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Garden Bridge Review
Meeting transcript

Event: MH/ Sir Edward Lister

Date: 1 December 2016

Present: Dame Margaret Hodge MP
Sir Edward Lister
Claire Hamilton

SIR EDWARD LISTER (EL):

All I'd say to you is that I haven't actually printed out the original MD. I can pull it up on my computer if we decide we need the actual numbers. So if you would just accept they're broad-brush numbers.

DAME MARGARET HODGE (MH): Okay. Well, I think --

EL: You've got the correct numbers in the documentation.

MH: We have, right. I'm not looking at is it a good idea, a bad idea; I'm looking is it value for money and were proper processes followed and what can we learn about the process, really. So not do I want butterflies in the middle of the Thames, that sort of thing.

What I need to ask you is really how did the idea -- was it Boris who said to you, "I want a Garden Bridge"?

EL: No, no, it wasn't -- it didn't emerge that way. It emerged originally via Joanna Lumley coming in to see Boris with the idea and it was very much her idea.

MH: She said she only saw you. She didn't see Boris.

EL: Yes, she saw me.

MH: But not Boris?

EL: I don't know if at the initial stage she saw Boris. Sorry, I will ... I can't actually remember. But she certainly did see him eventually.

MH: Okay.

EL: But probably not at the very first meeting. It probably did take place with me --

MH: It was you and Isabel?

EL: Yes, and then we reported it back to Boris, went through it all with Boris.

MH: And what did you -- but you reported -- what I'm trying to get is why a garden bridge. Who decided, "We're going to have a garden bridge"? So, when and why? Because you were thinking about loads of bridges and there were bridges in your manifesto and things like that.

EL: We were thinking about bridges but the Garden Bridge came really not as a -- initially it didn't start its life as a means of transport. It really came in more as a cultural idea, if I can put it that way, something to add to London's --

MH: Visitors, visitor attraction.

EL: -- attractiveness and that was really the bigger driver for it.

MH: From you or from Joanna or from Boris?

EL: From everybody, really, from everybody in those early days. It was very much about this could be a great addition to London. This is another reason for people to visit London. It's another exciting thing. London needs to constantly be refreshed with new ideas. This would attract both internal and external tourists and this is worth a considerable amount of money. And that's what it started life as and then it evolved from that.

MH: The feel I got from it, if I'm completely straight with you, which I'm trying to get is that Boris meets Joanna or gets a letter from Joanna, who is a very persuasive individual -- and it's -- I agree about you want to refresh London, you want to have visitors, you have done the wheel, you've done the cable car, you've done things like that, and this was --

EL: Well, I would argue the cable car did have actually a transport -- I think the arguments behind the cable car are slightly different.

MH: Yeah. And so Boris says, "I want this, go away and deliver it, Ed"?

EL: Yeah, basically. "This sounds good", yes.

MH: That's really what happened?

EL: Yes, basically. Sorry, it was a bit more structured than that.

MH: Yeah, but I just -- okay, and that's perfectly all right. I don't think there's anything --

EL: No, no, no, he likes --

MH: -- I'm not being critical. This is what mayors are for. When I did my original policy on mayors it was about that sort of thing.

EL: He liked the idea, so we then went away and it started to build up from that.

MH: And Thomas?

EL: He really came in about that stage. Joanna Lumley brought him in and he did some initial designs. He had a little model which you may or may not have ever seen. It doesn't actually bear a lot of resemblance to what finally turned out, but it was a little model which he put together very quickly and started to put the idea forward. And then he got enthused at that point and he started to really think it through and he then started to evolve the design which we know today, which is a very exciting design.

MH: Yeah, he's a very talented man.

EL: And it shows his talent and it would be a heck of a beautiful thing. So, he then got enthused. He then put that together. That then got everybody much, much more enthused at that point. And then --

MH: Yeah. And you always thought there, did you? You were looking at Vauxhall, Pimlico?

EL: The very first thoughts were actually at the Vauxhall end because there was that thought of a bridge there. But Joanna Lumley wasn't very keen on it there and the more you thought of it as a tourist attraction that moved it steadily to where it ended up because that really is a tourist location. It's also served a really great purpose over there in that it joined together two great cultural centres with basically another cultural establishment, call it what you will, which then -- I don't really want to call it a bridge because I think it was more than a bridge. It was actually meant more as a cultural thing, as an artistic thing, as a tourist attraction. And so that would then start to pull people from Covent Garden to South Bank, South Bank to Covent Garden, and that piece, particularly on the north side of the bridge, is a pretty dead area, all round Temple Station is unbelievably boring. I'm sorry, I shouldn't say that about a piece of London but it is boring.

MH: Yeah, yeah.

EL: And then it's suddenly become so exciting again. So that was the attraction of that location.

MH: And TfL in those early days are full of, "We've got no money. We've got no money. We've got no money"? Peter Hendy saying to you, "We've got no money"?

EL: Well, yes, but that's standard TfL answer.

MH: That's standard TfL answer.

EL: It was, "I've got no money. What's the question?" Sorry, perhaps you'd better not -- you'd better not quote that.

MH: No, I do know that they have got very, very big reserves.

EL: So that then came into -- came into play.

MH: So you thought the easiest way of doing this is through TfL?

EL: You needed to put some money on to the table. Just no way could you get such massive sums of money off the private sector without some public money being put on the table.

MH: Right.

EL: And there were two real routes for public money. One was the GLA family and in that particular case TfL and it was a transport -- had a transport relationship, so that was that. And then the other sum of money was very much going to the Treasury and Osborne and asking for money and that started life --

MH: What made you decide 30/30?

EL: That came out of the negotiations. It just came -- it worked its way through the --

MH: But at that point you didn't have numbers?

EL: No, at that point there were no -- there were no numbers on the table.

MH: The early stuff done by Arup and Mace, were there numbers around that?

EL: There were some numbers. I can't quote those numbers now.

MH: I think they were about 55. They were much lower. Does that ring a bell with you?

EL: Yeah, it's something like -- something of that order. It certainly wasn't the --

MH: It was under 60, I think.

EL: It certainly wasn't the £130 million which we then ended up with and then kept on going up. It had a habit of going up. And then -- but the initial approach to Treasury was actually about the VAT portion of it.

MH: Oh, right, which they didn't concede.

EL: About making this VAT exempt. Now, that's standard Treasury practice that it will never allow anything to be VAT exempt. The most you can ever get from them is usually they'll give you some money back equalling the VAT, but they will never make something VAT exempt. And I -- and if I was a Treasury official I think I would argue you must never break that principle. It's a bit like the mayoral one on the mayoral CIL for Crossrail. Once you've set the rules you mustn't make exceptions.

MH: Yeah, used to drive me mad, when we had -- you had VAT. The rules are mad.

EL: Yeah, but then you try and -- then you try and find a way round the rules.

MH: So they said they'll give you a grant?

EL: So in the negotiation that moved to grant and the grant initially was the VAT portion, and then in the course of negotiation it emerged as a 30/30 deal. So London took £30 million of the debt and Treasury took £30 million and that's how that emerged.

MH: Okay. Now, just stop me if I'm fast-forwarding things. I've got loads of notes which I might go back to at the end and see where we're at on it. So Thomas and Joanna come in. Thomas Heatherwick does all this work, builds a model, talks to Arup to get a few costings, and Mace to get a few costings. And you then decide -- you get the £60 million together and you decide, right we're going to start?

EL: And then it has to go through a procurement.

MH: Yeah. Now, looking at that procurement. Ed, you'd have questions about that procurement. What I don't understand is why didn't you just give it to Heatherwick?

EL: Because the view on TfL was it needed to go through a public procurement process and that's how it was devised.

MH: But it was rigged.

EL: No, no, no, there were three bids put on the table of which the strongest was Heatherwick's.

MH: Okay. Well then, if you don't accept that, then why didn't you say, "I want a garden bridge"? Why didn't the procurement say, "I want a garden bridge"? Why did it say a pedestrian bridge?

EL: I think this is where you now start to talk to TfL rather than me.

MH: But you wanted Heatherwick to do it, didn't you?

EL: Oh, yes. The obvious person was Heatherwick. He was the strongest possible contender for this.

MH: And did you say to TfL, "I want Heatherwick to do it?"

EL: No, I never said that to them but they knew that --

MH: Did Boris?

EL: Oh, yes.

MH: He said, "I want Heatherwick"?

EL: No, I don't think he ever said it in so many words but it was pretty clear that it was Heatherwick with a beautiful design on the table. Everybody was going to be much more enthused by a Heatherwick design than they were necessarily going to be by something that was less exciting, and that was really where that was.

MH: I think all your local authority experience and your experience as mayor might suggest you could have done the process in a different way which might not have landed you in trouble.

EL: The procurement process, once it was agreed that we were going to do this, was entirely in the hands of TfL.

MH: And who agreed it that way? Why did you agree that?

EL: Because it was TfL money coming through.

MH: This was this document, wasn't it, that became the basis?

EL: Sorry, you'll have to show me.

MH: That was the document on which you took those decisions?

EL: Basically, yes. Yes, that's right.

MH: Okay. And you couldn't -- you'd have legal advice saying you should do an OJEU and it seems to me the decisions you took ... well, let me ask you the question the other way. Why not OJEU? Why not OJEU?

EL: Because TfL felt that this was an adequate procurement system.

MH: Well, I haven't had the conversation with them but my guess will be that they did this, took this to a meeting -- I don't know whether it was you and Isabel or you, Isabel and Boris, the three of you, at which they were given directions. This was prepared for a meeting of you guys, not a TfL meeting. I'm right about that, aren't I? This was the Boris briefing meeting?

CLAIRE HAMILTON: I think that was prepared for a mayoral meeting.

EL: I will say yes to that on the basis that I'm doing this from memory so don't, please, hang me to dry --

MH: I think from what I've read this was prepared for a meeting where you took the decision --

EL: You must remember the process, which is very different today to what it was then. The process under Boris with TfL was always that there was a weekly meeting with TfL at which the senior management at TfL were with the mayor.

MH: And you were there?

EL: Sometimes, not always. Because of my role as chief of staff I was often at those meetings but sometimes I was pulled away for other reasons. So you'd actually have

to check the actual records of the meetings to whether I was present or not, and I can't tell you. I'm not going to say to you I didn't see the documents because, of course, I saw the documents. I saw all documents. That was my job to see documents. So the meetings took place every week. At those meetings each week TfL would bring to the mayor whatever the current issues of the day were. Sometimes they were just global reports, sometimes they were briefing papers. Sometimes it may be a worked-up paper for a board. It would be at different stages in its life. The whole purpose was to brief the mayor and that would have then led to a discussion with the mayor, with Peter Hendy, with the senior staff of TfL and a certain amount of debate would have taken place around the table and that would have then moved to its next stage.

MH: Right, so it was a joint decision through that?

EL: The decision to go through that procurement route would have emerged from there.

MH: From that meeting, okay. I'll tell you one of the things that's really frustrating, Ed, that just wouldn't happen here in central Government is trying to find proper records of these meetings is impossible. And when you're talking about procurement and public money, it might have been a sensible idea to have a lot of this properly -- so people vaguely remember this meeting here and you try and trace it just to make sure who took the decision. I don't think even in Islington we'd have done it without --

EL: Well, except a formal decision would have gone through boards. Formal decisions would go through (Overspeaking)

MH: Have we got minutes of this meeting?

EL: Probably won't --

CH: This one? No.

EL: No, there's no minutes of those meetings because they were discussions.

MH: But that's where the decision was taken.

EL: That was the decision then to go to the TfL board with that and the TfL board would have then gone through the process.

MH: But the reality --

EL: This would have been more like one of your leaders' meetings in Islington.

MH: Yeah, but they were all minuted. That's why it's interesting. I think if you went back to those, they'd be minuted. My weekly meeting with the chief exec et al who would come in would be minuted.

CH: It didn't end up going on to the TfL board until the procurement had been carried out. Do you know if that's unusual?

EL: I can't comment on that, no, I wasn't --

MH: You didn't and that's one of the things --

CH: Might be worth looking at.

EL: I wasn't that close to the procurement.

CH: No, fair enough.

EL: Once the decision was to go with the Garden Bridge, which was a pretty public decision, by the way --

MH: Well, except some of the people we've seen, on the other side of the argument, I accept, say the first they knew about it was when the planning application went in, which wasn't until 2014. That's what we were told yesterday. So I think what is emerging is there were discussions with Coin Street. I can't remember the name of the guy, I haven't met him yet, the Coin Street guy, but in terms they were quite clear yesterday, weren't they, that they said the first they knew --

EL: Ideally you'd have to go back through all the press statements and the other things, but Boris made no secret about it. He talked about it on quite a regular basis. There was a lot of publicity about the Garden Bridge. He was chatting about it.

MH: According to these people yesterday, the first they knew - these were resident group type people, weren't they? - was when the planning apps went in.

EL: No, I don't accept that. There'd been quite a bit of -- he talked about it a lot. I'm sorry, you know Boris as well as I do. He did not -- when he gets excited over something, he will tell people about it.

MH: Well, let's check the press -- let's go back. I promise you I'll check that. Okay.

I've got to put it to you that you had legal advice -- so you weren't involved in that at all. Because there was legal advice floating around at this point saying do an OJEU competition.

EL: I can't comment on that.

MH: You can't comment on that?

EL: No, I don't know about that.

MH: And then there was could you pull people down from your framework but you couldn't because Heatherwick weren't on the framework, so it looks as if a procurement route -- I just put it to you it looks as if a procurement route was chosen which would put Heatherwick in there and that they were given an advantage by it being just called a pedestrian bridge in the procurement papers. Honestly, Ed, if you looked at it --

EL: I don't accept that.

MH: -- you'd think, bloody hell, you wouldn't do it this way.

EL: No, no, I'm sorry, I don't accept that because --

MH: You don't?

EL: No, because everybody at City Hall was openly talking about the Garden Bridge as a garden bridge. It was also a pedestrian bridge. It was those things because that was part of the negotiations with Lambeth that there should be no charges put on it. In fact, the planning permission --

MH: That was all after -- that was all after -- the Lambeth stuff only started after -- in 2014. This is 2013 when you put the planning app in, 2013 when you -- around February 2013 when Heatherwick were first paid public money, March.

EL: Well, I can't comment on that but all I can tell you was that there was never any secret that this bridge would be a garden bridge. All the discussions were about it being a garden bridge and that was what was being said as --

MH: The other tenderers didn't know it was a garden bridge.

EL: Well, I think you've got to now ask TfL those questions.

MH: Okay. And then they got the first tender and it's very unclear what they did. It was 50-something thousand in the first tender. And I'm finding it rather difficult to find what they did with that money except perhaps get paid for the stuff they'd done before the tender was even let.

EL: Again, I can't answer that one. Sorry, I really -- I was not party to that.

MH: Okay. I think this is all fine that the mayor was keen. There's the whole issue about the San Francisco trip. Do you want to tell me about anything about that, which appears to -- where again this was before the tender had been let and it was before --

EL: No, it was the very early stages of the proposal.

MH: February, it was about February, wasn't it?

EL: It was soon after the idea had come into being and had been quite openly talked about. And the mayor had, as he had done, raised this in various conversations with various people and he had got an indication from – and we've never actually said who it was. It was just somebody in San Francisco. I don't mind telling you who it is but --

MH: It's Apple.

EL: Yes, but I don't really want to say that -- I don't want to say that in this interview.

MH: Okay, all right.

EL: Because to some extent there was a degree of confidentiality about that.

MH: Okay.

EL: And the mayor felt there was sufficient opportunity to go to Apple and discuss it with them and there was a fair chance that Apple might actually sponsor the whole bridge.

MH: Sponsor.

EL: And there was a trip out there --

MH: In the same way Emirates had ...?

EL: Correct, and he felt the odds were pretty strong that this was a possibility, so we jumped on a plane and went to San Francisco. Probably one of the shortest trips I've ever done because we were only there for 24 hours and flew back again, so nobody can say we were -- it wasn't a quick trip but it was -- we went there, we talked to them, went through it all with them. They had an interest if they could build a retail store on the bridge and that was not going to be acceptable. Then there was the idea could you build a retail store on Temple Station, which was not --

MH: Mad.

EL: -- mad at all. But it then transpired it wasn't really a possibility. So those were the ideas and basically it was, we do this, you know, we call it the Apple Bridge and you pay for it, chum. And that was a pretty good idea but it all came to naught.

MH: It didn't work, it came to naught.

EL: And what do I think about that? Well, I think you try these things and it's always worth a try. The Emirates was a try and it worked on that one. It didn't work on this one. To bring, say, Siemens in on their side, that was again a try. They were all tries but if you don't try -- we won more of them than we lost, that's all I can say to you.

MH: Yeah. That's very helpful. It's a very helpful explanation. Did Heatherwick come --

EL: Heatherwick was there already. Heatherwick was in San Francisco at that time.

MH: So it was the three of you going, it was you and Isabel and Boris?

EL: And Boris. The three of us went there. Heatherwick was already -- as my memory serves me, he was already in their building. He was doing a presentation to them for some other things, for designs, and so, therefore, that was the opportunity to bring him in to help make the sale and that's what it was. It was a real sales operation to try and sell it, yes.

MH: Yeah, but it was before he'd been appointed, that's the -- that's the only -- that's why if you're -- anyway, we are where we are, but it was before he'd been appointed.

EL: Oh, absolutely, and it wasn't on the basis that it would be his design or anything else, it was just he was there. And he had the expertise and it gave it, excuse me saying so, the credibility. And we were really selling it at that point on that credibility.

MH: You didn't take Joanna to that, did you?

EL: No. Maybe that was a mistake. We should have taken her. She could have worked her wonder on them.

MH: I know, yeah.

EL: Because she was always pretty good at that kind of stuff. But no, we didn't.

MH: And then Arup get the next contract. Were you involved in that procurement?

EL: No, I wasn't involved in that. You must remember I was really involved in the development of the concept and supporting Boris and then getting TfL to look at it. Once that was done that was really the end of it.

MH: So who would have overseen that procurement process? Would that have been Isabel? Would it have been Isabel's job?

EL: It would have been Isabel to some extent but it would have been really within the procurement process of TfL and the staff in the TfL planning department. It was led by Richard de Cani but it was very much underneath --

MH: But would there have been an authorisation?

EL: Within TfL's processes.

MH: But with you?

EL: No, it would --

MH: Or with Isabel?

EL: -- it only comes back to me at the end of its life at that point when it came to a decision, and there was a mayoral decision which was published, and I can't --

MH: Oh, you mean to give the money to -- to give the grant to TfL -- and give them the power and the authority?

EL: Yes. That was the only --

MH: Yeah, but the Arup bit of it would not have been authorised by any --

EL: No.

MH: So can -- the TfL process --

EL: No, that would have been -- that would have been a procurement process within TfL.

MH: So the TfL processes, where does it get to the mayor or any of his representatives or her -- his representatives?

EL: It wouldn't really get to them at all. That would be a TfL decision. If anything, it would go through the TfL board. The TfL board makes decisions on --

MH: Who chairs -- and that's chaired by Boris?

EL: That is chaired by Boris. And TfL is -- and Isabel is the advisor to that.

MH: And there's a business case floating around that was done really after the Arup -- I think it was done -- let me get the timelines right, but there was a business case to justify the project which -- have you got that on your timeline?

EL: I'm going to take your word for it. Sorry, I ...

MH: Have we got the timeline for the business case, the outline business case?

CH: I don't remember off the top of my head, sorry.

MH: I think it was done -- it was certainly done after Heatherwick. I think it was done after Arup were appointed. Did you see that? Did you have anything to do with that?

EL: I had nothing really to do with that.

MH: That was just a process thing?

EL: Yes.

MH: Because it's a bit of an iffy business case if one's honest.

EL: I was nothing to do with that. I will step away from that. I wouldn't have been. There was no particular reason for me to -- there was no reason for me to be involved.

MH: I think if you had all been quite open and say, "This is a grand projet for London" things might have been much -- instead of pretending it was something else, but anyway. And when you said you were there with a concept and everything, this was supposed to be a privately funded --

EL: In its early days it was entirely privately funded.

MH: Although you put the £60 million in?

EL: Well, that came later. When it started life, it was to be 100 per cent privately funded.

MH: So when did you shift to thinking that --

EL: When we realised that we weren't going to raise the money from the private sector and it would need some Government money to oil the wheels and make it move.

MH: So that was about the time of the autumn statement, wasn't it, because you got the money --

EL: About that sort of time. I can't be more exact.

MH: Okay. And then did you feel after that -- did you think you could do it without any more public money?

EL: Yes, yes, yes. And the money was coming in fairly well through the trust and Boris did a number of events for the trust to raise money. I'm sure you're going to be talking to the trust and they can --

MH: I have talked to the trust.

EL: And they can tell you what money they --

MH: They are very, very short.

EL: But Boris was always very confident that he could with them raise the additional monies. And don't forget, Boris was quite a draw. He could pull a lot of money through the door and he did pull a lot of money through the door.

MH: Yeah. Well, why didn't he pull more here?

EL: I think time ran out. Sorry, it's as simple as that. I think because he ceased to be mayor and then it's really down to the new major to try and pull some of that money through the door.

MH: Yeah. Well, it's gone backwards.

And then the other thing that is slightly weird -- you didn't look at the business plan, which I think is a bit iffy. They then do a draft management and maintenance because, again, everybody, Westminster, Lambeth - everybody is saying to you, "We don't want to fund it. It's all right to put it up. We don't want to fund it". And it's 70 per cent of the income to maintain and run that bridge comes out of -- all the things, there's such an optimism bias in many of those predictions. What did you really think there when you looked at that?

EL: We always felt that we would raise significant sums of money. Don't forget there was the arrangement to charge. It was a bit of a problem when it was Lambeth more than Westminster who were resisting more. -- I can't remember how many -- I think we ended up with 12 days a year when it could be closed.

MH: Yeah, it is, it's 12 days.

EL: I'm sorry, this is from memory, but we always wanted more than that because there was a great opportunity to raise significant sums of money by that route.

MH: So when it came down to 12 --

EL: That actually I think did reduce the amount of income that could come from charging.

MH: Were you then confident that you could get the money?

EL: Yes, because all the indications in the meetings that Boris had with the Garden Bridge Trust were that they were doing fairly well in raising money. And he had attended a number of meetings with them and with various vendors --

MH: They hadn't even raised anything towards the endowment yet and this is from whenever they started in 2013 -- November 2013 they were registered as a charity, November 2013. There is a £2 million - which isn't signed off yet - endowment and nothing else, so it's a wing and a prayer.

What made you change? Because in all those -- there's Boris saying, "I'm not putting any more public money in it" which he does publicly a couple of times. You've got Westminster saying, "You've got to underwrite it because we're not going to pick up the tab for this". Boris then says, "I'm absolutely determined that they'll raise the money and do it themselves", and then you change -- April, just before the election you change from saying, "You've got to have the money in the bank for the first five years before we'll allow you to do anything" to, "You've got to have a plan".

EL: I think we always felt that once you got this moving that money would come in. People have got to see it to start moving it.

MH: But then why make it just a plan? Anybody can produce a business plan, it's actually getting the money --

EL: Well, you still had to -- yeah, you still had to provide the money because the planning condition was still that you had to find the maintenance money for the bridge.

MH: No, no, hang on, I'm not making myself clear. In the -- Westminster had said to you, "You've got to underwrite". I hear that, so you decided -- right, fine. And then Lambeth came on board and said you've also got to underwrite. In your underwriting originally, in your then negotiations with the trust, you said, "You've got to show us you've got money in the bank for the first five years. We will underwrite but you've got to show us that". Just before the election you changed from saying, "You've got to have the money in the bank" to, "You have to have a credible" -- I can't remember, a reasonable -- I can't remember the word you use, plan.

EL: Well, I think because it was -- because I think as I remember that, it was the trust very much saying, "We need to -- you need more time on this and really it's going to be much easier to raise the money for the running of the bridge once people can see something tangible". And it's very hard in the early days to raise that money.

MH: But you were no longer requiring them to have raised it?

EL: No, that's not as I remember it. There was still a requirement for them to raise it. They had to have a business plan --

MH: Yeah, but a business plan is different from the money in the bank, isn't it?

EL: Well, I think the two things go together. You've still got to get the money because you've still got to maintain the bridge.

MH: Have you got the wording? I've got it somewhere, but it does change, doesn't it?

CH: Yeah. So the one in June 2015 was the provision of guarantees:

"Contingent on the trust demonstrating to the mayor's satisfaction that it has secured a satisfactory level of funding to operate and maintain the Garden Bridge for at least the first five years from its completion."

And then the April 2016 one said:

"Demonstrating to the mayor's satisfaction that it has a satisfactory funding strategy in place to operate and maintain the Garden Bridge for at least the first five years."

EL: Yes, and that's what I was really saying. It was not that they didn't have the requirement to raise the money, it was just they were basically accepting they needed more time to raise it.

MH: I put it to you that I think it's different to say satisfactory funding strategy from satisfactory level of funding.

EL: Well, I will stick with what I've just said.

MH: And the other thing which is a bit odd is why did you allow them, or did you, to let the tender before they'd got -- this is the NAO point, really, before they -- they let the tender to Bouygues before they'd got the necessary permissions. They hadn't sorted out Temple. They hadn't sorted out the PLA, got a river licence, and they hadn't sorted out Coin Street which --

EL: That was all with TfL to deal with those matters.

MH: But they must have come to you, didn't they?

EL: No I don't remember them coming to us on that. As far as they were --

MH: Letting a tender before they had the permissions?

EL: Well, most of those permissions are in their hands to go and deal with and move forward on. The Temple Station was their station. The Coin Street negotiations were well under way at that stage and there was the whole business of the PLA, the discussions were well under way there.

MH: It just seems to me because you were providing all these guarantees, by that time you were into quite a lot of guarantees, you'd have to protect the public interest, London taxpayers' money, you needed to have some control. By signing that -- by signing the tender before they had the necessary conditions or, indeed, the money, there is a danger that you were ending up with the taxpayer picking up a whole tab for it.

Especially knowing Coin Street down the years and they're not the easiest people to get an agreement with.

EL: Well, TfL were happy with that and that was what they put through. And the procurement exercise --

MH: TfL must have come to you. I can't believe that they did that without --

EL: Well, certainly not when I was there. As far as I'm concerned, that was a procurement exercise they were happy with.

MH: Oh, dear. And what is your view now, that they will raise the money?

EL: I would be quite confident they could raise the money. I think the mayor has to actually get out and help them raise the money. I'm sorry, I'm talking about Boris as mayor. But, it does need that kind of leadership to get these projects off the ground. It depends whether you believe that the mayor can drive forward these big schemes and make them happen or you believe that you're not there for these grand projects and that London doesn't need them, and I would argue London does need them. You've got to constantly refresh and if we don't do that London will cease to be as attractive as it is today.

MH: But do you think the public should fund that or do you really think --

EL: No, I think the private sector should fund it. I think the (Inaudible). I think if necessary one could have gone back to the boroughs and said, "We need to shut this bridge more often to try and raise money". There would be other ways of raising that money, but it could have been done. There was also letting possibilities at both ends of the bridge, on both sites, so there was good opportunities to raise money.

MH: Which didn't go into planning permissions, did they? It got held up -- were you involved at all in negotiations with Lambeth or Coin Street?

EL: No, I wasn't --

MH: Would Isabel have done that, any of that?

EL: I don't know how much Isabel did. I did some very high-level negotiations with Coin Street but they were very high level.

MH: But your feel was what, that they would ...?

EL: I basically said, "Are you" -- I had open discussions --

MH: "What do you want out of this?" or ...?

EL: Well, basically, yes, which I then reported back into the system, but that's all. I was not part of the day to day negotiations. That wasn't my job.

MH: Why did they suddenly go sour?

EL: I don't know.

MH: I know Coin Street. I've known Coin Street for years from my old local government days. They were always a very tough bunch of people to do business with, in the old GLC, all those days. What's his name who was there?

EL: I can't remember his name now but I know who you mean. They've still got various planning projects they've never actually got round to building and some of those were pretty controversial. You know that and I know that.

MH: Yeah.

EL: But no, the negotiations were taken about as far as they could. I think it started to go a bit sour when Lambeth started to go a bit wobbly on the whole project. And Lambeth did go fairly wobbly. I think that was the time when they came under quite a bit of pressure, political pressure, to go -- I don't mean necessarily party political pressure but political pressure within Lambeth to be less helpful over the Garden Bridge, and that started to emerge.

MH: And did you ever think, when Heatherwick first came to see you, did you ever think can we do this by using Waterloo Bridge or any of the existing bridges?

EL: We didn't think --

MH: You are being straight. I think it was a tourist --

EL: I think I've been quite open about that. No, we just never thought it would work on the bridge --

MH: Which is why the business plan is a bit daft.

EL: Well, it was always going to be a pedestrian bridge as well, because people would go from A to B and you do need more bridges across. Even in that part of the world you need more people, and let's face it, people would use that bridge. They would use it, there's no question about it.

MH: Oh, no, no, I'm sure we'd all go there.

EL: Yes.

MH: We'd all go there.

EL: It would be another great piece of London.

MH: Mm. Now, is there anything I haven't -- that you feel you want to say to me? I suppose another question: during your time with Boris what are the similar projects? We've looked at the cable car. That's a little bit of a similar project. Can you think of --

EL: No, I don't agree that the cable car is a similar project. I believe --

MH: You really felt that was --

EL: I think that was a very sad -- I'll tell you where we're in trouble on the cable car is we've done the thing which in this country we never normally do, is we started putting the infrastructure in place before we'd actually built all the homes and the offices. And that's all that was there. Once you've got all that -- was it 25,000-odd homes?

MH: Yeah.

EL: Over in that peninsula, the jobs that are being created on the other side, that cable car will be heavily used. So I think --

MH: Will be busy, yeah. Mind you, I think that's a good thing to do. That's the mistake we made when we did Canary Wharf.

EL: Yeah. Well, I think you could have put a second cable car in actually at Canary Wharf. We should have gone the whole hog on that but, hey, that's not where we are.

MH: Yeah.

EL: So there was powerful transport reasons behind it, but yes, it was a grand project. It was different. It was again part of making London look different, so there was that. There was Olympicopolis and the proposals around Olympicopolis about transferring the V&A, trying to get the Smithsonian in, the UCL into Stratford. That was another one of -- I would put that in the same category as this. I suppose you could put the Orbit in, the Olympic Park. It was again something a little bit different. Those are the obvious ones that spring to mind but --

MH: And would you on reflection have done it a different way?

EL: What, the Garden Bridge?

MH: Mm. Your experience of running all those projects, would you on reflection think it might have been easier and better if we'd done it -- what lessons would you have learnt from that experience given that I'm now having to look at it?

EL: Well, I think only that I think when -- I don't think that we succeeded in getting the sales bit about how it was going to be a new piece of London and getting that across, and I think that should have -- more work should have been done on that.

MH: Done early on?

EL: Yes. And I think we perhaps slipped up on that, although I think Boris did put quite a bit of publicity out on it and, you know, the records will show how much he did.

MH: Apart from that?

EL: There were all sorts of projects we were running. You've got to remember that there were projects around the Olympic Park which we were getting going. We were getting Old Oak Common going. We had the 38 opportunity areas which we were trying to get moving. There was a whole -- we were not short of projects.

MH: Yeah, some in my patch, yeah.

EL: Yeah. We were trying -- Barking Riverside, the Gospel Oak electrification, all of that kind of stuff.

MH: Was this different in any way? What was different? Why has this one run into trouble?

EL: Well, I think because we had a greater percentage of private sector money coming into it and it was in some ways seen to be more controversial by people. I think it was the others they were more comfortable with. But if you believe that you've got to constantly do things which attract people and bring people in and make places exciting, then this ticks the box.

MH: Mm.

EL: I would argue the cable car actually is a great addition to Greenwich, for example.

MH: Yeah. I've never been on it.

EL: You should. You should go on it. It will change your view.

MH: Yeah, yeah. No, no, I don't -- I have no objection to it.

EL: The Siemens one was another one. I can roll them out one after the other.

MH: Yeah.

EL: That whole centre that was established there.

MH: Yeah.

EL: Look, the strength of mayors is that they can deliver these things. That's why you want to have mayors. They can drive the agenda forward. It isn't about the status quo. It isn't about just doing what you've always done.

MH: Yeah, I read the original paper by Tony Blair.

EL: I know, I know I'm telling you stuff.

MH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Good. Have I failed to cover anything, Claire?

CH: I don't think so.

MH: That I need to? If I may, as I proceed, if I need to write you a letter or something, or if you go away and think about something that you ought to --

EL: I've got to say to you please bear in mind I have no access to the records. Well, other than going on the web like anybody else and digging through. You have --

MH: I'm finding it rather difficult. I mean, the methodology of GLA and TfL leaves a little bit to be desired.

EL: So all I'm saying to you is, please, you will have to bear with me. I can't quote you chapter and verse on dates or anything else. You've got the documents, I haven't.

MH: Yeah. No, thank you.

EL: So I can't answer that.

MH: I've got too many documents.

EL: So I can't answer that, but I can tell you what the thinking was and I think I've been quite open about that.

MH: Yeah, you have. I'm grateful for that. I'm grateful for that. Good. Thank you very much indeed.

EL: All right.

MH: Thank you. How are we doing? Oh, we've been -- I've got so much else on trying to do --

Commented [GLA Fo11]: The GLA has redacted the remaining part of the transcript as the conversation becomes a private conversation. The conversation does not relate in any way to the Garden Bridge or contain anything remotely relating to the scope of the Garden Bridge Review.

It has therefore been removed as being out-of-scope of "a transcript of the conversation in relation to the Garden Bridge Review".