

# MDA No.: 1658

## Title: *At a crossroads: London's High Streets* Report

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting on 14 November 2024 the Committee resolved that:

*Authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.*

- 1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee agreed the Committee's report on *At a crossroads: London's high streets*, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

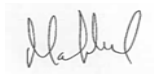
### 2. Decision

- 2.1 **That the Chair, in consultation with the party Group Lead Members, agrees the *At a crossroads: London's high streets* report, as attached at Appendix 1.**

#### Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has



**Signature:**

**Printed Name:** Marina Ahmad, Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

**Date:** 22 April 2025

### 3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

#### Background and proposed next steps:

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chair, in consultation with relevant party Lead Group Members and Deputy Chair, on 23 August 2024 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the report and its recommendations fall within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the *At a crossroads: London's high streets* report will be formally noted at the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee's next appropriate meeting.

#### Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:

Signature (Committee Services): *Sal Fazal*

Printed Name: Sal Fazal

Date: 10 April 2025

#### Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.


Signature (Finance): Not Required

Printed Name:

Date:

#### Legal Implications:

The Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal): 

Printed Name: Rebecca Arnold, Deputy Monitoring Officer

Date: 22 April 2025

Email: [rebecca.arnold@london.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.arnold@london.gov.uk)

#### Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:

- Alessandro Georgiou AM, Deputy Chairman;
- Zack Polanski AM; and
- Hina Bokhari AM.

#### 4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

##### Part 1 - Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, until what date:

##### Part 2 – Sensitive Information:

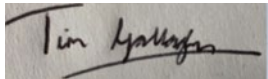
Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

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#### Lead Officer / Author

Signature:



Printed Name: Tim Gallagher

Job Title: Senior Policy Adviser

Date: 17 April 2025

#### Countersigned by Executive Director:

Signature:



Printed Name: Helen Ewen, Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Date: 22 April 2025

An aerial photograph of a city street grid, overlaid with a green tint. Several people are walking across the map, their shadows cast onto the ground. The people are dressed in casual and business-casual attire, including jackets, sweaters, and trousers. The map shows a dense network of streets and a few green spaces.

# **At a crossroads: London's high streets**

Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

**LONDONASSEMBLY**



## Economy, Culture and Skills Committee



**Marina Ahmad AM**  
(Chair)  
Labour



**Alessandro Georgiou AM**  
(Deputy Chairman)  
Conservatives



**Hina Bokhari AM**  
Liberal Democrats



**Anne Clarke AM**  
Labour



**Neil Garratt AM**  
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## Foreword



**Marina Ahmad AM**  
**Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee**

To see how London is changing, just look at its high streets.

If by some magic trick, or time machine, you could stand on Borough High Street at any point over the last 2,000 years, imagine the changes you would have seen! A dirt road paved with Roman stone, then burned by Queen Boudica's army. You could have met Emperor Hadrian, before the weeds grew over the road again as people abandoned Londinium for the country halls of the Saxon lords. The Normans built a new London Bridge at one end of Borough High Street and by the seventeenth century there were gin shops, a courthouse and pillory, followed by cholera and the temperance movement.

Closer to our own time we have seen independent shops swallowed up by supermarkets, with high streets under pressure from retail parks. Retail is now moving online, presenting a tough challenge for independent business and the big chain stores alike. High streets remain major shopping destinations but are also increasingly places where we 'do something' rather than 'buy something'.

In this report we have heard about challenges to the retail sector, but we are also asking 'whose high streets'? Are they just for private enterprise or is there a democratic need for public places that welcome all members of the community? What should we do if young people feel unwelcome on our high streets, or if only those with the backing of a national company can afford to set up shop? If we want them to be places where Londoners meet each other for business and fun, we must ensure that high streets are for all.

For this investigation into London's high streets, the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee has looked at shop vacancies, changing patterns of business and the impact of Greater London Authority investments. We have spoken with experts in regeneration and visited a thriving youth space.

Our recommendations call for support for small businesses and regeneration that opens up opportunities across all of London's communities. As Chair of the London Assembly's Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, I know we must do more to champion our

entrepreneurs and set the conditions for success. The government is planning to rebalance business rates to reduce the amount paid by small independent shops, but it remains a tough environment to start a company.

My thanks go to everyone who has contributed to this report, including our guests, committee members, researchers and scrutiny officers.



## Executive Summary

The London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee launched its investigation into the state of London's high streets in September 2024. The investigation sought to understand:

- the impact of recent economic instability as well as long-term economic and consumer trends on London's high streets and assess their effects on local businesses and communities
- what support is being provided by the Government, the Mayor, and local authorities to London's high streets, and how well this is working
- to what extent high street redevelopment is inclusive for local communities, and what measures can be taken to ensure that it benefits all residents
- how the challenges facing high streets in inner London compare with those in outer London
- how London's high streets have changed and adapted post-pandemic, with a focus on consumer behaviour, footfall, and the key elements that contribute to a strong and resilient high street
- and how high streets in London can contribute to economic growth and cultural value.

As part of its investigation, the Committee held one formal meeting in City Hall on 14 November 2024. We also carried out a site visit to Wood Green High Road on 15 October 2024, where the Committee took part in a roundtable discussion with Haringey Council.

The Committee reached several **key findings** as part of our investigation, which are summarised below:

- Many of London's high streets are thriving. There is sometimes an image painted of high streets in the media as neglected places full of boarded-up, empty shops. Most of London's high streets do not look like this. But – particularly with the growth of online shopping over the past two decades – the 'decline of the high street' has been a persistent concern across the country, and London has not been immune from this. The pandemic brought further challenges for high streets, while an increase in the cost of living has meant that consumers have less money in their pockets and high street businesses find it harder to make ends meet.
- For many years high streets were mostly seen as shopping destinations, but there has been a noticeable shift from traditional retail shops to service-oriented businesses on the high street. With more people shopping online, high streets have had to adapt in order to survive. At the same time there has been a growing demand for experiences and services, such as cafes, gyms, beauty salons, and other personal care providers, which now play a larger role in attracting people to local high streets.

- London's high property costs and rents make it difficult for new businesses to establish themselves on the capital's high streets, often limiting opportunities for smaller enterprises and creative ventures. One way for high street businesses to grow is to sell their products online as well as in their shops. But some small businesses face challenges in doing this, including a lack of digital skills.
- Compared to other parts of the country, London's high streets have a relatively low vacancy rate. But there are still vacant units in some London high streets, and this can be exacerbated by negligent or absent landlords. Strengthening rules on ownership transparency and encouraging landlords to engage with local stakeholders can help to bring vacant units back into use. Community ownership and wealth-building initiatives can ensure that local communities benefit from and feel a greater sense of attachment to their local high street.
- Temporary use, also known as 'meanwhile use', of vacant properties on the high street has been a popular initiative that has helped bring a new lease of life in empty units through temporary occupation by businesses, community groups, or creatives.
- It is vital that local communities and residents are meaningfully involved in high street regeneration plans. This is essential to giving people a sense of ownership over their high street and building lasting partnerships. Often local residents are consulted on high street regeneration efforts, but feel their feedback is gathered but has little influence on the actual decision-making process and outcome. This can lead to disengagement and a lack of ownership in the changes taking place. Involving a diverse range of voices throughout the process ensures that regeneration reflects local needs and aspirations.
- Art, creativity, and heritage can play transformative roles in high street revitalisation. Initiatives such as public art installations and cultural programming can make high streets more attractive places to spend time in and enhance people's connection to their local area.
- Poor litter management and a lack of food waste segregation on the high street undermine public realm improvements. Diminishing local authority resources have made further investment in street cleaning a challenge. Better waste management and the circular economy offer pathways to building more sustainable and pleasant high streets.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

The Mayor should ensure that the Grow London Local platform provides support to small businesses on the high street to improve digital literacy and adapt to changes in shopping habits. Following on from the announcement that 250,000 businesses have benefitted from its services, he should publish details about how many high street businesses have benefitted from its support on digital literacy training to date, and what form of support this has taken.

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### Recommendation 2

To help develop the unique character and heritage of each high street, the Mayor should develop an Art on the High Street programme that commissions public art installations, murals and interactive artworks on high streets in London. The GLA should work with local schools and artists in commissioning this work.

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### Recommendation 3

The Mayor should build on lessons from the Community Improvement Districts pilot to create an online engagement platform for local communities to have a say in high street regeneration projects in London. This should include formal processes such as regular consultations and community forums, as well as introducing voting rights for communities in relation to certain projects. This structure should be built into the GLA's new High Streets Fund.

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### Recommendation 4

When providing funding for future programmes on London's high streets, the Mayor should prioritise funding for areas with high vacancies, based on vacancy data from the High Streets Data Service.

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### Recommendation 5

As part of his new High Streets Fund, the Mayor should support local community groups to take advantage of the new powers introduced by High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs) to take over the leases of vacant units. This should include providing financial support to community groups to develop viable projects, to enable them to access vacant units as part of HSRAs.

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### Recommendation 6

To address gaps in capacity and encourage effective partnership working among local authorities, the High Street Network should offer training on stakeholder engagement and accessing funding opportunities. As part of this work, the GLA should facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring from boroughs with successful high street initiatives.

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### Recommendation 7

When delivering his new High Streets Fund, the Mayor should consider the feedback received by the Committee about the onerous nature of competitive bidding processes for high street

projects. Where possible, he should work in collaboration with all London boroughs to identify the areas of greatest need when distributing funding.

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### **Recommendation 8**

When providing funding for projects as part of the new High Streets Fund, the Mayor should work with both inner and outer London boroughs to ensure that these projects are supported and enabled by local licensing regimes.

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### **Recommendation 9**

The Mayor, working with ReLondon, should provide further funding to increase the number of circular economy and waste management initiatives on the high street, ensuring businesses and councils have the resources to implement sustainable solutions and drive long-term high street transformation. This should form part of ReLondon's next business plan, which is due to be renewed at the end of 2025.

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### **Recommendation 10**

As part of his new High Streets Fund, in cases where the funding impacts local transport and accessibility, the Mayor should ensure that both inner and outer London boroughs have actively gathered and taken into account the views of residents and businesses on parking and transport accessibility. This should include consulting with local Disabled people and their representatives.

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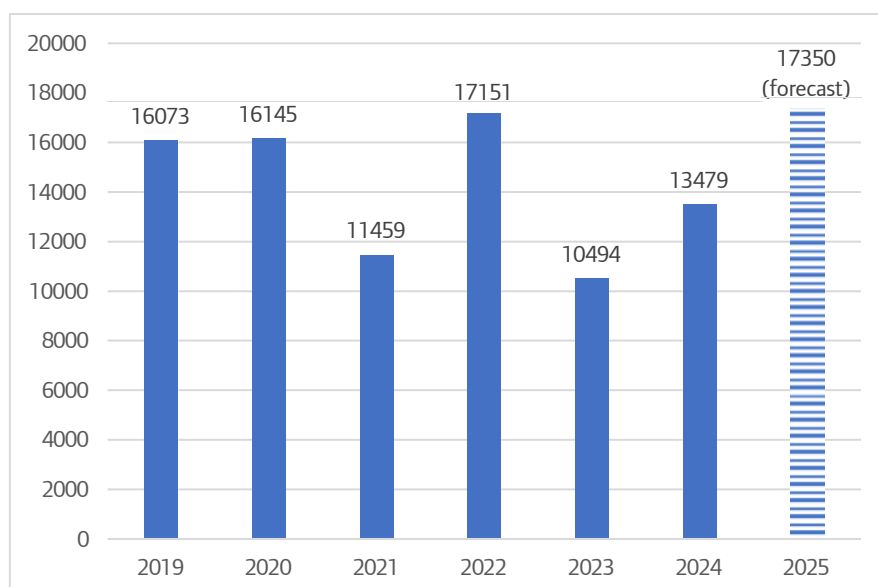
## Introduction – the state of London's high streets

London is home to some of the most famous shopping streets in the world. But it is also made up of hundreds of local high streets, from Camberwell to Camden, from Barking to Ealing. With 90 per cent of all Londoners living within 10 minutes of their local high street, London's high streets are places that connect communities, shape local identities, and boost local economies.<sup>1</sup> A vibrant high street is a critical part of making an area desirable to live in and attractive to visit – for London to succeed, its high streets must succeed as well.

Many of London's high streets are thriving. There is sometimes an image painted of high streets in the media as neglected places full of boarded-up, empty shops. Most of London's high streets do not look like this. But – particularly with the growth of online shopping over the past two decades – the 'decline of the high street' has been a persistent concern across the country, and London has not been immune from this. The pandemic brought further challenges for high streets, while an increase in the cost of living has meant that consumers have less money in their pockets and high street businesses find it harder to make ends meet.

Whilst there is limited London-specific data on high street shop closures, the national picture is concerning. There have been well-documented examples of large retail brands like Topshop, BHS and Debenhams collapsing over the last decade. In 2024, according to the Centre for Retail Research, more than 13,000 high street shops closed across the UK.<sup>2</sup> The same organisation projects that more than 17,000 stores could shut their doors within the next year.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: Rate of UK retail closures from 2019 – 2024** (comparative figures for 2019 – 2024 show 2022 as the worst year for retail closures, with 2025 projected to worsen)



Source: Altus Group and Centre for Retail Research

<sup>1</sup> GLA, [High Streets for All](#)

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Retail Research, [The Crisis in Retailing - Latest Closures & Job Losses](#) [Accessed: 2 January 2025]

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Retail Research, [The Crisis in Retailing - Latest Closures & Job Losses](#) [Accessed: 2 January 2025]

Despite the challenging outlook for high streets, there remain significant opportunities for recovery and revitalisation. Across the UK, high streets are evolving, with a noticeable shift from traditional retail shops to service-oriented businesses. This change reflects the growing demand for experiences and services, such as cafes, gyms, beauty salons, and other personal care providers, which now play a larger role in attracting people to local high streets. In a 2021 report, the think tank Centre for London argued that the high street is only “dying” if the viability of bricks and mortar retail is taken as its only vital sign.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the charity Power to Change has stressed the need to shift away from a retail-only model of the high street and encourage a greater role for communities.<sup>5</sup>

### How do we define high streets?

The high street is commonly used collectively to refer to streets in city centres, town centres and local centres, as well as in more remote areas, like village and island centres.<sup>6</sup> Although town centres are generally larger in scale than high streets, and high streets tend to be situated across a classic linear street, the two terms are frequently used interchangeably. “High streets” will be the main term used throughout this report. However, the challenges facing both high streets and town centres are largely the same, and evidence related to both high streets and town centres across London will be referenced.

The London Assembly Economy Committee previously investigated London's high streets in 2021, where it explored the issues facing high streets during and while recovering from the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> As part of this work, the Committee found that vacant premises, the rise of online shopping and business rates were some of the main issues facing London's high streets at the time. Four years on from the publication of the Committee's report, London continues to grapple with many of the same challenges. We decided to return to this issue to understand what has changed since the pandemic, and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead for London's high streets.

### A new High Streets Fund

Toward the end of our investigation, on 27 February 2025, the Mayor and London Councils launched the London Growth Plan.<sup>8</sup> The Plan aims “to restore productivity growth to an average of two per cent a year over the next decade, making London's economy £107bn larger in 2035, and to help create over 150,000 good jobs by 2028.”<sup>9</sup> As part of this, the Mayor has committed to a new High Streets Fund of £20m for boroughs to invest in improving local areas – funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.<sup>10</sup> This is welcome news. No further detail has yet

<sup>4</sup> Centre for London, [Community Town Centres](#), May 2021, pg.15

<sup>5</sup> Power to Change, [Saving the high street: the community takeover](#), September 2020, pg.10

<sup>6</sup> Living Streets, [The Pedestrian Pound, 3rd Edition](#), November 2024, pg.11

<sup>7</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [High hopes: Supporting London's high streets in the economic recovery from COVID-19](#), March 2021

<sup>8</sup> Mayor of London, [London Growth Plan](#), February 2025

<sup>9</sup> Mayor of London, [London Growth Plan](#), February 2025

<sup>10</sup> Mayor of London, [London Growth Plan](#), February 2025, pg.98



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been released on how the fund will be distributed, so this report aims to inform the GLA's developing work on how it can best support London's high streets through and alongside its new High Streets Fund.

## Post-pandemic: challenges and opportunities for London's high streets

### Impact of the pandemic

The immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on London's high streets was devastating, with forced temporary closures, travel restrictions and social distancing guidelines in place.<sup>11</sup> Existing challenges facing high streets such as online shopping, changing consumer habits and vacant shops were only heightened as a result of the pandemic. BusinessLDN, in written evidence submitted to the Committee, stated:

"Before the pandemic, online shopping was on an upward trend, but this massively increased during the lockdowns. In 2019, the online spend as a share of total retail sales for London was 34% but rose sharply to 47% in 2020."<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Barking and Dagenham Council noted that the rise of the 'delivery economy' during the pandemic reduced the need for residents to visit high streets in person, further decreasing footfall.<sup>13</sup> The Centre for Retail Research is one of many groups that has argued that increased online shopping has been detrimental to high streets and physical retail, curbing the potential sales of many previously viable high street stores.<sup>14</sup> Data from Centre for Cities showed that, by May 2022, footfall and spend on London's high streets had not recovered as quickly as in some other UK cities.<sup>15</sup>

But the pandemic did not have an entirely negative impact on high streets, especially for local high streets outside of central London. With the national economy constrained by lockdown measures, there is evidence to suggest that public support for small and local businesses increased.<sup>16</sup> Findings from the Food Standards Agency highlighted a distinct move towards more 'local' food purchasing behaviour during the pandemic (35 per cent said they had done so more often, 11 per cent less often). People similarly reported buying from local suppliers (such as farm shops, vegetable box schemes) more often.<sup>17</sup>

We heard that shifts in how Londoners use their high streets have persisted beyond the pandemic, with local high streets benefitting at the expense of high streets in central London. At our meeting in November 2024, Chris Paddock, freelance Economic Consultant, told us that "certain outer London high streets have become more used [...] throughout the week".<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Centre for Cities, [How has the pandemic impacted high streets up and down the country?, January 2022](#)

<sup>12</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by BusinessLDN, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>13</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Barking and Dagenham Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>14</sup> Centre for Retail Research, [The Crisis in Retailing: Closures and Job Losses](#)

<sup>15</sup> Centre for Cities, [High streets recovery tracker](#)

<sup>16</sup> [House of Commons Library, Town Centre Regeneration](#), December 2021, pg.16

<sup>17</sup> Food Standards Agency, [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker waves one and two report published](#), May 2022

<sup>18</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.5

Evidence submitted to the Committee by Islington Council noted that the borough has “a large residential population living in proximity to its town centres”, which has “encouraged people to shop locally, a change in shopping habit that is considered likely to continue long-term.”<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, the New West End Company, in written evidence submitted to the Committee, reported a reduction in footfall across the West End, “both as a result of an acceleration in online shopping, but also because of an entrenchment of hybrid working arrangements.”<sup>20</sup> These observations reflect analysis from the Local Data Company, which suggests that there has been a notable increase in the number of convenience stores in Great Britain.<sup>21</sup> These shops have benefited from the “localisation” of shopping habits, a trend borne of necessity during lockdown that has continued, allied to wider trends seeing shoppers move from a large weekly shop to multiple shopping trips.<sup>22</sup>

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*“The smaller centres were pretty resilient through the pandemic and have remained pretty resilient since. That is maybe something we did not expect to see but it is quite interesting in thinking about future policy implications.”<sup>23</sup>*

**Chris Paddock, Freelance Economic Consultant**

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## Post-pandemic recovery and economic pressures

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, UK households soon faced a cost-of-living crisis, which saw a period of high inflation and rising energy and fuel prices.<sup>24</sup> Shop closures continued post-pandemic, with several well-known high street brands – such as M&S and Boots – closing branches in London.<sup>25</sup> In evidence submitted to the Committee, the Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA) reported:

“Footfall remains 39% below pre-pandemic levels, while inflation and the rising cost of living have exacerbated financial pressures on businesses, especially in hospitality and retail. Rising costs of goods, services, and labour are further squeezing already tight margins.”<sup>26</sup>

BusinessLDN told the Committee that: “Subdued retail performance has been the hallmark for 2024 and set against a challenging macro-economic environment, consumers continue to

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<sup>19</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Islington Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>20</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by New West End Company, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>21</sup> House of Commons Library, [Retail sector in the UK](#), August 2024, pg.20

<sup>22</sup> House of Commons Library, [Retail sector in the UK](#), August 2024, pg.20

<sup>23</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.3

<sup>24</sup> London Datastore, [Impacts of rising cost of living on London](#), January 2023

<sup>25</sup> MyLondon, [All the high street shops that have or will close in London this year including Wetherspoons, M&S and Boots](#), 29 March 2024

<sup>26</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA), [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

remain cautious about their spending".<sup>27</sup> In its written evidence, HOLBA noted that "in 2023, nearly all hospitality businesses in the West End reported increased costs in food, wages, and energy."<sup>28</sup>

These recent rises in the cost of doing business have exacerbated existing financial pressures for high street businesses, including the recurring issue of business rates. Kingston Council reported to the Committee on the current business rates system:

"the current system that is pinned to property value can disproportionately impact businesses in high streets with comparatively higher property values, irrespective of turnover or profitability. Several alternatives have been explored in depth by the previous government and a commitment to overhauling the system is overdue."<sup>29</sup>

In the 2024 Autumn Budget, the Chancellor committed to lower business rates for high street stores to help "level the playing field" with online retailers.<sup>30 31</sup> From 2026-27, the Government has committed to permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality and leisure properties with rateable values (RV) under £500,000. To fund this tax cut, properties with a RV of £500,000 and above, including large distribution warehouses, will face a new higher multiplier starting in 2026-27.<sup>32</sup>

High street businesses have also expressed concern about the recent rise in National Insurance (NI) contributions. In the 2024 Autumn Budget, the Government announced that the rate of employer NI will increase from 13.8 to 15 per cent and the threshold for paying the tax will come down from £9,100 to £5,000 in April 2025.<sup>33</sup>

Following this announcement, leading retailers wrote an open letter to the Chancellor opposing the rise in NI contributions.<sup>34</sup> The letter argued that the effect of the rise, alongside other cost rises, would be to "increase inflation, slow pay growth, cause shop closures, and reduce jobs, especially at the entry level".<sup>35</sup> In January 2025, The British Retail Consortium published a survey of CFOs from 52 major retailers, revealing that 67 per cent planned to increase prices in response to rising costs, resulting from the planned NI rise.<sup>36</sup>

## Crime on high streets

The issue of crime was not a major focus of our investigation. But it was notable that several submissions to our call for evidence argued that crime and the perception of safety are significant challenges impacting the resilience of high streets. This was particularly highlighted in evidence from various local authorities and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). Issues

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<sup>27</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by BusinessLDN, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>28</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA), [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>29</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Kingston Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>30</sup> Labour Party, [Change Labour Party Manifesto 2024](#), pg.31

<sup>31</sup> UK Government, [Transforming business rates](#), 30 October 2024

<sup>32</sup> UK Government, [Transforming business rates](#), 30 October 2024, pg.10

<sup>33</sup> UK Government, [Autumn Budget 2024](#), 30 October 2024

<sup>34</sup> British Retail Consortium, [Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer](#), 18 November 2024

<sup>35</sup> British Retail Consortium, [Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer](#), 18 November 2024

<sup>36</sup> British Retail Consortium, [National Insurance increase will force retailers to raise prices](#), 15 January 2025

such as shoplifting and violence can be major factors in deterring people from spending time on high streets, which has a knock-on effect on high street businesses.

The Knightsbridge Partnership expressed concerns about the rise in shoplifting and violence against shopworkers, which increases business costs and affects staff and customer wellbeing.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Barking and Dagenham Council noted that crime or the perception of it hinders feelings of safety on high streets.<sup>38</sup> We are aware of the Met's commitment to "put more officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) into local neighbourhoods"<sup>39</sup>, as well as the Government's commitment to spend £200 million nationally on neighbourhood police officers.<sup>40</sup> It is important that this investment is felt on London's high streets.

Brixton BID emphasised the need for a public health approach to address rising crime levels and anti-social behaviour, suggesting it be treated as a new "pandemic."<sup>41</sup> Lambeth Council pointed out the following:

"In our experience, the largest factor affecting town centres and their reputation as a destination is crime and perception of safety. This affects all of our town centres, including those with relatively strong footfall and spend trends like the South Bank."<sup>42</sup>

The New West End Company recommended that the Government ensures a more visible police presence on high streets and provides officers with the resources to address shoplifting in real time.<sup>43</sup>

## Support for high street businesses

In its submission to our call for evidence, Brixton BID highlighted the challenges faced by businesses and noted a lack of sufficient support to help them navigate these difficulties:

"Whilst support from the Mayor of London, local authority and central government was offered during the pandemic, less support has been offered to the high street during the more recent events related to rising inflation, cost of living and cost of trading crisis."<sup>44</sup>

One specific form of support highlighted to the Committee was support with digital skills. Nick Plumb, Associate Director for Policy and Insight at Power to Change, reflected on his time as a board member of the Government's High Street Task Force:

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<sup>37</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by The Knightsbridge Partnership, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>38</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Barking and Dagenham Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>39</sup> Metropolitan Police, [A New Met for London 2023-25](#), p. 3

<sup>40</sup> Home Office, [£200 million boost to transform neighbourhood policing](#), 31 January 2025

<sup>41</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Brixton BID, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>42</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Lambeth Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>43</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by New West End Company, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>44</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Brixton BID, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

“One of the demands, particularly from small businesses, is how can we sufficiently diversify so we are not just a brick-and-mortar business. How can we upskill ourselves to have the ability to play a role in that online shopping sphere? Lots of businesses which have been around for a long time have not got that digital literacy.”<sup>45</sup>

Enhanced digital skills could enable more high street businesses to sell their products online. At present, not all high street businesses have these skills. One support programme which could help develop these skills is Grow London Local (GLL), which was launched by the Mayor and London & Partners in January 2024.<sup>46</sup> GLL describes itself as “the dedicated place for London’s one million SMEs to access free business support through one-to-one consultations, webinars, guides, events, and e-learning.”<sup>47</sup> In February 2025, the Mayor announced that more than 250,000 local businesses had benefitted from the service, and we wait to see the details of the impact of this funding on businesses on London’s high streets..<sup>48</sup>

Support programmes such as GLL could play an important role in supporting small businesses on London’s high streets, providing them with skills to help them compete with online retailers. GLL’s success should be measured by its tangible impact on local businesses, including the number of businesses supported and improvements in their digital skills.

## Recommendation 1

The Mayor should ensure that the Grow London Local platform provides support to small businesses on the high street to improve digital literacy and adapt to changes in shopping habits. Following on from the announcement that 250,000 businesses have benefitted from its services, he should publish details about how many high street businesses have benefitted from its support on digital literacy training to date, and what form of support this has taken.

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It is clear from the evidence received by the Committee that high street businesses face significant challenges in competing with online retailers. These challenges have only intensified during and after the pandemic. The cost of doing business has gone up, online shopping continues to grow, while crime remains an ongoing concern on high streets. The following chapters will explore ways in which London’s high streets can evolve in order to survive these challenges and thrive in the future.

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<sup>45</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London’s High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.6

<sup>46</sup> [Grow London Local](#)

<sup>47</sup> Mayor of London’s response to the recommendations of the London Assembly Economy Committee’s investigation into the effect of late payments on London’s small businesses and the self-employed, [Appendix 1 - Response, Mayor of London](#), 19 September 2024

<sup>48</sup> Mayor of London, [More than a quarter of a million local businesses benefit from Mayor of London’s new support service](#), 5 February 2025



## Reimagining the high street

### Are high streets “dying” or are they just changing?

A recurring theme of our investigation was rethinking the purpose of the high street. For a long time, high streets were mostly seen as shopping destinations, but in recent years there has been a noticeable shift from traditional retail shops to service-oriented businesses on the high street. There has been a growing demand for experiences and services such as gyms, beauty salons, and other personal care providers, which now play a larger role in attracting people to local high streets.<sup>49</sup>

When thinking about the future of high streets, Rumi Bose, a consultant specialising in high streets and town centres, argued that spaces could be used for varied purposes:

“Having spaces working harder throughout the day is a real opportunity, so hybridisation of space at the same time, going to collect your laundry, having a haircut, picking up a coffee, all in one space. That can help with flexibility, with vibrancy.”<sup>50</sup>

Echoing this point in its submission to the Committee, BusinessLDN emphasised the need for high streets to adapt and cater to a wider range of uses to stay competitive in the face of online shopping growth: “High streets must leverage their strengths over online platforms and repurpose their empty space to offer a mix of socialising, dining and shopping experiences.”<sup>51</sup>

We heard evidence from local authorities in London that high streets need to evolve to meet changing demands and adapt to new shopping habits. Waltham Forest Council highlighted the increasing importance of hospitality and leisure, noting a shift in the mix of retail and leisure services: “There has also been a marked change in the mix of retail and hospitality/leisure, in particular an increase in hospitality, food and beverage and leisure services (that is goods and services that cannot be bought online).”<sup>52</sup> Barking and Dagenham Council emphasised a similar point: “High streets need to provide more than just a shopping experience. This means creating centres that appeal for a range of shopping, leisure and community uses, that have distinct characters and provide a safe and welcoming environment.”<sup>53</sup>

The potential to integrate public services on the high street is another part of transforming the high street to a space for services as well as retail. Rumi Bose touched on this during the Committee meeting, and proposed the high street as a place to provide more public services:

“High streets helping to plug some of the gap with the National Health Service (NHS), for example, and moving some of those less-acute services from hospitals to the high

<sup>49</sup> House of Lords, [High Streets: Life beyond retail?](#), November 2024, pg.14

<sup>50</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 – Minutes – Transcript of Agenda Item 7 – London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.3

<sup>51</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by BusinessLDN, [London's high streets – written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>52</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Waltham Forest Council, [London's high streets – written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>53</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Barking and Dagenham Council, [London's high streets – written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

streets... providing some of those public services to address things like food poverty, social isolation, tertiary services within the high street.”<sup>54</sup>

Nonetheless, retail stores are clearly still central parts of London's high streets. As discussed in the previous chapter, some shops on high streets outside central London may have benefitted from the increasing attraction of shopping locally since the pandemic. Islington Council's response stressed the need for high streets to adapt, while also recognising the ongoing importance of retail for local communities:

“Retail centres in Islington have therefore needed to adapt and futureproof for these changing circumstances while maintaining a level of retail necessary to cater for local communities and workers; the future for town centres is as a ‘place to be’ rather than solely a ‘place to buy.’”<sup>55</sup>

The evidence received by the Committee suggests – despite the undoubted challenges – that London's high streets are changing rather than dying. Many of the people we spoke to were optimistic about the future of the high street, and excited by the opportunity to apply more creative solutions to sustaining London's high streets. The immediate future for London's high streets will involve a mix of retail and services – and it is vital that they continue to adapt to ensure they are places Londoners want to visit and spend time in.

The GLA and London boroughs must ensure their policies keep pace with this evolution in high street use, supporting creative solutions and actively removing barriers to using space in innovative ways. This should include efforts to transform the high street into a ‘place to be’ as well as a retail destination. This approach is clearly already underway, and the next section considers one important way in which the GLA is supporting the development of attractive civic space on high streets.

## Arts and culture on the high street

Arts and culture can play an important role in making high streets more attractive places to spend time. Arts Council England's 2021 report, *A High Street Renaissance*, found strong public support for cultural investment, with 69 per cent of respondents agreeing that cultural spaces made their local area a better place to live.<sup>56</sup>

GLA programmes have recognised the importance of culture in the revitalisation of high streets. A notable example is in the most recent High Streets for All Challenge, where £170,000 was invested in Stratford Broadway to convert a redundant building into a space that includes affordable artist studio spaces. The Creative Land Trust was commissioned to develop a public artwork on the high street to signpost upcoming activity on the site and “strengthen the area's identity.”<sup>57</sup>

In evidence submitted to the Committee, local authorities, and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) across London shared examples of successful regeneration projects on their high streets, including cases where arts and culture enhanced the visual appeal of high streets.

<sup>54</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.3

<sup>55</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Islington Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>56</sup> Arts Council England, [A High Street Renaissance | Arts Council England](#), August 2021

<sup>57</sup> GLA, [High Streets for All Challenge](#)

Lambeth Council stated:

"In 2023, London Festival of Architecture (LFA) welcomed Brixton as a key LFA Destination. The winning design was 'Views on the Atlantic' by Brixton Community Cinema with Bamidele Awoyemi, Farouk Agoro and Livia Wang. 'Views on the Atlantic' was comprised of two interventions that transformed Atlantic Road into an interactive cinema screening and community workshop space and, installed two moving-image projections in Windrush Square displaying archival images and footage."

King's Road Partnership explored "art as a wayfinding tool to encourage exploration of the King's Road westbound and continue the programme of arts including murals, sculpture, temporary installations, digital and interactive art."<sup>58</sup> HOLBA expressed support for the creation of a new 'Arts Quarter in the West End':

"HOLBA supports the creation of a new Arts Quarter in the West End, which will help cultural institutions in the area to 'spill out' onto the streets and provide a unique, inclusive and immersive experience to come and experience world class art in all its forms."<sup>59</sup>

In a multi-million-pound regeneration scheme, Kingston Council renovated a derelict site to create a new creative space:

"Unlocked the transformation of a long term, derelict, riverfront site, delivering for Kingston, the borough's first creative and knowledge quarter. The multi-million-pound, regeneration scheme includes a new cultural venue and permanent home for a local youth arts charity, addressing the lack of creative maker and performance space, together with 11,000 sq ft of new affordable enterprise and workspace that will deliver over 200 new jobs and over 3,000 skills and training opportunities."<sup>60</sup>

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*"Arts and culture are another opportunity; experience of arts and culture is best had in person, and if high streets are not going to be retail-led, how about the idea of having high streets as a platform for creativity and culture?"<sup>61</sup>*

**Rumi Bose, Director**  
**Rumi Bose Ltd**

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<sup>58</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by The King's Road Partnership, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>59</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Heart of London Business Alliance, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>60</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Kingston Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>61</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.3

### Case study: Fore Street Living Room Library

During the Committee's meeting, Jan Kattein, Director of Jan Kattein Architects and lecturer at UCL, cited a GLA-funded project which saw success in integrating creative and cultural initiatives on the high street: "The Fore Street Living Room Library has been a massive success in Edmonton; there is a community group that has formed around it called Fore Street For All, who have taken over a library that we have retrofitted to be more versatile in its spatial arrangement. They now run events and cultural programmes there on a regular basis, have organised their own funding around it, and are collaborating across borough boundaries, even with Haringey arts groups as well. Something that started on a high street premises is starting to work itself across a much bigger geographic area."<sup>62</sup>



Fore Street Living Room Library, Enfield. Source: [Designing Libraries](#)

<sup>62</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.7



## Case study: Blue House Yard

Blue House Yard is a redevelopment of an empty and underused car park site a few minutes' walk from Wood Green High Road. In 2017, the GLA provided funding to Blue House Yard, alongside Haringey Council and High Street Works. It has been run by Meanwhile Space since it launched in 2018 on a profit share model.

Blue House Yard operates as a workspace catering to artists as well as a flexible yard space for entertainment, food, and markets, surrounded by two-storey wooden sheds from which local businesses make and sell. The site also houses Ludo's, a small independently-run bar and venue situated in a refurbished double decker bus.

On our site visit to Wood Green High Road, we found the space occupied by several businesses and were impressed by the way in which the space had been repurposed. Haringey Council representatives gave the Committee a tour of Blue House Yard and told us more about the model. All spaces are let on a fair rent policy with prices being set below market value, on flexible terms and with no upfront deposits.<sup>63</sup> During the visit, Eddie Taylor from Meanwhile Space explained the benefits of the model: Tenants are able to use the space as an opportunity to try out new business ideas or as a first affordable retail window for existing businesses, before potentially venturing out onto the high street.



Blue House Yard, Haringey. Source: [Jan Kattein Architects](#)

<sup>63</sup> Blue House Yard, [About](#)

The Committee's findings highlight the transformative potential of arts and culture in revitalising high streets, as evidenced by various initiatives across London which have brightened up high streets and made them more desirable places to spend time in. These examples illustrate how incorporating arts and culture enhances the vibrancy and uniqueness of high streets, as well as boosting footfall and fostering community. There is a pressing need to reimagine high streets as aspirational “places to be” rather than solely “places to buy,” and arts and culture are critical for this.

We welcome the work the GLA has already done to support the way London's high streets are becoming destinations to spend time in, rather than simply places to shop. We encourage the Mayor to go further in this, using his support and funding to develop London's high streets as unique civic spaces. This should include prioritising art and culture on the high street, including by setting up an Art on the High Street programme.

## **Recommendation 2**

To help develop the unique character and heritage of each high street, the Mayor should develop an Art on the High Street programme that commissions public art installations, murals and interactive artworks on high streets in London. The GLA should work with local schools and artists in commissioning this work.

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## Community-led regeneration

### Integrating the local community

It is vital that efforts to regenerate high streets have the support of local communities. Throughout the committee's investigation, meaningful community engagement was identified as one of the important factors in ensuring a dynamic and revitalised high street. In the Committee meeting, Chris Paddock, freelance Economic Consultant, reflected on his experience in engaging with communities:

"People are asked for their opinions, but they are not necessarily asked for their agency. That in itself can be quite disempowering. That is why I advocate for Nick's work in Power to Change and others so much because giving communities a role and empowering them in the partnership is incredibly important."<sup>64</sup>

Nick Plumb echoed these sentiments during the meeting and cited a "lack of shared vision" as one of the obstacles in creating the right partnerships.<sup>65</sup> Engaging residents early in the process gives them agency, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration. In its evidence shared with the Committee, Barking and Dagenham Council outlined the importance of correctly engaging with community stakeholders:

"It is important to spend the time up front to correctly identify community stakeholders and understand what their aspirations are and the progress of community-led initiatives underway. Often the aspiration is there, but support is needed to mobilise initiatives. This isn't just about funding, but also organisational management."<sup>66</sup>

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*"It is about engaging as early as possible and getting the right people around the table to form that partnership so that, as the project develops, you have a whole range of different voices."<sup>67</sup>*

**Nick Plumb, Associate Director for Policy and Insight  
Power to Change**

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### Community Improvement Districts

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have proved successful in involving businesses in the development of local economies, but there is not an established equivalent system to involve

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<sup>64</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.11

<sup>65</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.11

<sup>66</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Barking and Dagenham Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>67</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.11

local residents.<sup>68</sup> There has been a rise in research highlighting the central role of the community in high street regeneration, which is where the concept of Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) emerged. CIDs were first proposed in 2011 by the London School of Economics' Professor Tony Travers.<sup>69</sup> They provide a new approach for community stakeholders to have more say on strategic direction of the high streets alongside local authorities, businesses and other local stakeholders.<sup>70</sup> Although many BIDs do involve residents, ward councillors and other community stakeholders at board level or on sub-groups, this is often in a non-voting capacity<sup>71</sup> (we understand the rationale for this, as BIDs are putting forward the funding). But CIDs give local people and community organisations, as well as businesses, a say over the strategic direction of local high streets.

As part of a pilot led in collaboration by Power to Change and the Mayor of London, Kilburn High Road and Wood Green were named as London's first CIDs in 2022.<sup>72</sup> Each pilot was awarded a total of £40k (£20k from Power to Change and £20k from the Mayor of London) alongside expert support to help set up a CID. Since then, Power to Change has published a report which evaluated the pilot.<sup>73</sup> In this, Power to Change found that "while the programme did not identify an ideal model, governance structure and funding source for CIDs, it showed an enthusiasm and need for engaging local communities in high street regeneration."<sup>74</sup>

The report noted that existing approaches, such as those led by local authorities and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), rarely treat local communities as equal partners in decision-making. The pilot also highlighted that CIDs could help to mobilise local leadership and engage with communities in a way that other approaches have not succeeded in.<sup>75</sup> The evidence suggests that while the pilot did not establish a single model for how to operate CIDs, it demonstrated their potential when properly resourced and supported.<sup>76</sup>

During the meeting, Nick Plumb reflected on the CID model, citing "mixed results across the country" and explained:

"One of the things that we learned through the process was not always starting with the model. We were saying, 'Let us try and bring these things into being', and that was the starting point. So often, the starting point needs to be a conversation that matters to people in that place and then build from there and think about the governance that sits around it afterwards."<sup>77</sup>

The evaluation of the pilot CIDs suggests that there is no single established model for engaging communities on high street regeneration. However, it remains vital that the GLA and boroughs work with local communities when implementing changes to high streets. The GLA's new High Streets Fund provides a valuable opportunity to meaningfully engage residents and community groups, as well as local businesses, when investing in high streets.

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<sup>68</sup> Power to Change, [Community Improvement Districts: A Discussion Paper](#), October 2020, pg.7

<sup>69</sup> Power to Change, [Community Improvement Districts: A Discussion Paper](#), October 2020, pg.7

<sup>70</sup> Power to Change, [Community Improvement Districts: A Discussion Paper](#), October 2020, pg.7

<sup>71</sup> Power to Change, [Community Improvement Districts: A Discussion Paper](#), October 2020, pg.7

<sup>72</sup> [Community Improvement Districts pilot programme: Final report - Power to Change](#)

<sup>73</sup> Power to Change, [Community Improvement Districts pilot programme: Final report](#), July 2023

<sup>74</sup> Power to Change, [Community Improvement Districts pilot programme: Final report](#), July 2023, pg. 5

<sup>75</sup> Power to Change, [Community Improvement Districts pilot programme: Final report](#), July 2023, pg. 5

<sup>76</sup> Power to Change, [Community Improvement Districts pilot programme: Final report](#), July 2023, pg. 5

<sup>77</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.17

### Recommendation 3

The Mayor should build on lessons from the Community Improvement Districts pilot to create an online engagement platform for local communities to have a say in high street regeneration projects in London. This should include formal processes such as regular consultations and community forums, as well as introducing voting rights for communities in relation to certain projects. This structure should be built into the GLA's new High Streets Fund.

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### Tackling vacant units

During the Committee's meeting, Nick Plumb told us that vacant units on high streets are less of a problem in London than in other parts of the country:

"In lots of towns, vacancy rates are really high, which leads to a sense of decline, which can in turn lead to antisocial behaviour, social and economic problems. In London, vacancy rates are much lower, therefore that is less of a problem. Property prices and asset costs are so high that often that prevents a more diverse set of businesses taking part in high street activity."<sup>78</sup>

Data from the Local Data Company (an insights and consultancy business) suggests that London has the lowest vacancy of any region in Great Britain, with a vacancy rate of 10.6 per cent, compared to a GB average of 14 per cent.<sup>79</sup> Despite the relatively low vacancy rate, many of London's high streets nonetheless have vacant units, which can negatively impact the character and attractiveness of a local area.

### Examples of tackling vacant units in London

Throughout our investigation we heard about how London boroughs are proactively addressing the issue of vacant units, including by involving local communities and businesses. During the Committee's meeting, Elizabeth Harris, Regeneration and Growth Service Manager at the London Borough of Sutton, spoke about the approach that Sutton has taken in tackling vacant units in the town centre. The council bought a landmark high street building to create a new space for Sutton College, a community learning provider run by the council. Additionally, Elizabeth Harris said:

"We also purchased the St Nicholas Shopping Centre in 2021 to bring that into council ownership and are progressing a programme to enable us, through an appointed developer, to free up the civic site, moving the council into the heart of the high street to create a new civic hub."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.1

<sup>79</sup> Local Data Company, [The Vacancy Monitor](#)

<sup>80</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.9

She explained that these measures “are having a positive impact” as they are helping to attract other outlets to the high street, giving the example of a Pret A Manger which had recently opened.<sup>81</sup>

Barking and Dagenham Council has aimed to address the issue of vacant units through the use of ‘pop-up’ stores.<sup>82</sup> Temporary use of vacant properties on the high street, also known as ‘meanwhile use’, has been a popular initiative that has helped bring empty units back into use through temporary occupation by businesses, community groups, or creatives.<sup>83</sup> These rotating, curated occupiers not only support small businesses but also help shape the retail landscape within town centres. Barking and Dagenham Council told us that “[these] initiative[s] that can be quite successful in terms of promoting small business and influencing the type of retail within a town centre”<sup>84</sup> Grace Nelson, Town Centre Manager (Harlesden, Willesden Green) at the London Borough of Brent, described a business model on Ealing Road. She noted that if a unit becomes vacant, another local business will often take it over, and as a result “Ealing Road probably has one of the lowest vacancies across the borough.”<sup>85</sup>

## Recommendation 4

When providing funding for future programmes on London's high streets, the Mayor should prioritise funding for areas with high vacancies, based on vacancy data from the High Streets Data Service.

## High Street Rental Auctions

The challenge of vacant units can be exacerbated by negligent or absent landlords, and we support measures which bring vacant units back into use by local businesses and communities.

One new way of addressing vacant units could be through High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs), a legal change introduced by the previous government in early 2024 which came into effect in December 2024.<sup>86 87</sup> HSRAs allow councils to put properties up for auction that have been empty for more than 365 days in a 24-month period, for a one-to-five year lease.<sup>88</sup> The aim of this initiative is to tackle prolonged vacant shops and premises and to regenerate high streets by renting units out to local businesses and community groups. In March 2025, the Government announced that 11 councils had already made use of these new powers, including three London boroughs (Camden, Hillingdon and Westminster).<sup>89</sup>

<sup>81</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.10

<sup>82</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Barking and Dagenham Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>83</sup> Places for London, [Meanwhile Use Spaces](#)

<sup>84</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Barking and Dagenham Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>85</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.10

<sup>86</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, [High street rental auctions](#), May 2024

<sup>87</sup> UK Government, [Huge boost for high streets as councils get new powers](#), 3 December 2024

<sup>88</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Vacant shops to be filled as high streets revitalised](#), 6 March 2025

<sup>89</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Vacant shops to be filled as high streets revitalised](#), 6 March 2025

During our meeting, Nick Plumb, Associate Director for Policy and Insight at Power to Change, expressed support for HSRAs, urging “the GLA and local councils to make use of those new powers”.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, Nick Plumb highlighted how the convening powers of the GLA could be used to work with local anchor institutions and organisations to help access vacant units for the community.<sup>91</sup>

Another initiative to enable more community ownership on local high streets is the ‘Community Right to Buy’ scheme, where communities can more easily purchase neglected high street properties and force the sale of these where necessary.<sup>92</sup> The Government’s English Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024, proposes introducing a new ‘right to buy’ scheme, whereby communities could buy valued community assets, such as empty shops, pubs and community spaces.<sup>93</sup> This means that communities would get the right of first refusal when spaces with significant community value come up for sale, with the aim of revamping high streets and reducing the number of empty premises.<sup>94</sup> Nick Plumb told us that this is “a real opportunity to change that ownership picture on the high street”.<sup>95</sup>

We are persuaded that community-led initiatives can have a significant impact on improving high streets. If local communities are involved in regeneration plans, they are more likely to feel a sense of attachment to their local high street and more likely to spend time there. Innovative approaches to tackling vacant units, like temporary pop-ups or flexible use of spaces, are practical ways to breathe new life into struggling areas. Initiatives such as High Street Rental Auctions can help empower councils and local communities to bring vacant units back into use more effectively. The Mayor and the GLA can play an important role in supporting London’s boroughs to make use of these powers.

## Recommendation 5

As part of his new High Streets Fund, the Mayor should support local community groups to take advantage of the new powers introduced by High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs) to take over the leases of vacant units. This should include providing financial support to community groups to develop viable projects, to enable them to access vacant units as part of HSRAs.

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### High Street Estate Agency

On 27 February 2025, the Mayor and London Councils published the London Growth Plan.<sup>96</sup> This included a commitment to:

“Explore a publicly owned, mission-driven property agent and manager. It would manage empty units on behalf of local authorities and other landlords, bringing them

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<sup>90</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.21

<sup>91</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.21

<sup>92</sup> Power to Change, [Saving the high street: the community takeover](#), September 2020, pg.10

<sup>93</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [English Devolution White Paper](#), 16 December 2024

<sup>94</sup> Power to Change, [Places and spaces matter: a Community Right to Buy - Power to Change](#)

<sup>95</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.18

<sup>96</sup> Mayor of London, [London Growth Plan](#), February 2025

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back into use for local businesses or community uses. It would match empty shops with new users, breathing new life into high streets.”<sup>97</sup>

The press release for London Councils provides the following additional detail:

“A further £400k UKSPF [UK Shared Prosperity Fund] could go towards piloting a publicly owned High Street Estate Agency to manage empty units for local authorities and other landlords, bringing them back into use for local businesses or community uses, creating more affordable workspaces where most needed and breathing new life into high streets.”<sup>98</sup>

We welcome this proposal in principle and look forward to seeing more detail once it is published.

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<sup>97</sup> Mayor of London, [London Growth Plan](#), February 2025

<sup>98</sup> London Councils, [London leaders unveil Growth Plan to turbocharge productivity and add more than £100bn to London's economy](#), 27 February 2025



## Funding and partnerships

### GLA high street initiatives

The responsibility for managing high streets in London primarily falls on local authorities.<sup>99</sup> However, the GLA maintains a strategic role in shaping the overall economic development and regeneration of London's high streets.<sup>100</sup> As noted above, in February 2025 the Mayor launched the London Growth Plan,<sup>101</sup> which included a new High Streets Fund of £20m for boroughs to invest in improving local areas.<sup>102</sup> No further detail has yet been released on how the fund will be distributed.

Our investigation considered the funding and support that pre-dated this announcement, including several programmes which have funded regeneration schemes on specific high streets. These include the Good Growth Fund, a £70m regeneration programme which started in 2017 and has now closed, which included substantial investment in high street projects.<sup>103</sup> More recently, the Mayor has invested in London's high streets through the High Streets for All recovery mission<sup>104</sup> and the Civic Partnership Programme<sup>105</sup>.

### High Streets for All recovery mission

'High Streets for All' was one of the nine 'missions' established as part of the London Recovery Programme in 2020.<sup>106</sup> As part of this mission, the Mayor established the High Streets for All Challenge Fund which provided targeted advice and £4m of strategic enabling funding.<sup>107</sup> Delivery of the Mayor's High Streets for All programme continued until March 2024.<sup>108</sup> Tim Rettler, Area Manager South, Regeneration and Growth Strategies at the GLA told us that the GLA was in the process of collecting 'self-evaluations' from the projects.<sup>109</sup> After these self-evaluations have been submitted, the GLA is due to carry out a "full programme-wide evaluation".<sup>110</sup> It is important that this evaluation is used to understand how successful this programme has been, and to inform the development of future high street programmes.

### The Civic Partnership Programme

One current GLA programme which aims to support high streets is the Civic Partnership Programme (CPP). This programme has provided funding to several boroughs to develop regeneration strategies in 12 particular areas of need, involving local communities and

<sup>99</sup> Local Government Association, [Creating resilient and revitalised high streets in the 'new normal'](#), 24 January 2022

<sup>100</sup> Centre for London, [Community Town Centres](#), May 2021, pg.52

<sup>101</sup> Mayor of London, [London Growth Plan](#), February 2025

<sup>102</sup> Mayor of London, [London Growth Plan](#), February 2025, pg.98

<sup>103</sup> GLA, [Good Growth Fund](#)

<sup>104</sup> GLA, [High Streets for All](#)

<sup>105</sup> GLA, [Civic Partnership Programmes](#)

<sup>106</sup> Mayor of London, [London Recovery Programme](#), October 2020

<sup>107</sup> GLA, [High Streets for All | London City Hall](#)

<sup>108</sup> Mayor of London, [High Streets for All Challenge](#)

<sup>109</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.3

<sup>110</sup> Mayor of London, [High Streets for All Challenge](#)

businesses.<sup>111</sup> The GLA subsequently awarded a total of £12.4m to five of these projects in Brent, Redbridge, Hackney, Lewisham, and Croydon, to make improvements to public spaces.<sup>112</sup>

### The Town Architects programme

Most recently, in October 2024, the Mayor announced a two-year pilot scheme: the Town Architects programme, aimed at improving high streets and public spaces across the capital.<sup>113</sup> In this programme, the Mayor will appoint 10 built environment experts to support the capital's boroughs to improve the quality of high streets and public spaces. This forms part of the Mayor's £1.25m Local Growth Capacity Support Programme which aims to support local growth and the design of public spaces in London.<sup>114</sup>

## Building on success: The Mayor's impact on high streets

Evidence presented to the Committee highlighted the positive impact of GLA initiatives on high streets across London over many years. Jan Kattein, Director of Jan Kattein Architects and lecturer at UCL, noted the support that the GLA has provided for high street projects "in the last 10 to 15 years."<sup>115</sup> He also emphasised the global influence of GLA initiatives, stating that these efforts are being copied across the UK and worldwide, with central government programmes such as levelling-up funding inspired by London-based models.<sup>116</sup>

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*"I think The Mayor has had an absolutely phenomenal impact on high streets in London. There are obviously still huge challenges, but just the turning around of the narrative of failure into a positive message and repurposing high streets as spaces for democracy, culture, and art."<sup>117</sup>*

**Jan Kattein, Director**

**Jan Kattein Architects and lecturer at UCL**

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Chris Paddock similarly praised the strategic approach of the GLA, noting:

"The Mayor's approach, High Streets for All and the Good Growth by Design, are the best in the world that I have seen. I have the privilege of speaking to other cities, and it is always an example that people want to talk about."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> GLA, [Civic Partnership Programme](#)

<sup>112</sup> GLA, [Mayor invests £12.4 million to transform public spaces across the capital | London City Hall](#), 5 August 2024

<sup>113</sup> GLA, [Mayor launches two year pilot scheme to improve high streets and public spaces across the capital](#), 4 October 2024

<sup>114</sup> GLA, [Mayor launches two year pilot scheme to improve high streets and public spaces across the capital](#), 4 October 2024

<sup>115</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.14

<sup>116</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.20

<sup>117</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.20

<sup>118</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.21

We also heard from boroughs about the positive impact that GLA programmes have had on local high streets. Elizabeth Harris told the Committee about the positive impact this funding has had in Sutton:

- The Green Enterprise Partnership, formed alongside a BID with High Street for All Challenge funding, led to the Go Green business rates discount scheme, supporting 128 businesses to halve carbon emissions by 2030.
- The Good Growth Fund supported the development of Oru Sutton, converting a former BHS site into a co-working space.<sup>119</sup>

### Case study: Wood Green High Road

Haringey Council hosted the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee for a visit to one of London's busiest local high streets in November 2024. Wood Green High Road, like many high streets across the UK, has had to deal with challenges stemming from COVID-19 and long-term economic pressures.

Through the Good Growth Fund, the GLA has invested £1.87m into projects based in Haringey and Wood Green High Road specifically. These include the delivery of a 'pocket park', tree planting and public realm improvements, and safer routes between the town centre and local schools. As part of our visit we went to Rising Green Youth Hub, which opened in August 2022.<sup>120</sup> Aimed at young people aged 11 to 19 and those aged up to 25 for people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), it is designed to provide them with a place to "relax, socialise and enjoy".<sup>121</sup> The project received the Best Social Value Project award at the 2023 Thornton Education Trust's Inspire Future Generations Awards, with Rising Green being hailed as an "exemplar project" that went further than just "involving young people" by putting them "at the very centre of the brief, purpose, process and delivery."<sup>122</sup>

Through the High Streets for All Challenge, the Mayor invested £200,000 to deliver the 'Eat Wood Green' project, which will provide a new rooftop garden at Wood Green Library.<sup>123</sup> This project is still in development.<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, Grace Nelson outlined how GLA funding had been used in Brent, where the Good Growth Fund enabled the acquisition of the Picture Palace in Harlesden, which will now be a centre celebrating African and Caribbean heritage.<sup>125</sup> She explained that the High Streets for All Challenge Fund had supported a programme which included "a cooking club initiative" and "a

<sup>119</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.8

<sup>120</sup> [Architects' Journal](#), [Power of youth: Rising Green by Freehaus](#), October 2023

<sup>121</sup> Haringey Council, [Rising Green Youth Hub](#)

<sup>122</sup> FE News, [Wood Green Young Voices scoop award for Rising Green Youth Hub success](#), 19 December 2022

<sup>123</sup> GLA, [High Streets for All Challenge](#)

<sup>124</sup> Haringey Council, [Eat Wood Green](#), 3 May 2023

<sup>125</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.9

robust health and wellbeing programme". She emphasised that these projects have fostered a "heightened sense of place, agency, and ownership" among the local community.<sup>126</sup>

### Funding mechanisms and challenges

Despite broad praise for the positive impact of GLA funding programmes, we heard that there can be challenges for boroughs when funding is of a short-term nature and is distributed through a competitive process. Preparing proposals often requires substantial resources, which can disadvantage under-resourced councils and community groups.

Grace Nelson told us that Brent has received "fantastic funding support" but that revenue support was needed for community partnerships "to provide that long-term management of these projects, so these projects become sustainable and last the course long after the funding has gone away."<sup>127</sup> In response to a question about what further support is needed for high streets, Elizabeth Harris explained:

"Continuation of funding streams which are flexible enough that they respond to local needs and are not overly prescriptive is really important. Also, it is about them being provided for a long enough period that we can plan projects and we can deliver them."<sup>128</sup>

The Committee also heard that competitive bidding processes for high street funding often create unnecessary challenges for local authorities and BIDs across London. Evidence from Islington Council highlighted that "additional non-competitive funding support over multi-year periods would enable local authorities to address local need."<sup>129</sup> Kingston Council endorsed this view, emphasising:

"Funding and grant award timeframes can allow for more meaningful co-design and authorship within communities. Avoiding competitive funding – should only be used as a last resort where allocation approach cannot be reasonably applied."<sup>130</sup>

Similarly, The Fitzrovia Partnership told us:

"The lottery approach to supporting and funding local high streets is not taken in other areas of the public sector such as social care, health or education, where those in need are allocated resources and services, rather than having to be in competition with others. We encourage funding to support high streets to be allocated on an evidence- and needs- basis."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.9

<sup>127</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.14

<sup>128</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.13

<sup>129</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Islington Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>130</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Kingston Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>131</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by The Fitzrovia Partnership, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

In additional written evidence, Jan Kattein also highlighted concerns about the competitive nature of funding applications for Mayoral programmes. However, he added that despite the demanding nature of such applications, “this resulted overall in high quality outputs and an elevated level of anticipation and ambition.”<sup>132</sup>

It appears that the GLA recognises these concerns and has emphasised the collaborative approach of some of its funding programmes. Tim Rettler, Area Manager South, Regeneration and Growth Strategies at the GLA told us that the High Streets for All Challenge was a revenue funding programme rather than a capital one and emphasised that “places [that received funding] were identified in collaboration with local authorities.”<sup>133</sup>

However, many high street funding programmes from both the GLA and central government involve competitive processes such as open bidding rounds, which place significant administrative and financial pressures on local authorities.<sup>134</sup> GLA funding for specific projects has generally been on a competitive basis. Many recent funding programmes – including GLA schemes like the High Streets for All Challenge Fund – operate on short-term cycles, making it difficult for local authorities to plan and deliver long-term, impactful regeneration projects.<sup>135</sup>

Where there is a competitive bidding process in place, the GLA should seek to minimise the burden on councils in submitting funding bids. One potential way of doing this is providing support through the ‘High Street Network’, which is a GLA-run network of local authorities and other key stakeholders.<sup>136</sup> During the Committee’s meeting, the GLA told us that the network had recently been “refreshed” and was now delivering a programme called the “High Street Classroom”, which is funded up until March 2026.<sup>137</sup> The GLA describes this as a “learning programme of events and activities” for boroughs and other key stakeholders, which includes visits to high street projects across London and working groups to deliver solutions to specific challenges.<sup>138</sup>

We believe this programme has the potential to enhance capacity in boroughs to submit bids and access funding, and that this should be a focus for the support it provides in the coming year. However, this will only help organisations to manage the burden placed on local authorities and community groups by a competitive funding model. It is important that public money is used to best effect and that allocation of funding is perceived to be fair, and therefore there will be times when competitive funding is necessary. However, given the concerns expressed above, we believe that a competitive bidding process should not be the only

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<sup>132</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Dr Jan Kattein of Jan Kattein Architects, [Appendix 5 - Response Director Jan Kattein Architects and Lecturer in Architecture UCL](#), 20 December 2024

<sup>133</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.1-2

<sup>134</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Islington Council and The Fitzrovia Partnership, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>135</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Kingston Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>136</sup> Mayor of London, [High Street Network](#)

<sup>137</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 2 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.3

<sup>138</sup> GLA, [Join the High Street Network](#)

approach to allocating funding for high streets. The Mayor should also consider allocating funding through a collaborative approach based on evidence and need. We believe the GLA should explore this approach when delivering its new High Streets Fund, which was announced as part of the London Growth Plan.<sup>139</sup>

## Recommendation 6

To address gaps in capacity and encourage effective partnership working among local authorities, the High Street Network should offer training on stakeholder engagement and accessing funding opportunities. As part of this work, the GLA should facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring from boroughs with successful high street initiatives.

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## Recommendation 7

When delivering his new High Streets Fund, the Mayor should consider the feedback received by the Committee about the onerous nature of competitive bidding processes for high street projects. Where possible, he should work in collaboration with all London boroughs to identify the areas of greatest need when distributing funding.

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## Planning and licensing

Although planning and licensing were not primary areas of focus during our investigation, written evidence from local authorities and BIDs across London highlighted their importance in helping high streets thrive. Licensing, particularly for outdoor dining and street markets, emerged as a key factor in revitalising high streets, especially post-pandemic.<sup>140</sup> We received the following evidence from stakeholders:

BusinessLDN: "A range of Government initiatives including the 'Eat out to help out' and pavement licensing schemes have helped to drive footfall back onto the high street."<sup>141</sup>

Merton Council: "We would request that the London Assembly Committee consider the value of street markets to our town centres and that there is a need to review the street licensing model to support partnerships."<sup>142</sup>

The Fitzrovia Partnership: "a more enabling and consistent approach to pavement licences could reinvigorate London's West End, including the commercial areas of Fitzrovia, thereby contributing to growth and job creation."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Mayor of London, [London Growth Plan](#), February 2025, pg.98

<sup>140</sup> Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, [Supporting our high streets after COVID-19](#), December 2021, pg.17

<sup>141</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by BusinessLDN, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>142</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Merton Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>143</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by The Fitzrovia Partnership, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)



The Knightsbridge Partnership: "The requirement for regulation, such as licensing of premises and outdoor dining, should be minimal and approached by the public sector to enable growth as the guiding principle."<sup>144</sup>

These responses reinforce the Committee's recommendation from the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills report on the night-time economy, which acknowledged the importance of using the licensing regime to support local businesses and the wider economy:

"The Mayor should review the impact that London's current licensing regime has on the success of the night-time economy and, working with boroughs, take steps to strengthen this regime."<sup>145</sup>

We recognise the views expressed here that licensing has a significant impact on vibrancy and appeal of high streets, especially in relation to outdoor dining and street markets. We also recognise that the views of residents need to be considered as part of licensing decisions. Powers and responsibilities relating to licensing rest with boroughs rather than the GLA. However, the GLA should also take these views into account as it works with boroughs and designs its own interventions to support high streets.

## **Recommendation 8**

When providing funding for projects as part of the new High Streets Fund, the Mayor should work with both inner and outer London boroughs to ensure that these projects are supported and enabled by local licensing regimes.

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<sup>144</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by The Knightsbridge Partnership, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>145</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [London's Night Time Economy](#)

## Future-proof high streets

### Creating sustainable high streets

The future of high streets hinges on their ability to adapt not only to economic challenges but also to pressing environmental concerns. During this investigation, in both written and oral evidence, the Committee heard about the importance of green spaces, keeping high streets free of litter and overall climate resilience on the high street.

Guests highlighted 'circular economy' principles as crucial for the future of high streets. The circular economy is a system where materials never become waste through reusing materials already in the system, thereby reducing the need to extract these resources. In a circular economy, products and materials are kept in circulation through processes like maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacture, recycling, and composting.<sup>146</sup>

Chris Paddock emphasised the importance of the circular and repair economies, stating: "The circular economy, the repair economy, these are important things which enable us to have a more resilient and more positive economy for London in the future."<sup>147</sup> Repair is an important element of the circular economy as repairing products instead of discarding them reduces demand for new materials and manufacturing.<sup>148</sup>

Despite the importance of sustainability in creating future-proof high streets, Gianluca Rizzo, managing director of Brixton BID, highlighted the difficulties businesses face in implementing sustainable practices:

"Given the variety of pressures businesses on the high street are facing, sustainability is not one of their key concerns. In order to change behaviour, ultimately sustainable initiatives for business should aim to save them time and/or money in order to increase adoption."<sup>149</sup>

We believe there is a need for initiatives that not only encourage sustainability but also demonstrate tangible benefits to businesses, such as cost savings or operational efficiencies. The absence of easily accessible tools and practical support for integrating sustainable practices makes it less likely that businesses will adopt them.

One potential form of support for high street businesses looking to introduce sustainable practices is ReLondon. ReLondon is a partnership of the Mayor of London and London boroughs to improve waste and resource management systems and push the city towards adopting a circular economy approach.<sup>150</sup> In May 2024, ReLondon announced that it would

<sup>146</sup> Ellen MacArthur Foundation, [What is a circular economy?](#)

<sup>147</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.4

<sup>148</sup> Resources, Conservation and Recycling, [Repairing the circular economy: Public perception and participant profile of the repair economy in Hull, UK](#), May 2021, pg.1

<sup>149</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Brixton BID, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>150</sup> ReLondon, [About us](#)

award grants to 22 high street businesses, with the goal of helping them reuse, repair, rent, share and recycle more as they provide products and services to their customers.<sup>151</sup> As part of ReLondon's 'High Streets Beyond Waste' programme, each business is being given grants of between £2,500 - £10,000 to set up "a new 'beyond waste' circular economy idea to tackle all the stuff they or their customers buy, make, use and throw away, while also helping their business to grow."<sup>152</sup> The Committee believes there is potential for the Mayor and ReLondon to expand such initiatives, enabling high streets to become hubs for sustainable shopping and supporting broader environmental goals.

## Recommendation 9

The Mayor, working with ReLondon, should provide further funding to increase the number of circular economy and waste management initiatives on the high street, ensuring businesses and councils have the resources to implement sustainable solutions and drive long-term high street transformation. This should form part of ReLondon's next business plan, which is due to be renewed at the end of 2025.

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### Car use and parking on high streets

In its analysis of retail outlets across the UK, PwC reports that – in contrast to high streets – retail parks "bucking the declining trend" and are experiencing increased footfall.<sup>153</sup> The success of retail parks is often linked to their convenience, particularly the ease of driving and availability of free parking. This contrasts with high streets, where there are often fewer parking options.

We received evidence expressing a range of views about car use on high streets. Some evidence highlighted the benefits of pedestrianisation and an appetite to move towards a more 'car free' high street:

**Barking and Dagenham Council:** "Enhancing public transport options and promoting cycling and walking to reduce reliance on cars."<sup>154</sup>

**Brixton BID:** "More pedestrianisation and a leaner framework for businesses to active streets is required. Including more car free days, roads open to people, more tables and chairs licenses granted, easier redirection and/or removal of bus lanes where appropriate."<sup>155</sup>

**Kingston Council:** "Our extensive new cycling network is making it easier for people to access high streets using active transport, recognising the economic benefits of doing so compared to using the car."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> ReLondon, [A blueprint for circular high streets: 22 businesses pave the way](#), 28 May 2024

<sup>152</sup> ReLondon, [A blueprint for circular high streets: 22 businesses pave the way](#), 28 May 2024

<sup>153</sup> PwC, [Store Openings and Closures H1 2024](#)

<sup>154</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Barking and Dagenham Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>155</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Brixton BID, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>156</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Kingston Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

**Lambeth Council:** “From July to October 24, in partnership with This is Clapham Bid we delivered 13 Car Free weekends at Voltaire Road, which gave space for businesses to expand onto the street and community activities such as face painting to take place. On the 21st of September, Atlantic Road was shut off to vehicular traffic and space was given to people to do planting, visit businesses and dance.”<sup>157</sup>

However, we also heard that some high streets are poorly served by public transport, and many Londoners rely on cars to access them. Rumi Bose gave the example of Neasden Town Centre in Brent, which does not have extensive public transport access. Without this access, she stressed that any shift away from car reliance must come with “alternative solutions and enabling conditions” to help people adapt.<sup>158</sup> Chris Paddock noted that “for a lot of people, owning and using a car is an important part of their life.”<sup>159</sup>

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has also highlighted car parking as a key factor influencing high street footfall.<sup>160</sup> In its recent Future of High Streets report, the FSB recommended that local authorities introduce policies offering free parking on at least two Saturdays per month, as well as on additional high-footfall days tied to major events or local shopping patterns. The report argues that “strategic parking pricing is crucial” in making high streets more attractive to shoppers who might otherwise choose retail parks with ample free parking.<sup>161</sup>

The Committee’s findings highlight the differing views of stakeholders when it comes to pedestrianisation and car use on high streets. We recognise the advantages retail parks offer in terms of convenience and accessibility through car parking. But we are also supportive of sustainable travel options, and the role that pedestrianisation can play in making high streets more attractive environments to spend time in. Every high street is different, and it is vital that local plans relating to car use and accessible transport are developed in conjunction with local communities.

## Recommendation 10

As part of his new High Streets Fund, in cases where the funding impacts local transport and accessibility, the Mayor should ensure that both inner and outer London boroughs have actively gathered and taken into account the views of residents and businesses on parking and transport accessibility. This should include consulting with local Disabled people and their representatives.

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<sup>157</sup> Written evidence submitted to the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee by Lambeth Council, [London's high streets - written evidence, November 2024.pdf](#)

<sup>158</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.9

<sup>159</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Appendix 1 - Minutes - Transcript of Agenda Item 7 - London's High Streets](#), 14 November 2024, pg.9

<sup>160</sup> Federation of Small Businesses, [The Future of the High Street](#), August 2024, pg.62

<sup>161</sup> Federation of Small Businesses, [The Future of the High Street](#), August 2024, pg.63

## Committee activity

The Economy, Culture and Skills Committee held the first meeting on London's high streets on 14 November 2024 with the following guests:

### Panel 1

- **Nick Plumb**, Associate Director for Policy and Insight, Power to Change
- **Dr Jan Kattein**, Director of Jan Kattein Architects and lecturer at UCL
- **Rumi Bose**, Placeshaping & Regeneration Consultant, Rumi Bose Ltd
- **Chris Paddock**, Freelance Economic Consultant

### Panel 2

- **Louise Duggan**, Head of Regeneration and Growth Strategies, Greater London Authority
- **Tim Rettler**, Area Manager South (Regeneration – Growth Strategies), Greater London Authority
- **Grace Nelson**, Town Centre Manager (Harlesden, Willesden Green), London Borough of Brent
- **Elizabeth Harris**, Regeneration and Growth Service Manager, London Borough of Sutton

**Site visit:** On 15 October 2024, the Committee carried out a site visit to Wood Green High Road and took part in a roundtable discussion with Haringey Council.

**Call for evidence:** The Committee published a call for evidence in September 2024, and received 16 responses from the following organisations:

- Barking and Dagenham Council
- Brixton BID
- BusinessLDN
- Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA)
- Islington Council
- Kingston Council
- Lambeth Council
- Merton Council
- Music Venue Trust
- New West End Company
- NLA
- Southwark Council
- The Fitzrovia Partnership
- The King's Road Partnership
- The Knightsbridge Partnership
- Waltham Forest Council

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Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

### Greek

*Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.*

### Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinize çevrilmiş bir özetini okumak isterseniz, lütfen yukarıdaki telefon numarasını arayın, veya posta ya da e-posta adresi aracılığıyla bizimle temasa geçin.

### Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਖੇਪ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

### Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज़ का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

### Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লেখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

### Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا مذکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

### Arabic

الحصول على ملخص لهذا المستند بلغة،  
فرجاء الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو الاتصال على  
العنوان البريدي أو عنوان البريد  
الإلكتروني أعلاه.

### Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટપાલ અથવા ઈ-મેઈલ સરનામા પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.



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