borough involvement would be welcomed.

Promoting a range of uses

1.4. It is worth considering alternative strategies and tools for those ex-retail spaces to create attractive transformation options. If long-term changes in the operation of the retail market are negatively affecting town centres, conceptualising them as primarily retail-driven places can impede innovative solutions, whereas other town centre functions (leisure, civic and cultural uses, local services, meeting places, employment space) might offer equal or more potential.

1.5. Embracing and fully recognising the cultural and ethnic diversity of different areas of London can in itself become a marketing tool for town centres and help them to attract new investment for growth and distinguish themselves apart from the traditional shopping centre experience. For example, the Brick Lane area has long been synonymous for Bangladeshi curry restaurants; however the area has also grown in recent years to become a vibrant shopping and cultural hub with a growing night-time economy. In Southwark, the Elephant and Castle town centre has a concentration of Latin Americans, who have established local businesses in the area over the years. We have recognised the value these ethnic communities make to the local economy within a Supplementary Planning Document which sets out a vision for the town centre, which includes expansion of the evening and night-time economy. These types of businesses can promote more leisure opportunities for local people, visitors and people working in a town centre, boost the local economy and number of jobs and also enhance the perception of 'place', choice and mix of uses.

1.6. The Elephant and Castle area also has a positive reputation as a creative area, hosting vibrant arts festivals and a multi-cultural arts scene. Through planning policy, we have specifically promoted the inclusion of new arts, cultural, leisure and entertainment space to increase the attraction to a wider catchment and contribute to a more diverse offer.

1.7. Adding housing into a town centre can help to support retail thresholds, but in many cases this will not be sufficient to change the structural trends that underpin long-term retail change. The increasing demand for new housing has put pressure on the balance of town centre uses and the use or redevelopment of vacant commercial properties. This conflict of land use in town centres has been recognised in the NPPF which states that the needs for main town centre uses should be met in full and not compromised by limited site availability, however residential development can play an important role in ensuring the vitality of town centres and can be encouraged on appropriate sites. It will be important to retain existing business and retail floorspace where this is appropriate and supported by evidence of demand, to ensure there continues to be space available for established businesses to move into the area and for start up businesses to establish themselves.

2. How can town centres compete in the new age of consumerism and succeed alongside out-of-town retail?

Integrate large-scale retail sites

2.1. Many large retail sites are under-used assets, essentially relics from a different planning context that favoured low-density car-driven development. Moreover, these 'big box' retail sites often create severe negative adjacency effects through servicing and access needs, blind facades, badly configured refuse arrangements and car parking. However, they are also important economic anchors of town centres, with high land values. For many new large-scale retail (re)developments, combining the retail element with high-density housing has become more common. Also, and because of the scale of some of these developments, access and servicing arrangements can be addressed holistically, providing an improved urban design and housing environment. Viable solutions sometimes require a larger scale perspective beyond individual retail site ownerships to achieve comprehensive regeneration. This may be needed to deal with transport, parking and to provide additional public realm benefits.

2.2. In the Southwark context, the Canada Water town centre has been identified in the London Plan, as an area of intensification to accommodate new homes and jobs. At the heart of the area is the Surrey Quays shopping centre, the Decathlon retail sheds and Surrey Quays Leisure Park. Built in the late 1980s and 1990s, these sites have around 40,000 sqm of shopping space and are served by some 2,000 surface car parking spaces. Physically, the area around the shopping centre feels like an out-of-centre destination, rather than a more traditional town centre. We have adopted an Area Action Plan which sets out design principles and strategies to integrate the 1980s shopping centre and surrounding land uses into a new town centre to strengthen Canada Water's role as a shopping destination. This will involve expanding the amount of retail space by around 35,000sqm and providing a much more diverse range of shops than at present. We have required a new high street to be developed which will help integrate retail on the shopping centre site with surrounding roads and provide improved connections to the three tube/railway stations. It would also enable a more effective use of the existing car parks and help give

the shopping centre site a town centre character.

Place identity

2.3. Regeneration strategies for town centres also need to focus on how to attract and increase a mainly local customer base, with the development of strong local links and local visibility and identity, rather than being somewhere people would travel a significant distance to shop at. The cultural and social history of an area and its townscape heritage of buildings, streetscapes and planting need to be fully recognised as they all contribute to define an area's identity, sense of place and overall attractiveness. Bermondsey Street and the surrounding area in north Southwark has gone through a successful transformation to redefine the historic heritage of the area and attract new development. Since 1993, a collaborative partnership between the Bermondsey Street Area Partnership, English Heritage and the council, have implemented a range of projects to regenerate the area, through funding historic building restoration, environmental improvements including streetscape and open spaces, and a 'Village manager' to help progress the proposals. The unique streetscape with cobbled streets and old railway arches caught the eye of a creative crowd and small-scale property developers who appreciated the affordable space available in the area. The area is now where independent shops, restaurants and artistic businesses are flourishing, alongside a residential community.

2.4. Another example is the 'Peckham Vision' which is a consortium of local residents, artists and businesses, who have come together with the Peckham Society, to seek information about the development plans for Peckham Town Centre, raise public awareness of these issues and stimulate an informed discussion about the future of Peckham. Each year the 'I Love Peckham' festival is held in the town centre, in partnership with local businesses, showcasing live music, art exhibitions and other entertainment and activities, centred in and around Peckham Square.

Affordable Space

2.5. Retail decline can enable imaginative thinking about alternatives such as small affordable workspace or pop-up retail space. In Southwark, our ambition is for better quality, more flexible, better managed and affordable business space to be made available for start-ups and businesses that are ready to grow. We have taken the opportunity to require large retail developments over 1,000 sqm (including refurbishments) located in the Elephant and Castle opportunity area to provide a range of shop unit sizes including affordable units suitable for small and medium sized independent operators. Our strategy is for affordable units to be made available in the first instance to existing businesses in the area who have been displaced as a result of development in the town centre, then new business start-ups, and finally other independent retailers. Suitable businesses should have 3 units or less. Rents should be discounted by not less than a total reduction of 40% below market rate averaged over a 5 year period. We will use s106 planning obligations to ensure that a proportion of new shop units are made available as affordable units. Making some shops available to independent small and medium sized (SME) operators is consistent with the approach the Mayor is taking in policy 4.9 (small shops) of the London Plan.

2.6. Parades of shops on high streets and town centres can offer the space for 'thinking outside the box' and using space innovatively, for example meanwhile use and specialist shops. Another example of an innovative approach to place identity and provision of affordable space is to initiate 'pop-up space' projects. This has been organised by Southwark's Better Bankside BID. Pop up spaces provide landowners who are finding it difficult to rent out commercial units in the current economic climate to make use of the spaces on a temporary basis while providing an outlet for creative uses. Pop-up spaces bring life to the streetscene, showcase local talent and contribute to the vibrancy of Bankside's cultural character. In the long term Pop-up spaces can improve the sale or rental prospects of the vacant units.

3. How can town centres become more accessible and increase footfall to local shops? What is the role of innovative transport and parking schemes in this respect?

Improved public realm through partnership working

3.1. Increased investment in the public realm can help to support new and existing shops in town centres. Streetscape improvements can also often be the most innovative transport solutions. The CABI study (Paved with gold: the real value of good street design, 2007) found a direct link between the quality of street design, management and maintenance and economic benefits. Within Southwark, Walworth Road was selected along with other London high streets as part of this study. The street's design quality was assessed using PERS (pedestrian environment review system). Each street was also assessed for its public value and a cost placed on it to show whether street improvements represented a good investment. In the case of Walworth Rd the pedestrian improvements represented a benefit of £286,000.

3.2. Another example in Southwark is the Camberwell town centre revitalisation scheme which is a project being progressed with funding from TfL and in collaboration with Lambeth Council. The improvements will include alterations to the highways and enhanced public spaces, and the objective is that the work will bring renewed focus to the business and retail sector and address concerns relating to crime. In broad terms, the objectives of the project are as follows:

- ☐ To make the best use of the area's transport connections to create a town centre that is truly integrated with its surroundings;
- ☐ To create a new space for London which promotes the aims and objectives of the Mayor's London Plan, Transport Strategy and Great Outdoors programme;
- ☐ Introduce 'gateways' to Camberwell town centre;
- ☐ Enlivening and improving the dead spaces around the town centre;
- ☐ Improve and unify the streetscapes around the town centre;
- ☐ Improving pedestrian facilities in order to provide a focus to the town centre, providing links to key community facilities and balancing commercial and local community aspirations;
- ☐ Reduce crime and fear of crime.

3.3. Addressing the potential of 'Transport hubs' in town centres, by increasing the density of uses in these locations can also help to create a focal point for an area and encourage people to use the area around the hub. For example, Southwark are working with the GLA, Network Rail and Southern Railways to deliver our aspirations for improvements to Peckham Rye train station and its surroundings. A successful bid to the GLA's Regeneration Fund, which was part of the Mayor's post-2011 London riot response, will bring the Council funding to help implement a proposal to create a 'Peckham Rye gateway' at the train station. The council will be match funding the circa £5 million that the GLA are investing in this project. This will help to create a focal point for the area and a proper arrival point into Peckham and Nunhead, as well as encouraging people to use the area around the station as a place to linger.

Accessibility and Transport improvements

3.4. Creating a pedestrian focused town centre environment will inevitably help to attract more visitors and shoppers. The Council have identified that there is a disproportionate number of collisions on busy roads and/ or in town centres in Southwark, therefore safety for pedestrians in our town centres is a serious issue. Over 30% of all collisions in town centres involve pedestrians, compared to fewer than 20% for the whole of the borough. Tackling the source of this threat requires an increase in pedestrian priority in these areas combined with reductions in traffic volumes and speeds.

3.5. London Councils recently (2012) carried out a parking review which looked at the relevance of parking in the success of urban centres (to which Southwark contributed). This addressed questions relating to the correlation between the amount of free/ cheap parking and commercial activity and how people travel to town centres and what they spend. They found that more parking doesn't necessarily mean greater commercial success. Free parking doesn't exist because any costs not covered by parking revenue fall to council tax payers. They also found that although car drivers spend more on a single trip, walkers and bus users spend more over a week or month. There needs to be more emphasis placed upon the negotiation of car parking levels in town centre redevelopment.

3.6. Another important consideration is whether access routes to the town centre are both safe and perceived as safe, especially for cyclists and pedestrians. The availability of cycle parking provision and the promotion of cycling as a mode of transport to our town centres are key tools to make town centres more attractive and easy to visit. Southwark's Transport Plan specifically refers to the provision of cycle parking the major town centres; district town centres and local centres. If we wish to encourage cycling for shorter (<5km) distances, good quality, secure parking is important.

3.7. It is also worth noting that the promotion of pedestrianism and active transport in town centres also supports the public health agenda for increasing levels of physical activity in every day life and improving and developing social connections. Resilience in social, health and environment terms will create successful town centres.

4. What strategies for regeneration of town centres and high streets would best encourage growth and prosperity in a time of austerity? How can they unlock the potential of key development sites in town centres?

Clear local authority objectives

4.1. Southwark's Economic Wellbeing Strategy (2012) highlights that successful town centres depend on a huge range of components, and the Council and partners can do much to help, from markets and street scene management, parking, lettings policies, community safety, measures to reduce blight caused by closed shops all the way through to its own regeneration schemes which can promote a mix of activities and encourage particular types of town centre uses.

4.2. Our strategy recognises that there is scope for a greater degree of flexibility and entrepreneurship when considering how to best encourage growth and prosperity in town centres. Businesses have much to contribute, both in the routine operation of their business but also in the wider role they often play, giving of their time, knowledge and even cash to transform their community.

4.3. We have set out several key ambitions which are needed to create thriving town centres and high streets. These include: Self sustaining local business networks flourish, engaging with their local communities for mutual benefit and providing a voice for local businesses; Better engagement between the Council and businesses leads to improved service delivery to underpin high street and town centre success; Businesses are enabled to play a greater role in community life – investing in public realm, involved with schools, supporting and partnering with the voluntary and community sector and; High streets benefit from fewer empty shops and a greater mix of uses, with more visitors for shopping and leisure.

4.4. In terms of business growth, it will be important for Local Authorities to take a balanced view on the many different land use needs, including establishing expectations and principles for the amount, mix, design, size, location and affordability of commercial space in new developments and regeneration schemes.

Business support

4.5. Ultimately, the development of many key sites in town centres will rely on private developers/landowners, however it is imperative that Local Authorities work more collaboratively with partners to help businesses to develop their own networks and increase business participation in community engagement and representation. With the statutory powers, leadership and resources Local Authorities possess there should be more of an emphasis to the role that local authorities can play in bringing together stakeholders to address the market failures affecting town centres. More resources for local authorities to provide business support are needed to be made available.

4.6. Following the London disturbances in 2011, Southwark Council announced a £1m Community Restoration Fund in February 2012 to help restore local community pride and act as a catalyst for new ideas that support improvements to high streets and town centres or which encourage young people to engage in

positive activities in the community and make positive life choices.

4.7. One of the many recipients of this funding is 'The Means' based in Peckham, which builds on Mary Portas' vision for Town Teams, and will work with local businesses to establish a thriving business network in Peckham and deliver a number of projects to improve Rye Lane, Peckham High Street and the surrounding area. The business network will bring businesses together to develop the quality of shopping on offer and promote Peckham to potential shoppers.

Identify and support emerging sectors

4.8. The creative and cultural sector has been identified as the fastest growing sector in London and they have also experienced growth in employment in Southwark in recent years. Peckham town centre has been identified as having characteristics suitable for creative and cultural industries such as advertising, radio, television, music production, artistic creation and art galleries. One of the major attractions in Peckham is the relatively low rents, the existing presence of established creative industries and the very good public transport accessibility transport links. The availability of an increased number of suitable small office/studios/workshops could lead to the establishment of a more formal physical cluster of creative individuals and businesses in the area which could contribute to the physical transformation of the town centre while maintaining cost efficient space for the businesses.

4.9. The promotion and expansion of street markets in town centres and high streets is one way of helping to enliven town centres, reinforcing the identity of an area and helping to provide a more varied shopping experience. The Mayor's Food Strategy recognises the importance of street and farmers' markets in meeting dietary requirements, as well as enhancing choice in, and vitality of, town centres.

4.10. The economic significance of street markets on the vitality of town centres has been highlighted in the London Development Agency's report 'London's Retail Street Markets'. It is estimated that annual spend in London's markets is currently £430 million, of which £309 million is on non-food items and £121 million is on food. This represents 0.94% of overall retail spend in London (nonfood items account for 0.67% of spend and food for 0.26% of spend). The report cites that customers at markets spend an estimate of £752 million per year at other shops in town centres. This represents a significant multiplier effect, with market customers spending on average £1.75 in other shops in the town centre for every £1 they spend in the market. While this spend would not necessarily be lost to town centres as a whole in London if markets did not exist, it does suggest that a number of individual existing town centres would lose out if their markets were to close. A large minority (42%) of customers surveyed for this research said they would not visit the town centre if the market was not there. The research report also sets out that markets provide an opportunity to deliver business-led solutions to regeneration problems. Maida Hill, Acton and Borough markets in London provide examples where the development of markets has acted as a catalyst for change (in particular, using

food as a mechanism for change). The vibrancy of farmers' markets and other specialist food markets illustrates a role for these markets in supporting wider regeneration of town centres.

4.11. It is estimated that London's retail markets directly support 7,319 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs. A survey of street traders highlighted that 25% were they were hoping to expand their business. Plans included opening other stalls, moving into high street shops, opening a superstore and starting an online business. The results provide some hard evidence that market stalls can provide important opportunities for business start-up.

5. How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? How can Londoners be encouraged to live in and populate town centres?

5.1. There is already a strong emphasis from national and regional planning policy on the promotion of the vitality and viability of town centres. Local planning policies need to ensure they are consistent with the NPPF objectives of building a strong, competitive economy and ensuring the vitality of town centres. To demonstrate consistency, Local Authorities need to set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period, supported by an assessment of the need to expand town centres, and the identification of primary and secondary shopping frontages. Policies also need to set out a clear economic vision for the area which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth. The London Plan policy also encourages boroughs to consider the scope for consolidating and strengthening centres by seeking to focus a wider range of services, promoting diversification, and improving environmental quality.

5.2. In Southwark, our planning policies recognise the importance of introducing a mix of uses in town centres to promote a more sustainable and mixed environment, where services and employment are concentrated thus reducing the need to travel. Our Core Strategy and Southwark Plan set out policies which seek to ensure that a balance of different uses is maintained in town, district and local centres and protected shopping frontages, to continue to ensure that there is diversity to the food and goods offer in our shopping areas. In Southwark, an area based approach to the location of new residential development in the borough has been implemented, directing new homes to be developed in the 'growth areas' which contain the town centres and good public transport accessibility.

6. What are the powers and mechanisms available to local planning authorities to revitalise their town centres and stimulate development activity?

6.1. Local planning authorities currently possess a wide range of powers and mechanisms, such as spatial planning policy, "cleaner, greener, safer" services, funding of schemes and projects, enforcement and licensing which can all remove barriers to business growth in town centres and help nurture the supply of local jobs.

6.2. Whilst Local Authorities can take the reins setting out spatial planning policies and to initiate projects, collaborative working needs to continue to be promoted and embraced to ensure involvement between businesses, land owners and community groups leads to success in stimulating activity within town centres and high streets. Developing good working relationships with other local business owners, the local authority and the local community can mean we can respond quickly to opportunities and initiatives. For example, capital funding into Southwark's Improving Local Retail Environment (ILRE) programme and area renewal programmes, has created long-lasting improvements to many shopping parades within local centres. This project helps local traders improve the shopping experience for their customers, and ensure that local shops continue to thrive and support the communities they serve. Area Renewal schemes also include streetscape improvements to create a distinctive character for an area and they have been successful in reducing the number of vacant units through refurbishment.

6.3. The preparation of council strategies which provide a framework for guiding and influencing changes is crucial in the growth of town centres. Southwark has adopted and is in the process of preparing several strategies which set out what we want to achieve and how we aim to work across the council and with our partners in the private, public and voluntary sectors in order to make Southwark a more prosperous borough. Our streets trading and markets strategy aims to chart the way forward to reinvigorate and transform existing markets in Southwark and create new ones that significantly contribute to regeneration, social cohesion and entrepreneurial activity in Southwark. Our economic wellbeing strategy sets out objectives to promote thriving town centres and high streets and also business growth.

The Use Class Order

6.4. The Use Classes Order (UCO) has been a key tool for Local Authorities to rely upon to ensure an adequate supply of land to meet important needs such as town centre uses, and to ensure that the impacts of development are considered. However, aspects of the UCO now need to be reviewed in order to ensure a more balanced mix of uses is maintained in our town centres. Southwark raised some concerns in the recent government consultation about proposed changes to the UCO and also suggested alternative changes.

6.5. We submitted comments in relation to the retail (A class) uses, and raised strong concern particularly on the issue of the proliferation of betting shops on our high streets, which are in the same use class as banks or building societies i.e. A2 (Financial Services). Betting shops are appearing in disproportionate numbers in areas of Southwark, and the current legislation is undermining our ability to improve the vitality and mix of uses available in shopping frontages. Currently there are approximately 75 betting shops in Southwark, with concentrations around Walworth and Peckham. The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman QC MP published a report on the Problem of Betting Shops Blighting High Streets and Communities in Low-Income Areas in Southwark in 2011. The report highlighted that a snapshot of local authority areas has shown that an unintended consequence of the Gambling Act 2005 has been a dramatic

proliferation of betting shops in deprived areas and a clear clustering of these shops in high street locations in these areas. This proliferation is driven by bookmakers' desire for more of the very profitable B2 gaming machines which represent 40% of their profits. In order to get round limits on the number of machines per shop, currently set at four, bookmakers are simply opening multiple shops in close proximity.

6.6. The betting and gambling machines in store make many of these shops more akin to amusement centres rather than being comparable to other types of A2 use. Betting shops (and pay-day loan shops) should be reclassified as a sui generis use. This would enable Local Authorities to assess whether there is already an overconcentration of this use in certain areas. The betting shop issue is not just a planning concern but also licensing. Local authorities might be able to exercise greater control on the location of betting shops if gambling legislation were to be reviewed.

6.7. There may also be a need to reassess the extent of permitted change within and between A class uses; for example to make it less straightforward to convert longstanding community pubs (A4) to A1/A2 or A3. There are also some considerable grey areas in the UCO around A4 uses (drinking establishments) and late night entertainment uses (sui generis). Some clarification in the definitions which would enable clearer distinctions to be made between cafés, café-bars, A4 drinking establishments and night clubs could be considered. The definition of what constitutes a night club, as opposed to a late night drinking establishment with ancillary entertainment, would assist in the implementation of the evening economy planning policies and enable more effective enforcement of planning and licensing control.

6.8. Another consideration is the loss of independent retailers from our high streets, which the local authority has limited control over. GLA Economics research indicate that there has been a decline in the independent retail sector and the growth in multiple operators getting involved in smaller format stores, illustrated by a decline in the number of self-employed in the retail. The GLA report 'Cornered Shops- London's Small Shops and the Planning System' identifies the contribution that small independent shops make to the community. Loss of independent retailers is affecting the diversity of high streets and eroding the character of town centres. Consideration should be given to creating a new use class within the A class for independent stores. The definition of qualifying retailers could relate to their number of stores. Evidence produced on behalf of the GLA by Roger Tym and Partners suggests that nine stores would be an appropriate threshold, below which retailers could be classed as independent.

7. How can Mayoral planning policy, the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres?

7.1. The Mayor has shown considerable support for boosting local high streets in town centres through the Outer London fund and the Community restoration fund, which have particularly benefited Nunhead and Peckham in Southwark. We would welcome further regeneration funding becoming available for inner London town centres; for example, Camberwell requires improvements to the

street layout and public realm to make it a better place to visit and shop.

7.2. London Plan planning policies for town centres has set a solid basis for future guidance to be prepared. The forthcoming SPG is intended to give detailed guidance for policies in relation to town centre land uses (retail, leisure, culture, tourism, offices, housing, social infrastructure and mixed use development). It will need to recognise that London boroughs have local priorities and issues and the identification of a range of strategies to improve performance of town centres should be incorporated into the SPG.

7.3. Policy 2.15 of the London Plan states that borough should support and encourage town centre management, partnerships and strategies including business improvement districts to promote safety, security and environmental quality. The SPG should therefore signpost businesses, landlords, local authorities, communities and other interested parties to useful tools on how to implement these initiatives. Best practice examples of town centre renewal projects (such as the Business Improvement Districts success) would be helpful.

7.4. The recognition that town centres should perform not only a service role, but also a social role for the community and workers needs to be at the heart of the guidance. The SPG should also include reference to large retailers local corporate and social responsibility roles, to help smaller businesses gain footing in town centres.

7.5. The range of measures set out in the SPG will also need to link with the Mayor's forthcoming SPG on Lifetime Neighbourhood principles (and London Plan policy 7.1) to ensure that a holistic framework for town centre development can be promoted.

We trust the above comments will be taken into consideration on this matter.

Yours sincerely
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TC023_Peter Wood OU

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**Written Submission to the Review of London's Town Centres,
London Assembly Planning Committee**

This submission is made in my role as a researcher studying for a doctorate in Geography with the Open University, titled "Creating City Cyclists: Why People Start, and Sometimes Stop, Cycling in South London." It contains policy-relevant data resultant from fieldwork conducted during October 2011-2012. A central finding of the study is that many Londoners who ride bikes have a very limited, often non-existent interest in any specific "cycle-centric" lifestyle. Their aspirations were facilitated by cycling, but their central desires tended to be for urban lifestyles located in or around vibrant town centres. This submission details three key implications of this. Firstly, how trade by cyclists might be better attracted, and the economic segments particularly benefited by doing so. Secondly, that explicit demand for cycling-provision in town centres may be relatively muted, in comparison to its latent extent. Thirdly, data indicates that cyclists are not an autonomous social group, but a subset of a wider demographic which would, given the right conditions, visit and live in town centres. The requirements and benefits of attracting their residence and custom are thus explained.

Firstly, all forms of travel imply different requirements and journey patterns: the bicycle emerged as particularly suited to facilitating regular passing trade and supporting specialist retail or services. This may explain the findings of TfL (2011a), in which cyclists tended to visit town centres for frequent small purchases. To better capture the passing trade of existing cyclists, and to generate modal shift towards the bicycle, small amounts of secure cycle parking need to be provided at regular intervals, rather than in large central units. A particularly frequent example was individuals stopping to purchase small amounts of cooking ingredients, beverages, or other ad hoc purchases on the way home from work. Longer walks between parking facility and retailer encourage the cyclists to plan ahead by include these marginal purchases in more infrequent visit to larger supermarkets or shopping centres. A similar feature was that when traveling by bicycle individuals seemed more likely to organise social events in town centres (and vice versa). When travelling by public transport individuals were encouraged to visit Central London (and vice versa); participants would not want to cycle to or from a "big night out", but enjoyed being able to leave their work-area, relax and stop en-route for a brief after-work drink. It is also worth noting that higher earning

participants did tend to own more expensive bicycles and wear more specialist equipment. Thus, the potentially highest spenders were the least willing to leave their bike in ad-hoc, unsecure, badly lit, or distant parking. Regarding specialist retail, cyclists were (perhaps unsurprisingly) not likely to carry large amounts of shopping by bicycle, such as a week's groceries. However, whether as passing trade or prompting a specific journey, cycling seemed particularly suited for visiting multiple locations on the fringes of town centres, which were often specialist retailers, or had some other specific draw: a favourite café, independent butchers, voluntary work or religious venue. The key feature of this is that cyclists demonstrate a high propensity to visit town centres, but if cycling is not facilitated they are likely to travel to an entirely different location by an alternative means of transport, and avoid the town centre all together.

Secondly, the majority of study-participants did not want to have their personality defined by being "a cyclist". Therefore everyday open support for cycling may still be relatively muted or expressed indirectly, even considering its recent visibility in the media and politics. For example, though many participants felt strongly about cycling, they did not want to become involved with cycle campaigning because they generally did not like participating in political campaigning. They did not feel that cycling was a party political statement or radically counter-cultural ideological position, for them it primarily suggested an aspirational cosmopolitan lifestyle, drawing predominantly upon ideas of European "Café Culture" and/or a physically active, healthy, life. (This view was widely established before the London Cycling Campaign's high-profile "Go Dutch" campaign, which reinforced this association.) Furthermore, whilst understood as a personal decision, perceived social context affected people's responses. For residents of both Inner and Outer London, all felt that car use and dependency is higher in Outer London, that measures which dissuaded or inconvenienced car use there would be badly received by the general public, and that many Outer London residents actively liked cars. Discussing Inner London it was felt that through-traffic might be prevented in residential areas (not including public transport), because Inner London has lower rates of car ownership, greater alternatives to car use, and a general perception that Inner London residents were more ambivalent towards car travel. However, this implies two consequences. Firstly, that there is likely to be suppressed demand and support for low-car areas; many people do not voice the full level of their support for cycling because they presume themselves to be in a very small minority. This demand is not strongly voiced because many people did not personally enjoy campaigning and did not want to inconvenience their neighbours, but especially because it was felt to be socially important not to be perceived as a "political cyclist" or an "anti-car fundamentalist". The counter-side of this situation, researched in Camden by Dr Melia from the University of Western England, indicates that, excluding a vocal minority, people are relatively ambivalent about their mode of transport so long as they can reach their destination quickly and cheaply. Just as induced demand tends to remove the benefits of capacity-expansion in the long term (Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment [SACTRA] 1994), so are initial inconveniences

eroded in the long term by modal shift. Although cycling may not be voiced as the top-priority of many people, even cyclists, infrastructure provision is a demonstrably cost-effective means of generating modal shift towards the bicycle, and of attracting cyclists' custom to well served areas⁷.

The third and final point draws out the implications of cyclists being disproportionately drawn from the wider demographic groups which tend to live in and around town centres. This study found that cyclists are not an autonomous or stand-alone social group, and perceive cycling as a subset of a wider "cosmopolitan" urban lifestyle. Contextualised against geographic demographic data shows these "cosmopolitan" groups tend to be of above average income. Avoiding the suburbs, they tend to live in proximity to, and frequently visit, Inner London and town centres (cf. TfL 2010; 2011a; 2011b). The implications of this for town centres are twofold; firstly that if certain groups are already more likely to live nearby and to visit, then meeting their specific "near market" desires may be both a priority and more cost-effective (TfL 2010). For example, if cycling (and walking) is a form of transport with demographic links and technical benefits for visiting and creating vibrant town centres, it may be a priority to encourage cycling and walking in town centres. Conversely, it may be quite difficult, if not self-defeating, to create town centres which can compete with suburban or out-of-town supermarkets by prioritising automobile access. This study cannot carry out an economic analysis of these competing options, but it can suggest how "cosmopolitan" demographics might be attracted and the place of cycling within this. Firstly, because cyclists visit town centres for small but frequent purchases, they may be very adept at supporting a general baseline of activity which makes a town centre feels "vibrant" and attracts further non-cyclists (Gehl and Gemzoe 2004). This is especially true where non-cyclists also understand cycling to be a highly-visible icon of a vibrant cosmopolitan café culture i.e. cycling does not just make town centres busy, it contains a multiplier effect by being fashionably attractive. Secondly, there was a strong perception, including by those living in Outer London, that essentially *all* of Outer London was hostile to bicycle use and dominated by the motorcar. There are general social and environmental justice rationales for supporting bicycle use, both because it is an inexpensive form of transport, and also because the negative externalities of automobile use disproportionately fall upon deprived and disadvantaged groups (Sustainable Development Commission 2011). However, the construction of infrastructure which better supported cycling would address, perhaps iconically, the degree to which Outer London town centres are perceived to be different to Inner London, even when their land-values and architecture might be similar (GLA Economics 2010). Supporting cycling is likely to attract the relatively wealthy "cosmopolitan" demographics to the economic hinterland of the town centres, as both residents and employers. This would assist the viability of town centres, and in turn reduce upwards pressure on land values in Inner and Central London. Thirdly, it was strongly felt that "filtered permeability" measures

⁷ (Department for Transport 2010)

which prevent motorised through-traffic in residential areas (see Greater London Assembly 2012), made significant improvements to the residential environment, irrespective of cycling. There was a general consensus that preventing through traffic along residential streets would encourage individuals to live close to town centres, whilst current high levels of through-traffic around town centres encourages people to move to cleaner, quieter and safer roads in more suburban locations. This supports findings by TfL in which individuals actually visiting town centres found that “cleaner streets” and “less traffic” to be the second and third most important ways in which town centres could be improved (Transport for London 2011a, p37). By creating built environments on the edges of town centres which are attractive and safe places in which to walk and cycle, this encourages those people most likely to use town centres to live within walking and cycling distance of them. It is also the area that those individuals most in favour of walking and cycling are likely to already be living.

In conclusion, contemporary practices of cycling in London seem to involve the types of journeys which are most likely to support a strong baseline of trade and activity in town centres, particularly including passing trade and specialist retail to an above-average income population. Yet narratives of cycling involve a self-awareness of its minority status, despite highly publicised increases in cycling levels. This was a largely unspoken, latent, non-party-political demand for cycling, because many people who support cycling do not want to be thought of as “political” cyclists. Finally, because cyclists are part of a wider demographic tendency and urban lifestyle, many measures to support cycling are likely to make town centres more attractive to non-cyclists; visitors, residents and employers. Although a variety of solutions will be needed, cycling is potentially the spark required to rekindle a sense of safety and vibrancy in London’s town centres.

Sincerely,

Peter

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Appendix 2- Methodology

This study involved repeated meetings with 20 cyclists once every three months (e.g. November/December, February/March, May/June, August/September). This used a variety of qualitative methods: travel diaries, interviews, focus groups, and rides to accompany and film cyclists before interviewing them about the events depicted. This data has been extensively contextualised against published quantitative data, particularly that published by TfL and the Greater London Authority (GLA). This allows the findings to be generalizable to a greater extent, complementing these large observed quantitative datasets by adding in an experiential perspective which might explain existing counter-intuitive trends, suggest detailed qualitative actions, and explore currently under-researched situations.

Recruitment made a specific attempt to attract participants beyond those with an active interest in cycle campaigning. The study includes many individuals cycling "only" once a week or more, and/or those who would not term themselves "proper cyclists" (see the work of Dr Rachel Aldred's, University of Westminster, for a greater discussion of this term). Furthermore, roughly half the participants had only started frequent cycling (>1 journey per week) since 2007, with many starting less than 12 months previously. The participants, who were recruited from workplaces in the London Borough of Southwark, were from a variety of employment sectors but predominantly of above average income, white, with an almost equal gender split, almost all legally able to drive (although many did not own cars), and resident in the TfL South sub-region.

~END~