

# A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS

## An Inclusive City Growth Workshop

11<sup>th</sup> November 2016, 9.30 – 13.00

### Designating inclusive public spaces Table 8 Session 1

**Facilitator in bold facilitator – comments in bold**

Respondents in regular text

*These notes are a summary of the conversation*

---

*Session 1, Table 8*

#### **Tim Rettler (Facilitator)**

Santa Pedone, Elephant and Walworth Neighbourhood Forum

Glyn Kyle, Greater London Authority Strategic Access Panel

Nicholas Plumb, The Challenge

Will Stinson, Family Mosaic

Paul Harper

Sophia De Sousa, The Glass-House

Pip Jackson, Camden Access Centre

Linda Beard, Planning Policy Team, London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

---

#### **Introductions.**

I live in the Elephant and Castle area and am part of Just Space to make planning more accessible to community groups.

Strategic Access Panel.

The Challenge. I arrived in London a year ago to do research at University College London and am trying to do a map of community assets especially under threat.

Family Mosaic for social inclusion.

Glass-House.

Camden access officer and involved with the Olympic Park and parents of disabled children.

Planning policy team.

**We think it's good to look at the spaces between buildings from the broader perspective. We have different specialisms here. What are the key issues for you? Ken**

**Livingstone had the 100 public spaces program, Boris Johnson had a programme too, but what about going forward and inclusive design – itself a broad term? So what do you think we need to do so our public spaces are safe and accessible?**

As a disabled parent of disabled children we want too much of our spaces, especially for the visually impaired and those with mental health issues. It is harder to interpret space doing three to four different things at the same time. We need to ensure that people get from A to B safely as a basic aim.

**Balance is needed in getting to and from and around spaces.**

Generally in London, for disabled people the biggest issue is shared space as there are various schemes. They are not cohesive, with different rules for different schemes. You cannot get to and from different areas and expect shared spaces to work the same way. They should need similar navigational skills; you should not need six guide dog trainings for six boroughs.

**So is there a role for giving direction from the GLA?**

I am someone scared of shared space. I agree with your view that the Mayor should give a lead, and I would like to see overarching concepts taken on board and prioritised. It seems embedded in documents, but some unifying theme would be useful.

On design of spaces, in trying to create a kind of uniformity across the shared spaces, how do you create the localness of a place? Is it about designing infrastructure or the quality of spaces? There is function and quality in a space, which is connected to how it is designed for form, feeling and function, with the function that makes it a sharable space.

Difficult if someone doesn't have full senses. If someone is blind, they understand some of the cultural norms of the use of public spaces and how to navigate across the city. This is common, so they travel safely.

Cyclists and motor vehicles don't mix, and that is accepted, but there is an apparent aversion to this concept for cyclists and pedestrians, younger people and the elderly – each need to have a safe space.

At Tower Bridge traffic is not allowed to go over and people are expected to dismount from their cycles, but they don't and it puts lives in danger. Some cyclists have tried to form a sort of road block to prevent this. We have housing schemes with more accessible garden spaces. Sensory gardens have been suggested. We don't have resources, but asked other tenants and staff to come forward to build it together for those needing it. If there was a public strategy to make people aware of these needs, the public might take some responsibility to gather volunteers to help.

They are often consulted separately. Young people feel like they are designed out of public space as people are nervous around them. They want a shared space, not to feel boxed in. They don't feel there are spaces for them to connect with people of different ages, but what in their behaviour might feel threatening to others and vice versa? We don't talk much about space and interactions with our environment and how it affects interactions.

So many of us could do things, like talk to children in schools, as we don't talk about it or do research.

Councils are cash strapped so new concepts are not discussed. There are seven types of tactile paving. What do we put around one to ensure people know it is there? I have been soaked before now. Do they want to get wet? As a blind person, at night I got wet feet and drenched.

Working in children's playgrounds there is an over emphasising of safety, which is seen as 'absolute' safety so that no one will be upset or hurt and will never be in any discomfort. Our biggest lesson in 20 years is that that is impossible and takes you in a very unhelpful direction. If a public space is engaging it has a degree of unpredictability. So let us unpack what 'safe' means and the different wishes about the degree of it. Some consensus is needed. An energetic eight year old has different hopes for space compared to an elderly 80 year old. Looking at cities from their perspective is a good starting point. There is a book on this. It is very important to unpack the word 'safe'. Don't use it alone, say 'safe stimulating' or add another adjective.

A city is exciting and is manifested in shared spaces. Perhaps we should mix things less. As the population increases, with more living in flats and little space, we need to have welcoming public spaces. What mix do you think we should have to be safe at night and day, where you can have a festival too?

I volunteer in Tower Hamlets, supporting families to have play opportunities in public spaces. I have seen redesigned projects in Tower Hamlets with an emerging consensus that spaces are where all ages can play or sit. Trying to partition functions is doomed to failure as spaces have 'fences' preventing inclusion. If there is a big basket swing, mums with toddlers like them during the day and it is popular for play with teenagers later in the day. So 'age appropriate' functions may be needed.

I think people should engage and interact whatever their age. We encourage shared space, and TfL encourage this by removing barriers and reducing motor vehicles in spaces with no pavements.

Is this shared road surfaces?

There is no navigational aid for some of these spaces.

What are the speed limits?

In some, it is 30 to 60 mph, which is not safe.

We have 20 mph limits. They cannot see to the end of a street and cannot therefore go fast. It is harder to slow down cyclists.

We don't want to disintegrate society i.e. prevent children cycling, but if there is a cyclist superhighway we don't want navigational aids that create a problem. A solution is to ask people what they think. If you engage with residents, the children – it helps as it's what they know and understand too. Understand the needs of others. It can include play, interaction and transition.

There is a big waste of space in our area. Some areas are signed 'No Ball Games'. Vast areas like that that can be used, otherwise they are just sad-looking grass areas. On design, look at what is not inclusive design. The Guardian had an article saying there is a way to keep gangs off public space using a device that produces a noise that could be annoying to teenagers – the Mosquito. It is scary.

There is lighting that exposes acne.

It isn't working.

It moves the problem elsewhere. We had a group and the Mosquito noise was there. Half heard it, half didn't. Below the line in newspaper articles is scary, but there isn't a clear consensus. There is hostility to public space with some young people and taking inclusion and entitlement to enjoy public space differs. Bringing the old and young together raises the sights of some beyond the immediate, so they consider what it is like to be parents or old people.

It is interesting that you can lay down basic entitlement for the use of public space as it gets more and more privately owned, so how would you frame those entitlements?

You want different things there compared to amenity or green spaces.

You design space to encourage different use, but what if you cannot skateboard? If homeless you are moved on. Are there principles on public space use?

There are eight year olds wanting to run about. I have a visually impaired eight year old who wants to hold my hand to feel safe.

We do role play exercises and ask them to defend the position of another interest group. It needs stereotyping, but people think outside their immediate needs and then they find they have more in common than not, so what do we share?

It is an almost impossible design brief so we need to understand the design process and the needs of others.

And we have to encourage that add-on to the education or designers, as if left out it is just an 'add on'. If people go across Tower Bridge, how do you get people to understand the norms or 'right approach'? Citizens should say, "This is what should happen." If children gang up on one member of a group, people could feel more empowered to say, "This is not encouraged in London." Would a more educational approach help?

For the Olympics we had volunteers, so why not have more of that for social needs? It gives people something to do as an opportunity. There is a big gap. Have a spatial awareness champion, for instance. My son has no idea what the needs are for your daughter, and I will tell him, but education would help. I didn't know about the Mosquito sound issue until now. There is no one here under 30 to get their opinions. I doubt teens want to be on the streets. I was a teen when the 'No Ball Games' signs came into being, but would prefer to be in a gym. Children want free gym membership to use.

My son wants to know he won't be hit by a football, so public space cannot be for all. Suppose one area is quieter for people to chat in, and another area is for activities?

There is something about designing spaces so people can move from and to them to meet different needs.

Does it help to have a notional neighbourhood where there is a good set of offers, so people can engage and move through space? It is impossible to have one space meet all needs but, over an area, yes we want areas for young and old people that meet their needs and where they can also mix.

The London Plan does set out requirements for the amount of space available and play space. Is there more of a need to think about size and type of space?

It is said 10% must be child space, and people get wrapped up in having it exact.

You don't want dangers with unwelcoming spaces fitting the notional number but which are not friendly.

I was in a small Antwerp space with problems with young people. Locals didn't want to get rid of the seating; they wanted it to be better. People are afraid of what might happen, so blank space is better than what they think could happen if features were put in it. There is a need for experimentation with temporary interventions that show correctly placed and designed benches won't add to drug dealing.

One group put moveable objects in a playground and open space so people could play with them and move them around. It was fun and a way to test how people wanted to use space.

People will experiment, and if something doesn't work it should be removed.

There was a GLA grant to take out benches. They put in fixed seating in reduced numbers as they felt it was safer. Now they seem to be going back. It seems we have extremes.

Places need to change; there will never be one solution fitting all forever.

We spoke to designers of space around housing who were asked to design socialising out of the space. The Young Foundation did some research on interactions.

We need training and education for designers on the different needs and parameters they should work with. Our place-making team had not considered disabled children until I worked with them. Education is needed.

There is also a crisis of confidence around public spaces. In my neighbourhood the typical response of many is, "I am afraid of what happens there now and anything we do will make it worse."

There is a lack of sense of our ownership and entitlement to use public space. Teens were in a park throwing wrappers on the floor, and I asked them to pick them up and bin them as it was nearby. One asked if I was from Tower Hamlets and I said, "No. Don't you want the place to be nice?" People don't take ownership and defend their local space.

There was a verge in Norfolk that was looked after by a local person who then got into trouble with the council. He weeded it and cared for it.

So you have to give people some agency to do positive things.

**There is recognition that public space needs to be multi-functional and efficient. We should use untouched potential and different user needs, but bringing them together is a challenge. Better engagement with users of the space and designers is a priority, as is not segregating groups. Professionally, those involved need to consider some of the above perspectives, including safety and enjoyment, with a more nuanced risk assessment on how people use space. Entitlement could be part of the engagement. The Mayor can give direction on making spaces legible for vulnerable groups. Is there**

**something across London that will help navigation across the city? Quality underlies all the above.**

Toilets were not mentioned.

In playgrounds we don't do risk assessments now, we do risk/benefit assessments, so the move is to a more balanced approach. It starts at the right point and saying, "What good things do we want from this space?" rather than, "What are the bad things to stop?" This approach is supported by the Health and Safety Executive on playgrounds. It could have wider application.

It is important to consider the different types of spaces that can be shared in different ways by different groups of people, so there is not one space for a specific group or use. So how do you create multi-use spaces or a network of spaces that can be connected?

Also consider the times when spaces are used.

Dog toileting – if guide dog owners need to toilet their dogs and there are signs saying 'No Dogs', how is this managed?

# Designating inclusive public

## Table 8 Session 2

---

*Session 2, Table 8*

### **Tim Rettler (Facilitator)**

Wilfried Rimensberger, University of the Arts  
Kezia Coleman, Thomas Pocklington Trust  
Claudia B, Hackney Play Association  
Reuben Saxon, The Social Innovation Partnership  
Luke Burroughs, London Councils Planning Officer  
David Burdus, Burdus Access Management  
Kenne Amisah, Affinity Sutton

---

### **Introductions please.**

Consultant for University of the Arts at Chelsea College. I run community inclusion projects with students and lecturers. I live in Westminster and am involved in community projects.

We support blind and partly blind people.

Hackney Play Association. There are 50 streets opened regularly for children to play in.

Social Innovation Partnership chief executive, working with government support evaluations and social impact. My interest is design through civic technology.

London Councils planning officer.

Burdus Access Management. I work in the built and public environments; I chair the British Wheelchair Association and am director for a communications app that connects disabled people with service providers giving them advance notice of arrival.

Affinity Sutton housing association. I am involved in inclusion management in a community investment team. We have a place-making strategy and aim to build many homes, but residents are wanted for consultations in design and to have a say in how public spaces are designed.

### **Thanks.**

My specific issue during the last four to five years is accessibility for visually impaired people. Projects seem to be in denial that taking away crossing points and other key features may exclude visually impaired people, even though the schemes are usually good for most other people. The issue needs to be kept alive. My current projects seem to significantly exclude the visually impaired, and even though I work on the projects it is difficult to keep the issue alive.

There have been accidents; there could have been more. With shared space – especially the new cycle routes and floating bus stops you reach by crossing cycle routes – you cannot often navigate through.

If we acknowledge it as a real issue, how can we resolve it?

**This was also the same issue at the first workshop. Others don't understand the needs of disabled people. Perhaps the Mayor can get a broader discussion on how others perceive the use of public space as people think of cyclists in high vis jackets speeding through an area, which is not so in other public spaces outside London.**

The car is king. Drivers do not understand the need to close streets – the cheek of it! There are other uses for streets. If children are playing football in the street, you don't expect drivers to accelerate down the street.

When I was small, one person had a car and the street was the children's domain then. Now, shut the street? I had not considered it, but back then there was community feeling.

These are residential streets used as car parks and the occasional fast car going down them prevents people letting the children out to play, but the streets could be community parks.

Neighbours would then come out to speak like they used to.

**It's interesting to see how you feel about TfL and the new London Plan to enable communities to challenge perceptions. Rebalance the use of streets.**

I think we need to make it more visible. We have many communities that sometimes link up, but individuals are not brought together in an overarching way, and the GLA is supposed to do that. There is the council to do it, but it has not happened generally. There is a need to overcome fragmentation. We are going through a process with students working with residents in SW1 to map people, places and projects creating community values. It's interesting to see, because the students think it is easy and they start off in a flat way, but as they progress they realise there is a matrix and it is fluid. Now we are looking at creating a digital living sculpture but we have a problem with resources, because we have no budget or access to protected software. We wonder why the GLA doesn't have such a mapping project. Why doesn't Westminster Council have a planning tool to include those dynamics? The students realised – because they come from various cultures and countries – that they could enable a learning process for others that could be generally accessible.

I visited Andrew in York who has opinions on the types of spaces you need, access, engagement and encouragement of citizen involvement. Getting people together in a space and to behave differently is my interest.

**The difference between public and public sector, and delivery of public space by big business, means there is nervousness on use of public space where it is privately managed. How do we ensure there is cohesion and a connected network of spaces for multiple usage?**

Space is a great leveller, where you think of yourself as a citizen first and employee second.

So it is like you have a life to lead, and feeling part of a community is important so you feel grounded and happy, and you want to live your life in one space and not pollute the atmosphere by driving around from A to B to C. How far do we need to tip the balance?

Who owns public parks? The Council? Or will they be privatised as the only land left to sell or even pay for?

We have to pay for access to play games in our park.

We have Go Ape and you pay also for adventure playgrounds. Streets are outside the door and we have planting schemes in Hackney – it makes such a difference.

**For growing populations with less private amenity space and more pressure on green space to be used by more people, how do spaces need to be used? And be free to use?**

It would be interesting to quantify or validate social inclusion so people realise it is financially viable for cities to do. For example, if you have a development involving flattening a building, why not use the space as green space? I don't think authorities think of this.

In Hackney they are building tower blocks with amenities below, so why not have a green space for the public by each one? It is an opportunity.

On the River Thames, which I think of as a public space, there are many tower blocks rising on the south, taking away sunlight. Each project is looked at individually, so the overall impact is quite bad but not considered. If you talk to council planners they say they cannot look at it except individually for impact.

The public health impact should be considered when planning.

As a borough we are criticised a lot. The green belt constrains us, building affects health and public space, but housing is the priority. We can only deliver the applications put in by people, and we can improve only a little. Profit drives them. We need more investment in public spaces to make spaces more liveable in the future. New public spaces are often created via section 106 in planning, and the finance to deliver the public spaces is often not enough to create really good spaces. It would be good if we could borrow to do it, but we cannot.

Some community spaces deteriorate if they are not managed or maintained and we don't have resources. They then become dangerous and the community doesn't feel ownership.

**You need good public spaces to attract developments, but councils then have to maintain them. What about experimental approaches? How do we test different scenarios for use of public space?**

Do you mean contained space? There is growth in technology to assist with information on the flow of people and traffic, where they want to go at a certain time. People want information, but we can use telematics. Smart knowledge means I may decide how to travel based on information gained. We could have smart traffic direction, use kerb space better, encourage different types of vehicle use linked to a charging system – air polluters, keep out huge vehicles, use electric vehicles. Technology in design could explore this. At one point text telephones were only for deaf people. Smart telephones have satnavs now. They could show which streets are shut, or say if you go down a street there will be a fine.

**There is a healthy streets concept – getting people to move on foot or cycle rather than by car. They want the overall number of trips to reduce, but that isn't likely as population grows, so we need to know what length is acceptable for walking and how to get the information and understand if the environment is fit for that purpose.**

Looking at London globally, I think it is losing character. It looks like New York or Hong Kong and is losing what regular tourists like so they get bored. Residents form part of that character; they move out. In my area in five months we lost eight or nine of the most active local

residents, who felt they couldn't live there anymore and moved to the countryside. People from the continent go back as the place is too expensive. It would help to have experimental space that is flexible in terms of health and safety rules and other red tape, where new models of business or community projects could be established and built on. If it could be established both centrally and at the edges of inner London, i.e. Hackney, perhaps the council could override certain rules.

**For people with disabilities, what are the needs from an environment? How would it differ between, say, Exhibition Road and Ilford?**

Crossings should be accessible and sufficient. There was a phase where the half-way places in the middle of roads were removed, which didn't help people with visual impairments, and pavements have to be a certain width so wheelchairs can turn. People with limited mobility are greater in number than current statistics show. New-build plans seem rushed and don't consider these things.

Wheelchair users take twice as long to get to work. It is time lost out of a person's life or employment time. My friend could not get the same job as me because his journey takes twice as long as he can't access the route better.

Good infrastructure means people could have work and be less cost to the community and have jobs and pay tax.

Also, public toilets are taken away, which impacts use of public space. I like them staffed, too.

**That issue was identified.**

I depend on McDonald's toilets; they are tiny.

So not fully accessible.

**With the previous Mayor there were experts who published a report on the facilities the aging population would need, and public toilets were high on the list. Their location, free to use, good quality, accessible and well located – it is part of infrastructure.**

Dogs are an issue. Councils battle with dog excrement issues. It would be good if there were dedicated spaces for dogs. And collecting the dog pooh – there are bags next to trees. On some streets you see one doggy bag after another and there is no bin.

On estates there are fenced-off areas. Why can't people play there? Because they are for dogs.

**We did a project at Nunhead Green, which had a play area and dog user area, but the layout was wrong. The engagement process wasn't quite right. You need to get people to acknowledge the requirements of others.**

Schools have locked-up outside spaces in built-up areas. How do you incentivise schools to open up the areas, as they do in Washington? They are managed individually and have issues with security, but they are for people.

We are discussing with Pimlico Academy the use of their fantastic but empty facilities at the weekend. We want to do an upcycling project, but there are insurance, funding and health and

safety issues. Academies are supposed to make money from facilities. The school garden has been neglected for two years, and though we have local residents willing to look after it, we face barriers.

I worked for Groundwork, and individual cases are tricky. Where the community gets together and works with charities and the council to improve an open space, you then have ongoing maintenance issues. Maybe an area is fenced off due to vandalism they experienced. Then you need volunteers, who tend to be older. They could open or close the space.

Many schools hire halls or extend operations at the weekend. They are public spaces.

Can you have publicly employed stewards to do this? Like the loos, if someone looks after them they are nicer than when they're not cared for. Maybe someone in a red jacket on the street, paid by the public, could be sought?

**In business improvement districts they take a levy from business to provide services. Could that be played out across the city? Volunteers were mentioned. Could they provide some stewardship?**

The play street scheme is run by volunteers. There is a disused park the community has taken over and got funding for. It is hard to keep going, but people want it.

It is fragmented.

To incentivise volunteers, although the time credit scheme – where volunteers don't want pay – works well, others say it is not enough. The time I spend putting in applications and wasting time as I compete with so many other organisations, all for £500, and needing follow-up reports. You spend so much time doing that rather than being on the scheme itself. You also need access to space, opening, closing it.

**Could crowdfunding or crowdsourcing or seed funding help?**

Crowdfunding works if you are backed by an existing community. Many fail, as people see the idea and go for it, but it is a crowded place. You may get £200, but the target is £500 so you drop it. Do it two or three times and you may not do it again.

**We started with the visually impaired and the need for acknowledgement and legibility, especially in street environments, but people belong in streets, so streets are places of movement. Public space is an expansive realm. You can be a human being first and employee second, so people could acknowledge this as a quality. Parks seem threatened and need protecting. A matrix on social inclusion may be needed. The Thames could be used. Large-scale development may be a threat, and better coordination is needed. The balance is with public space and space used by businesses. Technology and innovation were discussed – having smarter travel and making spaces more efficient with more information. Character in public space is still needed, and should be unique and not threatened. Toilets, bins and dog facilities are needed and should be in the right place. These may be small things individually, but all together maybe they have more impact and need packaging together. Crowdfunding – the community needs more ownership of ideas. We need to engage better with local communities.**

In Bristol they did Open Streets in summer, which could set the tone that cars are not king. It was done in Southwark, I think; a main street was closed. There are Sunday street closures too.

In Newcastle a street is shut and a market goes in.

We need innovative funding ideas. We live in a wealthy city and we need better wealth distribution.

One organisation had money to put into the local community but didn't know who to give it to, so in the end they gave it to the council and we have no idea how they used the funds.