

A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS

An Inclusive City Growth Workshop

11th November 2016, 9.30 – 13.00

Healthy Environments

Table 4 Session 1

Facilitator in bold facilitator – comments in bold

Respondents in regular text

These notes are a summary of the conversation

Session 1, Table 4

Katie Hunter (Facilitator)

Sam Williams, Arup

Claudia Draper, Hackney Play Streets, Hackney Play Association

Dayo Gilmour, Lane Family Network

Iman Achara, Partners in Integration Network

Jane Carlsen, London Forestry and Woodlands Advisory Committee

Carol Doviet, London Borough of Barnet (Joint Public Health, Barnet & Harrow)

Jim Lim, Southwark Public Health

Paul Plant, Public Health England (London)

We're talking about healthy environments, both aspects of the natural and the built environment, and which have the greatest impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing. How can we enhance those elements to improve health and wellbeing in London? Feel free to chip in.

Any aspect that gives children opportunities to play and gives them independence, not needing to be driven by their parents, being scared of being hit by car, or gassed outside school. There need to be safe streets and more green space. Networks of green space that connect these places up, so children don't have to fight their way to isolated playgrounds.

I agree. My background is play streets. It's a good way to wake people up to the potential of streets – more than just a place to drive your car. We want children to be playing out on the streets – it really makes a difference to children's lives. Most parents can't take kids somewhere – they have to get dinner or whatever – so kids need the independence to play freely. There's a wider community effect in using streets as community spaces – it affects older people and people without kids, so I'd be keen on that too.

I walk my child to school, so in a way I'm lucky, but I'm also not lucky. The toxic levels of air we're breathing. My boy is four and a half, and it's not easy. Cars are an issue. There's a

perception that cars are more important and the priority, and that clean air isn't. It's invisible. It creates the perception, "I'm healthy because I'm walking or cycling," but it's dangerous. When you grow up in London you get the perception of cars as more important. Community spaces are also really important. I live in an expensive place, and the diverse working class community is being pushed out. Everything is good if you can afford it, but the parks are going, community spaces are being shut down, libraries are becoming privatised – it's massive. When you have community and spaces and parks, you get your city back and children are a part of the city rather than isolated.

We need to make better use of the spaces we have, and make them friendlier. Make the spaces between developments more friendly. There need to be more safe places to travel, with good lighting and space for buggies. You want to feel safe, and you want green spaces and places to sit down. Urban activities for children, utilising 'meanwhile' sites. If there's a building on the high street you should utilise it for something, rather than just having it empty. There should be any sort of community usage. There could be food growing, making more use of the space that we have. We also need healthier high streets. Getting something done with A5 businesses, chicken shops and things like that. Restriction on those – some boroughs can do that. It should be in the London Plan, there should be some sort of healthy catering commitment, so if they're there they need to be healthier. They're so near to schools where I live in Barnet. Kids get off the bus and pile into the chicken shop. I was astounded to see that. It's so cheap, it's like £2. If they have to stay, they need to commit to being healthier. There has to be more commitment on that.

Things can be filtered on from councils. I live near Portobello Road. The council own a very small kiosk, which many different community members wanted. A group of us put an offer in to do a super bar with seasonal vegetables – quite trendy – and in the end a doughnut shop got it. Kensington and Chelsea is one of the worst for oral health in the country, and the council made the choice to give it to a doughnut bar. It's external; it's not run by members of the community. The council needs to be responsible.

If you get this kind of information in the plan, it will go down to the councils.

The budget is only £12,000 a year, so if we go down it's not a big deal. They want an assured tenancy on it, they want it to be the same for ten years. At this place, if it's your birthday you get a free doughnut, and you get a free doughnut with a coffee. You see the type of person going there.

There are complexities about that, because the planning isn't set up to do that. It comes down to individual councils.

The planning system doesn't address that sort of issue. The council is looking for the best income they can get.

Yes, but if you had one doughnut bar offering, fine. But other people offered. The message should come down from somewhere higher that they're actively pushing the fact that there needs to be a shift.

It's really important that your voice is heard. We need your input and support, and it needs to be vocal.

Maybe you should write to the council and say, "We feel strongly about this issue." Councillors do listen.

No they don't. It's pretty hard.

Have you written in?

Yes. It's about community engagement; it can't just be through councils.

This is about different political ideologies. I agree with you, but the problem is how do we tackle that? The planning system can't help.

There are six chicken bars on one street, so it is a problem.

What would you like to see? Should there be restrictions around schools?

It's a local area, and there are five chicken bars in a stretch of 300 metres.

There are different ways to do it.

We've got nothing near the school.

You could do 5% or less, so you don't get a parade of chicken shops. Hopefully there's something going in the London Plan. This is an opportunity to support that.

Mr Ryder mentioned the challenges the city faces. He mentioned bringing in new ideas, but also being realistic. The idea of putting restrictions on what is a free economy is for me problematic. When dealing with children, we have more people going to food banks, people below the poverty line, and these outlets provide them with nutrition. You can't put restrictions on their choice. We have to address poverty, because most people who run these shops are migrants. When they can't achieve jobs in the mainstream, they can't feed their families. The GLA is the voice of London, and we need the GLA to provide an economic forum to bring all these actors to City Hall and have a discussion about what would suit different communities. There's already a lot of tension; we don't want to be divisive. Without the economic side you won't get the social element we're aiming for. The money for parks and things comes from the money generated from shops. What would benefit the whole community? Maybe there should be a dialogue with these shops. We shouldn't bash people who, in a way, do contribute. I may not agree with what they're doing.

You need health as an objective in planning and licensing for local democracy to work. Community involvement produces effective solutions. City Hall, you can't do micromanaging, it has to be part of the dialogue to change the balance. Local governments have only just picked up health in the past three years, so local councils haven't got what this complexity is and what their role is. They just talk about a bit of weight control and anti-smoking, but this is about all policies, about having a dialogue to get a local solution. For healthy high streets it will take several years to have this policy, but by that time those chains will have gone online. You don't need to get food on the high street because you can get it online. You order it in, a pizza or a takeaway. That complexity can't be managed by City Hall.

They deliver to school gates.

That's scary; we do need to make them healthier.

You aren't going to put them out of business; instead it's about re-education. People want doughnuts because they don't understand the demon white sugar.

This is about growing up, a place to meet, and a place to socialise. In Haringey, with the secondary school kids, food was off site with your mates, it was on the street corner or in a park. It's not only about health; it's about lots of other things.

The major area we have issues with is the fact that there are no community spaces left. There are also problems with housing. I'm living with my mum again with a child, but the problem is there's no community space left. I have nowhere to go with my child apart from parks, whatever the weather. Community space turned into private space, private luxury flats. These spaces shouldn't be allowed to be touched. There should be something that comes down from local government, protects what was public. It should be put out to the community, space for youths, space for young parents who don't know what to do, who are going into depression. There's a whole public health issue behind no public spaces. In Kensington and Chelsea there are fantastic parks, but that's it.

What can we do to protect community spaces? Making better use of them?

There are schools in Hackney with the most incredible architecture, in the middle of housing estates, but they're locked up at weekends. They should be open to the public; communities should take charge of these spaces at weekends. There are security issues, but you can get over them.

There are challenges, but there are ways around them and good models for how that could be addressed. You're quite right: the London Plan could do something about greater protection for existing community space.

We need to work outside the box and use schools, universities. Actually being able to utilise all that space.

Incentivising it, there used to be a play space in Stoke Newington. Obviously it's becoming gentrified, but kids would play there.

Putting fences around schools and locking them up seems like a UK thing.

Sadly, that's about security.

It's cultural.

The school my child goes to, they do everything to rent out the building because they need the extra income, renting every piece of space to subsidise. Our library, a 125-year-old building, is under threat. The council have signed it over to a private school. It's a building used by the community. There are certain areas in London we all know about. Half the library in Brent went – it was renovated and the bottom half was a privatised library and private flats were sold upstairs. This shouldn't be allowed. These places need to be protected, because we have none left. The whole area's being redeveloped. Affordable housing is going to go as well. Our community is campaigning, but it doesn't matter.

These spaces don't get looked after properly?

I've spoken to people who work with youths, and youth clubs are sold out. They're private companies, not run by the council. Everything is third party. It's become a business. This is a decrease in our public health because we're less engaged. The community wants to be more involved, but they can't because they're not a legally formed company or a business. Even when the community is screaming out to be involved, it can't be.

It's so top down, there's a loss of bottom up. It would help having something in the London Plan to encourage people to work together for public planning in boroughs. That would filter down to local plans.

Without it being political, without it being which party has gained control of that borough.

There was a hope that that would happen when the plans first came about, but a hope isn't enough.

Public health ought to make these changes. It needs to be in the London Plan for it to go into the local plans.

At the local level we want to do it; all it takes at the London Plan level is a tiny sentence.

What could be done? I'm thinking solutions. Why not have some sort of reward for boroughs or communities? For example, you could have a competition around growing vegetables or flowers, making your area beautiful. It may seem simplistic, but it's very effective. In the rural areas, where my son went to a public school, they have competitions around flowers and stuff. It brings people together no matter their social background. It wouldn't cost anyone any money, it just builds that community, and you feel pride in your estate. The economic side should contribute. The Mayor could use his position, so he could go to a business to donate a prize for the community. You could use that to raise the profile. It may seem like nothing, but it really does a lot in changing people's perception.

If you can change your own street, with the play street, there's a ripple effect. A whole community is affected.

I don't have a television, but you read about the Bake Off, how big that is. Food competitions like that, everyone wants to be part of that. You could get a cross-generational thing that includes disabled people.

I think that's a brilliant idea. Entrepreneurs, they should do more community projects. However, suggestions have to come from the top; we as public health can't do much unless we have directions.

Around London Bridge they've been doing stuff on food growing. There's a charity called Britain in Bloom.

It's beautiful, it's lovely. That's what the Mayor can do with his power. The Mayor can't interfere in local government, but he can suggest if he wants something bottom up. I believe in taking initiative for yourself for your own area; don't expect other people to be there for you. We need to listen to other people and get information, but it's what you do with it. Get the best advice, but empower people to do things for themselves. People should be responsible for their own community.

Can we focus on how we get people more active physically?

Space needs to be accessible for all. That's an important principle. The Mayor wants to create more green space, but we don't follow it up by making sure it's designed so that it's accessible. When it's retrospective it becomes more difficult. A lot of spaces are private, only accessible to the expensive housing.

Accessible means so many different things. It needs to be designed well for children, because then it works for everyone. They want open and green space, space to explore, a wild area. A formal garden is inaccessible.

You won't take your children as a parent.

You need rocks and logs and things. It gives an exciting impression to children.

Underlying getting people physical is how you empower the local community to engage with their own space, which by default creates ownership. You get more protective and it creates community, even for people who are disenfranchised. You have to be careful about the class barrier – some people will feel eliminated and they're the people who need this more. We also have to look at pollution. We live under the Westway, which is owned by TfL. There needs to be input from the Mayor about making it greener. We have the worst health in the country because of that stretch of land. Children born with smaller lungs – it's awful. There's a charity, a trust that is supposed to be looking after the land, but they've done nothing for pollution. It's about re-education, gently. We're looking into the plants that are good for anti-pollution. Low-income people will not get involved in planting marigolds, but if you hand them seeds, and engage them, make it easy, they will.

Sometimes the stereotype is something that kills our community, whether they're people from the Middle East or Africa or Australia. They come from rural environments; they've been dealing with planting, flowers, trading. Why not use the refugee community to educate people? I grew up in a village in Africa. I know how we managed a sustainable environment. I would like to see the migrants share their knowledge from their agrarian communities. Let's tap into their knowledge.

How do you suggest engaging those people?

For these communities to come together, we can get businesses to give prizes for community engagement. Once these things happen, however, some people start making it elitist. This is all of us, and it's our right. I've set up more than 100 communities all over the world. The whole thing is to talk to them and engage with them. I come from a background of helping the Roma people and Travellers. You have to sit down and learn from them. I'm not going to tell you what they want because I'm representing myself, but often we miss out on a huge wealth of resource, so let's get those communities together, collect the evidence, and then we have private projects somewhere.

I think that's a really good idea. We need health as an objective to make the balance of power change. Encouraging support, we need to focus on the bit in between, which is the design principles, the guidelines, the "How do you do it well?" bit of this. Good design means involving communities, making them inclusive, when GLA will only – in planning terms – deal with very little. You don't deal with what the boroughs deal with on a daily basis. I think the teams are too small in boroughs. If you had some principles, people would get that, engage with them, and ask questions. It's about the bit between what the GLA can do and what local

democracy can do. It's not just the physical bit that would be really helpful for the GLA's London Plan team but also the process. Design principles cut across all of what we do.

Co-design or the physical design?

The principles.

The approach to involving people.

If you do a background literature review, you find out that all these principles are there. The question is, what's the energy, what can galvanise this big group of people to work towards a common goal? The public debt is huge and the council can't pay for it, so we need individuals to feel pride in their space. It wouldn't cost a lot, but they could use their power as leverage.

It needs to come from them to go to the local government. We need it coming from the top to filter down to us.

Can you tap into the community directly? I don't want to take out local government, but there are a lot of people in communities with a lot of talent, they know what they need but they don't know how to voice it. They're disenfranchised with voting and with their council. How do you invite people? Resources could be spent to put out initiatives to all the local newspapers, putting out a big message; otherwise you don't even know what's going on. It's really hard. If you don't see it in the right time, you don't know about it, even though there are a lot of brilliant schemes.

If you're working a lot you might not see them.

It's about something coming down that isn't taking away the importance of local government, but going straight to the community.

However, we are only tied to help you when we get word from the top.

You say 'communities' as if you all agree, but different communities disagree about different initiatives. Some parts don't want different things. We listen to them. It gets complicated. It has to be an objective that's locally comprised and democratic, using your local councillors. We deal with a lot of community groups who don't want what we think is good for health.

I work with women in isolation who have kids, have come from the Middle East, and can't speak English. I thought about that. You could empower the community. We don't have the space, so I gave them money to cook food, and I said we could use the park, it's open, and we had a big picnic. The place was filled with people; the children were running around, people volunteered to look after them. We sat around, and we respected people, and told them, "It's your community." Five community groups started that. I also got my bank manager to come and talk to them about using the tools, and I got a man to talk about tax, because if you're working you need to know about paying your tax. It's about giving them the best tools, practical tools. You need to take power.

One idea I heard during the vote for Mayor was assumed consent for play streets. You have to find out if you can do them, then you write to the council. A few months later you hear back. It's a long process. If there was assumed consent that you could have them, it would be great. In my experience it's been fantastic. It's not just for kids. All the kids and all the parents know each other now, people from all over the world. People I wouldn't have met otherwise. It's really opened the world up. For the elderly, there were chairs and tea and cake. It's particularly

important for the ones who are living alone, and it doesn't cost anything. Making use of the street three hours a week has brought everyone together.

It's regular?

Monthly.

Monthly is the most common.

What's London and what's local? Can that be applied at a London level?

Can we agree on three points that are the most important? There are so many good ideas, and it's a huge area.

I wanted to mention one thing. You could readdress some of the priority that's given to the car. Access to green space and healthy living could be addressed by changing that priority. The Mayor could put in green infrastructure around major highways. In our neighbourhoods, make them more sustainable by acknowledging that priority.

Do you think that's key?

Yes.

Another thing – bus stops and the Tube. If there were something that said what the next stop is, how long the walk would take and how many calories you'd burn, it would incentivise people to walk a bit more.

There should also be a pollution reader by every bus stop.

People should be able to make choices.

Integration of seed planting by the community against pollution, a no-car zone at certain hours. Encouraging the community to plant its own plants and green its own streets. That ticks two boxes. What I really care about is protecting community spaces. You can integrate these things.

Health has to be an explicit objective in the London Plan.

Shall we say health and wellbeing?

It's what the research says. If you can cross your road to talk to your neighbour, you're so much happier.

We should be designing for the most vulnerable, so the youngest and the oldest, then it can work for everybody.

That should be a line in the London Plan. That would really help us.

It's about building local relationships with planning.

They look at the London Plan to build the local plans. If it's there, it's really helpful. It's the nudge effect. All we need is a nudge.

Playgrounds are essential, because they're where children start to have a healthy life, and play is how they start to experience wellbeing. It's how they approach everything.

Yes.

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Healthy Environments

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Respondents in regular text

These notes are a summary of the conversation

Session 2, Table 4

Katie Hunter (Facilitator)

Vernon Herbert, NHS London Healthy Urban Development Unit

Gill Slater, Planning Policy, London Borough of Bromley

Tim Gill, Rethinking Childhood

Rory Macfarlane, London Councils

Neil Smith, BuroHappold Engineering

We're having a conversation about what aspects of the environment can have the greatest impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing, and how we can enhance those aspects. Overcoming barriers to active lifestyles, making the food environment healthier, what you think can have the greatest impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing, and where planning can impact those things.

I'd like to see in the document, a more robust restriction on A5 takeaways near schools. It should be included in the document for a robust stance. Ultimately, you'd like to see national planning guidance changed, but this would give local authorities help to make healthier choices.

How should we restrict them?

You need more broad guidance within the document. We understand that it's part of a healthy community, that they're detrimental to people's health on high streets.

Limits on the numbers?

Yes, there should be limits on the numbers within certain vicinities. It can't be strict planning guidance, but it should set out the vision.

Do the rest of you agree?

There's a wider problem; planning controls are just a smaller contribution. We need to change behaviour patterns, licensing laws. It's about getting the balance right of what powers and influence you have across the whole topic, rather than just doing a little bit of it with planning. The time it would take to have an impact outweighs it. It's a contributing factor, but it's not the main problem.

What do you want the London Plan and the Mayor to do?

They need to tackle the whole healthy environment issue, change attitudes and behaviours. It's not about directly planning. Planning can only have an influence over a long period of time. You want it to influence, but not be the only part of it.

You need alternatives for young people, like a youth group. My son used to meet up with his mates in Ladbrokes – that was the social place.

Or McDonald's.

Where are the other options?

That's striking.

And he's quite a normal lad.

We're writing policy for the next plan. Is it worth having a clause saying let's limit the betting shops and the chicken shops?

That's more the local council than planning. When there are so many, it normalises it. Every other shop is a betting shop. You can't shut down the ones already there, but you can restrict the number they build.

Don't build any more.

We need a wider vision, a set of objectives. Seems to me that there's a pretty strong case for an agreement that sitting is the new smoking. We have to get people up and out of doors. Lots of things follow from that, but it's a really clear goal. We need to promote active living and other initiatives that support it. My area is play. Play spaces that we're creating today are not a good enough offer to entice children from other offers, leaving aside the attitudes on traffic and fear of crime, and other barriers that face children and parents in using play areas.

How do you suggest we do that?

We need to promote pedestrians, to invert the hierarchy.

You're creating a public realm that promotes activities and provides opportunity, not just for children. Wide spaces aren't designed to enable people to use them. One of my key interests is outdoor gyms, which have started giving opportunities to excluded groups. Older Bangladeshi women use the gym in my area. That facility provided something for them to use.

Start with clearer leadership around that. I live in Walthamstow. The Mayor of London has used his money to improve cycling and cycling infrastructure. It's created civil war. People say, "Now I can't use my car." You're always going to get kickback, but we can learn lessons about how we should sell cycling and address people who lose out from it. It's got to the point that there are signs saying 'No mini Holland debates'. You'd think it was a revolution on the streets. Of course there are people on the other side, but my hunch is the council is going to take it back.

I see that my friend who used to work for the local paper saw the outpouring of rage. With partial blocking off of roads, most of the confusion is around the fact that it's hard to see the

plan. Obviously the plan is to have less driving on certain roads but, personally, blocking off roads doesn't encourage me to cycle more, because they're not necessarily roads I would cycle on. You would just use the main road.

Perhaps there wasn't the amount of engagement needed?

I wasn't closely involved in that programme, but I suspect that's right. The initiative was on a tight timescale. There was one shot at the whole thing, no opportunity for experiment or learning from the reaction.

Principles of healthy streets. Do you agree with them and support them?

Yes.

Prioritise pedestrians and children. You have to think of children as different; they don't walk neatly along the pavement.

80 Cities is a Canadian non-profit organisation that encourages you to consider streets from the perspective of an eight-year-old and an 80-year-old. Then it's inclusive for everyone.

Mini Holland, I'm not involved, but I know there are real concerns. It's created more conflict between pedestrians and cyclists because of the way the infrastructure was laid out. There are bus stops in the middle of an island, blocking access, scaring people from getting on, too scared to cross the road. People had no say in the process.

You need to hold people's hands in the planning and a fair way into the operation. You need to shepherd them all the way through, to overthrow reaction to make it work.

I think Enfield and Kingston have had similar debates.

There was some positive press about it because it reduced car usage, but they were saying they're going to rule it out.

So some key issues are physical activity levels, and the fact that play spaces aren't good enough. What should we do to improve play for children?

I'll go back to my prior question, about how to get people to feel better about being in public space. People of all ages don't want to be under the open sky. The more general thing I would say is move the conversation away from safety and towards a focus on things being good, on quality, of which safety is a part, but not absolute safety. Public space needs to be safe, stimulating, engaging, enjoyable. Safety is just a part of it, and it's not absolute. There's no guarantee that something bad will never happen; we need to move the conversation away from that. In disadvantaged areas of London, the default position is the space outside my front door is at best a void, and at worst a scary space.

Pokémon GO encouraged children to go out. In my borough they were everywhere. It wore off, but you never usually see children out. It just showed that they will get out and they will walk.

That came from left field; it wasn't because of planning. It's an example of people engaging with spaces and public streets differently. We need to tap into that.

Any ideas about how to get people to feel better about being out in the open?

Stop just talking about safety. We have to move the conversation on. One example for playgrounds, the approach people should be taking is not to do a risk assessment but do a benefit assessment. You write down the benefits of the structure, it focuses people on the benefits. It could be taken on by highway engineers and public space designers in other contexts. This encourages engagement: start the conversation on what is good. On a practical level, your council official who's got the form isn't just cutting down tree branches in parks so that children don't climb them and fall.

How is that implemented effectively? There's a need to make sure we're not excluding people from that environment. We need to look at it from an older person's perspective, someone with dementia or visual impairment. How can we allow them to cope? How is the policy implemented?

Could we move on to some other areas?

Housing. It's fundamental. Everybody knows we need to build housing appropriate to old people. There are so many financial reasons preventing that. There's great concern. The financial structures that determine who pays for care set up barriers that work against what everybody knows we need to provide. They don't want to build it because more old people will move into the borough and the council will have to pay for it.

Also thinking about where housing is in relation to public infrastructure. We're not tackling those other elements, so people can't live independently and then depend on public funding.

In the face of austerity cuts, in my borough public toilets are closing. Old people need access to public toilets, so we're excluding them.

Old people need to be able to get outside. It affects their physical and mental health. Studies have shown that if you move into a care home your life span shortens because you become inactive.

Getting people to travel more actively, through public transport, walking and cycling. How do we overcome barriers through the London Plan?

Cycling should be top of the list. It's especially a problem in inner London, because there's not enough road space. In Bromley, you've got more space. It's less dense patterns of development, it's harder to make the case for public transport, but cycling becomes something that could work. I was in Antwerp yesterday and it has space for 2,000 bikes at the station: perhaps that's a 20-year goal in Bromley. We know the Dutch, the Belgians and the Germans own cars, but they use them less because of the cycling infrastructure. It's good for children where it's done well, and in Holland old people still cycle.

The number of people over 65 who cycle in London compared with other parts of Europe is outrageous. Inclusive cycling: how is that actually being implemented in cycling infrastructure? Encouraging old people to do that has not necessarily been part of the overall cycling strategy. The focus has been on commuter cyclists.

At that age you're unlikely to start cycling. To expect to turn around the old population at this stage is too big an ask.

A major restriction is the danger, because the number of huge lorries with wheels taller than me in areas around here is ridiculous. These lorries have bad visibility and they're very intimidating. There's a balance between that and the fact that they're needed for construction, but could they use different sized trucks? I'm not sure how other cities work around that.

Freight in London is a big issue. TfL look at it very closely. I think we need feedback from people on how freight should be managed. With all the construction it's a big issue. As well as these workshops, individuals can email in if you feel strongly about it, if you feel that it's important.

That's just physical health; there's so much about mental health.

London is getting denser so it's becoming a bigger issue.

Mental health is improved by environmental health, green environments and trees. I'm conscious from my time in social housing estates that you have lots of space in housing estates, it looks green, but it's contributing nothing, people aren't spending time in it. It links to bad design and retreat from the outdoors. It's not easy to tackle. We need to experiment, try new things, and figure out different ways to entice people out of their front doors. The council need to be explicitly experimental. Residents are so afraid of things getting worse. They say, "No, I'd rather have the shit we already have than things get worse." The council should say, "We're going to try this, and if it doesn't work we'll take it away again." The projects should be low cost, creative and edgy. We should put sandpits in, and if they don't work, if all the cats come in, we'll take them away. The council should start putting in guerrilla benches.

Engaging people.

We're not starting from scratch, because there are lots of good things on place making. Doing things in scale, learning about what works, tackling the anxiety that many people have about the prospects for the spaces immediately outside their front doors. That goes for streets as well. Play streets start to turn around people's thinking about what the street is for. They're not just for parking or driving. Some parallel thinking about different public spaces. Parks are a bit different.

Changing thinking is important. When people disappear from the public space there's a whole generation who no longer use it, children no longer use it, and when they reappear all hell breaks loose. The dog team got to the park when there had been some antisocial behaviour to get the kids out of the park. People need to be reminded of some of the positive things of the old days. We'd see fixed in the policy the 'quiet enjoyment of the park', but that's forgetting what those places are for.

Multi-generational engagement. They're scared of young people; young people aren't going out because it's not a space they own. We need to talk together about developing that space.

We talked a little about healthier food. Does anyone have anything to add?

It's not my strong area of interest, but piloting community gardens and micro allotments. I went on a cycle tour of Antwerp, where the council figured out that local people planted their own plants in the street, in the soil around a tree. Historically, the council contractors would come and take them out, because they thought they were weeds, but then they came up with a scheme. They put a pink ribbon around any tree where underneath is a tomato plant, so the contractors don't touch that spot, reconnecting people with growing food. I volunteer at the

Cow Garden. It's a play space and a community garden, and there are raised beds, benches and a sandpit. It all works, and it could work in a lot more places than we think. It links with multi-functionality in places. There are people who think we need the children's playground to have a fence around it, and then a separate community garden, and then we've run out of space. We need creative thinking about layering different functions. Then you get eyes on the street, when different groups feel positive about a space and spend time in it, then it becomes safer.

I'm working on a scheme in the public realm, and public residents don't want it because they think it encourages people to hang around and create antisocial behaviour.

People need to be reminded that hanging around isn't a bad thing; it's antisocial behaviour that's bad.

How do you educate people? If I had fears about young people, someone from the council telling me not to worry wouldn't help. We need to get people to act into a new way of thinking. You change the behaviour, you get different uses into a space, and then you say to people, "It wasn't as bad as you think." If the council plonks a bench down, they can't do anything about it, it's there.

There was a space, there was a bit of money, but no one was engaged, so we just decided to plant trees. Sometimes, even if everyone is saying no, you just have to do it.

Really nice example is Springfield Park in Hackney. Trees fell down, someone used the wood to make little wooden animals, which were really endearing and cute. They were moveable, and they broke all the safety laws. People thought they would be gone in a week, but they were there for five years, and people played with them. It's creative and slightly edgy, but ultimately positive. We encourage experimentation by giving those custodians of the space permission to take a bit of a risk – a more balanced approach to risk rather than just risk assessment.

If you don't have any risk you don't learn. If it becomes purely based on reducing liability it becomes very sterile.

Councils often think we can't do that because of health and safety. This generation of parents is so terrified their kids will be hurt they don't let them do anything. The playground at the Olympic Park is very popular – on a sunny day it's incredible. It's very adventurous. It's proof that children want that space. Councils should put in adventurous offers for children, go out of their comfort zone. The statistics on liability, they're not great. 80% of council's liability cases concern people who slip on pavements. It's a fear of risk. We can't allow for the possibility that someone might sprain an ankle.

Inclusive play integrated into the design. The kids can't engage with the facilities, it's exclusive. We need to promote inclusivity. It's not black and white: not every child has to use every facility in a playground.

There's a pretty good understanding about what a good play space is. If you're a child who has mobility problems, or a parent with sight problems, does this offer enjoyment? However, not every child needs to get on every piece of equipment.

It's not black and white.

Let's get your thoughts on three key areas you feel are the most important.

Explicit experimentation and a balanced approach to risk.

I don't disagree. However, we haven't talked about air pollution or clean air, and that needs to feature.

How can we tackle that?

There's a need for clarity around what the strategic intervention is. A lot of initiatives come bottom up, and they're supported by the local authority or whatever. Longer-term exploration about what you can do cumulatively to shift the environment in five to ten years' time. That focus in the thinking, how can we set a framework so that the city as a whole can make a shift? It encompasses a whole range of players and initiatives.

How can the GLA facilitate that bottom-up action?

You'd just like to see a longer-term strategy, or do you have suggestions?

Cycling initiatives are the most obvious. It has shifted attitudes. It's a strategic decision. The 40 years it's taken to put a pedestrian path along the Thames. Planning is quite good at that, compared with how the city was ten years ago. The whole environment over time has transformed. There's a danger of losing sight of that strategic impact.

More around in the centre, more pedestrianisation of certain roads. There are so many small roads, there are some that need to be blocked off. Do you really need people driving along them? There are so many different routes they can take.

I was in Bukhara last month and I saw the Cyclodia programme. Every Sunday between 8am and 2pm the streets are closed to vehicles and everyone comes out to cycle. It's been there for 45 years. It's a well-oiled machine, it's at scale, and it's grown bigger and bigger. It's part of what they see as their city and how they explore and enjoy their city. Maybe we can't have a carbon copy, but there must be something similar. The regularity of it shows a public demonstration of a healthy, inclusive vision of the city.

Doing that in the whole of the city of London, there are only eight routes that go in and out of it.

Details are not important. Someone should try to figure out how to do it in London. It is feasible. It's great and people love it.

Start gently and then you can phase up. I also have a negative planning kind of thing: councils need to designate parks as local green spaces. Croydon have designated all their parks as local green space. Councils should allow you to form that as a local community space. There's a risk of them becoming attractive propositions for other use.

There's a select committee enquiry into parks as we speak, the status of parks.

Put that in the London Plan: councils could designate all parks under local green space.

The areas that need it most.

The community isn't aware.

The Mayor could support councils to do that.

I'd like to see that the councils don't have an option on this. They have an interest in not designating parks, so they can develop the space.

Thank you all for your participation.