

**Written comments received from the general public for the
London Assembly's Economy Committee investigation into
Empty Shops**

Public comments

1. Barnet 7/07/2012

Our Barnet High Street is looking more Empty then Full.

The biggest concerns our shoppers are experiencing is parking by phone and not enough shops on the high street.

Businesses are struggling due to high rates and rents

Maybe rates restrictions and rent restrictions should be put in place to support the businesses and with regards to parking if we have the first 3hrs free the footfall will increase tremendously without doing anything else.

Empty shops are filling up with charity shops and betting shops as mentioned in the email, this surely is not good for the society and is going to have a detrimental effect in few years time.

A review of all of the above will be appreciated.

2. Serbia 22/07/2012

I have just recently visited the web site of the London City Government and found an interesting piece on empty high end street shops. This is definitely a problem, not only in London, but in most cities worldwide.

I being a real estate professional in Belgrade, Serbia have seen this problem first hand, where the scope may be even larger since we are still an emerging market that is still feeling the economic recession. Therefore I am very interested in finding out what specific measures the City of London is undertaking to try to come up with solutions for this problem. I truly believe, that to solve this problem, of not only empty high end street shops, but also to bring in new life into city neighborhoods, the solution must be in innovative unorthodox steps that will truly breathe new life into the city.

I would appreciate it if you could supply me with information regarding what steps London is undertaking to solve this problem.

3. 25/07/2012

I have just read the article, and I'd like to start bringing back the high street back one lunchtime at a time. I am a graduate so frustrated with recruitment I have taken to doing something about it. Still small but it's a start.

<https://www.facebook.com/Lunchtimetourist.co.uk>

Any further questions phone me on.

Kindest Regards

4. North Finchley 26/07/2012

I am a resident of North Finchley, and saw your letter inviting comments from the general public on what people would like to see on their high streets.

My opinion is that we need some quality control by landlords to enable independent businesses to compete against chains. Especially needed are fishmongers, quality butchers, independent bookstores, children's shops (toys and clothing), stationers, independent cafes, traditional cobblers, delicatessens, ethnic food outlets etc to give Londoners more choice as well as having the usual supermarkets and Starbucks etc. A revitalised high street could also include pop up shops in vacant properties. Needless to say, parking rules should be devised so that it is easy for people to pop to the shops on impulse (eg free for an hour, or 2) so that shopkeepers don't lose business.

I used to live in Highbury, and the shops on Highbury Barn reflect the sort of high street I would like to see in Finchley (Italian deli, wine merchant, cheesemonger, butcher and much more - all independent) with the chains of Holloway road and boutique of upper street close by.

I also lived in Chiswick, and again, think that Turnham Green terrace is an example of a successful local shopping street, with the revitalised high road close by.

Good local restaurants add to the mix in a very positive way, as do independent quality pubs that serve food, and they should be encouraged in my view.

Marylebone high street again is an example, albeit possibly a bit too upmarket for Finchley (but the limited chains policy is the important factor I think, in all truly local shopping streets).

Chemists, banks, estate agents, DIY shops, etc are all necessary but it's the mix of independent shops that really make high streets desirable and successful.

I hope this is useful.

5. Colindale, 27/07/2012

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to communicate with you our views on the high street shops in our Area.

Problem: I am from Colindale and have seen many shops on Varley Parade - Colindale and Edgware Road - Colindale converted to betting shops. In fact on Varley Parade there is a BETFRED being installed which has taken a LARGE space! I am heartbroken as it next to a pub. This will make our area go into poverty with pub goers going there and I feel it will feed a nasty cycle of gambling, most likely increasing robbery in the area for people to feed this habit. Please, please, please don't allow this.

Solutions: Galleries from local schools can be installed into a shop. There was a gallery shop in Brent Cross and I asked the Manager where the paintings were from and he said from College Students in Camden. Maybe we could do this with Barnet College? Colindale/St.Marys/St. Joseph's School? The company who were in Brent Cross are called www.whitecrescentart.co.uk Email:

Maybe a shop with history of the area in it or community classes for children to learn from volunteers in painting/poetry/reading/languages.....This will help garner community spirit as well as spark creative sparks than GAMBLING with betting shops :(

Maybe something similar to what Grahame Park has with a community shop.

I understand there is another betting shop being made currently also along with BETFRED next door to Paddy Power just opposite!?

Please help us stop this.

I would love to hear other ideas to replace these betting shops. Or if there are any constructive criticism as to why this could not work.

6. 27/07/2012

Apropos Andrew Dismores' letter in today's local press, the proposed revitalisation of London's 197 high streets would be an important step forward. Please oblige and let me have your list of those streets and their borough locations.
Many thanks

7. Maida Vale, 28/07/2012

I have just recently got out of a lease on a shop in Maida Vale, London W9. Having taken over a re-assigned lease in February of 2008 (pre Lehman and financial meltdown) I was subjected to a high rent raise as well as an additional charge of £1000 for the use of the forecourt outside for tables and chairs. However, everything was economically rosy at that time so I forged ahead.

I opened an independent coffee shop/cafe. At the time of opening it was impossible to get any concrete information out of Westminster as to what, exactly, constituted A1 usage, A1 internet cafe, take-away restrictions, legal amount of tables and chairs etc. I don't really know why I bothered to try to find out in the first place because Westminster hides behind the term sui generis whenever it doesn't know, can't decide or is dealing with any of the major coffee chains which open with abandon in a world that doesn't appear to require planning permission or consent.

4 years down the line with a thriving business and no residential complaints and a 4-star score on the door a Westminster planning official turns up and starts to question everything about the business. Allegedly I was producing food which required an A3 license, I had no right to put tables and chairs outside (on my £1000 a year privately-owned forecourt) I was a restaurant, not a coffee-shop and I had too many tables and chairs. In actual fact I had a micro-wave, a toaster, two pannini grills, no gas, no heat, 350 sq. feet with 16 seats (two of which were internet stations with stationery computers) and 4 tables outside. Cut a long story short, I couldn't deal with Westminster's attempts to hinder rather than help so I sold the lease and got out.

What is Westminster's problem? A businessperson has no problem seeking appropriate licenses and consent but planners maintain an out-dated mentality about 'preserving the character of the neighbourhood'. Well, I can assure that after 23 years of living in Maida Vale preserving the butcher, the baker and the candlestick-maker is no longer a viable vision and that once Tesco is granted a license for not one, but two express stores within 150 metres of each other the vision of a nation of small shopkeepers is

pretty well gone. What the area wants, and needs, is coffee shops, meeting places, locally run internet cafes, take-away food etc. What Westminster is not granting are the licenses for these types of operations. I understand the need to protect the area from unwanted expansions, noise and pollution but I believe Westminster only have these ideas in mind when it comes to small businesses. When I enquired about A5 take-away permission for an up-market (healthy?) fish and chips shop I was practically laughed at because, and I quote, 'That area of Maida Vale is already blighted by the big Tesco on the opposite corner.' And who granted them blighting permission??? Again, one rule for the big guys.

I paid my VAT, I paid public performance licenses for music, I employed local people, paid tax on profits, paid NICS and holidays, paid rates and this was the thanks I got - Westminster hassle. I had one of my 10 staff go pregnant (the highest paid one, no less) and it cost me £1200 in holiday pay for a worker I had to cover for 1 year. The government needs to lighten up on companies with fewer than 10 or 20 staff, or less than £1 million turnover. These costs of employment is crippling. In the end it was many things that made me give up but Westminster meddling, on top of a 6% rates increase, was the straw that broke this camel's back.

If it were easy to run a business we'd all be doing it. Local government has made it so difficult and regulated that pretty soon none of us will be doing it. Planning permission and licensing needs to be opened up and made transparent for all. Answers to these issues need to be given clearly and legally to all potential business owners before they sign leases. Local planners need to assess neighbourhoods frequently and with an open mind to what residents need and want from their high streets. Small businesses need to be exempt from many labour rules and regulations governing benefits, maternity leave and NIC. Business rates MUST be reduced on small businesses and laws passed to decrease a commercial landlord's financial hold on previous holders of re-assigned leases. It is bad enough if one's business fails but to be held liable for rent on a property one no longer occupies for up to 25 years is criminal (most small business owners must put up personal guarantees to landlords).

I hope that some of the above comments help and may be useful in saving our high streets. Vibrant, beautiful and useful shops make a neighbourhood valuable to everyone who visits or resides there. We must act now or this special part of British life will disappear into a uniform, strip-mall like blight of Tesco, Costa, Betting shops and Poundlands.

8. Colindale, 29/07/2012

One of the saddest things about the decline of our High Streets is the part that Post Office Counters Ltd have played in it. They have taken an iconic institution and reduced it to bare bones and the brink of extinction. They were just not fit for purpose when post offices 'lost' the lucrative benefits payments monopoly. What they should have done then was re-invent themselves as the Peoples Bank providing competitive and sound financial services within a public services ethos framework. What we got was a 'sorry for ourselves feeling' a licking of wounds, a half hearted attempt at competing with the private sector and a contraction, instead of a really positive approach to the new situation. Clearly Post Office Counters were not up to the task and were unable to call on expert advice that might have saved the situation. That was all a long time ago and The Post Office might have lost out to the

Big 5 banks and other financial service providers in the meantime. But Hey Presto! what do we have now? The private sector banks have disgraced themselves and financial products from other service providers often fall well short of what could be reasonably expected. So there is an opportunity for the Post Office to recapture some or all of the ground it has lost over the last ten years or so.

But politicians like yourself need to realise that there is a tremendous amount of goodwill from the General Public towards the Post Office, that people who work in them, whether in Crown Offices or franchised ones are by and large dedicated to their local communities and give a high standard of service and are therefore in a good place to deliver a re-vamped and re-invented Post Office.

So what needs to be done? Well, Boris has spoken up for London to great effect. Either get him on board and or go directly to Government with proposals to bring the status of post offices back to where they belong, at the heart of the high street, or press for a high level report into the future of Post Office Counters.

9. Maida Vale, 30/07/2012

I was very pleased to read in the Ham and High that you are looking at ways to revitalise the high street.

It has been sad and concerning to see betting shops opening up, cash converters and estate agents and in some roads that's all there is and I have often wondered what the planning officers were thinking to allow this to happen.

The main problem is lack of parking. The restrictions are too severe. Therefore, rather than "pop" to your local shop, it is more convenient to drive somewhere like Brent Cross.

I would suggest offering a maximum of one hour free parking giving people a chance to shop locally and not being too much of a hindrance to nearby residents. Many times I would like to shop in Hampstead and Golders Green but the lack of parking puts me off and as I drive through there on my way to work, I see new shops opening and then shortly after close down. In some areas the parking signs are confusing and there is no uniformity between areas and boroughs eg: some areas you can park on a yellow line and in other areas not. Therefore, it is not worth the hassle to try and shop locally. I live in Hampstead Garden Suburb and where the shops are there on the A1, it is like a ghost town and looks very depressing for an affluent area. Shops open up and then shortly after close down.

As well as sorting out the parking, I would also suggest offering new business start ups three months rent free in one of the empty shops and then staggered payments after that.

I had taken up the plight of the struggling high street with Camden Council some time ago as I was concerned about the state of Heath Street NW3, and they said it was the fault of the landlord that the shops were empty. I'm not sure if this is correct but maybe something could be done to incentivise the landlords to make sure their shops are occupied.

There is also an action group that are concerned about what is happening with the shops in Hampstead which you may already be aware of

Best wishes and I really do hope you have some success.

10. Golders Green, 30/07/2012

I am emailing you further to the article in The Press seeking comments on high streets.

I am a resident of Golders Green and hence a consumer. I have lived in the area for nearly 30 years and in that period the High Street has gone from being one of the best in London to possibly one of the worst. It is so bad that I no longer like to go to it.

The reason for the demise appears to be the quality of the shops. There are mainly coffee shops, charity shops, and betting shops. These shops attract people who make the experience of the street very unpleasant. There are tramps and other unsavoury types who make the high street feel quite unsafe and my daughters and I no longer feel comfortable going to it.

The High street needs to be cleaned. Spitting should not be allowed. Drinking should not be allowed. The betting shops need to go. The number of charity shops should be reduced. The tramps should be removed. We should feel safe walking along it and not have to fend off rude and ill mannered males who make sexual comments and noises. The quality of shops should be better and perhaps there should be free parking for one 30 minutes or one hour.

These are just some of the problems.

11. 31/07/2012

This is a no-brainer. Shops are empty because of the massive increase in the rates! The rents are a minor part since rents do not come up for renewal that often although I remember a time when Golders Green Road was suddenly empty since the landlord increased the rents by an exorbitant amount.

Councils are desperate for money, they think they can get it with a big hike in business rates and this is the result.

12. Barnet, 31/07/2012

With regard to your request for thoughts on revitalizing our high street I can contribute, as a resident of Barnet, the following thoughts.

1. It is a great shame that I feel that I prefer NOT to use my local town centre for shopping due to the appalling difficulty in parking in the area. The system of pay by phone should be rapidly abandoned and normal meters re introduced. Why should I pay via a difficult and expensive system when I can drive a little further to an out of town supermarket, park for free, and get my shopping done with ease ??

2. As a suggestion to breath life into the high street perhaps you could consider offering a business rates 'holiday' to those business's which you wish to encourage whilst NOT offering the same incentive to the ones which you wish to discourage.

3. It would be great to have a parking system which allows a free initial period and a sensible rate of charge thereafter.

The thoughts of Barnet residents were expressed quite forcefully to Brian Coleman and please do something about this sad position with no delay !!!

13. West Hampstead, 31/07/2012

There are a lot of things that can be done to revitalise the high street, but some of them may require Westminster input.

1. All new developments should be forced to have only small retail units, small enough to attract independents, rather than multi-nationals. Any displaced retailers should be guaranteed premises in the new development at the same rent they paid before, or at a very, very small increase.

2. There should also be a proportion of shops with 'affordable rent', just like there are for flats and houses. My area (West Hampstead) is being destroyed because Nando's came in a few years ago and paid way above what was then the going market rate. This made landlords increase their rents for the whole area. Independent shopkeepers can't pay rents which one retailer said were equal to those at Brent Cross (he had previously had an outlet there).

3. And, if possible, this proportion of affordable rent should be imposed on existing high streets, not just new developments. How it would work, I don't know, but there must be a way - maybe by capping rents on small units, and preventing two small units from being combined into one (which was what Nando's did).

4. Some sort of restrictions on the number of any particular type of shop or service might help. In other words, no more than four estate agents in a street x number of metres long; no more than five cafes; no more than two supermarkets, etc. This may seem like anti-capitalism and anti-free market, but in fact it would increase the ability of retailers to do business and improve the choice of products and services available to communities. Again, using West Hampstead as an example, we now have two Tescos and a Sainsbury - with the probability of another large supermarket in a new development by London Overground - but have lost our independents which offered MORE choice: I could get things there that the supermarkets will not stock. We lost both our hardware stores. We have lost one of our gift shops (the best one) because rents were just too high; they'd been there for years. We are likely to lose our health food shop when the development on West End Lane goes ahead as it will take over a row of small shops (see point 1)

5. Cafes should be considered A3, however much 'takeaway' they serve - or there should be a separate planning category for cafes and councils should be able to - and be encouraged to - restrict these. How many cafes can someone living in one neighbourhood visit? Cafes can pay more rent because they have less capital invested in stock; they only buy food for a few days and are pretty sure it will sell, whereas a proper retailer has to keep stock for months and sometimes end up selling it at a discount, which limits the amount of capital available to them.

6. Councils should be penalised for not listening to their constituents. The development

on West End Lane was fiercely opposed by local residents; the council approved it anyway. They should also not have to pay for planning appeals – the applicant should take on all costs. Often councils are reluctant to take action against someone who has ignored planning laws in case they lose, having spent a fortune in the process. We have a cafe that opened without planning permission – despite being told by the council he would not get permission. It went to the High Court, the judge saying if the case came up before him again, he would fine the applicant for every day he remained open. Nothing has happened – 15 years or so down the line; the cafe remains open. The owner has lied and lied and lied – saying he doesn't cook on the premises. The kitchen is in the basement and the latest inspectors never got that far.

I've lived in West Hampstead since 1978 – and before that, twice in bedsits, as a student. I've seen it being destroyed. We lost the best off-license ever because the rent increase was too high; we lost a hardware shop when the owner retired – as well as the clothes shop next to it – because planning officers allowed developers to knock it into one to make a bigger unit and then gave it A3 planning permission, which attracted a multinational restaurant. The only local shop I know we won't lose until the owner wants to give up is the book shop, because he owns the freehold.

I have been on a local campaign group but resigned because I got so stressed dealing with councils, planners, etc. I feel completely trapped sometimes. We get more and more development, which removes more and more of our amenities. How can that be sustainable for us or the high street?

14. Roman Road, 31/07/2012

I just saw the article re empty shops via twitter. I have been trading for 8 weeks, in Roman Road, East London.

The hardest challenge pre-opening was negotiating a lease– commercial leases are petrifying and place a massive amount of risk on the business owner– a risk that many won't dare or be able to take. Most people don't have the knowledge to scramble their way through it, I certainly didn't and it was a massive learning curve. I sought advice from family and friends who, purely by chance, had some pretty in depth knowledge, but even still I am aware of how horribly wrong it could all go! Maybe something could be done where people can trial their idea on 6 month leases on a space where the risk is covered by a sponsor or the government? Just preparing a shop to trade takes a certain amount of money.

The other problem is the business rates, for which I don't seem to get anything, and adds a huge amount (almost 50% to my monthly bills) It's such an enormous amount of money to generate in those first few precarious months, whilst trying to promote your business, which incurs costs (printing, special offers) and keep yourself afloat. Maybe 6 months off to start with?

Roman Road has received funding I believe, along with 2 other tower hamlets markets via the Portas scheme– but I wasn't aware of the bid until they won it, and it is tied into a healthy eating initiative and the NHS I think. An alternative bid, that I was aware of was related to retail, how to give the road an identity, empty shops and what sort of business the area wants, and could use and support.

Anyway I hope this helps. I'm still learning and am watching this street to see what happens next.

15. Hampstead, 02/08/2012

I read about your request for comments in the Ham and High.

I live in Hampstead, very near the village centre. Our village has not suffered closures to the extent of others, but several shops have closed over the past couple of years. Based on living there for over 20 years, I have the following observations:

1. Make parking for customers easier. I know, this is difficult, but I have a few suggestions.
 - a. Force the large delivery lorries to make their deliveries between midnight and 06.00. Make the parking spaces they take available to customers to shop. Certainly if the large lorries are allowed to block lanes for a considerable amount of time it is possible to make a few spaces for customers.
 - b. limit parking to 30 minutes in places reserved for the shops.
 - c. Find creative ways to limit through traffic with such techniques as one way systems, traffic-free Sundays.
2. There is a huge traffic jam every weekday morning during school term period. The roads are blocked with huge SUVs with one driver and one child going to school. Is it possible to work with schools to encourage parents to walk to school with their child instead of driving?
3. Limit access to a few roads for through large lorries and buses. They block roads and slow traffic.
4. Work with local government to develop a shopkeeper - friendly approach.
 - a. Keep rents on council-owned properties at a reasonable level.
 - b. Encourage frequent community events on the High Street, even close the road to traffic for them. If we can do this for the Olympic Torch Relay, we can do it for our communities.
 - c. Consider offering rates relief for shops on the High Street.
 - d. Require Councils to confer frequently with community organisations, especially shopkeepers groups. And set expectations that the Council will do something about their concerns.
5. By 17.00 each evening the pavements are full of trash bags and other waste awaiting pick-up. While the Council does a good job of picking up trash in general, the High Street is not very pleasant between 17.00 and midnight. Find a creative way of dealing

with trash pick-up. Perhaps it is possible to store the trash inside and as the shopkeepers to take it to the trash truck when they open.

6. Make the High Street more pedestrian-friendly. Allow restaurants access to the pavements for tables, place benches and tables for people to stop and rest. The more flowers, the better

7. A constant police presence is important. People are becoming fearful of going out. Just 2 bobbies walking up and down the High Street can make a world of difference.

8. Try to find ways to make the High Street more accessible without automobiles. It seems to me that a frequent local shuttle bus going through each neighbourhoods would be a big success - especially for older people.

9. Is it possible to get some sort of VAT relief for High Street shops?

I wish you success in finding ways to preserve our High Streets.

16. 02/08/2012

I am writing after reading your article in The Mill Hill Press asking for suggestions on how to revitalise our high streets.

As a designer and teacher with 25 years experience, it is an absolute no brainer and has been clearly documented and researched that making all London high streets free for the first 30 mins would massively improve trade and get people back to our local shops.

I think that all London boroughs must agree to this, it is up to the LA and you Andrew (who I voted for). There is so much disparage from one borough to another with parking charges and pay by phone systems (some of which take almost 5 mins to pay on the phone, ((press 1 to verify, press 2 to proceed, now do you wish your parking to start press 1 to agree press 2 to think about it for a minute longer!!!)) that it must be a London wide plan. Parking fines have become punitive and a revenue builder across not only London but for all councils and that is not what it should be for, which is to help the ebb & flow of traffic, to stop people parking on double yellow lines!

I know parking is always a hot topic and people think its an easy target, we are looking for other ways to re ignite the economy, but its simple.

If people feel that they can pop to the shops without it becoming some arduous and punitive and expensive process then people will go to the local shops more and shop less on-line and at out of town complexes.

1. 30 min free parking on all high streets =
2. Busier shops and high streets =
3. more trade =
4. local economy thrives =
5. less closed and empty shops =
5. less betting shops and pawn brokers =
6. revitalised high streets =
7. re creating communities =

8. The big society (isn't that what you wanted David C.?)

You wanted our suggestions, this is mine, its simple its easy to start and put into practice, (please don't brush us off with some 6 month trial in North Finchley!,) The whole of London needs this, NOW, try something new and different, take some good advice, act on it now and get on with it.

We are fed up to the back teeth with politicians tinkering with our lives and making everything we do so punitive.

I come back to my car after paying an extortionate £2 an hour in Barnet, 1 min late, £60 fine! why? fair? revitalise our high street, I'm not going back there for a month if I can help it, I'll shop on line or out of town. Its simple!!!!!! 30 mins free parking. you want to get London moving, JUST DO IT!

You need more cash? make the tax dodgers pay what is fair, cancel trident, make corporation tax fair, make Olympic sponsors pay a correct Corp Tax, make HMRC tax everyone evenly and fairly. Fine the criminals and stop treating everyone else in a punitive way.

Its simple!!!!!! 30 mins free parking. you want to get London moving, JUST DO IT!

I would be very happy to come and talk to the committee and yourself about this if you would like me to

17. 05/08/2012

First and foremost we must return to sensible parking pricing both for commerce and residents. Until this is done the high street faces a short and swift death. What is the current situation regarding the review/reversal of the parking tariffs in Barnet especially the exorbitant Resident's Parking increase to £100 which the Conservative administration has burdened us with?

18. 06/08/2012

I have much experience in retail and a little experience in politics. As a result, I have a few thoughts on this.

I think it would be an improvement on the status quo to require planning permission for a change of use from A1 to A3, under an amended Use Classes Order. This would stop small retailers of useful goods being turned into yet more cafes without any examination. Incidentally, I was once in the advanced stages of taking over a small retail outlet in a North London suburb when a global coffee shop operator entered the proceedings offering the landlord a £50,000 reverse premium, i.e. a financial inducement to let them take on the lease. You can guess who got the outlet. The result: a local high street with one more coffee house and one less provider of goods.

At the moment planning regulations do not require that a competition test as recommended by the Competition Commission takes place; I endorse the suggestion that it now do so, as far too many small businesses have gone under the cosh as a result of irresponsible granting of permission to new entrants. Similarly I encourage "106

provision" (where developers are given planning permission only if they also make a financial contribution to public amenities) towards town centre rejuvenation and affordable shop units, though I would query how these could be protected in the long term with rent reviews and lease renewals.

However, I am concerned that many of the quick fix Mary Portas style cosmetic measures attempt merely to ameliorate the situation rather than deal with its root cause. I realise that the national structure of property ownership, investment and management may be beyond your remit, but I do think this needs to be addressed. Too often because of the need of institutions to see a theoretically high and secure income stream and therefore have tenants with a stronger covenant, independents miss out. When an institutional landlord has to decide between a global multiple or a local independent, the independent will always lose out. The obligations of a 25 year long upward-only rent review lease are often too burdensome for the independent, even assuming they can overcome the hurdles of covenant and rent deposit.

There is a further problem caused by the upward-only aspect of rent reviews – what happens when the type of ill-advised property development referred to above is built, and local shops see their revenues fall? If rents too could fall in line with the market, then maybe they could survive – but rents are kept artificially high and the shops either go bust or become the likes of charity shops.

I would be very happy to discuss some of these ideas further.

19. Fulham, 06/08/2012

Thanks for your letter in the Fulham Chronicle inviting views on our high streets.

I am not a trader but an enthusiastic supporter of independent shops. I try very hard not to shop in Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's or coffee chains because I believe they are wiping the character out of our neighbourhoods.

And I know I have to put my money where my mouth is.

I find the subject of how to revitalise our high streets fascinating. It seems the rise of internet shopping could even do for chains what MP3s did to CDs, which had themselves already wiped out cassette tapes.

Maybe the only shops that will survive in the longer term will be those that offer something truly different, or something more relational – whether with the shopkeeper or our friends. Certainly, we need places where we can bump into our neighbours and random encounters can be encouraged between reserved Brits.

But for these interesting creative shops to survive – indeed for entrepreneurs even to be able to risk opening up – we need to find a way of reducing rents and rates.

At the moment I believe planning law allows rents only to go up, which seems madness.

I also wonder whether we have anything to learn from Paris with its tight rules on food shops. In London we seem rather to be experimenting with relaxing use classes even more. It will be interesting to see if that works better for Britain and our creative folk.

I know of an enterprise centre that's about to be opened on Tottenham High Road with tiny units and tiny rents (£50/month, I think) so people can have a go at setting up a business. Maybe we need to encourage more landlords to convert some of their premises into such places.

Thanks for your important work, and good luck

20. Edgware, 07/08/2012

Ways to improve-revitalise High Street Edgware

1. Stop shops putting all their wares outside - blocking pavements
2. Also what with the No-Smoking ban in restaurants and Cafes'
Stop chairs outside for smokers - pavements littered with cigarette ends
and the smoke/smell is not good for the general clean air.
3. Street cleaning could be better.

Sincerely

Edgware Resident of over 30 years....and counting....

21. 08/08/2012

As a property developer/landlord/owner of a large number of retail shops/commercial properties etc., also own a manufacturing business, comment as follows:-

1. "Taxing" or call it "Rating" of premises is so outdated medium for raising revenue, needs to be abolished and in place introduce a Turnover Tax.
2. A t/o Tax would allow a knitting wool shop to flourish, alongside a designer jeans shop ~ diversity.
3. To have commonality on Rates relative to Rent is a patent nonsense and non-reflective of profitability.
4. This spurious and daft argument by politicians (numpties) who generally don't understand business ~ Rates (Taxes) on empty buildings encourages landlords to rent ~ poppycock ~ best illustrated where Council (Taxpayers) owned buildings are vacant ~ can't let ~ so are demolished!!
5. This (para 4) above illustrates the benign stupidity of politicians vis Rates (Taxes) on empty buildings makes the concept of Co2 arguments even more absurd.
6. Barnet parking issues ~ cannot the previous administration and current Conservative administration not get into the real world and accept they (Councillors/MPs etc) are Public Servants ~ I emphasise "Servants" and should respond to their Paymasters and be subservient ~ e.g. I employ a lot of people and they will do what they're told or do not have a job ~ ergo ~ Shopkeepers pay taxes, employ the Council ~ Shopkeepers own car parks ~ so they should be FOC ~ suggestion ~ STC ~ I will buy all Council (Taxpayer) owned car parks F/H ~ subject to P/Permission being granted ~ will build flats over the car parks and G/F level FOC in perpetuity is car parking facility ~ problem solved!! QED.
7. High Street ~ vacant shops ~ cut the planning nonsense and allow immediate conversion back to residential ~ which in all probability it was ~ i.e. a

mixed/resi/retail/commercial etc ~ and as that rather famous advertisement says, "Simples"!

Summary

Instead of all the hot air, Co2 being emitted, if commercial profitable orientated people run the Local Authority and/or indeed Central Government, then cut the , the problem could be resolved in 6 months and as a self-made multi-millionaire who started from zero, I've certain justification in making the above observations and will happily be tasked to put my money where my mouth is, and that is being fairly basic!

22. 09/08/2012

1. Further our email of 8/8 which detailed various Webpages of businesses I own. Please note our property Web only features lock up garages ~ we own +/- 12,000 spread over +/- 1,000 different sites and are the major owners in the UK! It does not detail our plethora of other properties ~ several blocks of flats and houses, which are rented to Housing Associations but the majority of our residential property is privately rented ~ for verification can supply you a list if you wish!
2. We are NHBC/Premier registered builders ~ can show you sites from London to Dover we have built and are also building now!
3. High Streets ~ Canopy/Glass "in" over footpaths ~ covered ways ~ more pleasant for shoppers/strollers ~ weather protection.
4. Planning Departments/Committees etc ~ forget the "Pickles" report ~ hot air ~ I am constantly submitting planning applications that conform to PPG and have approval from the Planning Officers ~ only to have such rejected by the politicians in committee, who invariably are devoid of any construction knowledge and cannot read a plan etc! I appeal and have done so many times and always get approval and sometimes costs awarded against the council ~ this galls me, my taxes and those of others are paid out to me due incompetence of Planning Committee members ~ time they were held responsible and personally surcharged for costs ~ would I believe galvanize such people into action! I build say 10/25 units a year, therefore say 500 building firms my size without all these planning delays, could readily construct 5,000 to 12,500 units p/a. If the planning nonsense as detailed was eliminated, this could easily be doubled ~ food for thought?
5. The escalation of S.106 and now C.I.L. tariffs etc, will seriously impact on developers and ultimately the consumer/customer of the new home will pay ~ another stealth tax and manifestly unfair.
6. Instead of relentlessly imposing and raising new taxes to fund the increasing burden of State expenditure, turn thinking upside down and start to cut taxes ~ how ~ cut the Civil Service headcount by 50% ~ will the system still function ~ of course ~ impose a 40 hour week, maximum of statutory holidays and approve Bank Holidays only (total 28 days p/a), no paid sick pay, no maternity/paternity paid leave, no compassionate leave etc ~ time off is out of "holiday" entitlement ~ any more is unpaid and will reflect on employees "earned" paid leave. This applies to all public sector workers ~ existing agreements are "torn up" and no redundancy pay and maximum state salary to the top echelon cannot exceed £100k p/a and all pensions are funded by employees and not employers, i.e. the State (Taxpayer).

7. The above would be the start to ensure the State cannot take more than 20% of GDP. The employed keep the bulk of their income, restoring dignity and individuality. Needs to be done soon, before business unrest, and we employers rebel and stop collecting tax from employees and paying tax over etc.
8. Thus more disposable income in "their" pocket per individual ~ a further start to rejuvenating moribund High Street areas ~ QED!

23. Hounslow, 12/08/2012

I saw a letter from Andrew Dismore in our local paper recently asking for views on our local high streets.

My local high street is Hounslow, West London.

I have lived here independently for nearly 30 years.

During this time the place has sadly changed into somewhere that you will only go to shop if there is no alternative.

There used to be family businesses, selling fresh wholesome food. These have almost universally disappeared and as each that we loyally patronised told us they were closing and we asked why, every one said the landlord had put up the rates to a level that they were no longer able to make a living. As a business owner myself, of a Ltd company established for 13 years, I realise that there is no way for them to overcome this. It's sad and I don't see a solution whilst greedy landlords wish to line their pockets and have no interest in cultivating a "community".

Our high street used to be somewhere to meet friends and acquaintances but now, one feels ashamed to be there and certainly would not imagine seeing anyone one knows. Now I try to use local places, but some are so shabby, selling out of date produce, it's off putting. I use the internet more and more for shopping to avoid going to the high street which is a great shame. For a while there was a farmers market in Brentford selling all sorts of natural food - this was only open for a season, I really felt that was a great start, but it tailed off in around 2008.

The saddest thing is that looking at my local high street in Hounslow West, its' fast food outlet after fast food outlet with pawnbrokers in between. The place looks messy, smells foul and its no wonder young people are obese as there is no outlet selling nutritious food or encouraging a healthy lifestyle. There is rubbish all over the floor. People spit and cough up phlegm which they disperse on the pathway, which is filthy and disgusting and sometimes spit in the direction of other people. TB is on the rise surprise surprise. People queue at the local fried chicken store to get their "breakfast". I could consider moving, but I like living in west London and is it so very different elsewhere? I am not sure it is.

We visit Japan from time to time. We often think if the Japanese visited our town, they would be horrified at the lack of respect our community has for its town. Japan is spotless, people don't litter. There are recycling bins everywhere and people use them. There is plenty of fast food - but its healthy food. It's always hard to return and become acclimatised to our dirty streets and a feeling to be ashamed of where we live. When our family visits from Spain, I feel ashamed to take them to the High Street - it should really be a pleasure, but its really not.

I'm not a senior citizen, in fact I'm in my forties, but it does make me feel like I am very old when I recall how we used to walk from work to the fishmonger to get fresh prawns at lunchtime and there was just one "wimpy" bar in the whole of town and even that was not so popular.

Anyhow, things have not improved, neither will they unless the Govt starts acting and taking some initiative.

Empty shops could be used for start-ups - with priority given to entrepreneurs with creative ideas to help the community;

- nutritious food
- unusual gifts
- recycled materials used inventively
- hand made items at good prices to get their business known
- or little clubs or outlets giving one day courses in "how to cook" or "positive thinking" or "wellbeing" - things that would help people's lives in a positive way
- dance studios that run sessions for all ages with teachers of all kinds of dance and selling promotional t shirts etc to help with the funding.

All these places could be selling merchandise under a title of "we support our local community" with some marketeer thinking of a character and slogan that people will want to be involved with. Eg Pride the Lion for the Olympics could be Pride the Lion for your High Street - in a different outfit!

Certainly the areas need to be "lifted" in some way. Maybe teams can be made to innovate ideas? When I was at school we had a team coming up with ideas to improve the grounds. There was always something positive happening. We need people to take an interest and not just leave it to others. We need people to be empowered and not flattened by "Government cuts". There needs to be a route to progress so people are not easily discouraged.

I think the demise of the high street stems from Greedy landlords down to the public's appetite for 24 hour junk food. The recession has crystallised all this, meaning the only shops that open are cheap goods - and there is a place for that - but just not universally. People no longer care much about small businesses as long as they can park their car at the Tesco megastore and get things in bulk cheap - we need to change the attitude that this idea is not really a smart one, there are better ways.

I do hope something can be done before it gets worse.

24. Fulham, 15/08/2012

I read with interest the letter in the Fulham Chronicle. I indeed share a level of concern about the rise in pawnbrokers, betting shops, payday loan companies and fast food outlets. I live close to where many of these are in ready supply.

As someone who is researching opening a small business in the UK, I am surprised by the lack of start-up grant funding for small businesses. There is the specific program for young small business owners, but those of us above the age limit, cannot avail ourselves of such opportunities. I would suggest that greater consideration is given to these issues. I have experience of such schemes in Australia and the tax breaks and support offered during the early stages of a business was effective when appropriate controls in place. I heartily recommend such schemes for your consideration.

25. Kings Cross Road, 15/08/2012

We have been forced to close our bookshop in Kings Cross Road, in central London, and for one very simple reason, which I explained in a letter to , the bookseller who runs a newsletter to other booksellers – ***business rates***. Why are extremely lucrative businesses with a turnover of literally thousands per day, like the coffee shop next door to us paying the same business rates as a shop of other types whose daily income can be counted on the fingers of one hand? Our business was sustained by our main business, translations, but by selling second-hand books that the public could browse (something they can't do on the internet) we were providing a valuable service and that has now gone. Almost all high street bookshops in big cities have gone from the UK for the same reason. Business rates should be based on type of shop and turnover, with betting shops paying the highest rates.

26. 21/08/2012

regarding your ideas-call I would like to suggest the following:

Councils should end business all rate reliefs for unused empty shops. The full rate to be used to motivate landlords to put empty shops on the market and encourage them to actively seek tenants for their empty properties, even for a lower rent.

Maybe a usage review to limit the amount of certain types of businesses per road like only 15% chain and franchise outlets per road.

This mixed with a free 15min parking ticket -to make it controllable - even on single yellow lines should help bringing shopper back to the high street.

27. Edgware road, 23/08/2012

As you will know, the Marble Arch end of Edgware Road is renowned for its Middle Eastern cuisine, cafés, retailers and residents.

The area is also a mecca for celebrations during festivals in the Muslim calendar - such as Eid - and when momentous events occur in the Arab world.

Perhaps the main focal point for this stretch of Edgware Road is [the paved opening onto Nutford Place](#) - because it's a pedestrianised square located in the heart of the neighbourhood.

Now I am suggesting that this small, open area (at the end of Nutford Place) be renamed to: Eid Square

1. This paved area is quite distinct from the rest of Nutford Place, as it really lies on the Edgware Road.
2. Introducing Eid Square would make explicitly clear on maps that a pedestrian area divides Edgware Road and Nutford Place.
3. As things stand, Nutford Place is a divided road - and drivers who aren't local (even emergency services) could wrongly assume they can access Nutford Place via Edgware Road and vice versa.
4. Established as an official name on the map, Eid Square would be beneficial for local business and investment.

5. Eid Square would also be a very useful local landmark - as both a meeting point and a reference point for navigation.
6. This minor name change would be a very modest acknowledgment of the local community - which would no doubt be appreciated.
7. "Eid (ul-Fitr)" literally translates as "Festival (of breaking the fast)" - which would be very apt, given the high concentration of restaurants on Edgware Road where people go to break their fast.
8. Eid Square on the Edgware Road has a certain ring to it - and "Eid" does mean "festival", which can only be a good thing.

Its shops and shisha pipes contribute to Edgware Road having an Arabic street culture. But more than that, Edgware Road really is for Middle Eastern cuisine what Brick Lane is to food from the Indian Subcontinent - yet it probably hasn't been afforded the same levels of recognition. However, this could easily be addressed with a simple change of address for a small patch of Nutford Place... to Eid Square.

Also submitted: 28/08/2012

Some more points to note:

9. Great BBC video that reflects the culture of Edgware Road: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-18830865>
10. Various videos demonstrate that people from all Middle Eastern nations go to Edgware Road to celebrate:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmtZp0XOAN4> Libyans celebrating in Nutford Place itself
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bujUcrbq8JE> Iraqis celebrating
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVsFEsixtgU> Egyptians celebrating
11. Instead of celebrations spilling onto the road, establishing "Eid Square" as the place to gather could even help to police crowds and minimise congestion.
12. There is a precedent of sorts nearby - "Joe Strummer Subway": <http://www.subwaygallery.com/Home.html>

Furthermore, this small paved area could easily be transformed - not only with a change of name - but with features such as:

- a) A kiosk, canopy or pavilion.
- b) Flower-beds, benches and sculpture.
- c) [On the blank side of Regent House next to Slemani Restaurant](#): a mural; neon lights or light projection; or for big (sporting) events, a big-screen / video projector.

28. Barnet, 27/08/2012

I have circulated the details of your article in the Barnet press and invited my committee members to write to you separately but we have discussed the issues affecting our local high street in North Finchley and I am confident that my committee shares the view I express below.

There is no doubt that diversity on our High Street has declined in the 20 years that I have lived in the vicinity - we have retained one or two anchor shops in the core shopping area such as Boots, WH Smith and Robert Dyas but the number of charity shops and takeaways and A3 uses generally has increased dramatically and we have acquired two very large pound shops in two of the largest retail units in the street. On

the other hand we have acquired recently two non-chain bakers and a fishmonger - we hope that they will survive - many individual shops have proved short-lived in the past few years.

There is no doubt in the minds of my committee that two developments have impacted on the high street.

a) We have two medium sized supermarkets (Sainsbury and Waitrose) at either end of the High Street. Although they sell some items apart from food this type of stock is limited so they are not in serious competition with, for instance, clothes or shoe shops and hardware stores. What has made a difference to the High Street, however, is the creation of a retail park at nearby Friern Barnet and a very large Tesco nearby. As Chairman of the chamber of commerce I opposed the development of the retail park at a public inquiry on the basis that it would damage the High Street (I had relevant experience as Legal Director of Wetherspoons) and although the original size of the park was reduced, the development went through. Within a fairly short time both electrical stores on the High Street had closed and now the large furniture store has gone also - these facilities are now located in the retail park. Whatever is argued by experts at public inquiries (and I have engaged quite a few of them in my time) out of centre retail parks and large drive-to supermarkets damage high street shopping. Further developments of this sort should be resisted if they are within a 20 minute drive of a thriving high street.

b) The above having been said we are where we are and permissions granted cannot be undone. If high streets are to be maintained as a vibrant and important community facility we must find a way to maintain daytime footfall and a choice of offering. It is fruitless to impose unrealistic retail quotas as some plans attempt to do. However, there are certain things which will attract shoppers in addition to anchor stores - high quality cafes and coffee shops, markets and pop up shops in empty units (see Mary Portas' proposals) and newsagents which offer a very local facility. Rigid structure plans should be discarded - planning policies must be flexible to respond quickly to changing circumstances. Consideration should be given to offering rates holidays to new outlets of the type which the council wishes to encourage as it takes a new business up to two years to become profitable and many fail before they have had a real chance because of high fixed costs. The proposal to extend Sunday opening permanently to all retailers should be resisted as it will harm independent newsagents.

c) The issue of parking cannot be avoided in this discussion - it has become a toxic issue in the borough of Barnet and may lose the Party the next local election.

When I moved to the borough the many car parks serving the high street were free. In the early '90s charges were introduced but they were modest, 20p rising to 30p. In the last year the local council has raised the charges dramatically so that in the parks nearest the High Street a 10 minute stay would cost £1.00, (this is now being modified because of the public outcry and the fact that the 'take' from car parks has gone down), 1/2 t - 1 hour £2.00, 1-2 hours £3.00 and £5.00 for a longer stay.

Quite simply getting parking right is a key issue for preserving high streets and therefore councils must face up to the fact that they should not regard parking charges as a significant revenue raiser. 5 minutes drive from North Finchley High Street is a massive Tesco which sells nearly every type of merchandise. It has a huge car park which is free. 20 minutes drive away is Brent Cross shopping centre which advertises its free parking and has every sort of outlet offered by a high street. Unless potential shoppers

can park for a reasonable fee they will by-pass the high street for these outlets. There will not be sufficient local shoppers on foot to support the type of outlets that a healthy high street needs.

This is a difficult issue for councils but the bottom line is that they must treat parking as a facility for high street users rather than as a revenue raising device or they will kill the high street in suburban areas.

I hope these observations are helpful.

29. 03/09/2012

The only thing which will keep shops open is sufficient shoppers with sufficient money to spend to create a sufficient level of economic activity in an area to support the trading levels the shops need to achieve to pay their rent and rates, their staff and make a profit.

There are many elements to this, but the key element is having sufficient people living or working locally who are in work with an income high enough to give them disposable income which they can spend locally. There is a real danger that close to local high streets and neighbourhood centres, there is too little housing for families in work and too much housing for lower income families who rely on welfare support. Where an area is dominated by social housing, local shopping will be poor. The only viable long-term solution to rejuvenating the high street is to build more family homes for sale, for those with good jobs and higher incomes, thus increasing the potential spend in the locality.

Where this is not possible, look to encourage local employment, so people working at commercial premises can support retailers. Stronger suburban centres also create jobs for low-paid workers who then do not need to travel, so lowering their cost of living.

Once these basic ingredients are there, other things can be done to lower the cost of running a business. Improving vehicular access, removing parking charges and lowering business rates and rents if possible. However, without the necessary level of economic activity, these will not work.

30. 13/09/2012

- Put off rates payment until the end of the first year to give the new business to build up financially, payments to change to standard practice in subsequent years
- GLA to maintain a list of landlords who will provide first three months 25% rent, six months 50% rent, three months 100% rent and six months and the next year at 125% before reverting to agreed rent. The landlord has some money coming in and the premises in use.
- Boroughs to provide all stock one or more years empty on the above two schemes.
- Office space to be offered in the same way particularly if for non-profit use.
- Lobby central government for a tax break for individuals providing loans to start-ups or have the scheme better advertised if it exists. The theory is that upper tax rates were cut to encourage private investment yet it does not seem

to be happening. The tax break for investment can be recouped by re-introducing the upper rate tax cut.

- Promote use of promissory notes as these have the affect of allowing for cash flow in increase before payment instead of paying bank loans off from the first month.

The single largest obstacle to starting a business is getting premises to work from prior to opening the business. It is often necessary for several people to meet to draft and agree on company papers, rent on meeting space is investing the putative businesses capital in another business. The three months low rent will help this initial process and provide delivery space.

From personal experience working as part of a group we have:

- Put forward taking over a council owned unused underground garage for use as a community/arts space, we had agreement in principal for grants, loans or services to make the scheme viable. The project did not go ahead as the council declared the garage unsafe, no reason for this has been obtainable
- Succeeded in winning support from Co-op Enterprise for a business which would have include one weeks training in areas we chose, legal fees for co-op formation and loan seeking assistance. We spent our own money for space hire in formulating the financial plan, risk assessment, etc. Inability to secure premises while more preparation took place resulted in our withdrawing
- Have successfully run two advanced web workshops using others premises - one a pub and the other Occupational Heal at Maudsley Hospital. Can raise money for equipment to put on training but can not get premises.

Commercial premises, in general, being more affordable during the initial stage of a start-up are going to be more useful to the economy than is being proposed at present. Using quantitative easing finance as grants to start-ups would put the money where it is needed.

31. Southwark, 13/09/2012

I run a small Italian Deli in Southwark. There are always at least 2 shops closed and others are often in very bad condition. We find that the main problem to trading successfully is the high rents, it would be useful if rents could be slowing increasing rather than starting high from the beginning of the lease. We had to invest a lot of capital to start up our family business but we often feel that Southwark Council doesn't value existing tenants or care to establish caring and stable communities. We have been trying for almost a year now to meet with Southwark Commercial Properties to discuss the difficult trading situation in but so far we have only had promises. We also feel that there should be a variety of shops not the same types repeated over and over.

32. 23/09/2012

For as long as the government and local authorities favour and allow big stores to open up any where they want and the land is big enough to build than we will never have a solution.

We will end up having shops converted into flats because there will be always a very

large store not to far from.

They all start by opening up with great cut down prices that draw the masses in. Then by the time they killed the small shops around and no longer have competition they put the prices back up. And people have to buy it because its there and they need it. And there are no longer any other shops to go and compare prices. So the big boys end up with all of the local monopoly.

It's disgraceful and degrading. In the space of less than half a mile of high street I have a very large Sainsbury's, a Morrison's that open up about a year or so ago and now we are having another massive multi level Tesco being build right in between this two. It laughable but not. It's going to kill the rest of the high street. Shops will close down and crime will move into this areas. The thing is that this people in government don't live and habitat in this same areas and they don't know what is best or what will work better for the people.

There is a massive lack of housing in the london area and they could have had build a good 500 flats easy in the very same space but they probably will try to kill the green common on the opposite side of the road with the excuse of lacking space to build houses. It's just a joke. A big joke. One big joke.

So until the government wont take control and call for an inquiry to be made into this criminal activity we will carry on to be at they mercy.

33. Chatsworth Road, 02/10/2012

I have been looking for a shop in Chatsworth rd for over a year now. I bake cakes and currently have a stall in a local market.

I feel as though I have been shut down. Every time I have approached a certain estate agent but have repeatedly told there were no vacancies but to find out some months later the very shop I enquiries about had been taken

A new agency opened in nearby Clapton so I visited them. We talked about life's issues and the type of shops in Chatsworth rd. I told him how long I have been searching etc

He told me that landlord had said to him if any black people approach him - he is to say there are no shops available. That answered my question.

It has come to light that not only can you not find some of the landlords but it's who you know. There was a shop for let in the area - I called the number and was told the shop was still available to let.

After viewing the shop I called back to express my interest - he never returned my call even after leaving numerous messages. Months later the shop opened to someone else.

It is great that this is being looked in to.

I look forward to hearing from you

34. 02/10/2012

I am currently working on a project for cats protection, looking at occupying a number of empty shops around the country, installing beautiful graphics across the window area, and promoting the work of our charity, through the shop. The shop would not be fully occupied, but local branches and adoption centres would have the opportunity to

use the site for any of the charity's activities. Our graphics are generally well received and appeal to families and animal lovers especially, and have proved to be a good landmark for residents to meet up or gather.

We are keen to work with local council authorities and landlords to better the look of high streets by installing some of our wonderfully attractive messages, which enable families and individuals to be enlightened as to the work of cats protection, and to promote awareness and the rehoming of cats.

We are obviously keen to take advantage of the rates rebate for charities and in these tough economic times any opportunity to spread our messages and rehome our beautiful cats, while a shop stands empty would hopefully serve many purposes!

We are able to vacate at very short notice and obviously can advertise in our poster that the shop is still available for let, and that we are working with councils and landlords to improve high streets and encourage the interest of local residents.

I would be very happy to send you an example of graphics supplied by our design department. I would also point out that these displays would not be used for fundraising messages.

If you would be able to speak to me about this project, and are interested in working with us, please do call me on . I would be pleased to meet with you to discuss the project further.

I would also be grateful to know if all councils operate an 'enterprise' or economy committee web address where we can make enquiries throughout the UK.

Many thanks and I look forward to hearing from you.

35. Barnet, 9/10/2012

"So, there was a call for benches in high streets so that older people could rest whilst out shopping, chairs in shops for similar reasons and toilets in restaurants and cafes to be available (perhaps in return for a small contribution to extra cleaning costs from the Council) and with large male/ female signs as one visually impaired woman said she kept walking into the gents by mistake.

As she told me "I don't care, because I can't see anything anyway, but the gents seem to. Otherwise I have to hang around outside, to see whether it is a man or a woman who comes out, and that is a bit odd too."

36. 17/01/2013

I hope you are well.

I am looking forward to seeing the report your committee is currently drawing up.

When do you think it will be published ?

Unfortunately, I missed the September deadline and was too late to contribute to your research.

However, I would just like to offer you my opinion, for what it's worth.

The basic problem, is money.

There is none.

The majority of the public do not have any spare cash.

So, there is very little chance of them being able to meet the high rents that the landlords are looking for.

Of course, there are always going to be some people with money, who can raise the required amounts necessary to open a shop.

However, this means relying on the few, to help regenerate and invigorate, the many.

To keep the illusion of success going.

I believe that we need to start from the ground up.

That means allowing the people access to retail spaces.

Landlords need to lower their rents and maybe even become partners, or get a share in the businesses that operate from their properties.

It would be far better to have a row of shops run by the community, rather than having a community with a row of empty shops.

Ironically, this was how many areas used to be.

Independent businesses run by local families.

This was before bigger companies came in and offered higher rents to the landlords.

The country is in a terrible state.

The only way to fix this is to give the people something back.

I hope this helps.

Best Wishes