Subject: The Future of London’s Town Centres

Report to: Planning Committee

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

Date: 15 January 2013

This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

1.1 This meeting will provide Members with the opportunity to discuss with invited experts from the public and private sectors how boroughs and the Mayor can revitalise London’s town centres, support their adaptation to new functions and meet current challenges through planning policy and other means.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Committee notes this report as background to explore with invited experts the role of town centres in London by discussing potential ways of implementing different approaches to supporting London’s town centres in the future, through planning policy, investment and other means.

3. Background

3.1 London’s town centres face an uncertain future and the drivers behind town centre change are complex - in the uniquely high density environment of London, it is particularly important for the planning system to develop their strengths and address these issues.

3.2 The Mayor has two main ways of supporting and shaping London’s town centres – through planning policy and through funding measures. The Mayor’s proposed Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on town centres is understood to be subject to consultation later this year and will support the existing town centre policies in the London Plan.

3.3 The Committee has decided to review a number of aspects that are relevant to the future of London’s town centres including, for example:

- The future impact of trends and challenges on town centre performance and regeneration;
- Infrastructure, transport, parking and employment;
- Sustainable development and green spaces;
• Investment, marketing and management; and
• Planning policy, strategy and Use Class issues.

3.4 The terms of reference of the review are:

• to explore the future role of town centres in London with an emphasis on the potential range of forms and functions;
• to inform the Committee’s response to the Mayor’s Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance for town centres; and
• to highlight any important issues for consideration in other areas outside the remit of the SPG.

3.5 Details of this review are set out at: 
http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/05a%20Final%20town%20centres%20scoping%20271112%20v4.pdf

4. Issues for Consideration

4.1 The review is taking place over two formal Committee meetings. At the first meeting in December 2012, the Committee heard from invited experts about the role of London’s town centres and how it is changing. The Committee then explored possible future scenarios for town centres and what could be a long-term vision to re-create them as sustainable centres of activity.

4.2 This second meeting seeks to consider some of the themes identified in December and gather further views on the possible future forms and functions of London’s town centres. Members will have the opportunity to discuss with policy makers, planning practitioners and other expert guests how to realise those approaches through planning policy and other means. Other measures could include financial investment, marketing and management schemes, or a focus on transport and accessibility.

4.3 Members might also explore how the Mayor’s emerging planning policy guidance for town centres could help making London’s town centres more successful, vibrant and welcoming.

4.4 Some of the areas Members may wish to discuss at this second meeting include:

• What are the potential future forms and functions of London’s town centres and how might they be delivered?
• How effective are existing planning policies to promote the vitality and viability of town centres? What approaches have been applied so far? Why are some more successful and others failed?
• What other powers and mechanisms are available to local authorities to revitalise their town centres and boost growth?
• How can Mayoral planning policy, in the London Plan and the emerging Town Centres SPG, best support town centres? Could the Mayor use any of his other powers to this effect? and
• How should the Mayor manage the funding streams directed at town centres, high streets and outer London and what should be his priorities?
Invited guests
4.5 Expert guests from the following areas have been invited to attend this meeting:

- key planning officers and town centre managers from four London Boroughs facing different kinds of challenges and proposing different types of solution;
- a planning advisor with town centre and retail planning experience across London; and
- an architect /master planner or academic with knowledge of London’s town centre challenges and large scale regeneration schemes.

Next steps
4.6 The Committee will produce a written consultation response to the Mayor’s forthcoming Draft Town Centres Supplementary Planning Guidance consultation later this year.

5. Legal Implications
5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

6. Financial Implications
6.1 There are no direct GLA financial implications arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report: There are none

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers: Proposed review of the future of London’s town centres

http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-london-assembly/assembly_investigation/future-londons-town-centres

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