

## Planning Committee

11 December 2012

### Transcript Item 6: London's Town Centres

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Now we are on to the main item for today, which is we all know that town centres are facing a very difficult time in London. We know they are important and we are going to hear a bit more about their importance. We know there are some very worrying trends, and what we want to do is to focus in terms of whether they could really readapt, whether they should change their forms and functions, it is these kinds of things that we want to explore. We know that they are a fantastic focus for communities, they give identity to neighbourhoods. However, as I have said, times are changing and they are changing mainly because of supermarkets, because of online shopping, out-of-town malls, and of course there is a recession. Also later next year we are going to explore demographic changes, and we know that demography and a whole raft of reforms are changing the pattern of London's mixed communities. So how is that going to affect London's town centres as well.

We are going to have the first part of the meeting looking at some of the trends and the challenges and the bulk of the meeting, will be on visions and the future. I want to begin this first part of the meeting and Onkar is going to kick off.

**Onkar Sahota (AM):** Thank you. Good morning. What are the important functions of London's town centres at the moment and what is the evidence that they are delivering all those important functions? If you just take it in turn to say what are the --

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** I don't think the form or the function is changing all that much from maybe 5 years ago, 10 years ago or 20 years ago, quite frankly. They are places for social contact. To a degree in many instances they have become refuges where people seek them out for safety and security in some respects, but as places of gathering they are very, very important for social contact. They are increasingly important due to people's desire to use public transport. As a business we see people increasingly want to use public transport, therefore those town centres that have good public transport have the opportunity to continue to thrive. The issue I think with many of them, quite frankly, is that they have been underinvested in for a long, long time. They are tired. In terms of the economics, the demand and supply in terms of what the people who use them for, there simply are not the facilities there that they necessarily want, and that is a function of the space being available to the types of services, whether that is food or retail. I think the other big issue facing them of course is the fragmented ownership. You have a cocktail of problems with many of the town centres at the moment. However, I think essentially their function remains the same. The question is whether they are adequately doing it and what is required to make that step change.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Do you mind if I just ask if you could introduce yourself?

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** Sorry, Chair. John Burton; I am the director of development at Westfield.

**Onkar Sahota (AM):** Anyone else want to comment?

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** Yes. I am Ziona Strelitz; I am the founding director of a research and strategy practice called ZZA Responsive User Environments. I agree that the role of town centres has not changed but what has changed significantly is the reduction of employment opportunities in town centres. From the point of view of my perspective - apart from other things, having been a national judge of the British Council for Offices Award for 11 years - I have seen over recent decades this enormous force to aggregation. Precisely the kind of fragmented ownership that John [Burton] poses as a problem I see as having its counterpart in the consolidation of workplace premises into big singular workplaces that are very heavily concentrated in the centre of London, also in peripheral locations, but all in big sites. You know, the British Airways (BA) Watersides of the world, the big technology campuses around Hillingdon, around Uxbridge, around Staines, places that have implied a reduction in the distribution of workplaces. These large employers previously had multiple sites and put all of the employment opportunities into one concentrated basket, withdrawing presence and ability to work from town centres.

That has been latterly compounded again by the digital economy so that branch banks, which would have employed people, are now call centres wherever, offshore, elsewhere in the country. There has been, for all sorts of reasons that have been useful for business efficiency, a withdrawal of employment opportunities in town centres. That has taken a huge toll and that has resulted in the kinds of charity shop presence that one sees. I am not referencing that as a problem in itself, but simply as a withdrawal of viable employment opportunities. I think that is a major challenge.

In another one of my roles, which is on the English Heritage Urban Panel, we visit several United Kingdom (UK) cities or towns a year. Practically every town and city articulates their problem in the same way, that if they could have a big retail offer that would solve their problem. However, there is a much, much wider and pervasive issue about employment base and perhaps in the next part we will come to what I think are practical steps that can be done to generate more economic activity and more local multipliers.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** First of all, my apologies for arriving late. My name is Julian Dobson; I am a writer and researcher and I run a company called Urban Pollinators. I would just like to follow up on Ziona's point, which is that one of the major forms of employment and also social activity in town centres, particularly over the last 20-30 years, has been employment and activity created by public services. Extraordinarily enough, planners have not fully acknowledged the importance of their own activities as part of local public services within town centres. If you look at what is happening in town centres it is often the local authority that is the major employer. It might also be the health service, it might be other public services. It might be educational institutions. These are the main anchors of town

centres within London and outside London. We are seeing something that I think is going to compound the difficulties that we have had with the loss of retail and the financial problems caused by the difficulties of the property industry over the last few years with the loss of public services, which we are now seeing in town centres. I think the major challenge for the next two or three years, for town centres, is whether the public services that have acted as anchors within those communities will be able to continue to do so.

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** Yes, thank you. William McKee, I chair the Mayor's Outer London Commission, but I have also been involved in London planning for 50 years and most of the town centres at one time or another. I agree completely with the descriptions of what town centres are and should be. I think they are facing a real crisis and I think that real crisis comes from certainly two, and possibly three, directions. The first one is that there is undoubtedly a structural change taking place in retailing in this country. When I first became involved in town centre planning the first thing you reached for was the 1961 Census of Distribution, which was really the relative importance of shopping centres in London at that time. That I think demonstrates how much the future of town centres in those days was bound up with their retail function. I am not saying that is not true anymore, but it is getting weaker by the day as the retail industry - and I do not pick on Westfield, I think they are an exception to the rule rather than the rule - that change in the way that retailers want to operate is a critical challenge to town centres because, to respond to that, they are going to have to diversify their reliance away from that primary retailing function. That is the first point.

The second point, and I entirely agree with Julian, is that there has been a flight of public services from the town centre over the last 40 years. Not just local authorities, but health authorities in particular, even education authorities, post offices, the list is endless, and all of these things contribute to what is the crucial factor in any town centre, which is footfall moving through the town centre. That is another challenge.

I think the third thing is that the problem is that addressing those two challenges is beset by the funding difficulties, which all of London's town centres I think are facing. It is absolutely right what was said earlier on, town centres, whatever the planning system says, are in competition with each other. Competition requires investment in order to respond to the competition down the road. Of course, investment is difficult in the public sector at the moment. If I can just finish with perhaps just one expression of the choices. Outer London town centres have to decide whether they want to make their car-parking free in order to attract shoppers to come back into whatever is the right retail offer they should be giving or whether they want to follow the green agenda, which is to say to make it more difficult for people to use their cars because that is part of a different agenda altogether. There are some real choices out there but the really important thing is that town centres are facing absolutely difficult choices.

**Navin Shah (Deputy Chair):** Partially guests have picked up the issue about challenges that are faced by town centres in terms of how the impact on key functions of town centres. If any of the other guests want to add to the challenges, please feel free to come in, but what I would like then to move on to the issue about how can town centres compete and succeed alongside other areas of development like out-of-town and online retail centres?

**James Miller (Lead Consultant, Experian):** Can I just pick up on some of the challenges, the wider challenges. My name is James Miller, I work for Experian in market strategy, I have a retail and property background. I authored a paper on town centre futures, which was looking at the key drivers behind a future change. A number of the challenges, there are some wider challenges that are affecting society and business in general and the economy, which I want to pick up on. Obviously number one at the moment is the economy and the difficulty in predicting where we are going to be in the future. Also the impact on businesses as a result, impact on people's wallets in terms of their expenditure and so on. That is a real concern when we look forward, which is affecting, not just high streets, it is business in general, but given they are nodes in the economic geography then it is important.

Secondly, and this is not rocket science, we have clear changes in demography, so demographic shifts. We are talking about the ageing population, which is obviously a factor for most westernised industrialised countries, but it is a major issue and impact to consumers and that is the kind of research we look at.

The third major strand, which has already been picked up on, is the digital technology and, over the past ten years, the kind of evolution and revolution really in terms of digital technology. The move of a lot of business online in ecommerce, but also we have seen the uptake of smart technology, smart devices, mobile technology and so on. All of these factors, economy, demography and digital technology, are influencing the way that people behave. Effectively in different ways and dependent on where people stand I suppose, if high to bottom of society it is affecting them in different ways, but I think these are all the key drivers we have pulled out.

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** If I could come in, maybe on online, I think it would be wrong to assume that every piece of ecommerce is a negative on a town centre. Online sales are probably starting to run towards 16%, 17%, 18% across different categories and there is a debate as to how far that will go. Not many people have suggested that it will go much beyond 20% for a variety of reasons, but maybe it will. There is still an increasing opportunity for the old bricks and mortar businesses to play a role in that. We see it as a business. People do want to come and compare the goods, they do want to click and collect from physical locations, there is an increasing reliance on taking things back to a store rather than having them shipped back. It is not all one-way traffic in terms of commerce and therefore different town centres, even in a hierarchy of town centres, can play a role in setting up businesses that play an ecommerce commerce role.

In terms of the out-of-town centres, the large wave of developments that particularly occurred here in the 1980s and through the 1990s, it will be difficult to reverse the impacts that you had there of those very large supermarkets, although we are going through a fresh wave of extensions of those supermarkets. Originally they were going to be 3,000 to 5,000 metres, we are now looking at the 8,000 to 9,000, and of course, as you increase the floor-space, they sell a wider and wider range of goods, with less and less investment in terms of getting them in, and there is no question that will continue to impact local people within probably 5, 10, 15 minutes' drive-time. I do not know what the answer is there because the planning system has a method of assessing it to deal with that. However, it had a major impact on those town centres. The question is, how much more should that be allowed to perpetuate.

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** I would like to just come back and it is terribly difficult in these conversations to resist the kind of presumption that the future of everywhere is totally retail-dependent. I think the point that Julian [Dobson] made about public services is critical. The point about the role of civic spaces is critical and the point about other types of employment opportunity are absolutely valuable. I would just like us to have a more balanced view about the strands of a productive society and the strands of a fulfilling society. They are not only about retail and about transit nodes, they are about a much broader definition of life and they are nothing without other forms of productivity, which exist outside the retail sector as well.

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** My name is Terry Farrell and I am an architect and a planner working primarily in the private sector, so I have a lot of projects that are what you might call town centre based. I think what is affecting London, the big issues today, are the increase in population, an extra million in the next two decades. I think what is affecting it also is the post-industrial age of occupying lands that used to be industrial for 19th and early 20th Century industry, which is land that is infill, such as Paddington, Earl's Court or wherever. It is also the South Bank, extensively on the South Bank, this was industry where we are now, and all along it, and also the move to the east. The third change I think is in shopping and the urbanisation of shopping and the conglomeration into larger shopping centres, which I will come back to.

Then the other is changes in transport. I remember a discussion when London leaders met in New York on just how much transport has been added to London in the last 40 years, with Crossrail adding to Jubilee and Victoria and all the other lines. It has been an incredible investment and change in where the stations are and the stations then affect the centres. That goes on. I think Crossrail will reinforce certain town centres and indeed may well create new ones with High Speed 2. Old Oak Common has the potential to become a completely new town centre. But King's Cross has become a new town centre, or is becoming. London Bridge is transforming into a town centre. I think Waterloo will become very much the centre of Lambeth. Victoria potentially could do that and Liverpool Street already has grown with a lot around it and I think this is going to increase over time. Canary Wharf was of a certain size but is now extending enormously with its Jubilee line and Crossrail. I think one cannot underestimate these new centres. Greenwich is another one, Greenwich Peninsula.

I think the consolidation of shopping centres is very interesting, how it has affected the high streets, the traditional ones, but Westfield has become the basis for a complete new centre around Shepherd's Bush and White City, which is becoming a town centre all of its own. Of course Stratford and Stratford City has been, as it were, turbocharged by having Westfield there. I think Blue Water, in the course of time, will grow to become a kind of town centre and these are fundamental changes in London. I think that, with the growth in population, this change in transport, the urbanisation of shopping, the post-industrial era of occupying land that was industry, is causing London to experience a shift to new centres and potentially successful centres, it all depends what we make of them. But the extra population will certainly mean that they will be inhabited.

I agree that the real role of town centres is certainly not retail alone, it is culture, it is leisure, entertainment, it is business, it is where people work, but I think one can ignore transportation at one's peril. Transport is a key component of town centres.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** I happened to come in on transport, Sir Terry, so perhaps I can just pick those points up with you, because I agree with you it is clear that public transport nodes, particularly stations, high-capacity transport, are very often the anchor of major district centres, metropolitan centres. However, over the years, one of the things I have seen is that when major transport developments come in it is a bit hit and miss as to whether or not there is some kind of master-planning process, supplementary planning guidance, if there is any policy, public sector shaping of the follow-through of development that flows from that station development. For example, I am thinking of the Jubilee line. It seems to me that the master-planning and the frameworks that were put in place, Jubilee line opened in 2000 but we have seen the area around Canada Water and the area around Greenwich, it was after that date when the serious planning work seemed to be done.

Looking now at Crossrail, huge opportunities, a string of pearls across London, and I could not put my hand on my heart and tell you that there is any kind of forward planning going on to help shape the working through of the impact of the increase in the land values in those areas. Do you think that is the case or am I missing something, and is it important?

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** There is not a lot of forward planning in Britain; it does not happen in the physical sense. There are stations that by their nature just do not grow. Ebbsfleet, I know it is not in the Greater London Authority (GLA) area, but if you go out to Ebbsfleet you would think, with a high-speed line and station there it would grow, but there is nothing there. That does repeat. However, I think by and large stations do accumulate activity around them and the age of the clean train has enabled St Pancras and Kings Cross to become good places to be. 40% of the people that go to St Pancras apparently do not go to catch trains.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** Where there is a new piece of high-capacity infrastructure going in that is going to have a big impact on the footfalls in an area and provide a driver of development? Why are we not in there first shaping what the future of that new town centre or that town centre that has gone through a revolution will look like? Why can the Mayor not tell us that he has a master-planning process going on along every one of the Crossrail station points?

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** It is not traditional in this country that there is proactive planning of that nature.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** Do you think we are missing a trick, Sir Terry?

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** I think other countries certainly do it. Mass Transit Railway (MTR) in Hong Kong deliberately control the land and the stations so that they put the two together every time. That is partly shortage of land, but it is partly a different kind of land ownership that goes on there. I do not think we do proactive planning

here. Where it does work is when the private sector owns a lot of the land around the station, as happened at say Broadgate, King's Cross and at Paddington where large areas of land that were post-industrial were bought by the private sector and developed. It still does not make a town centre. I think Paddington still lacks the quality of being a town centre, whereas Kings Cross is clearly becoming one. It is hit and miss. I do not think we proactively plan, we are still not planning for what the implications of Crossrail are at each of those places. But proactive planning is not part of what we do in this country; it is reactive.

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** I think you are talking about an infrastructure-led plan, which requires you to sort of take a couple of steps back. I have spent time working in Japan and the way the transport there, and the way people aggregate around the stations there, has the potential in some respects to be replicated around London in the years to come on things like Crossrail. Look at the way people socially behave. If you live in Tokyo no one ever goes into your house, you always join your friends out of your house. By the same measure, look at the way we are building homes at the moment. The kitchens you can fit in a cupboard, you are expected to socialise outside of your house. There are some fundamental changes going on in terms of the way people behave and therefore the importance, to your point about those nodes, about infrastructure, is critical. Developers will follow infrastructure. Infrastructure does not have to be --

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** Why not have a public influence on how that development follows through?

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** I would like to pick up the point about the urbanisation of shopping and ask when I am done for us to talk a bit about what that means. In my view a lot of the retail development that I have seen in the UK is what I would call anti-urban, so I think we should explore that. In terms of a truly emergent new town centre, I think King's Cross is a very good example, because the very first major use to come in, apart from the transport, happens to be Central St Martins [College of Arts and Design]. That arose entirely serendipitously as we all know, but, wow, you know, what a coup. What is the next big signed-up occupier? It is Camden Council. How significant that we are beginning to have embedded in King's Cross, apart from all of the housing that is being built, the real multi-stranded platform that I talked about for real town centres. I have a lot of hope for King's Cross. King's Cross has also been very proactive in how it engages with the existing development around its edges. It is not one enclosed hermetic bubble that is in a sense the visual absence of a town centre, it is a managed space inside someone else's demise. It is truly going to be a real bit of London with adopted streets. I think that is a very significant model and I think it is very different from anything that we have seen anywhere else, so I would like you to explore please, tell me what you mean by the urbanisation of shopping in London because I would welcome having a better appreciation of that.

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** I think Westfield Shepherds Bush and Stratford Westfield are both very good examples of shopping centres that are in the middle of conurbations, in the middle of the urban terrain. I think Croydon, the Whitgift and the shopping centre opposite, which is a contentious issue at the moment, but that is also potentially going to rejuvenate Croydon, the high street and the town centre. Brent Cross is

interesting. I think it is beginning to look upon itself as a place now and is looking across the road to Cricklewood at new housing and it is looking at how it can urbanise itself. I think urbanisation of inner shopping centres is ongoing and I think if we came back in 20-30 years we would find that they are much more reliant on public transport.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** Can I just pick up the last point on this though, you mentioned Croydon. Now Croydon did have a Richard Rogers [architect and Chair of the Urban Task Force] master-plan done for the whole town at the same time as the Tramlink was being planned, and it did to some extent refresh the town. However, is there not a point about what is the local council, the local estate, the local public sector doing to shape an area around a piece of transport infrastructure? Somebody mentioned the sort of patchwork quilt of different owners, where it is a town that is owned by a variety of landowners and users. Because, is there not a danger that otherwise all we are going to end up with are mega shopping centre developments because they can come in, take control of the economics of the area, take the benefit of the infrastructure, because the public sector is stepping back and not trying to shape a future of an area where there is not a big monolithic landholding to sell off. Do you see what I am saying?

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** Yes, I do not think the large shopping centre is the answer. I am just talking about phenomena. There is a phenomena happening of shopping centres becoming more urban. I do not know what the answer is to master-planning from the public sector's point of view. It has not really been hugely successful. Croydon has had an enormous number of plans, it has been over-planned over time. Whereas Canary Wharf, with the single land ownership, it is now going into Wood Wharf with a high street, it has the two big stations there, the Jubilee line and the Crossrail. I think single land ownership goes back right to the 18th and 19th Century. Marylebone High Street, and Marylebone is a very good town centre, but it is all in single ownership, Howard Walden Estate. That is because the tradition of Britain has been that it is the private sector that tends to have the control of the land and therefore builds out a successful town centre, and then follows it through with stewardship by management. That is one of the problems with Oxford Street, it is all in multiple ownership, whereas a shopping centre has single ownership. I am not advocating one or the other, it is just more difficult to change one set of circumstances than another, and I think that the Westfield in Shepherd's Bush is astonishing. I do not necessarily go there myself shopping but on the other hand it is embedded in Shepherd's Bush. There is substantial new housing growing, it has triggered the whole of Wood Lane and rethinking of the BBC. It has had a ripple effect all around it and I think that came from control of land, from having a big land ownership, because the public sector has not found a way of doing planning by other than reacting to big large ownerships.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** That is the point I am making that maybe we should be, because the danger is that people complain about lack of diversity in shopping centres and we end up with global corporations and --

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** Our planning system does not do proactive planning; it is reactive, people have to come along with proposals by and large.



**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** I do think we are slightly underestimating the role of the public sector in all this, I mean King's Cross had massive public sector involvement, and Hammersmith and Fulham was very involved in that area.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** It can be done.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** It was Henrietta, you wanted to come in and can you introduce yourself?

**Henrietta Green (Food writer and consultant):** Henrietta Green, I am a food writer, researcher, consultant. I was just going to make the point, but Terry did then make it, that the shopping centres seem to be at the detriment of the high street and it is the high street-- I mean the shopping centres seem to be doing rather well by themselves in most cases, but the high streets seem to be affected. Although Shepherd's Bush has become a rather thriving area, due to that, some of the surrounding streets around the Bush and the retail seem to be sort of slightly suffering as a result of it. However, we are going to talk about changes and effects that can be made in another sector, now is not the time to move on to that, is it?

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** We are going to move on in a minute.

**Henrietta Green (Food writer and consultant):** Yes, so I mean it was really that it seems to be so multi-stranded that you have these efficient, to some people, rather attractive places to go and the high street then seems to be suffering. In Croydon where I did the food programme, which received some grant, and looking at the development of the market and how they were going to regenerate it, it was quite appalling how the surrounding streets were just empty, falling into disrepair. There seemed to be no strategy, there seemed to be no overall plan and no vision. I suspect that is sort of what we want to try and tackle today.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Absolutely.

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** Yes, can I just make a couple of points, one of which I just want to flag to come back to in a moment, which is I get a little bit worried when the whole of the discussion is about St Pancras, Westfield, Shepherd's Bush. You cannot talk about St Pancras and Mitcham Town Centre in the same breath. The issues are not the same and most of the town centres in London are not Westfield, they are not King's Cross, and the issues that are facing them are entirely different. I think we need to come back to that later on.

Can I just make one point: I was planning officer of Croydon in its heyday in the 1970s and I can tell you there was a queue of developers and occupiers outside my door. They had to make them form an orderly queue. But you have to accept the limitations of the planning process. There is no future any longer in Croydon for the corporate back-office function. It has gone somewhere else and there is nothing in my view, and I think Croydon probably share this view as well, there is not much that the strategic planning system can do about keeping that back-office corporate employment in Croydon. The way business is done has changed and Croydon has to look for a more diversified mixed-use future rather than that heavy reliance on corporate

back-office. If the Government estate rescheduling goes even further, they may well not even have the Home Office services in Croydon.

I think one of the things that town centres have to do is (a) recognise that the market does change and there are limitations to how much the planning system can shape those changes, and (b) to make sure that it retains as much flexibility in the planning framework to enable it to respond to these changes when they happen. We are talking now about changes that may be over a 30, 40, 50-year cycle and we expect too much from the planning system. Things change; that is what is happening in retail, things change and towns have to adapt to it. I think that there is quite a promising future for some town centres in London, if not most of them, because some positive things are likely to happen. There is a tremendous opportunity -- when I was a young planner, the things everybody worried about was how on earth do we keep people in town centres after 6.00pm in the evening; that was the big worry. Now you have the opportunity of significantly increasing the residential content of town centres, significantly increasing the leisure and night-time economy content of town centres, in other words making them much more balanced community-based leisure, social services functions, which is frankly what they always used to be if you look back far enough.

I think there are some real positives about the future of London but this debate has to move away from the King's Crosses of the world because they are different and most of London's town centres, if you look at the way that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is, do not benefit from Crossrail for example, they are a long way away. They need a different kind of thinking.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** That was helpful, thank you. Did you want to come in, Roger, and then I want to move on to the next section?

**Roger Evans (AM):** Yes, Chair, I wanted to explore a couple of the points that the witnesses have made really. First of all, Mr Burton, we were talking briefly about the online threat to retail. I spent yesterday morning with the postmen looking at them delivering for Christmas and I used to work for the Royal Mail, not much had changed in the 20 years since I left except for the fact the canteen had closed and it was now full of boxes with Amazon.com on the side of them. I just wonder where you get your 20% figure from? Is it realistic to say this will stop at 20% or is it going to continue to grow? Why should it stop there?

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** Since probably 1998, 1999, when all the major research organisations were first trying to understand the ecommerce impact, they talked of 16% to 20% as being the market and they were basing that on what sort of products would be bought, who would buy them, what was a necessity, what was the price advantage for that. In different areas, and it depends partially on demographics, it depends on countries, there is a huge difference, for example, across the world in terms of the ecommerce take-up. What is ironic is we are sitting here in a country that has one of the highest take-ups, partially because of the strength of the broadband here and the ability to connect, and also the logistics. The UK is probably at the forefront of ecommerce right at the moment and they are approaching that number.

The question is now, which products? We have seen people now buying shoes, and if you asked people six, seven, eight years ago, would people buy shoes, the answer would have been no. What they simply do now is they buy six or seven pairs, and they take back five pairs because the retailers and the people doing that have made it easy for them to do that. They know the value of the sale is to do that. There are some categories -- we have seen the impact for example it has had on books, we have seen the impact it has had on music. So there is not a lot more damage in some respects, or penetration, which can occur in some of those categories. You have to ask yourself which categories leave themselves open now for further ecommerce. Cars, for example, could be a big component of that, while we do not traditionally think of them as retail spend, they are how we spend a part of household expenditure. I think there is the potential. As a business, it is hard to see it moving rapidly past 20%. The rates of growth that we have had in the last ten years I think will start to tail off.

However, by the same measure, we are seeing an opportunity for the bricks and mortar businesses to participate. A lot of those retailers who are in ecommerce want showrooms now. Increasingly they are talking about, where can we provide people with the touch and feel experience? I do not see it as a negative and I think the other side to ecommerce is the whole social thing. It is the way people talk about goods, the way they use the Internet, the way they use social channels to get confirmation from friends about, "Is this something I would look good in? Is this something I should be buying? Is this the latest trend?" That of itself can be used by locations to participate in that transaction.

Whether it is 20%, 22%, 25%, probably my colleagues at Experian probably have a better idea as to where it will go, but remember that the UK sits nearly globally, maybe other than some parts of Scandinavia, it is at the forefront of ecommerce, so you are seeing the maximum, the highest penetration globally.

**Roger Evans (AM):** What is the view of Experian, James, because I have not seen a lot of evidence; that was a detailed reply, but I did not see a lot of evidence there, it feels a bit like guessing.

**James Miller (Lead Consultant, Experian):** Yes, and there is an element of that. The people that have been sort of recording this in greater detail, the company Verdict Research, they produce a report every year, they had it at around 13% or something, 12%. Now the growth rate is declining; it is increasing but the rate of growth is declining if you see what I mean.

**Roger Evans (AM):** It is increasing more slowly.

**James Miller (Lead Consultant, Experian):** More slowly, yes, absolutely. What we are seeing is that ecommerce is becoming increasingly important, taking a greater share of overall retail expenditure. It is very hard to say what the cap is. There is going to have to be a cap somewhere because we are not all suddenly going to sit indoors and not leave the house and engage with the physical environment and what have you. Certainly things like music, books, video and so on; that is really in a sense long gone as a sector on many high streets, apart from the nice independent bookshops and what have you. I think the message we have been giving

people from high street operators, town teams and so on, is that it is very easy to get quite negative about what is going on, particularly in terms of the perceived competition over the last ten years, be that supermarkets, shopping centres, out-of-town, and the online itself. However, what we are saying is in fact if you turn it on its head ecommerce is an opportunity. As normal, as ever, the big guys are there first. The big retailers, the multichannel retailers, the big operators like Westfield and so on, are already doing interesting things with technology, encouraging people to come and click and collect - you know, the click and collect model and so on - encouraging people back on to the high street so they can -- what we are encouraging is the high streets to start thinking about how they can bridge the divide, be a physical bridging space between the online economy and the offline economy. That is really where they are going to need to seriously consider how they do that because the technology is here, it is inevitable, it is increasing people's uptake and it cannot be ignored.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** I am trying to move us on now to visions. The thing is, issues and visions are so inextricably connected and you are moving between the two of them. I wanted to give people a chance to sort of really do a bit more blue-sky stuff and I just wonder, Andrew, you wanted to come in, did you not?

**Andrew Boff (AM):** Yes, I just wondered how successful the big shopping centres that we know are successful, the Westfields of this world, how successful they would be if they did not have any parking?

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** I suppose I am the natural candidate for that. They would not be the size or they would not work in the same function, in the same way. There is no question about that. The balance however between public transport and parking is shifting and people are changing their habits. Even in the investments we have here in London, the investments we have across the world, we are seeing people shop increasingly using public transport. Historically, the person who arrived by car was a more valuable customer, they would take more goods away. However, if you look at how they would perform say in Oxford Street where people have for a long time relied on public transport that is not the case. The person who arrives in Central London there technically shops, or not technically, by evidence shops, buys the same amount as someone arriving by public transport. Over time, I think we will find even those developments that we have done will be more and more reliant for their success on public transport.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** Is it fair to say that you have not told your customers how to get to you; you have responded to how they want to get to you?

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** No, I think from the initial analysis point of view, we tell them how to get there, we market that fact that --

**Andrew Boff (AM):** You have not said, "You must not come to Westfield by car", have you?

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** No.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** You have not artificially restricted the spaces so that people --

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** No, but we do that through the planning system, through the planners, we say, "This is the amount of business that we believe could be done, this is the amount of traffic it will generate, can the roads cope with that?" The various, whether it be Newham or Hammersmith and Fulham, have constraints on parking costs and regimes. Ultimately the customer determines how they get there.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** I have been to Westfield a few times, not the one in the west, the eastern one, which is nearer to me, I have never had a problem getting a parking space at Westfield I must say.

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** No, and that is --

**Andrew Boff (AM):** It is a complete pain trying to get a parking space if I go to other town centres.

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** But that is in a road system that probably had the benefit of being able to design in the spider's web properly and the infrastructure has been put in and made in the correct fashion. It is the big challenge for the lower hierarchy centres that the number of spaces is a constraining factor on many of those lower tier centres and/or the adequacy of public transport. A bus service that only runs every half hour is --

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Can I come in here, could it not be the fact that there is no level playing field. That you do not pay if you go to a Westfield but you do pay if you go to what you call the lower tier centres? I mean there is no level playing field as far as shopping is concerned.

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** No, there has not been, and that is why there has been, in recent years, pressure to look at whether out-of-town centres, whether supermarkets, for a whole variety of reasons, from a carbon point of view, from an equality point of view, planners universally across the UK and other countries still have not come to a view as to what is the rationale for parking charges. But could it be that it creates a more level playing field in having some consistency in the pricing, charging regimes or some incentivisation. What we have experienced in London is there is a rapid decline of the use of the car in favour of public transport so that is a credit --

**Andrew Boff (AM):** I do not disagree with you, but it is how rapid that is and whether or not you are responding to how your customers get to you or whether or not you are trying to tell them how to get to you, you are trying to force them into a certain way of getting to you because it is -- OK, this should be about questions, not statements. Do you think the Transport for London (TfL) parking standards and the standards that boroughs are imposing on town centres gets in the way of those town centres thriving?

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** It would be hard to make a generalisation of that. I think what we do is that we look at people, how do we service the customer that arrives by public transport? Things like a growing part of our business is home delivery; what we effectively call hands-free shopping. Home to the centre, choose the goods, but have those

goods delivered to your home. This is both an opportunity for us, it also responds partly to the ecommerce issue. Does TfL do enough or could it do more? I think the big problem comes back to the question about, is the infrastructure in the right place for many of these centres? Because a lower tier, I would not call it a town centre, but even a village centre, does it have the public transport that is required of today to be able to support the level of business, whether it is a doctor's surgery, whether it is a shop, a restaurant, some sort of service, does it have the infrastructure to function and do the level of business it needs to, to make it a viable business. Many of those shops now are so small you have to query whether or not they can do sufficient turnover to justify the rent and support the family that may live above them. There is a very interesting demand and supply issue going on in terms of the performance of small shopping centres.

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** The evidence that was given to the Outer London Commission in answer to your question is yes, it does. Nearly all the London boroughs felt that TfL parking standards inhibited their ability to respond to competition either from Inner London or more often from outside London, the Guildfords and the nearby town centres. They were not necessarily saying, "Tear up parking standards altogether", but they were saying they need much more flexibility in the way that they can use them to respond to the particular circumstances of town centres in outer London, bearing in mind that of course, again I make the point, you cannot talk about London town centres as if they are all the same. There is not a Jubilee line station in most of outer London's shopping centres so they have to have a policy that is much more locally sensitive to what the needs of the area are.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Right, and I am now going to move us on to the second part, which is where I am going to encourage you, and then we are going to probe on what your visions are for London's town centres, so that they can fulfil roles as successful, sustainable and accessible town centres. Of course the form and functions may change as you have been indicating. So, who shall we kick off with? Shall we go around?

**James Miller (Lead Consultant, Experian):** My feeling is that, if we put aside the great big town centres of London, and look at the patchwork of small places where we see there are a lot of issues, for them it is just about becoming functional. It is almost as simple as that, and that is a really obvious statement I think. Becoming economic and socially productive, again some of them are clearly, but it is making use of what is in effect a local asset. As a business, we see that a lot of businesses we work with are concerned with the local environment in these places because business is struggling, people are not using these places, not feeling safe in them and so on. The vision for me really is a patchwork of places that the local community are proud to use. They are safe, attractive and enlivened, and by "enlivened" that means during the day and to a degree during the night, so we get away from these kind of deserts after 5.30pm in the evening, which still happens in a lot of small places. For that they need to be multifunctional, they need to be mixed-use, there need to be people living in these places as well as working in them and so on.

When we get on to the questions about sustainability and low-carbon economy and so on, which I think these small places could be very important in that kind of vision, we need to make sure that these places have enough in them to keep people in those places during the day, at

the weekends and sort of during the evenings. We also need to think about the retail itself, it is not all about retail, retail has coalesced into bigger centres, the big retailers are here to stay really, so they are performing a role that people can get to fairly easily. It is really about trying to reinvigorate these small places and for that, a number of those things I mentioned at the risk of repeating myself, but that is making them places people feel safe and proud to use.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Right, reinvigorate the small places. Let us move on.

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** Well, the extraordinary kind of dichotomy really that all places are essentially different, so they are differently configured, they are different positions in relationship to the metropolitan territory, they have different history, different ethnic groups and so on.

On the other hand, there are a lot of things that are always the same and there is a DNA of settlement that repeats again and again. I think there needs to be some kind of identification, more clear identification of what are those components that particularly work well for today. The reason why I think it needs to be done deliberately is where the big threat to most of the failing town centres is because of the single ownership town centres that we all know do not provide everybody with all that they want. If one has a town centre like a Canary Wharf or like a Westfield, what are the advantages of those places and how can it transfer then to other places. I think the components are to do with stewardship, management and integration. It is those kinds of things that the single ownership offers and which the place that has many, many centres and many different ownerships has struggled to do.

On the other hand that is the attraction of those places; that is why people quite like to go there, because they have that diversity. It needs a kind of an education or a taskforce or something to try and look at how do we get really genuine integrated transport in every sense. I do not just mean obviously that the cars are going through it - and yet the cars do go through most town centres to somewhere else - but the car-parking and particularly pedestrian domain. When you arrive at a place, what makes a true place are pedestrians and there is many a town that has the most appalling pedestrian domain where the sizes of pavement, the amount of crossings of high streets, and yet the universal rules are, you can see places that are solving it. I was in New York looking at Time Square and there are places that have radically altered their pedestrian domain. Servicing, clearly shopping centres and the Canary Wharfs have control of when the vehicles come in, that is why Oxford Street is so difficult; that is why small towns have great difficulty, there is a free-for-all.

How do you get - without too much of a big brother effect - how do you get this integrated, this community feel. I think it is integrating things, integrating all the things that the single-ownership place can offer you, but there is also stewardship. I think stewardship goes with curating events and looking after the place in a more soft sense, about trees, sitting places and the use of public buildings. There are so many public buildings on high streets that are not open after 5.00pm or on weekends, schools fit into that category and double and multiple use of public buildings, all of this is about imagination and applying simple rules of the good place. I think that what one has to look at, the places that are failing, and look at the places that are

succeeding, and say, "What skills and what conditions can be transferred one to the other?" Because it is surprising how you can get it to work.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Fine, OK, well Navin wants to come in. I would quite like us to get around the room too, but if you want to ask, Navin.

**Navin Shah (Deputy Chair):** Yes, is there a case for outer London town centres to have a different kind of vision, different set of criteria. If you accept the premise that they have a different set of challenges does that need a different perspective altogether?

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** I think it is difficult to generalise about outer and inner ones, because there are failing ones inner and failing ones outer. Also the outer ones, and this is when I was on the Outer London Commission, what is extraordinary about the outer ones is that they are all so different. What does Kingston really have to do with Stratford, and Wembley with Croydon? They are incredibly different and they often associate more clearly, more knowingly, with somewhere further in because they are on a line of connectivity into the centre.

On the other hand, there are things, whether they are inner or they are outer, that are in common, like pedestrian realm, like cycling, like ease of access to certain facilities and so on, and public information. Just how do you read your place? Marylebone High Street has big maps of where the shops are. There are simple ways of understanding where you are located and getting around, which repeats again and again.

I think there are problems of outer London but there are great advantages of outer London, but I think it is difficult to generalise about outer towns and inner towns, I think you have to think of the constants and what makes a good place and look at what continues to be a good place, which tends to be rather permanent: pedestrian domain; ease of access; a mental map and a legible place, all those have always been good components. Trying to sort out how you move about traffic and how traffic is controlled and managed. Some places do it very well, inner or outer.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** OK. You also said opening hours, you mean opening in the evening and so on, which I thought was not traditionally done. Can we move on around please?

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** I think the key thing we are talking about here is footfall and what delivers it. I am talking not really about the Westfields, but about the other town centres, and I think there are two words that really matter in the future, one is diversification. Town centres have to identify those activities, whether they are leisure, arts, culture, education, local authority, small serviced office suites, and very importantly services driven by residential demand. I think town centres, just like outer London in many ways, is the service sector for inner London, the same is true around outer London town centres.

I think once you grasp that, I think then you start to think about what can deliver that. Can I just mention two things, simply because they have not been mentioned before. I think you have to look at the property structures in town centres. I talk a lot to retailers and one of the things



that certainly the multiples tell me, as opposed to independent shops, is that the town centres are configured in a way now that makes it difficult for them to provide the right kind of retail space. The shapes are wrong, the sizes are wrong, the servicing is wrong, and it is one of the reasons why they are moving away because that is impeding their competition with multichannel retailing.

I think we need a much more proactive view of town centres where local authorities are prepared to use their compulsory acquisition powers to create the right kind of spaces, where they are proactive. I am absolutely convinced after 50 years that the successful town centres are the ones that proactively invest in their town centre. They recognise it is a competitive world, even if you are not talking about retail, it is still competitive about where the cinemas go. You need to up your offer if you want to be successful and that requires intervention.

What it is not about, just to try and kill I think one of the shibboleths that are knocking around, is it is not about property lease and occupational structures. If you look at those, the average new retail lease is probably about seven years now and does not contain an upward-only rent review clause and retail rents are quite a high proportion, but probably business rates are even more problematical. We need to follow that diversification route.

The last thing we need to do, and I think this is particularly true of outer London, is you cannot apply inner London transport thinking to outer London. It simply does not work, it is different. What works in the Walworth Road is not necessarily going to work in Mitcham Town Centre, so you need to have that flexibility in looking at the different town centres in London.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Useful, thank you.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** OK, thank you. I think a lot of the conversations that have taken place around the future of town centres, not just in London, but nationwide, have tended to focus very much on planning, on retail, on property and very much on the idea that a successful town centre is something that you create for people rather than something that is created by people or with people. The mega town centres, the out-of-town shopping centres, the major transport hubs, the places where you have concentrated land ownership, tend to be the ones that are done least by people and with people, and most in a top-down way for people and for people treated in a fairly narrow way as consumers of products.

I think the question really is how can we humanise town centres, how can we make town centres become places that are created by people rather than simply done for people? I think the conversation this morning has highlighted something that is very important about the difference in town centres in London; that there are very, very different kinds of town centres and in fact that the way that you plan one town centre has an impact on what happens down the road. I think Terry's points about transport nodes are really important, about the urbanisation of shopping centres. As a result of that, and as a result of the public sector support for a lot of the big master-planned town centres or transport hubs, we have seen the public sector aiding and abetting the decline of other areas, which have fallen down as a result. We need to think about how London can be less of a dysfunctional patchwork of town centres and more of a network of

different centres working together and supporting each other. I suppose my point really would be that we need to humanise all of that and not just the ones that are left behind where the commercial interests are less dominant.

Briefly on the major shopping centres, the Westfields, the Lakesides, etc, I think we need to find ways of humanising those so that we have real benefits accruing back to the community. The British Council of Shopping Centres yesterday produced a report called *Shopping Centres at the Heart of the Community*. There was not a question mark by that but there should have been. It had some nice examples of shopping centre managers doing nice things with communities, cleanups, taking on apprentices, that sort of thing, all very good. I think we need to see much more muscle behind the people who are benefiting from the concentration of spend putting something back into the community. I would like to see, as a minimum from the major shopping centre operators, a community reinvestment pledge where a proportion of profits is recycled back into the local area to produce benefits for the locality in terms of bringing unemployed people into work and creating opportunities linking with the most disadvantaged estates and neighbourhoods. I would like to see that also functioning in terms of creating space for local start-ups and new businesses within those shopping centres. I would like to see a proportion of those shopping centres being devoted to independent traders who again will recycle money within local communities.

If you think that is too ambitious or an unrealistic expectation, then I would think we would need to examine really how human, how beneficial are the consumer activities that we are encouraging within our cities. I think the really interesting areas are actually the ones that are at the margins, the ones that are less of interest to the major retailers, the ones that are not the major transport hubs, the ones that are not the centres of master-planned activity, because there is actually more opportunity for creativity, energy and local citizenship to manifest itself.

What I would like to encourage, I think, is a thinking about moving from what I call “me towns”, towns which see the individual simply as a consumer, to “we towns” where people are seen as citizens, where towns are created co-operatively. If we are thinking about blue sky thinking, then I think actually we can draw on a lot of what has been done in the past, particularly with the co-operative movement, more recently in terms of community ownership of assets, and start to think, “How can we actually create local ownership and local investment so that the benefits of what happens in our town centre recycle back to the citizens of those town centres, How can the citizens of town centres be active players rather than simply passive consumers?”

I think three key things. One is the committee use of land. Second is local accountability so planning is actually much more accountable to local people and I think neighbourhood planning offers some opportunities in that. The third, which I think is most important, is to relink production and consumption so that our town centres are actually centres of activity and creativity and not just consumption. I think we need to think about how can town centres be start-up hubs, how can they be social hubs, how can they be creative and digital hubs, cultural hubs, technological hubs, the kind of activities that do not actually need a huge amount of land and can be done by repurposing what exists already. I think in a lot of our town centres we need to think not how do we start again but how do we create new activities and what is there already. I think social media offers a lot of opportunities there to power a creative world, to

power local citizenship and involvement in decision-making. I think a flexible planning process is important. I think heightened civic awareness and involvement, participatory budgeting, for example, offers a way to think about how you redesign local services so they fit into the town centre.

Most of all I think we need to rediscover the co-operative spirit and I think there are a lot of examples of how that is starting to happen. I was very taken by the new Mayor of Bristol who is being paid entirely in local currency which can only be spent in the city. If our civic leaders in London were paid in the equivalent of Brixton pounds, I think that would send a really good signal to the rest of the country.

**Roger Evans (AM):** Yes. That was quite a visionary exposition about the future. I want to ask you a question which is perhaps slightly outside the box here. Do you see that residential development is a threat to town centres?

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** Interestingly enough, yesterday I walked through the Brunswick in Camden. I think the Brunswick is a good example of how you can design residential and retail together.

**Roger Evans (AM):** The Brunswick was done a long time ago.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** It was done a long time ago. That is OK. Most of our town centres were done a long time ago and most of them were originally residential.

**Roger Evans (AM):** I am linking my thinking with some of the things you said earlier about the flight of public services. For instance, if I am a multinational company and I own an office block in Croydon full of accountants, I may be able to save money by closing that block down and moving those people out. However, if planning policies mean that that block is worth a huge amount of money as a residential site because not only is it in the town centre but we are now encouraging dense development so we can pack properties into it, then surely that value is going to be part of the financial decision that I make as to whether I keep those people working in Croydon or move them out to a warehouse round the M25.

By the same token, we are having this sort of debate about public services in London. If you have a town hall or a police station that is in a town centre, yes, technology may allow you to have closed that and save some money. But if you can then actually sell that site for a huge amount of money for residential development, is this not perversely driving other uses out of the town centre and creating a possibility that we might just end up with a residential area whose only resemblance to a town centre is that people are close to the station?

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** Yes, I think at an extreme end of the spectrum that is absolutely a risk. I think there are two things. One is a good amount of residential accommodation in a town centre can drive footfall. Town centres are places for people if people are there. If people live there, they will use facilities that are there and you can

start to create places that are human, that people will want to enjoy, and that minimises the use of private transport, which is also a good thing.

I think land values are far too high. That is a completely separate conversation which I do not think we probably have time to get into this morning. However, I think perversely high land values drive perverse decision-making, so actually I think in London, contrary to what everyone else tells you, we should actually look at finding ways of lowering land values and possibly --

**Roger Evans (AM):** Perhaps we should make our decisions bearing that in mind because I do not think that factor is going to change anytime in London. I think it is going to get worse.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** I think land value taxation is an option.

**Roger Evans (AM):** The people at Camden, which you used as an example earlier on, the people who work at Camden Town Hall are not going to be living at King's Cross because they cannot afford the properties.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** No, and arguably creating a great town centre in King's Cross by shifting a lot of people up the road from Camden Town Hall does not actually solve the wider issues for Camden or for London as a whole. That is why I was saying that in some cases the public sector actually aids and abets town centre decline.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Just before we move on, can I just ask you a question, Julian? Earlier on, you talked about the competitiveness between town centres, and then you said you wanted to see more networking, more collaboration between town centres. Have you got an example of where that happens? This is different from a community being offered some payback from the big urbanised shopping centres. This is about your idea of a network of collaborating town centres. I thought it was rather intriguing but where does it happen?

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** Yes. I think I would not say there are examples that you could point to where it is happening. I think there are straws in the wind which are worth looking at. I think there is a movement that has started in West Yorkshire called Totally Locally, which is about supporting local town centres but is actually sharing knowledge across them.

I think in planning terms one of the difficulties with London is that you are split into all the London boroughs and each one wants to compete against the others. You have an artificial geography that does not necessarily create those kinds of networks that I think we need to see. For example, if you take Westfield in Stratford as a kind of shopping hub, which for better or for worse it is going to be, then there is a network of town centres around that that are influenced by planning policies in Hackney, in Newham and in Tower Hamlets and possibly Waltham Forest as well. Really they need to be thinking together about what is the function of places like Leytonstone, what is the function of places like Hackney, what is the function of places like Roman Road in Bow, what is the function of places like Green Street in Newham. Actually you can start to see where do all these places offer both something that is local but also something that is unique that might have a wider catchment.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** That is very interesting. Another thing is a lot of these centres are going to be increasingly surrounded by very poor neighbourhoods.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** Exactly.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** And your town centres are focused to a lesser or greater extent on a cluster of neighbourhoods. The poorer the neighbourhoods, the poorer the town centre. What is your vision for that? That is where the demography of London is currently going due to a lot of reforms.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** Yes. I think that is a really important question. In the paper that I sent to officers earlier, my postscript to that was that the best stimulus any town centre can have is to have more money in ordinary people's pockets. You cannot disaggregate what is happening in local town centres from the impact of economic and political decisions which actually make poorer people poorer. I think there is a real challenge there. There is a real challenge that if you are going to drive down the net amount that people get in terms of benefits in real terms, then that lost spend is going to be felt in the locality, so there are much bigger decisions that have an impact.

How you mitigate some of those problems in the short term I think is by making sure that you have got space for affordable retail and community activities in town centres. Part of what public services can do is recognise the importance of the local functions that they provide, so things like the library. Local authorities are closing down libraries all over the place and those libraries are often really important social places. They are places that people who do not have a lot of money go to and they use the town centre. I think there is an issue there that is about what can local government in particular in the short-term do to mitigate some of the worst decisions that have been made at a national level.

In the long term, I think you can start to think about how you can create spaces that are under community ownership, that create affordable space for start-up business, for retail, and that are therefore locked in long-term for the benefit of the local community and not subject to land value speculation. I think that is where the co-operative model and that is where the community ownership model actually comes in. That will take time, it will take a long time, but that is not a reason for not starting.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** OK. Would you mind, John Burton, if we just heard from people we have heard less from for the moment and just sort of skipped over you for the moment and moved on to Henrietta?

**Henrietta Green (food writer and consultant):** Well, actually, a few points have been covered. I think the main one, which probably answers your question just now about what is the possible solution, is to bring function back to the high street. I think this can be achieved in many different ways for many different possibilities. Obviously what it does mean is the opening up of usage and the change of use. William McKee said that retail function is getting weaker and yet you have all these empty spaces, so in a sense what to do with them. Looking

back to the 1920s and the 1930s when there was the development and the split between industrial estates and the small maker was moved offsite, off the retail space, and the retail space became completely focused on retailing and there is that separation.

It is slightly chicken-and-egg in the sense that if you have a retailer there and the retailer is not creating enough footfall to make their business viable. Actually, if their retailing and function were to be joined again and that your retailing shop was to become where they were actually the source of the production, and this would work in many different aspects, food being an obvious one, smaller-scale food but through to just about anything you can think of, to carpentry, painting, whatever, and you look at -- and there are examples scattered around London of areas that have become studios where people go and there are people working at their crafts and people go and look, there is the function and there is the retailing. I think that that consolidation of the spaces, the use of them, it introduces the community, it ticks a lot of the boxes that Julian was talking about and is, I would have thought, a vision that could - with presumably not that easy change of usage, change of planning - give huge opportunities.

Recently, when I was doing this research, there was a man who funnily enough lived in Croydon and was selling his hot sauces on Croydon High Street but actually was making them in an industrial area which he did not need, I mean, he was just sharing a kitchen with people in Park Royal. You look at all the various environmental consequences, apart from anything else, and then opposite where his little stand was pitched was an empty unit. I think this is crazy. There are so many younger - the Prince's Trust is a very good example - and not so young but people who just want to go into production, whatever they are doing. There are a couple of shops quite near me which various people got together and they have started a small publishing press. It is the change of usage which is prohibitive by the usage and also the rent, so the subsidised rent is presumably another way of looking at it. It is creating the footfall because this is not what exists in the high street, so you can have your great vision. You can make it a safe place, an attractive place. You can put plants.

Actually, I had better not say which one, but I started a market for one of our London county councils. They wanted to spend money on street lighting and street furniture. You are thinking why when the people are not there? What you need to do is to create an event, curating it, that people will want to come and see it. Again, in terms of events, there are some incredibly interesting examples going on. There is one not far from here which caused a great stir with initiatives like guerrilla gardening. There are people that are just digging up flower beds and putting in vegetables. Terry pointed it out. It is creating the events. It is creating atmosphere in places where people want to go, getting them in there and seeing what could go on.

There is this wonderfully visionary lady called -- I cannot remember what her surname is. You might know. Edible Todmorden.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** Pam Warhurst.

**Henrietta Green (food writer and consultant):** Yes, who has created a really charmless Yorkshire town and she has just made it edible. We have a similar initiative actually called Abundance in Chiswick, so in London, and it is finding those people, the local councils, the high

street, clicking onto their ideas, bringing them out, changing the function, bringing function in, all kinds of different ways. It is not just about shopping, about communities. There are hundreds and hundreds of them. What in a sense it really needs is the curator, the man with the vision or the woman or the person with a vision, but also the flexibility so that one can see what can be done.

Food, which is my area, is just one instrument and has been very successful. Borough was obviously a classically good example of how this was achieved. This was a combination of various visionary retailers, trustees who owned a place, an actual market, and the desire to bring people in and the investment in bringing them in. I do not think you can recreate it very often and farmers markets which people think are the panacea are not. It is much more fundamental way of looking and going right the way through the spectrum.

**Len Duvall (AM):** I just want to go back to -- probably Will McKee is probably the best one in terms that you straddle the public sector and private sector and about leadership and creating environments about the visions that we have just heard earlier on. I have worked with all sorts of planners, some very good planners. Somehow their training creativity does not really feature large on that or if you can call it entrepreneurial. I think you could have entrepreneurial in the public sector as well as the private sector.

This issue of leadership of these town centres. In terms of your work in the outer London areas, which I think is transferable to some inner London town centres, albeit they are all different, where does leadership come into it about creating environments? Never mind the markets, but the right type of leadership at different levels to make things happen? They do not happen alone. Everything that says either you are a young entrepreneur who wants to make things needs an environment where they can make it or someone starts to match things and making things happen. Where does that fit into the best of best practice that you saw around some of the town centre work in outer London boroughs and how transferable is that, given that they are all different, Will?

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** Thank you. I can only tell you what my experience is, Len. It is a terrible thing to say and they will probably throw me out of the Town Planning Institute now, but actually leadership rarely comes from planners. Leadership nearly always comes, in my view, from the chief executive, leaders access inside local authorities who have a much stronger vision of where they want their community to go and what kind of community they want it to be. I think they need the help of visionary architecturally-based people who have those kinds of skills to turn it into something three dimensional. However, I think planners, being blunt, see themselves as the environmental police rather than the deliverers of vision. I think that is a very difficult thing to do.

Perhaps I will just comment on something that Julian said. I am always fascinated by listening to blue-sky thinking. The problem I have always had in the office is being able to deliver some of it, given that it is very long-term and given that sometimes the sheer apparatus of local authorities is simply not geared up to deliver that. There are 32 boroughs. They do not agree on very much. If you asked me the odds of getting London boroughs to have a corporate view on life, I am not putting any of my money on the bet because I am going to lose it.

I think, if you really want to try and grasp that visionary thing, I think it comes from the centre of local authorities, not from the planning wing. One of the things that has always rather annoyed me is that the developing plan policy frameworks first of all are not in the middle of corporate plans. They are to the side. They are kind of, "This is how we deliver this in terms of buildings". That is not good enough. Secondly, they are not flexible enough to recognise that circumstances change and that you have to deliver things in a different way.

I am not sure, Len, whether that answers your question but that is my experience of where vision comes from.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Henrietta, what was your curator? Len was asking about leadership. Is your curator a town centre manager?

**Henrietta Green (food writer and consultant):** Yes, but I do agree that it has to be a rather visionary and rather inspired person. There are people about. Again, when I was in Croydon, there was a very nice woman who was very thoughtful but she was finding herself hidebound by a lot of the restrictions. Discussing the case that we were talking about, which just seemed to me to be the logical process that there was a space, why not open it up? Why not use it? But the legislation that had to be gone through just seemed to be defeating her the whole time and there did not seem to be in place any kind of mechanism where the kind of ideas -- I mean, I was asked to mentor her slightly but in a sense there was not really much that one could do because, again, you were being restricted the whole time.

I just wanted to add one thing to what you were talking about on planning. I have done some work in the past at Covent Garden in the piazza and probably none of you have noticed this but at one stage halfway through the direction of the cobbles change. On one side you are on the privately owned land and the other is actually Westminster. What you can do on the private land - and this is just setting up a market, getting retail space going, what you can sell and everything - and what you can sell on the Westminster land is extraordinary and the hoops you have to go through dealing with Westminster where it is on the private. It just again is rather extraordinary. It is, as far as the public is concerned, a piazza, a space, and actually you are stepping on there and you cannot do half the things that you can do on the other.

In terms of finding those people, they do exist and they need nurturing. You have volunteers. There are people coming out. If one could have some kind of -- I do not even think you need a blueprint necessarily because then you are starting to sort of hold people down, but there are enough community initiatives because you want to bring back the communities into the high street so that people start working in the spaces. They are the public spaces. It probably does not help you very much. Where are these people?

**Navin Shah (Deputy Chair):** On the question of leadership which Len started quizzing, you mentioned potentially lack of leadership, let us say, from planners. Do you reckon from your experience you get enough leadership or vision when it comes to planning or town centre developments from elected members? When you talk about planning and development within boroughs, etc, obviously one might say that elected members play a major role. Do they, do



you understand, have grip of planning when it comes to it? Obviously, without that leadership and that vision, you struggle no matter how good potential your areas might have.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Be honest.

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** I will. I might regret this in a minute. My view is that there is actually extremely good and strong visionary leadership from elected members. However, in the average local authority of about 80 members, it is probably ten of them at the most. That is where the leadership comes from. That leadership in my experience is actually very, very good and most leaders of local authorities that I have ever worked with actually have a very strong vision about where they want their communities to be going and the direction they want to go in. I do not think there is any problem there. It is a restricted number but it is very good where you find it.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** And the role of the Mayor in this?

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** I think you are talking now about structures of local government, but I think the Mayor is capable of giving just that kind of strong leadership. It is not a structural thing. It is a personal thing.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** We are going to ask more questions in terms of what we can do and suggest what the Mayor can do. Ziona?

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** We were asked by one of the guests here what the function of a town centre is. The town centres have to decide on their function. Whilst I accept the diversity, I think the thing that they all have in common is to be promoters of opportunity and participation. I think those are really useful things to think about because what people want to participate in is more than being passive recipients of a consumer experience. It is participating in social life, participating in civic life, participating in educational life, in institutional life and in economic life.

Will, forgive me. Going back to King's Cross, it is not that it is a blueprint for every jump in scale that exists. However, it is a very, very good reminder of the fact that all these different opportunities are accounted for in the content of the scheme. There are institutions around. There is residential opportunity. There is employment opportunity. There is cultural opportunity. It is accessible. I think that that is extremely important to go to. But without employment opportunities, one is very, very limited.

For example, if you take the power of employment opportunities that move in a kind of counter-trend direction, there are two examples in this book here. One is Pentland, which is a sportswear company and it moved from Soho to Finchley. There it is as a very strong visual expression of its aspirations as a place of employment, as a business, embedded in the most prosaic looking housing you could imagine in any town centre of London. The multipliers of that are absolutely significant. Not only does it create job opportunities for people who work there, who actually have young families, but it has run a nursery that is open to the community.

The local shops around it do business at lunchtime, not only the evening economy because people work there. It is a granular little example but it is a token of what might be possible.

I have also done a lot of research sequentially at Chiswick Park. We could have a conversation about Chiswick Park, which is quite a sort of off-street mid-urban park that has been designed. There are many other circumstances in which it could have faced the street more full-frontally. What I have identified over the years is that it now offers a local employment base to a huge number of people who live locally, who can cycle to work and walk to work such that the restriction on car parking that was initially felt to be an issue there has disappeared.

These are examples of when, with facilitation and some leadership, corporate employment opportunities will come locally. There is a huge number of people who now work outside corporations, so we should not think that the only role of town centres is to encourage or cajole or make it easy for large employers to stay but to promote the kinds of access to workplace opportunities that everyone sees at the British Library, that everyone sees at Royal Festival Hall. Here again I think we should do the jump in scale in reverse. The British Library - and I did quite a lot of research in this Why Place Still Matters in the Digital Age research project we did last year - it is a truly amazing place for a city to have. It is heaving with people. It is the most facilitative institution in terms of the plurality of access that it provides for people who want to come to an exhibition, for people who want to follow references, for people who want to hang out, for people who want to be inspired by someone else who is being productive, for people who want to work there instead of the LSE library or the University College London (UCL) library or wherever.

One of the things that I have identified through our research is that people spin off each other. It is a place for building social capital as well as economic capital. There is no reason why every single local library currently under threat of closing down, fighting for the right to be managed by its local community rather than have the books chucked out, why they could not become these much more robust incubators for economic and social life. People do business sitting in Royal Festival Hall for free. They sit there. Some people go there every day. They sit there in the same place running their business; free Wi-Fi, free furniture, lovely ambience, free electricity. A great way of providing economic and social leadership.

I have to say privately owned properties can do the same. I do not know if people are familiar with Kings Place at the bottom of York Way, an entirely privately owned building that absolutely invites people to come into its spaces - it is all written up here and I can pass it around - come into its spaces, use the furniture, use the settings, use the Wi-Fi, plug in their electricity and, goodness, someone has made money out of it. That building was sold inside of four years of having been opened and did extremely well. It is a real shot in the arm for any commercial real estate developer who thinks that they have to squeeze absolutely every bit of juice out of the net to gross. There are a lot of different models around but they all are at this new intersection of the way in which people, place, travel and the digital world interact.

I do want to conclude my visionary plea about travel. One of the things that we have not talked about today is the fact that although vehicular traffic in the country has gone down in the last ten years, what has gone up are car-based journeys in surrounding town centres., the short trips

to the shops, to take kids to school, to go to the high street, to go to the doctor. There is a real choice there. If one takes a co-ordinated view of what a quality place will be like, then making it impossible for local businesses to do business in town centres because they are so swamped by transit that could be differently undertaken by cycle and by walking if there was strong leadership on that issue, it would make a huge and positive difference.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** So, as well as some of the other things, you are talking about third place working, people being able to work in their town centres?

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** In their town centres and --

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Self-employed people.

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** I did this research study last year. It grew out of something I had done previously, which was a kind of reflection on how corporations shape urban development, which I thought was actually quite injurious. I looked back across a lot of the workplace consultancy studies that we had done and discovered that these amazing offices that people had moved to like the BA Watersides of this world, etc - and we did this study of the BBC when it moved from Oxford Circus to White City - it often involved hugely dislocating shifts in people's lives even though the offices that they moved to were on paper wonderful places full of sports facilities, gyms, restaurants and things like that. But actually, for people trying to construct their lives, get back to the kids, potentially get back to elderly parents, feed the pet or whatever, the distance between home and work is very, very critical. It needs to be easily negotiable and it needs to be predictable.

Last year we did this study of why people work in third places. If you are not in a big company office and you are not working at home, what are you doing in a business centre, in a library, in a coffee shop? We concentrated the locales for this research on the edges of big cities, so the Greater London study was Chiswick, Chelmsford, Watford and in fact More London. We went to Regus' centre in the Norton Rose building at Number 3 here because it was at a transport hub and in King's Cross around the British Library. We did similar studies in New York, Paris, Hong Kong and Mumbai. The extremely interesting thing across some of the local variation that we found country by country was that the benefits that people attained by working in the third place where they were working were (a) being productive, it got them into a productive mind-set, (b) being able to handle work/family interface much better and (c) safeguarding their work/life balance because many, many people said that because the digital experience now enabled them to work from anywhere including home, if they did not create some place boundaries, they would feel that they were always on and they could never, ever relax. They wanted to go to work somewhere that was not home and they chose third places to do so.

All of these places do provide value. For all of their other ills which we do not need to discuss today, the Starbucks scenario is really productive as a workplace for many people. Libraries are very productive workplaces for people and so are business centres and business lounges. However, they all have limitations. Business centres are subscriber-only access, so they have an entrance cost which can be quite high and which people can experience as exclusive. The

coffee shop scenario can be very overcrowded, very unpredictable, very noisy, insecure Wi-Fi, unpredictable broadband, etc.

Enter the library scenario where local authorities really can take the kind of leadership that we have seen at the British Library and Royal Festival Hall in creating spaces that people can use on very accessible terms, very appropriately equipped and, critically, with a full entitlement to be there which is not something that under any circumstances you will ever see in any private development. It is fantastic and admirable that Kings Place invites it and supports it. It would be amazingly wonderful if Westfield would do the same. But it is always going to be on their terms. Unless it were a planning condition, it would never be something that would be a citizen's right. I think that that is where communally-owned, publicly-owned facilities can do something that is hugely valuable for building enterprise and building social capital.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Thanks. OK. I think we have got to move on to other questions because there was a lot there. We can pick up on this. We have got another session in January where we can pick up on a lot of this thinking. Do you want to come in?

**Navin Shah (Deputy Chair):** Yes, there is an interesting scenario I am posing here. The question is can or should we protect London's town centres or do you think there is a case for reinventing the role of our town centres, their relevant form, as well as the purpose that they serve? Julian has come up with some interesting thoughts already but any other guests want to pitch in?

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** I definitely think that place plays a fundamental role on us as people. Both collectively and individually, our sense of place is one of the first things that you find out about a person. You find out where they come from or where they live. Association with place is not vague. It is that you come from Hornsey or you come from Chiswick or wherever. You come from somewhere and I think that when you say that, you have a concept of what that means. The stronger that is in physical and community terms, the stronger you are as a person. I think it is fundamental as a place in all parts of our psyche.

I think the question of leadership is very interesting. I think that there are a lot of great elected leaders and very good people and there are some terrible ones, like in all of life. I do agree with you that a lot of the best leadership often can come spontaneously from people doing other things, just doing a thing about food or about a particular activity or even a protest thing. I think that sometimes a proposal to do something can actually galvanise and bring communities together and that often is not political.

The thing that I feel to be constructive could be done is that there is no doubt that people -- because it has got much more complex and much more overwhelming, our towns and centres and life today, there is a considerable lack of awareness of what can be done and what to do and how to do it. Yet there are places doing it and I think there ought to be a better appreciation of what can be done and how you can do it. Simple things like the public realm of streets, pavements and cars, the management of your public realm, your space. There are some places doing it extremely well and others are a complete mess of signs, miserable pavements, no

trees and a terrible scene generally. Also, stewardship and creating. There are some places that have street festivals and get-together and their public buildings are busy and full simply because there is stewardship and management either by the elected leaders or by the general public or whatever. It is part of the DNA of that place.

How do we get the message out to those places that are failing that it can be done? It is almost educational. It is awareness. I think that that is the first step. It is not money. I think it is the general sense of what is possible today for town centres, that they are fundamental to us all and they are really important. I do not think it is money. There are some great places where there are not very well off people and there are others that are a mess where there are better off people. I think it is a sense of you can do something about your place and that it is important to do so and how to do it. Learning from elsewhere is just fundamental to improving your town and other places can do it so you can do it, too. What do they do over there? How did they get their town right?

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** Can I just mention one thing because it is a very small point but it follows directly on from what Terry says? Two things strike me about UK town centres. One is that they have a lot of linear space and not very much aggregated space. Where they do have aggregated space, it is the means of walking from a building on one side to a building on the other side, whereas if you go and look at really successful town centres, town centre activities flow through the spaces and between the buildings. We are always told in this country that you cannot do it because of the climate. I do not think that actually is true. You see plenty of places where it can be done. One of the transformational things about Midtown in London is the fact that the restaurants are now on the pavements, whereas they used to be behind the closed doors. I think those spaces in town centres first of all need to be more non-linear spaces and they need to be activity places in their own rights. I think we can do a lot to do that.

The other thing is - and this is just a comment - I think one of the real lacks of joined-up thinking is actually between the different agents in the public sector. I have been running a development corporation for ten years. Despite governments of all persuasions forming cross-departmental boundary committees, actually they still all go their own way. One sees so often the council is struggling to keep the library open and then the health service moves the cottage hospital out. I think there is really something to be said for a leadership role - and the Mayor, particularly - pulling together the public sector agencies in London and trying to get them to work together. If they all agree that town centres are an important quality of life thing, then they all need to do something to try and do it. It is very difficult because they are on the whole driven by financial criteria. The reason they are closing them down is because actually they need to find money and that is how they do it. It has always struck me that there is a leadership role if you want one. Try and draw the public sector into a single coherent way of approaching the issues that you are concerned about.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** Can I come in on leadership? There is a slightly different take on it. I think what Will said is valid, but I think we should look to distributed leadership rather than organisational and hierarchical leadership. Leadership is what you do. It is not what job title you have or what label you have got on your lapel.

I think one of the ways in which Boris as Mayor of London is actually a good leader is that he is very good at motivating people and picking up on what other people do and amplifying it. Actually, that is quite an important role in a leader. It is not to do everything and control everything itself. It is to be able to see what else is going on. If you are thinking about town centre leadership, I think the thing to do is to look for the people who have energy, who have imagination and who are wanting to make a difference. You will find them in all sorts of different places. You will find them in the private sector. You will find them in the voluntary sector. You will find them in the public sector. It is what they are doing and how they are thinking which is where the leadership resides.

Just as one example, if you want an example of real leadership in terms of transforming place, I would suggest you just go along the South Bank to Coin Street where a community-led development trust has created a real sense of place in an area that would otherwise have been just yet more bog-standard office blocks if the planners and the Greater London Council (GLC) at the time had had its way. You have leadership coming from the ground up and actually creating a real sense of place.

It is the same thing in West London. The Westway Development Trust has actually transformed a really unpromising area under the arches of the A40, I think it is, which is now a real community hub. It is about imagination. It is about thinking about what you can do with the place and then facilitating with people who have got the imagination and enabling them to do their stuff.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Thank you. We have to move on now. Val, are you coming in?

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** Yes. Can I comment a little bit on some of that conversation and then lead into talking a bit more about transport and low carbon options?

I think the fact is we are literally in a cold place at the moment. It is not just cold in here but recession-wise people have been asking, I think and I understand this, for more management of town centres, town centre managers, more policing, retention of public services. We are in a public service environment where of course everything is contracting by a quarter. The shoppers are about to be hit again with a tsunami of poverty. We are in a very, very difficult place. While I think we all agree with the power of leadership and what you can do with it, the wind is blowing against our local economies at the moment and we do have to fight back. In the practical world that we live in, what is it that we could be doing?

One of the things that has been mentioned this morning is about the importance of transport. We are looking at Transport for London which has -- OK, they have their problems as well, but they do spend about £9 billion a year. They have huge leverage. Their research shows that the potential for most growth in cycling is in local areas. It is in district centres. It is in outer London.

I am looking at a Transport for London business plan over the years which has been basically focusing on cycle hire and cycle superhighways in central London. Do you think there is much

more we could do in sustainable transport to help boost the footfalls or the attractiveness and the liveability of our district centres, cycling just being one of those possible things? Who wants to talk about transport for a minute?

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** I think that plays absolutely to the point that I made about the increase in the number of short distance trips that are made to centres in the outer areas. Also the point that Will touched on about getting different aspects of the public sector to pull together, I think that with more co-ordination cross-portfolio in the different aspects of public service facilities, one could create much more critical mass in unifying places that were aligned with practical cycle and walking access within local districts. We see the health services pulling one way, post pulling another way, police pulling another way and they are all driven by different financial crises, different service ambitions.

I think that there is a huge role for leadership to forge co-ordinated spatial propositions that people can come to and that will play into the transport agenda because you will be able to accomplish so many more tasks or agenda requirements within single trips. I think that the land use and the travel have to be thought of in a co-ordinated fashion.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** Transport for London has just wiped out its integration unit as part of the cuts programme and I think we are seeing many councils reduce their planning departments, which were a huge intellectual capacity for this sort of thing. I kind of feel that things that are too ambitious right now - perhaps in the long run what you are saying is fantastic - but things that are too ambitious at the moment are probably going to be unachievable. What are those relatively easy, obvious, quick things we could do to support our district centres?

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** As a very quick and easy thing, your comment about poverty was really important at the beginning. Running a car is one of the most expensive things you can do, so if you can manage without it, then that is great. How can you help people to manage without a car? You encourage car clubs, encourage car sharing, so that when you need a car you have got access to it but most of the time, when it is sitting around and you do not need it, you do not have to have it and you do not have to pay your insurance, your running costs, etc. I think that that is something that is quick and easy that could easily be encouraged and built on the car clubs that already exist, car sharing schemes, and lift share schemes that already exist.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** I think Islington has had fantastic success with supporting the car club situations. Would you like to see more cycling facilities, cycle hire or cycle storage or concierge-type systems?

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** Yes, definitely. I think employers can do quite a lot. They can give their employees cycle allowances, encourage that and forget about the company car. I think the car as a status thing is a very difficult idea to get out of people's heads, but I think employers can actually play a large role in helping to change that thinking. I think it is about changing mind-sets. Cycling is massive in Copenhagen and Copenhagen has a

much worse climate than London. If people would cycle in the snow in Copenhagen, they can do it here. They do it in Copenhagen because they know it is safe and the facilities are there for them, so it is not difficult. It is about political will and about social will.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** Will said something earlier on about transport in central London being different from what you need in outer London. I think, if we are looking at bus services, for example, there has been a sort of freezing of the number of buses but an intensification of the heaviest used routes. Would you like to see any kind of special bus offer around the district centres? Is there something that has occurred to you while you have been looking around? Do we need Hoppa buses or something of that nature?

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** I think that TfL have definitely been going in the right direction on outer London centres because basically they have been reshaping the services around the centres, whereas they used to be kind of alternatives to longer distance forms of transport. I think that is absolutely right.

What I think even in the era of the mobile phone is one of the real unexplored sources for use of public transport is people's real-time awareness of what is available and where it is going to. Is it going to be there when you get there? You know, if one thinks of the information that is just on the average bus stop, if you could have that information easily available in your house before you decide to set out --

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** It is. There are about 600 apps. It is fantastic.

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** It is, but very few people use it. Perhaps a concerted educational campaign to get people to use real-time information to plan their journeys would actually help them in a bit of the modal transfer, which is what you are trying to talk about.

I think the point I was making about outer London is that when you look at the density of bus services in outer London compared with the density of bus services in inner London, there are going to be a lot of trips for which the bus cannot actually provide a real alternative. The only alternative there is walking, cycling or using the car and you have to just plan that into your thinking. If you look at TfL's statistics, one of the most interesting ones is that 80% of the car trips in outer London actually do not start or finish in a town centre.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** OK. That is very interesting.

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** They have nothing to do with what is going on in town centres.

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** Can I come back here? I was slightly disconcerted that you said, "That is a big idea but it might be a bit difficult for now, so we might have to park it and look for some low-hanging fruit and come back to it maybe one day when it is too late".



**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** We have had it and rolling back is the point. We want to keep it. However, right now we have to do something urgent, do we not, for the district centres?

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** But there are also so many agencies thinking that they have to do really urgent things right now and what they are doing is all working at cross-purposes. The issue about leadership is not only where are the leaders out there who might curate high streets well, but one does have to sustain the leadership about the strategic debate because there are real opportunities for agencies who are working at cross-purposes to pull together to a higher aim of creating a good place when their driving mandate is just to stay alive. I think that one does have to keep that --

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** You have to keep the flame alive. I absolutely agree with you.

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** You have to keep it in a very proactive way.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** We do have to keep the flame alive, but I think the sad truth is that most public sector managers and local politicians are managing decline at the moment. They are managing contraction and it is about how to make the best of what they have got and of course obviously sharing is important. I am looking for what investments we can be making from the resources that the Mayor has got to help our district centres. I am talking about transport in particular.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** It is a shame we cannot go on further about this because there is a lot more still to explore. What is the town centre for the young person? What is the town centre for the increasingly elderly population, etc? We have heard some very interesting things and I want to ask each person - and just keep flagging it up - each person to give one approach that they think, bearing in mind what Val has just said about managing decline, one approach we could take now and in the future to really -- you know, what the Mayor should do, what somebody should do to revitalise town centres to help realise some of the things you have suggested.

I just want to flag up I think one of the newest things that has been suggested is - I think co-location is a rather clumsy word - bringing together consumption and production in the way it used to be but now is not. I thought that in all sorts of ways that could be a very interesting way of bringing back vitality and employment opportunities to town centres.

I just want to ask because we did not ask you about your vision, John Burton. I just wondered how Westfield's vision sits alongside some of the visions you have heard. Can you see it being compatible?

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** You ask about what leadership means. To me, one of the great things about true leadership is its ability to prioritise. We see that in this building here. The Mayor puts out his priorities in different areas during the year. It is that prioritisation that would allow you to do a lot of the things that Terry has said.

Just put mine to the side for one moment. What I do see - and I started right at the outset - is that so many of the district centres, the lower tier centres, have lacked investment for a very, very long time. There are a host of reasons as to why that has occurred but they are essentially tired. For many parts of the community, therefore, they are not regarded as comfortable. They are not regarded as safe. So when Terry talks about the need for amenity, the need for lighting, the need for safe and secure spaces throughout the day, that can be affected quite simply by many of the councils with not a large amount of investment. Encouraging the occupiers in there to also take some pride in the ownership would also be a part of that because once you have pride in place, you get far less graffiti, you get far less crime. There is an issue around whether the council should have access to rates around all that. The way the whole rating system and allocation works causes difficulties for many councils.

Our vision has been to create places that are respectful of their communities. On Julian's point about the agenda that we have, we do provide in terms of jobs. In Stratford over 3,000 long-term unemployed people have received jobs and we continue that training. We have established a skills academy there for both continuing employment but to upgrade people. We do offer places of worship. We do offer subsidised rent, incubators and independent retailers' opportunities. We also look very, very carefully at the sustainability arguments. In some respects, we have to take big leads to show people what is responsible and what is capable. There is much more that we can do in terms of recycling generally in London. I think, compared to other cities that I have lived in, there is a hell of a lot more that we can do in the area of use of resources and recycling that we currently do not tackle. We do provide free Wi-Fi and free phone charging. We recognise people see the sorts of developments that we have as places of, as I said at the outset, refuge. We do not charge them to do that. We have a focus within the community and a social responsibility which we do not ignore.

What we do have and what we have shown is how people respond to investment. That I think is the underlying problem that we have at the moment. Many, many of our smaller district sub-regional centres are extremely tired and in extremely poor condition and they are uninviting. They are uninviting for occupiers. If something has not had any money invested in it for 20 or 30 years, *a la* Croydon, why would you want to be the first person to go and invest in there on a small scale? So there is this inertia that we currently have which is a function of probably the global financial crisis (GFC) to a degree but we need to break that to get people to invest and see the opportunity to create pride in place and get them back there.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Thank you. Now, each one, just going around, I will start at this end with Ziona. Just one recommendation you would make. I am afraid we only have time for us to ask you for one recommendation that would make a difference, either immediately or in the longer term.

**Ziona Strelitz (Founding Director, ZZA Responsive User Environments):** Publically available space for people to work like the Cockpit studios in Camden for makers, like libraries where you can brew up a new business, get help. That investment I think will pay huge, huge dividends.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Thank you. Henrietta?

**Henrietta Green (food writer and consultant):** Ease planning restrictions, change of usage, start filling the empty shops and possibly also look at changing the current property laws, which I am not too familiar about, where landlords are not charged for empty buildings. Start actually penalising them so that they are encouraged to create this sort of energy to fill people with the spaces.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** All right.

**John Burton (Development Director, Westfield):** Investing in amenities.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Yes, investing.

**Julian Dobson (Director, Urban Pollinators):** Co-operate. The really big changes are about behaviour. They are not about this action or that action. Open up the conversation, create a co-operative spirit and bring benefits back to local communities in whatever way it is possible within your local circumstances.

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** I believe it is learning from elsewhere. I think the GLA should have a programme of places that are not doing that well learning from all those that are getting their act together, not just in London but anywhere in the world. There are places that can teach us an awful lot about how they worked it, how they got it right. I do not think it is hugely magical but I think to see how somebody else has done it, how they got their act together. I think that is a positive programme for every level, for those aspiring to kick their leaders as well as the leaders themselves.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Can you give us a mayor that we should emulate?

**Sir Terry Farrell (Founder, Terry Farrell and Partners):** I have just come back from New York. I thought it was extraordinary what they have done in New York.

**James Miller (Lead Consultant, Experian):** In my view it is less about intervention and more about an approach. It is about understanding the people and it is beginning with the people who live in local places, understanding who they are, what they want, what their futures might look like. That is the key and I think that echoes a lot of what we are talking about here in terms of actually, whether we are making places for people or people are working to make those places themselves. I think the planning policy really needs to help understand exactly what those people are like. From that, a place can actually decide what sort of place it is that we are. Then I would echo Terry's point. You can start to look at other places where things are working well where you can take best practice and put those kinds of measures in place. It is about understanding where you are today and where you are going to be in the future. Experian will say that but that is what we are about.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Do you want to say something about what the Mayor should do?

**William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission):** It is a little bit of a shot in the dark, but I suspect the answer lies in planning policy being based around mixed use intensification.

**Valerie Shawcross (AM):** A planning answer. That is helpful.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** OK. Thank you very much. Thank you all very, very much and I am so sorry we are, as always, pressured for time. But we are going to carry on this debate and we are very grateful to you all.