Planning Committee

15 January 2013

Transcript Item 6: London’s Town Centres

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Right. Now we can get on with the main business which is the second meeting on the future of town centres. The last one we asked our experts for their visions of what should be done in the future. At this one we are going to focus more on -- of course we do not mind you bringing out your vision but what we are talking about now is what is actually being done on the ground, what is being prepared in terms of the future of town centres now and what examples of best practice there are now. Particularly we want to concentrate on what is needed to realise these in terms of powers, instruments, regulation, what can local authorities do, what can the Mayor do and what do we lack in order to realise this. It is a very, very serious issue because town centres are the focal point of our communities, as you know neighbourhoods really relate to them, we all live in neighbourhoods, and they are largely in decline. We have just seen the closure now of HMV, last week it was Jessops and recently it was Comet. Every week now you get news of more and more evidence that town centres are hitting the buffers.

It is really important what we are doing and I am really glad that you have agreed to come along and participate. The first thing is that you each introduce yourself. We have brought a lot of you together because we want a lot of different perspectives on what we are talking about because it is a very diverse area; town centres. Therefore I would like you just now to say very shortly who you are and what your job title is and perhaps one more line. That is about it. Shall we start?

Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon): I am Mike Kiely. London Borough of Croydon. I suppose one line is Croydon is probably the largest outer London centre within the largest borough by population. A centre that was comprehensively transformed in the 1950s and 1960s and we are working on that again. What we are looking at particularly is the introduction of a significant amount of residential within the town centre.

Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow): Good afternoon. My name is Stephen Kelly. I am Director of Planning at the London Borough of Harrow. Harrow in one line is London’s capital of metro land. It is a 21st century suburb in many respects but it also contains a designated metropolitan town centre in the London Plan, one of the original ones, and a Mayoral area for intensification in the London Plan focused around Harrow and Wealdstone.
Nick Lynch (Planning Policy (LDF) Manager, Planning, Housing and Regeneration, LB of Barnet): Good afternoon. My name is Nick Lynch. I am the Planning Policy Manager for Barnet Council. My one liner is Barnet is a sustainable city suburb with the most town centres in London - 20 - all of which provide different challenges. Despite being a suburb we have the fourth highest housing targets for London; 28,000 new homes to be delivered by 2026. Town centres have a role to play in the delivery of that housing.

David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking): I am David Harley. I am the Group Manager for Economic Development at Barking and Dagenham. Barking has got huge growth potential, and really we are making sure that the opportunities are in the town centre and people use the town centre rather than go elsewhere. We have got some real challenges with things like Westfield and other town centres in the location. We are looking at a strategy and a Barking Town Team set up to address those.

Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives): Steve Norris. Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives. I have been advising the public and private sector for 20 years on retail and town centre development and regeneration. I previously worked for DTZ and GVA in the commercial property sector.

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): David West. Partner and urban designer at Studio Egret West. We are an architecture, design and landscape practice. Passionate in place specific solutions. Which has got a great deal to do with the future of the high street, whether it be public realm transformation, buildings or urban strategies.

Elizabeth Cox (Head of Connected Economies, New Economics Foundation): Elizabeth Cox. I am Head of Connected Economies. I lead on local economic development work at the New Economics Foundation which is a think tank. I also worked on things such as Clone Town, re-imagining the high street, as well as local enterprise support.

Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects): Helle Søholt. I am a Founding Partner and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Gehl Architects in Copenhagen. I am very happy to come from such a long distance today. I run an urban design practice where we focus a lot on liveability and liveable cities. We advise major cities around the world on urban design issues.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): One of the things you are doing is currently advising the Transport Commission of New York, correct?

Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects): Yes.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): And also working in London currently?
Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects): Yes.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Thank you very much for making that journey.

Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects): Thank you.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): We are very glad. Thank you. If I kick off to get us going. How can local authorities’ powers, instruments and initiatives, including planning policy - we do not want you to restrict yourselves to planning policy today - help diversify - we are talking in terms of retail, leisure, public services - that off? Leisure, retail and public services in London. In London’s town centres. Shall we start with Steve Norris?

Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives): Thank you very much. I come from a very commercial perspective. I realise you have planners here as well. It is all about delivery for town centres and that very much is about working with the private sector to deliver change. I know that private public partnerships are very much top of the agenda but it is about actually seeing that occur at the local level. There is a lot of talk made of private public partnerships but in reality it is quite difficult to deliver. In reality you see lots of private public partnerships failing because of vested interests on either side and, for developers at the end of the day, it is all about, for them, the returns on their investment.

Part of the promoting development and diversity in town centres is about local authorities being able to work and to offer sites that are fit for purpose for developers and investors to work from. There is a key element to that about how the private public partnerships work together.

Also the key thing is about having strategies and visions for centres that are also deliverable. It is about delivery. The key mantra really. Too many visions and strategies I have seen over the years have been quite academic exercises that then gather dust on the top shelves of local planning authorities only to be brought down to reminisce about what could have been. Many visions and strategies and master plans do not have a Plan B so if Plan A fails what happens next? In many cases there is not that second option about putting too many eggs in one basket in terms of key development sites and if the development site fails then where do you go from there?

One of the key things I wanted to get across today is about working with the private sector and really taking account of the private sector as well. When you are doing strategies and visions for centres and you have grand ideas for your centre or you think, “We’d really like our centre to be X when actually the private sector thinks it should be Y” then you have got a big disconnect. I think there are, again, too many strategies and visions limited by budget and do not actually connect with the private sector at those very early stages in the process. They are almost seen as coming in at the late stage to deliver our grand plan, rather than sitting there right from the start and working alongside the public sector to deliver change.
Nicky Gavron (Chair): Right. Thank you. It would be quite good to get a range of views on this and then we will drill down.

Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon): I completely agree with that. In Croydon we talk of four eras of regeneration in Croydon which started with the Archbishop when he decided in medieval times to have his summer residence and Croydon did quite well out of that. The second one was when the Victorians decided to move the high street further north when it blossomed. We then had the 1950s and 1960s which was the response to the planning position at the time where there was a need to build offices in London and Croydon saw that gap and did very well out of it. We are now in the fourth era.

It is absolutely right that you have got to understand your patch, the dynamics in the various markets that are operating in your patch, and what is your unique selling point. Then develop a realistic, but shared, vision both with your political community, with your residential community and with your business community. That is what we have been doing. We have encouraged the development community to set up Develop Croydon and we work very closely with them to work through the empirical evidence that we have in terms of what Croydon can offer, what it can move into, and what it can change into.

Our core strategy really has grown out of that and our main strategy of injecting much more residential into a town that has got the other side of two million square foot of retail floor space and close to eight million square foot of commercial office floor space but which is passed its sell by date, and it is unlikely that offices are going to come en masse to Croydon but it is still a good offer for offices. Given London’s position in terms of housing and given Croydon’s position in terms of accessibility that, to us, seems the obvious answer; to encourage a significant increase in housing. Upwards of 7,000 units are planned to be built in the town centre where there are hardly any now.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Up to 7,000 units in a town centre. You must come back in. We are going to ask a question just about residential in town centres so it would be good if you came back in. Shall we go on round?

Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow): There is probably a theme that is going to come through this. I often think it is important to look at why town centres do not necessarily deliver on the aspirations – picking up on Steve’s point around the plan. It seems to me there is a fundamental issue about alignment, and alignment not only between the public sector agencies and a local authority and its own functions but also alignment with the development industry’s aspirations and outcomes.

Having worked quite a bit outside of London what is quite interesting is that we have been quite slow in London in aligning our activities towards a more common agenda, partly because the imperative has not been there. The development industry and the public sector as regulators of change, I do not think have necessarily had the conversations early enough in the process that has delivered strategies that are
implementable, because there was so much optimism and prosperity. Now that that has changed the ability of the local authority to align both its property functions but also public realm and transport functions and, more importantly, to align that upwards with the GLA and Transport for London and to bring all the development industry’s objectives into that alignment, is really fundamental.

In Harrow we have perhaps not necessarily been hugely successful at that in the past but we now work very well with the GLA family in bringing forward the intensification area and bringing much more closely together the development industry around our key strategic sites both in the intensification area that has been designated but also outside that. It is that realism but also that alignment of endeavour, for want of a better word, which we all share, a singular set of objectives, and we all understand our various roles in it.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): That is good.

Nick Lynch (Planning Policy (LDF) Manager, Planning, Housing and Regeneration, LB of Barnet): In Barnet, as I mentioned earlier, we have had the challenge of dealing with 20 town centres. Therefore, in terms of how we can diversify the retail, leisure and public service offer it is very important that we improve our understanding of how our town centres actually work. We need to gauge the diversity of our town centres in order to protect and enhance their offer.

One town centre that is very diverse is Cricklewood, and 80% of Cricklewood town centre businesses are run by people from the black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. It is this understanding of how town centres function and their relationships with the surrounding populations, which in Barnet tend to be more affluent, helps us to manage change.

Our work in Barnet has been focusing mainly on the larger town centres; Edgware, Finchley, Church End, North Finchley and Chipping Barnet. Focusing on these priority centres and creating town centre frameworks which are underpinned by a neighbourhood planning approach exemplified through our work with local communities, traders’ forums and landlords. We have the benefit of the first local plan in London that is compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) so we are in a strong position to move forward with these strategies for our town centres. We consider that these documents are not going to sit on a shelf. They are focused on delivery, living documents, that will take these town centres forward.

David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking): In Barking the issue about the realism of plans and how the private sector is engaged is important. We set up the Barking Town Team to address this, because a lot of the retailers do not quite understand the development market and particularly the issues in Barking where we do have difficulties getting development to happen. The key way we can unlock schemes is through supermarket space. It is the only big value development that seems to be working, certainly in Barking, with viability. We made it
a scheme where there was residential above. It was more tied in to the town centre and actually works so much better for the rest of the town centre than a scheme which did not involve the council at all. Absolutely, the involvement is key.

The way the council can work in terms of its decision making and the location of its services is key. We invested heavily in a new technical skills academy, put it bang in the centre of Barking town centre, 650 students, 100 staff, really raising footfall. The key issue is how do we raise footfall in the town centre? A lot of it is through new housing development. We can talk about that later. It is services that attract people into the town centre and the council can play a critical role in that. We have looked at moving an adult college into the town centre as well. We are generally trying to move facilities that do bring people in and bring vibrancy into town centres.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): You began by saying that the only viable -- well it was retail really, supermarkets. The only part of retail that seemed to be viable were supermarkets.

David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking): I am sure everybody here has public meetings with retailers. Get in a Marks & Spencers and your problems are solved. That is not possible. The viability of schemes. Big redevelopments. Certainly in Barking land value is difficult. Residential is actually difficult to do without some council involvement at the moment. An actual supermarket scheme which did deliver a lot of public realm improvements linking it will really improve footfall to the town centre.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): We heard at the last meeting from Westfield that the future of town centres and urban centres was really shopping malls.

David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking): Stratford City is 15 minutes away from us. We recognise we are not going to compete with that. The big leisure shops. People will go to that. Most of the footfall in Barking town centre is local. The growth points. We have got the highest birth rate in London. We have also got 6,000 new homes coming within the town centre. Barking Riverside another 10,000. This is where the growth is, where we can address the issues, but we cannot be complacent and assume everybody is going to go to Barking unless the quality of the facilities are there, the public realm, and all of those issues are addressed as well.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Useful. Thank you. Shall we skip over Steve?

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): I can echo everything that has been said. Given that we are talking about town centres in London it is hopefully safe to say that London always avoids the grand plan and whatever is thrown on it it rustles away from it. The two words that, for me, are key are responsiveness and evolution. What I find really strange about any conversation I hear about town centres is that it always seems to be a negative conversation about it is the downfall of the
town centre and it is all over for the town centre retail shopping experience. It is always a negative town centre regeneration is desperately required. Rather than saying town centres need to evolve. They always have done. Why do we need to freeze them or put them in aspic? The whole point of a town centre is that it evolved because I wanted to meet you and I wanted to trade something with you and we managed to trade things and we moved on.

My personal strongest view I would like to put forward is that we need to be much looser in our definition of town centres and allow them to evolve and respond. The best examples, the ones that everybody pins up and then tries to copy, are there simply because of alignment, points in time, where someone who did something truly innovative made something happen and was responsive. That is how we should work to transform every town centre.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): You are working in many town centres are you not, all over in London?

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): Yes. Lots in London, yes, but also outside of London.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Can you just name the ones you are working on in London?

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): Currently we are working in Croydon, which has been lovely, east Croydon. We are working in Clapham. Clapham High Street. We have just completed the Clapham Library building which has started to become a pin up of mixed use successful private public partnerships (PPP) because it has delivered a very flexible civic room, more of a theatre than it is a library, a flexible hall, doctor’s surgery and one stop shop plus 136 apartments right in the middle of a very constrained high street site. We have been working in Ponders End. We have worked in the past in Harrow. We are working in Hayes transforming the old vinyl factory. At the moment we are working in Stratford. We are working in the London Borough of Newham. Canning Town. I could go on actually!

Nicky Gavron (Chair): It was more about the examples.

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): Examples. Clapham is a very good example because it shows to me the acceptance of the need to evolve and the need to be responsive which, for me, is the most underpinning thing of the conversation, and the need to be place specific. The only worry I have for Clapham is that it becomes a model and everybody goes and has a look at it and says, “Can we do one of these?” Because actually that is exactly the wrong thing to do if one buys into the argument of place specific strategies and responsiveness to a particular demographic, a particular moment in time and that is how anything successful really happens.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Good. Thank you. Elizabeth?
Elizabeth Cox (Head of Connected Economies, New Economics Foundation):
Picking up that idea of alignment, that distinctiveness and diversity, I think there is a need to align the spatial planning with the characteristics of the local economy that you are actually supporting. Whilst you may be filling the space with an entity, is that retail entity actually having a very positive impact on the overall local economy? When you are looking at these plans there is a need to understand the characteristics of that local economy that you are trying to support and get below the high level figures and say, “Is there a positive local economic multiplier happening as a result of this? Is there spending and respending back into the local economy?”

In aligning these strategies it is important to see that the high street is not separate from the wider local economy, it should reflect some of that dynamism and it should have different things on it, not just retail - which were some of the challenges with maybe the Portas inquiry and some of the suggestions that came out of that.

When you look at some interventions, particularly on high streets like Brixton where they have launched their Brixton pound, they have done some analysis with people using that pound to say how well is that spending/respending doing and it has come up with an LM3 local multiplier measure of 1.72 which means for every pound spent in those businesses there is another 72p going back into that local economy and people’s pockets. This becomes important when you are looking at the economy because what you might have is a very shiny street but it is a very fragile local economy, as we have seen with the recent closures.

Aligning and understanding the economic characteristics that you are trying to support and then making some judgements on how that space is filled is really important.

I would also add that environmental considerations should also be alongside that so that we start achieving some of our carbon reduction targets as well as what is populating that high street.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): That is very helpfull. This question is about diversification; retail and leisure - we had a bit on leisure and you have all talked about having a much more diverse approach - and also public services. Now we are watching public services being removed from town centres. We are seeing stations closing, offices being pulled out and so on. You mentioned, David West, a space which had a theatre. It also had public services in it too. How important do you think that is and what that contributes?

Elizabeth Cox (Head of Connected Economies, New Economics Foundation): It is very important. If you compare it to the impact that post office closures have, it is a vital service and it creates footfall for people within the area but also, when you are looking at a local economy, you would have to clarify what market are you serving and how much of that retail space or that social space is actually for people in the local area or are you trying to drag tourist footfall in. That is also going to affect the shape of what you offer in that high street and how that spending and respending might happen,
or not. Local services become really important, particularly when you are seeking to serve a local market.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** That is helpful. Helle, as we are going to have a presentation from you shortly, I will not come back to you on this one.

**Helle Soholt (Gehl Architects):** That is fine.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Are there any comments any of you want to make just on that diversification question, otherwise we will move on?

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** It may be something that was covered by the first session that you held but as someone who carried out a PhD in the late 1980s/early 1990s which was all about the threat and impact of regional shopping centres on the high street, the ghost towns that we faced then and the Government – Lord Nicholas Ridley, bless him, and others – saying, “How can we stop this? We cannot do it with the powers the Government has?” That was the threat of outer shopping. Now we are at the point where we are facing a seismic challenge to our high streets and town centres from internet shopping.

This was probably something that was talked about in the previous session but I do think we need to rip up the old models, the business models that the retailers operate – and we are seeing that now with HMV and others going out of business – the old models of how we approached town centres, what makes town centres work, the old formats of shops and large format retailing. It is very much about town centres having to be diverse. They cannot rely on retail alone. Those that do will die unless they are the large shopping malls that you mention.

Those that are diverse and have a range of offers and offer click and collect and show -- it is a bit like the Apple stores where you go in and you are entertained. There is a reason for going. It is about restoring town centres at the heart of communities, creating pride in your centres and making town centres a place you want to go to because that is your identity. When people say to you, “Where are you from?” you generally refer back to the town centre. When you say, “Shall we meet in the town centre?” it is normally around the public square or public realm. It is about making town centres more vital and viable but also places you actually want to go to, rather than places you would rather not be in, certainly in the evenings and during the day sometimes as well. That is the hardest thing; about changing perceptions of centres as well.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Do you want to come back?

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** I completely agree with that. It is important to really understand the dynamics because it takes us further. There is the threat of internet shopping so retail from floor space is declining. Also, as presumably John Burton [Development Director for Westfield] was
telling you that the only place is his malls, those destination retails are the one area that is expanding. What that means is you have got a double whammy in the traditional high street that the internet is sucking trade away and these destination retail units are sucking trade away.

Yes, we need to diversify but the reality is we have to manage the shrinkage of many of our town centres. It is particularly the case in London, if you look at the inner parts of London, when the population was much more dense that it is now, retail was quite intensive and it went along streets almost continuously and we still see the vestiges of that. We have never really managed the shrinkage of that and the concentration of that into centres. In some boroughs it is quite hard to discern the centres.

In the core strategy we produced in Tower Hamlets, when I worked there, part of it was identifying and creating those centres from rather disparate retail activity that was starting to shrink and self-manage into this concentration. We do need to bite that bullet because some of our centres are much bigger than they need to be now and we do need to understand what is happening in the marketplace and plan for that.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): That is a theme I want us to explore further. Before I bring in everyone else is there anything anyone wants to say on the role of public services within a town centre? Anyone else apart from Elizabeth?

David Harley (Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB Barking): Just one point on the location issues. Obviously councils are grappling with dealing with the issue of making savings. There is a contradiction. If you are looking at closing a site facility, ones that are in town centres are the more valuable sites but the ones that are outside town centres will not realise the value. We need to make sure that we are looking at how town centres are impacted by those decisions as well. It is not just which site gives you the best value for release.

Andrew Boff (AM): I wondered how much of the viability of town centres is down to planning policy and how much is down to day to day management?

Nicky Gavron (Chair): That is a good question.

Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow): There is a point around optimism and notional values. What is interesting from looking at areas where vacancy rates are rising or in some of the interactions that are taking place, or interventions to try to stop that, it is not a London example but High Wycombe has had a real issue about a new out of centre location opening. We spoke to them in Harrow because we have introduced a local development order to try to remove the perception of planning being a barrier to changes of use and the diversification of -- it was North Harrow centre itself.

Speaking to High Wycombe - and our experience follows theirs - it is not actually the local development order that makes any difference in the number of people who have
different uses; it is the sense that something is possible that was quite interesting. Nobody used the local development order that we created to do something that we would not have otherwise permitted but both in Harrow and in High Wycombe the sense was that by creating what was effectively an enterprise zone for retail - in our case we had leisure uses and GP uses, healthcare and so on - you change the art of what people think is going to happen, you change the sense of optimism about things moving forward and something happening.

That is a powerful piece that is not just about the barrier through policy of saying you can change from this to that or you can reduce the size of your town centre, but it is a very interesting issue about how businesses, who are the drivers of this peripheral diversity that creates local distinctiveness, perceive all of the complexity of the process as being something that is uncreative, deliberately containing and making places much more boring and less exciting as an opportunity. That is something that we will look at quite carefully - certainly we are looking at it in Harrow at an officer level - to see if we can stimulate edge places by using a perception of freedom. It is actually David’s point; it is the sense that there is an evolution and change is what you need to excite entrepreneurs and so on. A lot of our planning work disincentivises that behaviour because it is all very regulatory.

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): That is a very good answer to a very good question because it is actually tackling the cause which is the policy and management in a sense needs to be aligned in that positive way, which probably goes back to my point about town centres not declining but just evolving.

I remember being on the receiving end of a project in the London Borough of Newham called Meanwhile London and everyone seeing meanwhile as easy because it is temporary and therefore it is worthless. It is just temporary stuff. Actually meanwhile is worthwhile because meanwhile is what grows businesses and ideas and trials and makes coffee taste better and showcases new ideas. If one takes things like that and turns them into positives and says, “This is the way that things and places evolve” you can see how positives can spin out really really quickly. That is such an interesting answer.

Andrew Boff (AM): I am struck by the fact that, at the end of the day, we are talking about footfall. We want to encourage people to come to a certain place. To what extent does the planning encourage them to come to that place or do management encourage them to go to that place? I know both.

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): It is a mix of everything.

Andrew Boff (AM): It seems to be that we did have an awful lot of places that had been planned perfectly and completely unmanaged and then nobody went there. Tell me I am wrong?

Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives): That goes to the heart of what we said about having visions and strategies for centres that are all
inclusive. The centres where I have worked where they have delivered things and delivered it well is where you have had strong leadership from the top but also at all levels across planning. You have engaged with the businesses, local stakeholders and the community, you have had a buy in to a vision for the centre -- that might be a 20 year vision but it is flexible and changes, there is an option B and an option Z. It is not about the big bank development; it is about the smaller things. It is about public realm. It is about town centre management that makes it work and town centre managers working with the council, rather than against them, working with local businesses, rather than against them. Everybody being enthused and empowered about where they live.

At the heart of it though, you have got to have a commercially viable centre and you have got to know what makes that centre viable. Not every centre can be a shopping mall. Not every centre will attract a food store. Not every centre can have a street market or independent boutique shops and specialist shops. They have to fit in with their local communities. They have to work with other communities.

Andrew Boff (AM): Is the solution not really easy; just increase footfall? Is that not it?

Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives): It does not follow. You have to understand where your centre sits -- particularly in London where it is such a dense hierarchy. Where does your centre sit? You cannot expect to compete with the larger malls. You have to offer something different, be it value led - which might be viable - be it street markets, be it independent destination shops, be it antiques, be it whatever makes your centre work. That is the thing. What is the unique selling proposition (USP) for your centre? Not every centre can be the same because, if they are, they will fail.

Policy is also about managing for decline and I do not think enough local authorities are bold enough or brave enough to actually say, “This neighbourhood centre, this street centre, these secondary streets, are failing and we need to change them back to residential and make a more consolidated compact prime shopping area.” If we do not do this the whole centre is going to fail because you are going to have voids, run down areas and buildings that are falling down and it will just detract from the rest of the centre.

It is not about managing just for growth and promoting centres; it is also biting the bullet and saying, “These centres are failing what do we do? How do we turn back?”

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Do you agree with what Dave West was saying that it is not so much about framing it, which is the way I have framed it and we all frame it, which is about managing decline or hitting the buffers? Would you say it is more about evolution? The next question is very germane to this. You have talked about shrinking centres, how to make the centres smaller and so on. It is a question about residential. It might be a good idea to get on to that now and see what we think. Many of you
touched on increasing the number of residential accommodation. That of course helps footfall, and it builds up consumption.

**Navin Shah (Deputy Chair):** Chair, given the issues and pressures we have been talking about with evolving town centres or town centres reinventing, should local operators seek to increase the residential complement of town centres or is there a case for shrinking the residential complement in the town centres?

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Shrinking the residential?

**Navin Shah (Deputy Chair):** Yes. Even that. Westfield talked about having urban retail shopping malls and nothing else. You have other examples - Brent Cross Cricklewood. If residential development did not go ahead that is what we are looking at. The question is what should the role of housing actually be within the new town centre thinking? Whether it should increase?

Also I would like to raise issues about affordable housing. Whilst those centres lend themselves to sustainability in a big way to provide socially affordable housing, often we are told that there is not a business case because of pressure to provide other facilities. David, would you like to comment first?

**David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West):** I am a very strong believer in mixed use and a very strong believer in raising residential density as long as it is done with the knowledge of the potential impact on the community that it is arriving in and the knowledge of the need to increase services and public facilities in the community that is arriving in. Whether that is considering further education facilities, creche facilities, play spaces, amenity spaces, flexible halls etc.

My straightforward answer to the question is, I could reel of half a dozen examples of where urbanisation and increased residential density is what helps sustain and increase footfall to some services. As importantly, it gives a good slosh of cash back into the project, which is a very blunt thing to say, but our Clapham project would not have happened without the 136 apartments that danced their way on the top of it. It was paid for almost entirely by the 136 apartments and it will be sustained by the 136 apartments. One really does not work without the other.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Was that a Wandsworth initiative?

**David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West):** That is Lambeth.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** A Lambeth council issue.

**David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West):** In exactly the same way the site on the other side of the road, all part of what is called the Future Clapham Project, is a leisure centre across sports and a pool and, again, another 100 homes. All
affordable. That nicely balanced mixed use compact thing right at the heart of the high street infects the high street with more people, more energy and more life.

It has also meant - because I live there - that the catchment of the school behind my house has gone from 450 metres to 200 metres in one year. A lot of the people will be pretty upset about that I am sure when they realise, next year, what happened to the catchment. It is not an easy answer that residential solves everything; it just means you have to be quite careful about the impact that density shift, particularly in our more suburban centres, is actually going to have.

Nick Lynch (Planning Policy (LDF) Manager, Planning, Housing and Regeneration, LB of Barnet): Residential, as I said earlier, plays a key part in delivering housing. We expect 1,200 new homes by 2026 which is probably a smaller number in comparison with the regeneration of Brent Cross- Cricklewood, Colindale and Mill Hill East which will produce around 18,000 units. We see the opportunities are there for mixed use development and residential, but we are also realistic in terms of the type of housing that town centre development can provide. By its very nature it tends to be high density and provide accommodation for people who want to be closer to services, jobs and public transport and enjoy an urban lifestyle. Our view in Barnet is that town centre residential is not suitable accommodation for families but we recognise it is attractive to young and old in terms of accommodation.

We do have concerns about whether town centre living is going to create a more transient population with restricted opportunities for them to stay within the area because of the dominance of flats and the price gap between town centre housing and larger family accommodation. It is important that we do not create islands of high density housing in our boroughs. It is important that we look at how the relationship between the town centre and the surrounding community can develop.

Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon): It is not a panacea but, God, does it give you an awful lot of bangs for your bucks I think. Certainly that is our view in Croydon. Your town centres, particularly a large town centre like Croydon, has got a phenomenal amount of investment already there in infrastructure, not just rail and buses, and it enables you to sweat those assets. With a relatively modest amount of additional investment you can bring forward housing that is quite intrinsically sustainable, well connected and it has good services close to it. It can also bring what I would call much more structural solutions to some of the anti-social problems you get in town centres. If you do bring a large residential population in there then the vertical drinking culture etc becomes less attractive to the market. You have got people there much more regularly spending greater sums of money and you can work with the market to structurally solve those problems, rather than just put the policing sticky plaster over it every Friday and Saturday night. We cannot ignore it in the context of London’s housing problems. There is huge capacity to expand many of our town centres and we have to seize that.
Certainly in Croydon we have done quite a lot of very detailed work in trying to optimise the amount of family housing that we can get within our town centre. I do not think it is the case that you cannot get any but you can get some, there are approaches to the housing typologies and the way you provide them that you can get some family housing. I am not talking about putting families in tower blocks. We are talking about high quality family housing within our town centres. You do need to do that detailed work to understand what is possible on the various sites that you have within a town centre.

**Navin Shah (Deputy Chair):** You mentioned family sized housing. Is that affordable? What proportion of that is affordable?

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** The affordable element is a different question. Yes, some of that family housing will have to be affordable.

**Navin Shah (Deputy Chair):** Are we looking at a tiny proportion or a larger proportion?

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** The way we have approached it in Croydon is that there are parts with very little capacity to provide family housing and then others that have got greater capacity. It is about the design of those buildings. We then have our policies that are designed to deliver affordable housing as a proportion of that and we seek to optimise that. I can go into it but it will take time. We have got a sophisticated and complex policy that seems to optimise that and has claw back clauses as well. We seek to optimise the amount of affordable housing that we can get. That affordable housing has to meet housing need. We are trying to cross the borough to get 55%, maybe 60%, family housing but there will be less in the town centre than there will be outside of the town centre. Overall we seek to meet our needs.

**Steve O'Connell (AM):** Not really surprising on the Croydon aspect because that merit speaks for itself. Going back to Steve’s comments and district centres as opposed to the larger town centres, I was interested in your point around perhaps looking at increased residential where there is a decline in district centres. I visit many district centres and I get lobbied often by residents who are uncomfortable that, although they are seeing shops closing and voids, they are uncomfortable with planning applications coming in to replace them by flats and houses and not shops. How do you counter that with your earlier premise? Anybody? Steve perhaps?

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** It goes again about understanding the centre and how it has evolved over time. Is it a district centre that can be recovered? Again, it is market interest. Is there market interest in it or can you stimulate market interest? You only know that by speaking to retailers, businesses
and operators. Does it have the necessary catchment to support the retail that it had previously or has that catchment changed or going elsewhere? Can you, realistically, claw it back? It is really understanding how that centre functions within the hierarchy of centres that it might be competing against. It might be that there are lots of similar centres nearby that do what that centre tried to do and did well previously but do it a lot better now.

Then from that you have to take people with you. The key thing - I will keep going back to it probably during this - is about involving the community, engaging with stakeholders, and making them understand that the centre they have now is very different from the centre they maybe knew 20 years ago because of various reasons and things are changing. Within that, to say, “Yes, we are losing retailers on the fringes and there are voids, but actually the new residential is bringing more people into your centre and is creating more vitality and viability because it is creating footfall along your street. It is creating more day to day footfall than you have got at the moment so your catchment population you are kind of in-filling.”

It applies to the question about residential. Yes, you should have more residential in town centres because it goes to the heart of sustainable development, mixed use, vitality and viability. Yes, you have to have residential --

Nicky Gavron (Chair): This point about sweating assets. The bigger the centre the more you are likely to have the infrastructure and a smaller district centre might not have the supporting infrastructure for more residential? I am just thinking on my feet but what do you think?

Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon): They probably will not have the capacity for the growth. It is generally proportional. They will at least have maybe a railway station and other connectivity.

Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow): There is a point in dealing with the challenge of trying to gain consent for change. Two things are obviously happening. One of them is that most London boroughs are developing a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) at this moment in time to complement the Mayor’s CIL. One of the associated activities that goes with a CIL is developing a coherent long term infrastructure plan, which in many ways is where an awful lot of the lack of confidence comes from about change, and David’s point about catchments shrinking and so on. There is an associated discussion then with the community which is about how do you want us to respond to these challenges and what can development bring?

As Navin knows, we have had a lot of discussions about growth and is it good or bad and so on in Harrow. What we have done in the Council is try to set out the conversation that says, “Actually by engaging in growth and by engaging as part of London, associated benefits can come with it” and try to build the confidence that this change can be delivered in collaboration with communities.
The point about residential and town centres is it then starts to focus you on the edges quite heavily because certainly, in our context and probably in most other outer London boroughs, residential is a driver of value. It creates values. It is what you then do with that and how you understand what you are doing to your town centres by bringing residential people in close proximity. The higher density living that is really best placed in and on the edges has with it associated requirements; for good high quality green space or open space, for investment in parks, investment in some of the transport infrastructure and public realm because you are sweating that harder and you are asking people to live their lives in a very much higher density state. Of course there is no surprise that successful European cities - I have examples if you want to hear about that - in utilising people because of proximity to create a more vibrant town centre are not doing it half-heartedly. They are putting in the investment in public realm spaces and joining that up with transport and so on.

The sums are not significant are they, but the CIL and the discipline of local authorities and the public sector working together to plan for long term infrastructure is, potentially, the way of brokering that conversation more effectively and being confident about that.

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): May I add one sentence on to that? A project we did once in the London Borough of Enfield was called a Framework for Growth. By the time we had done two consultations it had transformed into a Framework for Change. I say this very specifically because it is the only time I have ever been involved in a framework for change and it is actually the only time I have heard the three words together in London.

The whole point of the project, which I really think is a very admirable project, was to take a point in time, called 2010/11, where there was a stakeholder over here talking about an academy maybe floating and landing down, a stakeholder over here saying, “Gosh, there’s half a dozen housing applications in to transform high street retail into housing” and there were five other stakeholders all with very, very different and quite competing aspirations. Our job was not to do a fixed blueprint of a master plan, it was simply to create the lightest of touch frameworks for change that could be consulted upon very, very quickly. A very, very light touch so everybody knew the direction that their specific place - called Ponders End - was going.

It was amazing. I thought there was going to be a rash of framework for changes going across London after that and I do not think there has been a single other one. However, for me, it was the lightest of touches of ways of bringing people together and helping shape a place to know where it was heading.

Frankly, it sounds like exactly the same thing is the strategic infrastructure plan that maybe different boroughs and wards need to have.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Thank you for that. If no one has any more points on residential -- we will come back to residential when we start looking at instruments and
powers and ways of incentivising. Helle, the next question is going to be on the public realm. If you could preface that by giving us a flavour of the work that you do on public realm and regeneration?

**Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects):** Thank you very much, Chair. There are not a lot of examples that I can show in a short period of time here but just to say that, for me, town centres really are about the life that takes place within them. It is not just form in terms of buildings, spaces, functionality and so forth, it is really about how we live our lives, how we work and how we shop. We are attracted to other people. We are attracted to other activities. The town centres and cities that manage to attract people, footfall and activities are also successful in attracting businesses and commercial activities and so forth. Really it is about people.

We are in a paradigm shift of planning in this period of time in the world I would say. We do not know enough about what type of physical form actually supports people. There is not a lot of research in that area. There is not a lot of knowledge necessarily. We do need to talk about how to manage incremental change. That is a model for change that my company is advising cities on, not necessarily to do the fixed master plans as we have talked about, but managing incremental change which means understanding what is happening now and who comes. The second question, what is needed and who can we invite? Then, third, how do we measure what works? Really trying to see how that process can work.

To me it is not only about creating diversity but it is about arriving at a set of new qualities that we can use to guide us in the physical development of our town centres. It is about proximity between the way that we move around, the fact that we can cycle or walk to work or to school with our kids and so forth, the fact that there are destinations to go to and a proximity of different uses in the town centre. Diversity is about diversity of uses and types of activities, but also the types of activities that are happening within the year, within the week and within the day. Flexibility, not least as we have talked about, that things can change, that there is an adaptable use of the spaces and we can go from a building being commercial for it to be homes. The built form itself needs to be flexible so that you can pull out the building and build something new. Also work with different types of typologies. We need to arrive at a set of quality elements that we can use in our discussions and evaluations of the built form.

Now, ultimately, it is of course about density but not necessarily about tallness of buildings, not necessarily arriving at one tall tower solution that can fit all types of people in them. It is about a compactness of city form that can also arrive at a liveliness of the public spaces. When we look at London it is in the middle of a couple of examples that I would like to talk about today which is Melbourne. I would like to show examples also from New York, Seattle, Vancouver and other places where we have worked.
Starting with a very classical example in terms of understanding compactness is of course the European city Barcelona. It has a super high density. One of the densest cities in Europe. It is not tall in terms of tall towers but it is compact in terms of a very, very dense urban form. That does not necessarily mean that the public spaces are crammed and dark and dull because once you arrive down between the buildings the spaces are actually very, very nice, they have a human scale to them and so forth.

Now for many reasons Spain is not a good example and a reference for us right now in terms of economics, but I would still argue that the urban form, the compactness and liveliness of cities like Barcelona is absolutely admirable.

Turning to some instruments and examples of what other cities have done, we have worked very closely with Melbourne for a period of 15 years. Melbourne could maybe be similar to some of your town centres. It has a traditional business core and a suburban sea of houses around the centre. In Melbourne there are about four million inhabitants. Now about 20 or 30 years ago the city centre was empty and it was useless. It was called a doughnut city because it was only offices downtown, nothing was really happening and when you read the papers it would say things like, “If you want shops as good as Paris and Milan and food halls as good as in London or apartments as good as New York there is really one thing to do and that is to leave Melbourne”. That was the sense of crisis at the time.

Now Melbourne has worked very had for the last 25 years to go from a mono-functional city centre to a multi-functional city centre, really transforming the city into a mixed use place. One of the elements has been adding more housing. At the time in 1983 there was very, very little housing, as you can see here, and there was no real mass of people who could support shops and things like that. They lowered the tax level in order to get developers in and they added housing on top of the existing building stock. Over the course of the next 20/30 years there was a lot of housing that has been transformed and built on top of the buildings so today there is a critical mass of people that can now use shops, offices and so forth. They have not increased the public realm or the infrastructure in terms of roads but simply added to the density of people.

Sidewalks have been increased and widened, and everything has been paved with the natural bluestone that is local to the area. Very, very nice. Public realm developments that have been done at the same time so now you have this Parisian almost feeling in Melbourne when you go there today. The streets have been greened with planting 500 trees per year, which is very important in a very hot climate as you know in Melbourne.

Also there was a hidden resource in terms of all the little traditional streets and laneways, as we know them from other cities as well. Today there is more than four kilometres of small laneways that have been transformed into wonderful public spaces, wonderful human scale environments with no traffic. This is how they used to look; empty, not feeling safe and not welcoming at all. Everything has been opened up and transformed into a wonderful people environment.
There is also a fine grainness and a lot of different activities that are happening, also an arts programme. Instead of building an art museum in Melbourne they have actually said, “No, the public spaces need to work as our museum of modern art” so a lot of changing activities are happening within the streets.

Just an example in activities and shops. You can see that the number of shops and cafes have gone up a lot over the years and this is just one type of commercial activity you could say. Really when you look at the numbers, retail has gone up, residential has gone up, office vacancies have gone down, employment up, bars and pubs up and so forth.

This could be one model that you could choose. Melbourne is trying to densify also the activity centres, or the sub centres, the suburban cores or the type of town centres that we are debating today. They also have those types of centres but at a very low density and they are now looking into how to densify those areas to become much more urban. Again, not choosing necessarily a tall building model but this compact city model, arriving at a mid rise steel city but of mixed use, as you were saying, David.

We have also been working with New York and the Department of Transportation for the past 5/6 years. Some of you might know the public realm work that has been done at Manhattan and other boroughs. Times Square being the most well known example. This is how the square looked earlier. In fact there was no square. There was a place that we all knew and that has now been transformed into a place for people.

Again, using this incremental approach and methodology we surveyed the effects of this model as a temporary project, you could say, and interestingly a 40% decrease in pedestrian injuries because there is now more space for people, we have 84% more people spending time in the area, and also 42% of New Yorkers shop more often in the area. When we look at Manhattan, in general the commercial activities have gone down and suffered in the financial crisis, however, the areas that have been supported by these pilot projects have gone up. Also, again, there is a larger percentage of people now saying that Times Square and the other spaces that have been developed have improved dramatically. It is not even due to new buildings or Chinese granite or nice landscaping designs, but really the change of configuration of space inviting more people to spend time.

I just wanted to close by mentioning Vancouver and Seattle as a couple of cities that are using these same models of providing public spaces of high quality, walkways and densifying the city centres. As a proof of this paradigm shift of planning that I was mentioning, I think you all know the United States (US) paradigm of mobility focusing a lot on the car and the types of things that they built in the 1960s were very much the type of infrastructure landmarks that you see in these images; the super highways and the viaducts where people are very, very tiny and very, very small, if not disappearing in these types of environments. Those barriers are now being taken down. We have done some analysis and proven that we can take this down, we can provide public spaces of
high quality, new types of art programmes are coming in and the cities are densifying their cores, taking down and reconnecting these types of downtown neighbourhoods.

You know the Vancouver model of having the towers in the middle and having a mid rise block around it still aiming at a people scale or human scale environment and type of densification coming in.

I would argue that we need to have a split strategy when we look at the town centres. We need to look at and understand the hardware of things, the proximity, how to arrive at density and diversity with a focus on flexibility and adapted use. The types of public spaces are hugely important when we want to talk about quality of life when we all need to live closer and live urbanly. The landscaping in it. Infrastructure and mobility is of course important. Also the whole software which is about how do we build a culture of urban living? How do we invite people to live in different ways in the future? How do we programme and manage and how do we make sure that there is a mix of activities? It is not just about the physicality of the materials but how the place is run. It is about process, it is about temporary use and it is about understanding the city as an organism.

Then of course it is about how do we support the organisations that are delivering it, the civil society, the city leaders, not just the planner and the cities but actually the local people that want to take leadership and support the type of partnerships that we can build this on?

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Very good. Thank you very, very much for that. That really, really was excellent.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** On that note what can planning policy and town centre management do to provide a good quality of public realm and active welcoming town centres? There are a number of developments happening in London at the moment which are seeking to make these centres attractive. The one nearest me is Dalston. Not a lot of green space. Transport for London (TfL) has a planning application in that is going to not utilise the green space to provide public green space that could be provided. For me it is quite current at the moment. How can we provide that public realm and make them welcoming places?

**Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects):** With the examples that I tried to show here, public space does not need to be a lot of space. Public spaces also can absolutely be quality space within a compact city model where you arrive at high densities of mixed uses but then still make sure that the building’s land is in an environment where they are ---- and, frankly, where there are a lot of activities at ground floor. No long and blank façades. Lots of details that can entice people, make people feel safe and welcome, and feel that they are walking in a very interesting environment for them.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** We are talking about developing residential developments, for example, around town centres. There is a temptation amongst developers to create
gated communities and effectively seal off the inhabitants from the community that is around them. Is that an approach you have seen in your experience around the world?

**Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects):** Yes. Unfortunately I would say it is something that we see a lot. I do think in Europe though that we have some very good examples of residential typology where you can do it in a more clever way. For example, you maybe have a type of block with a semi-private courtyard space which could be locked off where people can still use that space as a community type space, but the buildings are open to the public and engage with an on-street environment. Not with a gate but with the actual building coming down to establish and form the public space. We do need to have edges in public spaces. Spaces do not float around between gates and fences. Spaces are defined by buildings. We do need the buildings to actually come all the way out to activate the spaces. When we do build residential in the town centres and in urban areas, I do think it is very important that we think about how the ground floor of that residential building could have other types of uses potentially to enliven the public space.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** How about green space? How important is green space? We always think green is further away from the town centre. How important is green space?

**David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking):** In Barking town centre we are starting to get known for good quality design and in the town centre we have built an arboretum of mature trees. Part of that was what the people want to see in the town centre and lack of greenery was an issue. We have created this little oasis between two quite tall residential blocks. Really green dense trees. All different colours and different shades. That has really been a well received popular public space.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** How do you resist the pressure, bearing in mind what the land values are in town centres, to develop those potential green spaces?

**David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking):** It is very high density all the way round. Actually it looks pretty big when you are standing there, but when you look at a floor plan of all the area you have not used a great deal of land. It is more effective planning and design of that space and creating it --

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** It is not much bigger than this room is it?

**David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking):** It is not really but when you are there -- I can show you pictures. It really is well received.
**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** It goes back to having a strategy for your centre at the outset which is not just about development of plots of land for building, it is about how you balance that with the green space as well and the provision of services. If you have got a very well thought - and I will go on about this - out vision and strategy for your centre and a financial master plan which then says, when applications come in, “We’re going to take developer contributions to pay for public realm”. It is all well and good planning for these kinds of things and they all look very nice on paper. Who is funding it and who is managing it once it is built? That has got to come from having a very clear steer, and funding, that comes from the private public sector to make sure that you have viable public realm as well as viable development occurring in your town centre. Otherwise you end up with nothing.

We have done some work recently in Hackney on Dalston and Hackney Central - area action plans for those centres - which have been tested. We tested the robustness of those. That was very much about balancing development with public realm. You cannot compromise on it. You have got to get buy-in to it. From the outset you have got to have a vision as to how your centre is going to look because you cannot feel your way through the murk because the market will shift so dramatically.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** What do you do about future-proofing these plans? I sometimes think that architects tend to do designs on the basis of, “That is the plan, that is how people are going to live and that is how they will always live”. How do you plan for these places to evolve beyond your initial plans? How do you plan to build in for the kinds of events that might take place there? The future innovations that might take place? A shop may turn into a meeting room which may turn into … How do you do that?

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** Just as your town centre evolves your visions -- I said at the start master plans are done and they are not delivered because they never have an Option B and they just collect dust. It has to be a flexible document and you have to evolve as it evolves. Again, we are sitting at this seismic time where nobody really knows where internet shopping is going. People are forecasting it is going to do X, Y and Z. The people forecasting it, with the greatest of respect, are over a certain age who do not know the minds of the next generation coming through that are being brought up, almost from the bottle, on using tablets, iPhones, computers. They know it. They do it at school from a very young age. I know, I have got young kids. They are not brought up on the traditional high streets that we were brought up on. They are being brought up in a very different world where the high street to them may not be relevant to the world that they live in. It is about how do you connect it and make it relevant to generations.

Again, do not, when you consult on things, just engage with people of a certain age. Engage with the schools and engage with the kids. How do they see their town centres evolving? There is going to be a big gap otherwise in terms of what we offer.
Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow): There is an issue. On one level the answer is in a way relax. I think somebody mentioned earlier on planners are guilty of trying to plan everything. Cities did not evolve by planners. They evolved by enterprise and innovation. There are certain parameters we need to set --

Andrew Boff (AM): I was brought up in west London, in Uxbridge, and there is a conservation area in Uxbridge. You could not build the conservation area now. It would all be condemned. Half the places were not built with a toilet. That is the irony of it; those places we treasure were completely unplanned.

Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow): There are some components of -- it is a bit like those time frame photographs that you see with lots of people rushing around public spaces. Certain things in those public spaces frame that whole preformed chaos. I think we are not used to that. The UK planning system, the Mayor, the local authorities, the regulation and the umpteen sets of plans and versions are not used to that, “Hang on a second. We relax a little bit about this but we understand [and this is the important piece] the assets we have got and what drives those behaviours”. Helle’s presentation was about spaces but also the interactions of those spaces.

We have done some work in Harrow about the function of different parts of the town centre and tried to use developers to say, “Can we make more of that, turn that up, because we think that is what we are missing, it is not part of what we have got?” Actually the land uses -- when I first arrived in Harrow we looked at the policy and it said this. There is a really good example of a guy who is running an independent cafe in our town centre who puts some tables and chairs out. Now that was against our policy. The policy said, “There is more than 5% and Costa were next door and Nero and so on”. You had an independent enterprise. The appeal was dismissed and so on.

When we were doing the area action plan we said that is the wrong approach. Does this development contribute to life in the town centre? We have drafted our policies quite deliberately to be less organised, much more flexible and actually change the culture of the teams who implement those polices and work with members to say it is about --

Andrew Boff (AM): Do they want a job in Hackney?!

Navin Shah (Deputy Chair): I want to come to the Mayor’s Outer London Fund which, as you know, is aimed at focusing and helping those town centres with regeneration and public realm etc. The question I have is something I always wondered. Do you see this as a short term fix, rather than tackling also long term regeneration issues of whatever local problems you have with town centres?

David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking): We had money in both round one and round two of the Mayor’s Outer London Fund for Barking. Very much round one was the short term fixes with very
limited time to deliver a project and it was very much boosting trade, again, footfalling. We did spend it on events and things like that.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** How much was it?

**David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking):** The first round we secured £650,000 which also went for some public realm improvements we were doing outside the station which is the longer term stuff. Some design work as well.

Then on the second round we got £1.2 million and that is doing things like the public realm outside this skill centre I referred to, which is making sure all the 650 students and 100 staff, walk in access into the street market and the areas there, and make the rural environment really good high quality. Also addressing things like shutters and shop front improvements and doing issues like that.

It is a bit of both. Really we did need it. We did need that short term boost when everybody was feeling down after the recession and it did help make people come together actually. It is amazing how much a funding source can bring stakeholders together to try to get that money. That was very useful. Yes, addressing the long term stuff.

I think the Outer London Fund is good in that it does let local people decide what is best to create growth so, in that sense, that is very welcome and we think it will really boost town centre trade.

**Navin Shah (Deputy Chair):** Do you have any in Croydon?

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** As important as those bits of money are, unless they are part of an ongoing strategic approach to resolving those problems, I think there is a danger that they will have an impact, it may be a great impact, but it is in danger of fizzling out.

In Croydon we developed a programme really of projects that flow out of our master plans, our core strategy, and our opportunity area planning framework called Connected Croydon which is about focusing on the public realm accessibility and permeability within Croydon. We have got quite a bit of work to do to fix some of the interventions in the 1960s that were worshipping the car. Now have a legacy of things like Wellesley Road which is a barrier through the town centre and we are starting to put in crossings. It is part of a ongoing programme that is just looking forward and keeps rolling forward in order to create that public realm that is necessary to support the other work that we are trying to do.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** I do not know if I am jumping ahead. We have all been very happy to see the Outer London Fund money being spent but there is a sense in which it replaced the previous Mayor’s 100 Town Squares programmes where we saw
some very dramatic transformations. The centre of Brixton. I was going to say that as a policy instrument, the Outer London Fund is very good but it lacked the mobilisation of Transport for London resources, not just money but the reshaping of red route space and the longer term component. There was something quite short term about the Outer London Fund whereas the 100 Public Squares programme actually was aimed at multi-functional transformation of public spaces. Would you prefer to see a policy instrument that was bringing more than just some cash to the table but deploying very grand thinking about the use of the public realm pavements and that?

David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking): TfL obviously have got a lot more resources than the Outer London Fund in totality and their focus on town centres is important. Interestingly our round one did tie with a TfL project so we were linked up there and used that. Probably the 100 Public Spaces did not quite have the emphasis on the economic outputs.

Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM): That is interesting because I think my perception - and this is not quantified - is that that public realm project in the centre of Brixton has had more of a profound effect on the local shops. The Brixon village, the old market centre, which was derelict really and they were trying to sell it off to knock it down, is now a fantastic venue for start up restaurants etc etc. It has had an economic benefit which was not actually predicted or anticipated.

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): It is all about the place in time. I competed for the public space in Brixton town square ten years ago. It is only in the last two/three years when it was completed, after seven years of sign, structure and change, that one can really sense the change in Brixton. I think the Outer London Fund deserves that same time to see its implication.

For example, we are working in Bromley at the moment which has received two sets of Outer London funding. Very similarly the first one was mainly about events and gentle change. The second tranche is actually being used as a tool to really work a public private partnership for the entire town centre; upper, middle and lower sections. A lot of which is to do with reprogramming spaces, event spaces, destination making, rebranding - the full works. The pounds that have been given through the Outer London Fund are being, I think, quite wisely spent and doubling, if not tripling, their impact through public private partnership.

I personally think both programmes have been very successful and just the level of understanding in most local authorities in terms of their regeneration teams or their town centre teams has grown in knowledge from the first programme to the second programme. Transport for London, Design for London and the GLA design officers and transport officers are almost always at the table, whether they are meant to be or not. There is just this level of joined-up thinking that is actually taking place. That is my experience.
Andrew Boff (AM): On that, I have got a different experience of the 100 Squares. You look at Gillett Square in Dalston it is a great place for street drinkers. A lot of money went in there. Possibly there was a disconnection between what the actual local community wanted but the enthusiasm to improve. How do we ensure we get the maximum out of that money? What can we learn from? What mistakes have we made in the past that we can learn from about getting the maximum out of the Outer London Fund? We have been used, for decades, to seeing great chunks of money being thrown at certain areas and not getting anything back from it. What should we watch out for?

Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow): From my perception in places like Harrow we are not massively resourced as organisations to engage in funding programmes. Therefore, the Mayor’s Great Spaces project we did not have any projects because we just did not have the resources to sit behind it.

One of the great things about the Outer London Fund (OLF) or, indeed, the Local Implementation Plan (LIP) programme, TfL capital programme, has been, certainly from my perspective, the opportunity to put people in rooms within the GLA family to share an agenda and at least understand where that is coming from. There is a piece about alignment.

What is difficult for us, as a local authority - and we try to work as closely as we can with the GLA family - is some sense of resilience to a programme that runs through. A bit like LIP funding. There is a structure and a degree of resilience to it. At the end of OLF2, which we are on at the moment, we would like to think that we can continue to think through a programme of progressive delivery in partnership using TfL, and the Mayor’s office and Design for London with ourselves to tell a story to the development industry that this is a programme and that actually it requires them to see that but also have the confidence to participate.

A slight problem with OLF and stop/start funding for outer London boroughs like ourselves - we do not have core funding that we can draw in perhaps to the same degree as others - is that it takes us a while to get going. We do not have lots of inhouse resource and it takes us a time to communicate that across both our internal organisation but also to working with our developer partners and get them excited and see things happening not all in a rush - because time limited and so on - but actually as part of a journey of progressive evolution. That is what, if you have not got lots of resources, takes a bit longer.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Are there any other funding streams, priorities or initiatives that the Mayor could bring to bear on town centres? The second part of the question is what sort of fiscal measures should there be? Let us start. You have talked about LIPs. You have talked about the Outer London Fund. You have talked about Design for London. What other instruments has the Mayor got that he could bring to bear on town centres? Should he reprioritise some of his funding streams?
Elizabeth Cox (Head of Connected Economies, New Economics Foundation):
One thing that has come out of some of the conversations -- we have been talking about local authorities and planning, and we have been talking about business and residents as if they just populate some of that space. In the presentation, who is making the decisions and who is in control is also important. Bringing people along with you not in consultation but making active decisions about the places where they live is also important. There are examples. We have worked in Brentford and Malvern using an adapted American process from Main Street reimagining the high streets. People form groups, they make decisions about the design, the local economy, how they can strengthen it and then try to, with the local authority, develop those plans. Importantly then, they are taking action and they understand the consequences of their own choices that they are making to make the public realm work for them and make the local economy work for them.

So the who is in control and actually putting residents alongside businesses and the local authority is really important - and funding to allow that to happen. It assumes everyone has free time and can volunteer. There is coordination. It is the bit that does not get funded or you just do it as a consultation.

The process of involvement and engagement and one that encourages experimentation, rather than the perfect plan. If it is going to emerge then you have to test things, so how can you build in that flexibility to the way we work saying, “It is OK to fail but have a go”. Some of that funding can allow some of that experimentation to trial new ideas.

Steve O’Connell (AM): That is a very good point. On the first point on the OLF particularly - I cannot speak for the previous Mayor’s schemes - does very much involve residents and businesses. I am going to miss tonight at 6pm a meeting in Worcester Park that addresses OLF money through the North Cheam area. That is a succession of meetings with businesses, the council and residents shaping how that investment is - which is a point well made. Perhaps lessons have been learned over successive Mayors as a better way to deploy funding. There are probably better ways indeed but it is improving, in my mind.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): You are all economists so you know about these things. Are there other fiscal measures that should be asked for to help town centres?

Elizabeth Cox (Head of Connected Economies, New Economics Foundation):
There are some questions around the business rate and the use of the business rate that I am sure my colleagues over here will have some ideas about. Also how they are applied and is there any way to think about the business rates to be applied in a way that those enterprises that invest back into their area, that have very strong supply chains and employ local people, in some way it is recognised the value that they are contributing and those that do not. There is some kind of levy based on them for that disbenefit that they are creating as well as the other positive sides.
David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking): Business rates are going to be a big issue because, interestingly, over the last few years, whenever you had a public meeting with retailers, they all thought the council set the business rates. We have had that issue. You always have to explain it was the Government that set it and we collected it. Suddenly people do know that soon it is going to be councils that will have more control. We cannot, unfortunately -- because we would have loved to have put things up for uses we did not want and maybe look at those. We can offer incentives but not put things up. There is a risk that boroughs may be doing a bit of competition between each other and that might be an issue that the Mayor needs to look at.

The issue about incentives and reducing business rates - a major step that. Having no economic benefit for London as a whole but businesses moving round to get those benefits if boroughs were to do that. Most boroughs probably will not be able to afford it but we will be able to offer incentives.

Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon): I was just reflecting on Valerie’s question about the Mayor’s 100 Great Places - and Wellesley Road was one of those - and the Outer London Fund and the contrast between the two. The problem with the Mayor’s Great Places was that it was a fantastic idea, very visionary, but for Croydon it was a grand project for which there was no budget. Whilst we tried to bring that forward there was no real confidence that the very expensive price of that was going to be found. What we did was to break that up into a series of phases of early wins of more detail in the final project. By doing that we were then ready when the Mayor’s various funding, both the Outer London Fund and the Riot Recovery Fund, was available. We had those projects up and ready to go ahead. It is important about being realistic in terms of the funding envelope, whatever pockets make up that funding envelope, because otherwise you just raise expectations and nothing happens.

The important point that I do not think has been discussed yet -- and it is something we have grappled with in Croydon because we made investment in the past but because we never really thought through the maintenance of those areas of public realm they relatively quickly deteriorated and the good was lost. We are continually working on changing the way we procure our projects, both from a design point of view, that our maintenance people are there as part of the design input so that we produce public realm that is beautiful, does work and does what it needs to do but also can be maintained, kept clean etc.

Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM): The business plan will increase the public realm. That is an obvious point really.

Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon): It is more complicated than that. You do need to get the maintenance as part of the design input.
**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** It has got to be put in at the beginning. We had a whole --

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** Yes. It is about being realistic about what you can actually deliver as a maintenance programme.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** It should be part of the design.

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** Absolutely.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** That is right.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** That is what you mean by business plan is it not?

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** Yes.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Built in from the beginning?

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** Yes.

**David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West):** I was intrigued by Elizabeth’s starting point about the business rates. Obviously it comes hand in hand with some relaxing of the use classes order, but one thing I was struck by is in a lot of town centres schemes is there always seems to be maybe one thing, one shop, one special shop, one special service, one special place that is just pursued by a set of entrepreneurs whom you might not even expect to be entrepreneurs that just suddenly catalyses a place and makes it great.

I told you over the phone, Look, Mama, no hands. Where did that come from? The extraordinary cycle experience.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Tell everyone that because it is interesting.

**David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West):** You can now have, on Old Street, once you have a puncture you can mend your tyre, you can have your bike fixed, you can have a coffee, you can ogle your latest set of lycra, you can agree with other like minded cyclists the whole experience of cycling and everything else. Much more than that it has become a community hub. If you go and try to set up a Look Mama No something or other somewhere else you will probably get hit by higher rent levels and too high expectations in terms of that. For me, as a natural extension of the Outer London Fund, I could easily imagine some form of programme that encourages local authorities with a struggling – let’s face it – evolving high street experience to potentially target one or two of the empty shells that they have and somehow help transform that into something new and something different. Just one. Because the power of one can be quite extraordinary. I am sure we all have our favourite examples
of that one place that is such a signifier and a changer. That does not feel like that has happened to date yet.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** One of the best little regeneration projects I ever saw -- people sniffed at it at the time and called it flower basket regeneration. In the Bellenden area in Southwark. Have you seen it?

**David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West):** Yes.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** When they started that. It is terraced housing and little shops. Streets. They could not let the shops off for £5 a week. They were really, really nasty and derelict and the whole area was on the way down. They actually used arts and crafts design to redesign the street furniture, to give grants for things like mosaics and the whole thing was arts and decoratively laid. It is now the really des res area of Peckham to be honest and is beautiful and has been maintained.

There was a tapping into of fun and funky cultural thread that we have got in this community, like the Look Mama No Hands stuff and like the Brixton Village. There is an entrepreneurial counter culture which will generate a form of regeneration if that is facilitated.

I think there is huge potential there. The problem is, I think, the shop keepers will talk about, “Give us rate relief”. The independent shop keepers will particularly say, “You should be favouring us independents” and I understand that, as opposed to Costa and the chains. The problem is the landlords, because as soon as it becomes a fun and funky area with lots of people moving in, they extract and milk the value from the rents, the rents go up and up and you start to see good attractive viable businesses killed off, moved out and replaced. Because, actually, the rent values are going up.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** That is a good point. What can we do about that? I know it is a very extreme example but the tailors of Savile Row got a use classes order for tailors only on Savile Row. Artists are always gentrifying areas, moving in and then they have to move out. What ideas have you got? We are moving into the employment question which is Onkar’s [Sahota] question. Employment activity. How can we hold these entrepreneurial activities, whether they are arts or bike repair or a whole variety of things?

**Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow):** We have had a bit of a play about trying to see whether we can use residential development to subsidise, effectively, affordable premises. I know that they have done that in - Quintain have got some of that in the Wembley schemes. Certainly on a site on the edges of Wealdstone we are trying to do the same thing to effectively underwrite discounted space. However, unless the local authority or the public sector controls the property it becomes essentially -- you are adding value for somebody else over time.
Now that is not to say that is not the role of the public sector to try to do that in terms of stimulating a new form of space, but Section 106 agreements that are site specific, notwithstanding CIL, could still play a part in delivering that, certainly within mixed use schemes. Of course some local authorities have got still fairly substantial land assets. The GLA and TfL in fact have got fairly substantial land assets. TfL because they have inherited some of the former Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) land.

There is a wider question about value, what role value has in short and long term, and what value means to the public estate, both in the short and long term. Obviously the temptation, quite understandably, for all local authorities, is to pay down debt but also to reduce liabilities and so on. These properties represent risks as well as opportunities. However, until -- we can use the planning system collaboratively with the Mayor’s office on those schemes to play for subsidised or structured space. You are distorting the market if you do that and obviously there are other premises elsewhere that you may well be impacting on, or you can use your collective estate.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Ownership of properties wanted then and flexibility in the use class order.

Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM): You used the phrase distorting the market but public manipulation of values seems to me to be quite important.

Andrew Boff (AM): You can insist on certain unit sizes though which tends to favour smaller businesses? That is within the plan.

Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow): And you can create, effectively, pseudo enterprise zones. If you think about the enterprise zone concept of reduced taxation and planning and deregulation -- OK, you have not got capital gains tax provisions or whatever. I do not know about enterprise zones so much now because we do not have one. However, certainly with Land Securities in Wealdstone we are looking at how can we liberate the planning regime so that you get, effectively, a blanket consent force for certain types of unit size. You have got CIL capabilities as a local authority. It is not a tax obviously and it is a viability driven thing, but if you are in low value areas there may, once it beds down, be opportunities to become a bit more sophisticated about our segmentation of viability areas to reflect certain types of nil value for CIL land uses. You have still got cross subsidy. The ability of development to enable other development as a cross subsidy.

Andrew Boff (AM): I think it was 25 years ago, Broadway Market, my high street had five butchers. We lost our last one last month. Should the planning policy go down to a detailed level of ensuring certain kinds of businesses to be available on a high street? The butchers is now going to be an overflow for a pizza restaurant.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): It has that ability.
Andrew Boff (AM): We are all seeing it in London. Wherever we are we are seeing these pressures happening. Should there be a level of detail that protects these kinds of retail opportunities for the sake of the overall high street as a whole, or should we just let the market work?

Nicky Gavron (Chair): There is a use class order for that. What is going wrong? There is not a use class order for butchers but there is a use class order for essential shops.

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): That is so interesting because Broadway Market is of course exceptionally successful and is exceptionally loved. The latest thing that has opened on Bellenden Road is really an extraordinary butcher called Flock and Herd. It is quite amazing what is suddenly not viable in one place is --

Andrew Boff (AM): The problem with Broadway is not to attract footfall; it has too much footfall.

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): It has got an extraordinary amount of footfall.

Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives): Is it competition that has done for your butchers? Is it food stores opening or is it a lack -- a lot of independent businesses lack business acumen.

Andrew Boff (AM): The butcher’s rent went up from £8,000 a year to £35,000 a year.

Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives): So it was on the edge of profitability and it tipped it over the edge. As much as we have affordable housing it would be easier, if you have got new shopping centre developments -- although there are not that many of them around now, if any -- that there is an affordable retail element to that. 10% of that is for -- the developers have to implement affordable units. Low subsidised rent or whatever, so that smaller businesses can develop. Street markets -- and no one has really mentioned those yet -- are fundamental to town centres because that is where your Tescos and your Marks & Spencers started.

Andrew Boff (AM): That is how Broadway Market got its footfall.

Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives): Again, they are the lifeblood of centres. That is where you entrepreneurs are formed. That is where they evolve and develop and move into a shop and then, who knows, move into two centres, three centres. That is how retailing has evolved.

Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM): I agree with that very strongly. One of our concerns, for example, about the redevelopment of the Elephant and Castle, at the moment there is a pretty low value market and you can buy anything cheap there. It certainly is cheap
there and it serves a poor local community. Lots of first rung on the ladder people in that market; refugees for example. The redevelopment of Elephant and Castle - which we all support - our biggest fear is that it will lead to an ethnic social cleansing of the poor. You will have to be wealthy to live in the area, in the new premises anyway. The shops will be providing for a middle and upper class market and there is not a protection for what is an existing -- it is a viable business provided the rents are affordable for them.

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** Competition is good. It is survival of the fittest. If you are an entrepreneur and you have got a product and you are selling something that someone wants then you have got a viable business. If you are selling something that is tat or people do not want then you are going to go out of business.

For Elephant and Castle and other things, there is an opportunity to engage with your Lend Leases to say, “Look, as part of this scheme …” It is a huge scheme. They have got potentially a huge amount of money coming out of it. We need affordability on that. We need to do something that is away from your mainstream large format retailers.

Again, we are at the point where that kind of large format retailing, in 20 year’s time when we look back, our high streets are going to be very different to what they are now and the business models now about building large format retailers is not going -- we could actually be returning to the Portas ideal of smaller shops, customer service and entertainment. People go in and they know your name. You get that in my local centre.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** When there were problems in the book market which were the book shops that closed? It was the big ones. It is the little book shops that are keeping going and it is the big book shops that have closed down, despite the pressure from the internet.

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** Look at Hay on Wye.

**Andrew Boff (AM):** Absolutely competition you need. I believe in the free market. Absolutely. Freedoms need policing.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** We have got to give advice. Can we come back to the use class order? The point about rents and the use class order is the use class order is there to keep value -- there is a hierarchy of value on a use class order. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker and all these are at a lower use class order than most of the rest. Yet what happens - it is very parallel I think to letting agents and landlords -- this is different because it is landlords. The rents are being forced up above the value really. They are being forced up so that the value is not kept low. They are forced up often because they have got an eye on what could replace the butcher which will be a
higher value use class order. We have lost the plot. I do not know what ideas you have
got but let’s start with Elizabeth.

**Elizabeth Cox (Head of Connected Economies, New Economics Foundation):**
We are talking about positive examples. Also we have been contacted by Lambeth to
look at detoxifying high streets, particularly lower income areas where you are starting
to see betting shops, pay day loans, fried chicken was their example. There are reasons
why certain communities prefer some of that. They are moving on to those high streets
until there is nothing else there. Is there a way that some of those use class changes
can be applied, particularly to groups of pay day loans and the betting shops, into
separate categories so that they cannot take over. They are not the same as having
financial services. Having that space for local finance provision, particularly looking at
credit unions or other community development finance institutions that actually
reinvest back into the area and take deposits from the population themselves, play a
key role in the economy. I would be looking at some of those distinctions between
some of the more toxic parts of what becomes dominant on those high streets so you
do manage the diversity better.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Any other ideas. That is good.

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** I do not
think it is true that the use classes is predicated on land values. I do not think that is
the case.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** No, but you understand what I am talking about.

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** I am not
sure I do actually because within the classes there are a whole range of values. Certainly
the A1 use class, the main one for retailing, there is a whole range of values. The use
classes order is predicated on the nature of those uses, what they bring to a town
centre and their potential to have negative impacts such as noise, fumes etc gathering
people and making a nuisance.

We can always refine the use classes order which normally means taking uses out to
making them too generous. We are always doing that because there is always a criminal
use that is a nuisance. At the moment is it betting shops? Is it pay day loans and
whatever? That is a matter of Government policy. To how much do they expect the
planning system to manage the market? I would suggest the planning system is not
actually very good at doing that and you are forever chasing your tail. I think it is a
much broader issue of the health and vitality of your high street. It is a problem, but it
has been a different problem at different times over the year; the nuisance uses.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** Do you think there should be licensing.

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** I think
licensing is a much better way of dealing with it. Yes.
**Helle Soholt (Gehl Architects):** Can I just add? It is not that that I know a lot about these UK classes or anything but I am thinking about tying it back to the walkability of the town centres. The type of surveys we had from Copenhagen shows that when you have a walkable neighbourhood and people are walking and cycling as an every day means of transportation they actually shop the same amount of money as the people that are going to the shopping centre. The difference is that the people going shopping by car maybe only go once a week whereas the ones that are walking and cycling actually shop much more often. They split the same amount of shopping but during the week. We really need to think about behavioural changes and developing new types of cultures of living where we can act in these different ways, we can walk down to the local butcher because there is a nice invitation to do so. In that sense combine them.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** That is interesting.

**Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow):** There is potentially an opportunity though we need to think about which is that there is a huge community of interest amongst the owners of town centre shopping centres that is currently pursuing one agenda, but will suffer, in some ways as significantly, as broader places by the narrowing of the retail offer as a result of some of the failures of consolidation, but also who have a value driven interest in bringing in affordable space.

One of the things that is interesting where we are in north London is we have Brent Cross Cricklewood potentially coming on, but Wembley is coming forward with its designeer retail outlet. Yet we have got a lot of town centre shopping centre owned, privately controlled space, in which they are starting to wake up to the fact we need to provide interesting facilities in our spaces, not just areas for Next and New Look and so on. Some of that affordable space at a deliberate loss because they are going to fall over. We are not probably currently exploiting that opportunity because the regulatory framework for pop up shops and so on that have been promoted by some of the small businesses is hugely burdensome for local authorities, whether it is insurance or business rate relief or business rate payments. Yet there is a ready market there of potential partners to deliver that stuff for you.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** That is interesting. What we are trying to find out is what are the barriers? There was one point which is how do you get -- you talked about that nice example of the bike shop and the fact they were doing everything else as well. I know one where -- it does not matter. Anyway, the point is you were talking about repair and you were talking about selling things. You were also talking about servicing. You are getting a mixture of things; production, consumption, repair and so on. How can you get flexibility to allow that to happen if it is not in just one property? Several small shops together perhaps. How can one do it?

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** At the moment if you are advising on policy you are defining primary shopping areas, secondary shopping
areas, primary frontages, secondary frontages and some of the policies are very -- I have to scratch my head sometimes. Thou shall allow 80% A1 on the primary shopping area and only 20% of other uses. Actually that is a bit of an archaic approach because, like you said, the bike shop. We had something in our local centre in Ealing which is Explore Learning which is actually a place where kids can go and get extra maths and english after school. It draws so much footfall because the parents are taking their kids in for an hour, they then stop in the local cafe or do a little bit of shopping across our local district centre, and are spending money. Actually that one place alone is generating footfall, linked trips, viability for other shops and businesses there.

The same with the bike shop. They are different from the norm. You cannot really categorise them. They are having a huge difference. There needs to be thinking about, not just is it A1 or not A1 but is it actually generating vitality and viability for the centre? Is it generating footfall and is it generating spin off expenditure as well? That is where the policies at the moment -- the trouble with policies locally can be so process driven. It is mind numbing sometimes to see the hoops that you have to go through when you have got a very good idea or a very good business and you just cannot do what you want to do because the planning process is stopping you.

Steve O’Connell (AM): We are talking about how we can encourage vitality of town centres, particularly from a financial point of view, but also you will be aware that there is an emerging forthcoming Mayor’s town centre Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) that no doubt you will have made contributions on in your boroughs. What we are really asking here is what do you want to see in a perfect world? What headline piece would you like to see emerging from the Mayor’s SPG to encourage and increase the vitality of our town centres? This might be part of what you have already consulted upon. What would you want to see coming out of the SPG?

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Think very laterally. The Mayor might be fettered but forget that he is fettered.

Steve O’Connell (AM): What would you like to see in an emerging SPG even if you may not see it in practicality? If you could write the top recommendation what would it be?

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): I have not seen the SPG --

Steve O’Connell (AM): No, it is emerging. There is going to be an emerging Mayoral town centre SPG.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Feed into it.

David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West): Personally the future of the town centre experience, or the high street experience, is the experience and it has got to be about enjoyment, it has got to be about life style, it has got to be about choice, it has got to be about face to face experiences and it is about, I have written down
personal service and services. That is why I choose to get my lighter from that particular shop rather than going online. I must buy everything online apart from things which I want to enjoy with other people. It is so obvious! It is not even worth saying it is the holy grail. It is so obvious that is what we need to do.

**Steve O’Connell (AM):** We need a planning mechanism. That is fantastic. The planners might have -- it might be more specific regarding something you would like to see in it although, actually -- you will not be holding your breath -- if you could design an SPG for your boroughs particularly what could you do? What lever would you like to see?

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** What instruments do you want? What do you want to help?

**Steve O’Connell (AM):** What tools do you want?

**Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow):** Setting aside perhaps some of the operational issues, the issues for town centres as part of experiences for outer London, there are some technology issues about Broadband and the capability to be able to use 4G in a town centre as part of that experience which may well become an issue, so support for the infrastructure.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** That is a good one.

**Stephen Kelly (Divisional Director of Planning, LB of Harrow):** More particularly a recognition that town centres are about changing things and activities so we are coming back to the alignment point. How easy is it to close a street to hold a market if it is a bus street? How committed can TfL be towards a collaboration on freeing up space? There is a huge amount of public space that buses and cars run on at the moment.

A piece really around a commitment to town centres as a very prime London issue. The shape of London is changing at this moment in time with the Westfields and the large out of centre OAPFs and so on. That is almost as threatening to town centres probably as the shift in terms of the move to the internet and online. In some places, Harrow, particularly is going to get an awful lot of flak from Old Oak, Brent Cross Cricklewood, Wembley and so on. In a way if we want to celebrate town centres we need, even if it is to refix them around those, to be absolutely clear that they are important and, in a planning context, that some of these high value alternative regeneration proposals that may well be needed must not undermine that seriously.

**David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West):** I am not responsible for a London borough. I wonder if the key word is flexibility and somehow to enshine that -- somehow, some way - in the SPG as an approach is so crucial, to allow each local London borough, each local centre, to define its own definition of how a town centre needs to perform, can perform, can be defined, in a way it is utilising its use class
system, in the way it is activating its frontages and in its own way be able to define that. I think the flexibility word, for me, is probably the most important thing.

**Steve O’Connell (AM):** To devolve and to delegate even further to the boroughs?

**David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West):** Yes. I think that is key.

**David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking):** I think that is why we are having difficulty answering this; because we have all got different solutions for our town centres. Trying to produce guidance that covers that is difficult, apart from set aside town centres.

**Steve O’Connell (AM):** What you would like is that ability to engineer even more your own town centre specific and less prescription.

**David Harley (Group Manager Economic Development and Regeneration, LB of Barking):** The Mayor only gets involved when it is big strategic issues and major competition and issues like that. Big scale things.

**Steve O’Connell (AM):** A more light touch from this building.

**David West (Founding Partner, Studio Egret West):** It is the most particular thing about London. We all know it. It is a complete collision coalescence of villages and hence there is lots and lots and lots and lots of duality and all the rest. So in a sense the only way it can work is if there is an extreme amount of flexibility and particularness. It is kind of obvious. That is the gorgeous wonderful thing about London and that is what sustains it and carries all the things to keep on changing and changing and changing. I think it is essential.

**Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects):** I would also emphasise again the public space. Public realm is what we share. It is the glue of the township. We might all recognise the bike shop but we do not all use it. What we have in common is the public realm. That is where we all move. It is our day to day living room.

I hope not to be offensive to anyone but I think in the UK in general there has been a neglect of the public realm --

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** In England?

**Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects):** In England.

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

**Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects):** For decades. When you look at mainland Europe they are far ahead in terms of green spaces and squares and focusing on mobility and taking away guard railing and all that type of engineering that you have had a strong
A strong emphasis on quality of life in terms of what you share in the town centres being the public spaces, the streets, the meeting places.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** To get down to something very concrete -- because what we are looking for are useful mechanisms that will help - or instruments or powers - boroughs who you have heard are strapped for cash and so on to be able to make some of these things happen? Have you got examples from overseas? You might pluck something from Melbourne. What has Melbourne got or Barcelona or New York -- of course New York has got ten times the budget and seven times the levers. What have they got that we could steal in terms of a mechanism or at least get the Mayor to lobby for?

**Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects):** Speaking very locally from Copenhagen, where I come from, it is a much smaller city or town but, having used this incremental approach of surveying how the spaces are used, that has been used as a mechanism, you could say, to prove constantly how the implementation of public spaces are being used and then how to extend the types of activities. Copenhagen never had a master plan in the 1960s saying that we should have only so and so parking spaces left and we should have more than 100,000 square metres of pedestrian space. It has been developed over an incremental process of measuring how many people are coming, what types of activities and events are taking place and so forth.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** That is very helpful.

**Helle Søholt (Gehl Architects):** Being data driven is also what is helping Mayor Bloomberg in New York at the moment.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** I am aware of that.

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** There are lots of things I could say about my town centre but are they in the Mayor’s gift to roll out? The issue about public space, the important thing to remember is large chunks of that are highway or tramways or whatever. To stop thinking purely from the interests of the car that we need to keep traffic moving etc does it matter if it slows down a bit as it goes through your town centre? It is to start thinking of it as a land use, as a competing land use, and how intensively -- how many people use that square metre of road compared to how many people use that square of pavement. Then start to rethink about the distribution of those land uses from the point of view of the demand for those uses. When you start to analyse it in that way you draw a very different highway network through your town. It is unlocking that thinking that is still there in TfL, that it is all about the car. It is still there.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** We could get some tram extensions into Croydon could we not?
Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon): Absolutely.

Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM): That would be great.

Nicky Gavron (Chair): Can I ask you a quite provocative question? We have heard over and over again there is no level playing field between town centres and these big destination shopping malls on the edge of town. We know parking is charged and we have argued for some slight relaxation, perhaps short term parking and so on. Do you think it would make sense if out of town shopping centres actually had to charge for their parking?

Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives): It would make sense but it is not within our powers to make that happen. The thing is --

Nicky Gavron (Chair): We are trying to make people think out of the box. What should we be lobbying for? Either Government or the Mayor. What sort of ideas are needed to make things work in the future for town centres.

Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives): I think you are right; it is not a level playing -- just parking a bit. My point was going to be more about investment in town centre is not easy. They are not easy environments for the private sector to invest in because you have not got level playing fields and you have not got clean sites. It is complex. A lot of the big centres have had big investments in shopping centre developments because they have had the investment to do it. Town centre investment regeneration and development can take a decade. More. That is with a good run at it. The big schemes you see across the country. Liverpool One. Birmingham. They have taken decades to come forward.

Part of the process - and I get it acting from the private sector - is that you will have a site, it might be a car park, and it is the council’s ownership therefore they are looking to get revenue from it and re-provide the parking as part of the development. To make it really work - and it might be back of house behind the high street - you want to bring in the high street, you want to punch through to the high street to create a proper circuit.

The trouble is a lot of the schemes fail and they just become out of centre plonked into town centre because there is not the willingness or the knowledge or the know how of how to implement compulsory purchase order (CPO). No one has mentioned CPO here. There is a real big issue about local authorities, private sector -- the private sector would bite your hand off if you could offer a site, a nice clear site, and go on, which is what they get out of centre. That is why in the late 1980s/1990s there was a big fear about ghost towns; because planning was laissez faire, it was a free for all. Nice out of centre sites. “We’ll take that one and that one”. Green field. No cost. Bang. You can do what you want. Lots of free parking.
Town centres are a lot harder nut to crack and there has to be this willingness and resources for local authorities are being pressed and pressed all the time. They are being cut and cut and cut financially. They are losing good staff. They are not getting people coming in. They do not have the people with the knowledge on CPO who can actually implement it and work with the private sector and understand what viability means for the private sector.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Do any of the boroughs want to come in on CPO quickly?

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** It is an important tool. It is something I am aware of and have experience of. It is not a panacea. I have got experience of CPOs that have not produced the right result. I will not go into it. For their sake, it is embarrassing. You have still got to have the right scheme. The CPO is a tool to deliver it.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Local authorities have lost the ability to do CPOs.

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** I am not sure many of them had it in the first place.

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** They are just not willing to use it. It is a tool they have but they are not willing to use it.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** It is policy but they do not use it.

**Mike Kiely (Director of Planning & Building Control, LB of Croydon):** People are frightened of it. They think it is more complicated and more difficult than it actually is. It is complicated and difficult but it is deliverable.

Going back to the issue of car parking often there are an awful lot of myths around car parking. It is important that you really do your empirical research and understand it. There is research out there where, certainly for small town centres, where people have complained about their lack of parking and parking has been provided and it has not increased footfall. There are an awful lot of myths and you have really got to understand your car parking offer; what is needed, where it is, what work and what does not work. There is a perception that there is not enough parking in Croydon. There are 7,000 spaces. 3,000 are not used. The perception is that there is not enough because the good car parks get full up because those are the convenient ones. It is about understanding what is necessary and where it should be provided.

**Steve O’Connell (AM):** Parking is an opportunity for boroughs to have their local fit. To be able to decide about pricing and where the parking should be. There may be parking spaces -- and Croydon is a bad example because, as you know, the previous council flogged off NCP so parking, in most of the council, in Croydon is too expensive. People are waking up and say, “Shall I drive to Croydon? No, because it will cost me £8 to park”. The council can do nothing about it. That is a separate point. There is a
place for parking because if people do not have cheap available parking they are not
going to get the bus or the tram or the train in; they are going to get in their car and
they are going to go out of London to one of these sites that we talked about earlier --

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** Where the parking is free.

**Steve O’Connell (AM):** Where the parking is free. To Bluewater. You are not going
to be able to enforce parking charges. That family that lives on the edge, that will get
in their car, needs to go in and not out, and we need to encourage them to do so.

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** Equally, if you
have got council owned car parks in town centres the council are not going to say,
“We’ll offer free parking here” because it is a big generator of revenue for the council.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM):** They do not want people to drive. That is what it is
about. It is not about money.

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** It is a whole range
of things. I do not think, punitively, you can say to outer centre operators - because
they are there now. They have enjoyed it for years.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** For the next lot? There is a huge lot in the pipeline.

**Dr Steve Norris (Partner and Head of Strategic Perspectives):** That is how you
do it. It is affordable retail. Charging for parking. Squeeze them. If it impacts on the
viability of outer centre schemes then that is fair dos.

**Nicky Gavron (Chair):** We have to stop. Thank you very much for your indulgence. I
think it is a measure of how excellent you have been as a panel. Thank you very much
for all your expertise and insights and enthusiasm and inspiration. Thank you.