

A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS

Accommodating Growth Workshop

2nd November 2016, 9.30 – 13.00

Town Centres and High Streets

Facilitator in bold

Respondents in regular text

These notes are a summary of the conversation

Session 1, Table 5

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Brendan Harper, Cross River Partnership

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Martin Laheen, Northumberland Park Residents Association

Ron Hollis, London Tenants Council / London Tenants Federation

Susie Barton, Historic England

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Welcome. The theme is to talk about the future of London's high streets and town centres. Obviously it's a broader conversation. Following from Jules and John Lett's presentations it's clear London is experiencing an enormous amount of growth in houses, jobs and need for green spaces. A lot of pressure in London. One of the key things we wanted to talk about was the role of town centres and high streets in accommodating that growth, but also what we mean by good growth. We have a few specific questions but we'd like to have a conversation. One of the main things, I'll just show you some material (shows stimulus), two maps depicting the designated town centres and land uses across London. Within the London Plan, there's a hierarchy of town centres identified, these dots. There are international centres, metropolitan and district centres. This map above here shows land uses. It highlights roles that high streets play. Whilst we often think of London as a series of centres, there's something happening where it's a network of connected places.

Often where you live, you might go and use your high street rather than your town centre. There's a local perception of how London works. One of the questions we wanted to talk about was how that should be represented in planning terms. There are a few interesting figures. Over 50% of London's jobs outside the Central Activity Zone (around central London) are on high streets. Big employment hubs. 47% of businesses outside central London are on high streets. Two-thirds of London's developed land is within 200 metres of high streets. Thinking about new homes, high streets have a lot of potential to be areas of growth. Two-thirds of Londoners live within a 5 minute walk.

Some research that's been done by GLA has identified a few themes affecting London's high streets and town centres. One is a slightly strange phrase: low threshold enterprise space. One thing we've been noticing is that whilst London's been experiencing growth, there's been pressure on things like affordable workspace, how you describe slack spaces. New businesses or creative industries, artists, community organisations, are finding it hard to get hold of cheap space. Question marks over how we can ensure that that kind of space survives in London.

Community participation. One of the key themes Sadiq's been talking about is about how London's growth can be more inclusive. How can Londoners feel like they have a say? Thinking about what role local tenants' organisations, community arts organisations, BID's, what is the role of those organisations in the future of London's high streets and town centres?

The restructure of retail. We're seeing more and more online shopping. That's obviously having an impact on London's town centres. We're having to see that high streets and town centres might have to adapt and change. Thinking about what that means.

Another 3 issues that have been coming up are around fragmented ownership. One of the issues in town centres particularly is how difficult it is to bring forward large-scale regeneration. Or even have a joined up vision for a town centre, for example, because you have so many people who own land. It ends up being a very complicated thing to create a vision for a place that takes into account everybody's views.

The other thing is about high quality design.

Are you saying the difficulty of lots of individual places, causes problems because you can't have a bigger vision? What would be a better vision ?

Yes. For example, some councils are looking at the idea of taking on more land ownership in town centres in order to be able to have more of a curated approach to the types of shops that are there, the types of workspace and social infrastructures. More control over town centres. Also an opportunity for BID's, community organisations, developers, land owners to do that. Lots of different ways of dealing with the problem, which would be good to talk about.

Issue of high quality design. We've talked about building new homes but what does that look like? One of the key things the Mayor picked up in his manifesto was supporting existing qualities. Town centres already have qualities that people value. There is anxiety that these will be lost. Those 2 things are really linked as well (fragmented ownership, supporting existing character). Do you want to say more about that?

I think that there's a clear implication here that a struggling high street, for a start, has fried chicken shops on. It's extremely precious. Barbers, bookmakers and charity shops. I understand the issue of fragmented ownership, but the fact that you put a name to it, it's a rather hostile thing to do. When you say successful shopping high street, you've named it; restaurant

quarter, department store. I've grown up and lived around Shepherd's Bush and around Hammersmith and Fulham and Chiswick. I don't like Westfield, don't appreciate it, disgusted by it, but I understand a lot of people find it a desirable place to go. I'm not happy with, 'This is a struggling high street, this is successful.'

Do you think that's about the mix? At City Hall we get quite a lot of people writing letters to the Mayor. One thing I've answered lots of letters about is, not that the existence of chicken shops, charity shops, betting shops are bad in principle, but more that there are too many of them.

A characteristic of struggling high streets is estate agents. They draw very few customers in numerical terms but because they are relatively wealthy, you can get areas where half the shops are estate agents. Which is really alienating for anyone who's not trying to buy a house, which is most of us. I can see some of the problems. You talk about fragmented ownership and the way that everything comes together. Rather than the particular impact of particular kinds of things. I live close to Balham. The biggest chunks of places around Balham are taken up by supermarket car parks which contribute nothing in an area that has extremely good public transport. It's got a railway station, the tube, it's on a main road with lots of buses. These single storey buildings with huge car parks really have a very adverse impact on the integrity of the whole thing.

Don't get me wrong, they can be useful, but if there are two floors of flats above each of the supermarkets, they would double the amount of housing in the central area. The ownership is irrelevant. It's the use. One of the problems we have is the weakness of planning law. It means that almost any kind of retail space can change another retail space without any control at all. If there was an ability for a local authority to delegate an area for particular kinds of shops, so it didn't get lots of estate agents, that would enable lots more balance without necessarily having to take over to buy the land. It seems that it's the planning laws are one of the major contributors to the fact that some areas become dysfunctional. The local authority has no means of exerting any kind of control. The local community doesn't have any control.

Community participation - in what the speeches said there has been no mention of localism. We've got a chart to develop a neighbourhood plan that takes account of the local plans. We're meant to have a bit of power here. Obviously it's up to us as people, residents, to test that. This is what I'm trying to do in my local area but I wonder how much influence we have. We'd love something like this (high quality design). This is only 8 storeys. Our libraries are closing down. Hugely tall buildings going up off plan to foreign investors.

With regards to localism, the evidence shows that the only people who are accessing localism such as neighbourhood plans are the most privileged people in London. The most advantaged, educated people. The most vulnerable communities most likely to be hit with developers away from localism are not accessing neighbourhood planning. The forums, assets of community value registers.

Do you think that's related to capacity building? The skills required?

Yes but you have to bear in mind that councils, in our area, in the two areas where neighbourhood areas have been designated, and plans have gone through to referenda, they've encountered major problems with the councils who haven't known themselves, what localism is.

Lack of knowledge?

There can be a conflict rather than full support from councils. We've seen a lot of conflict and a lot of councils pushing back against us. We've only got two properties on the list of assets of community value in Kensington and Chelsea, which you would imagine is full of assets of community value. It's got three, versus Camden next door, which has 38, because the council is not supporting.

No equality of opportunity across the boroughs?

A problem that there is a different view of community from local authorities. What people on the ground view as their community. In Brixton, we've got a situation where through the centre of Brixton runs a couple of railway lines which are a substantial chain of open space in the area. At the moment Network Rail has decided to refurbish. All the small businesses that are in there now are being thrown out. There's no right of return because the new rents will be so high. All these small shops that for a long time have served the community, very local people, small businesses, are being taken over by Starbucks.

That's what comes back to this idea: the bookmaker, charity shop, chicken shop, they serve the local community. They're there because they work.

Although there is this massive change in terms of the community, massive resistance to it, the councils can't do anything about it. Nothing about it in the planning law, which for once I accept. This massive change is happening to the character of a town centre. No local community control. In fact, it's at the expense of community. It's all very well having wonderful plans involving everybody but the bottom line is, will communities have any power? To have their ideas implemented or not. All the rest is just chat if that doesn't happen.

This comes back to this idea of low threshold enterprise space. That idea of affordable spaces within town centres that can allow local business. Do you think it's positive, in this instance, that Network Rail are creating new workspace? Is it just that this workspace isn't accessible?

It's not new workspace. They're renovating. What is been provided at the end of that renovation is identical shops, more Starbucks, perhaps the odd restaurant. They won't be affordable. Land, that is that the owners of the land, Network Rail, within their instruction from government, have to maximise the return they get from the land. They have no brief to do something supportive from the community.

That's why we're finding our Grade 2 listed library building is being leased to a prep school. It's 125 years old. We've had numerous campaigns, gone down to a council. Stopped a council meeting with 100 of us taking over the town hall.

Everyone know Tottenham Hale? A place called Hale Wharf, 21-storey block on the green belt. Anyone know Hale Village? What happened was, 160 people objected. 55 people turned up at the planning meeting last night. 5 people represented the objectors, which I'm one of. They rejected it. The planning authority and Haringey Council rejected the 21-storey block. What they're saying is blocks as high as 25 or 30 are okay in a town centres. In town centres they're okay but not in urban areas. The people won last night. We won round one because we're going to object. Things can happen.

Do you think you could put your finger on what was successful about that?

The local councillor, 30 years in the estate, and her partner, he's Friends of the Earth. A lot of powerful people who live in Hale Village, and the ordinary people like me. That's what made it successful. 5 objectors, you know, they knew their stuff. They went through all the pages. Page by page. Then they picked out the pages they were concentrating on. They had all the officers going through the paper, 'Where is it?' They tied them up in knots.

Who's actually accessing localism? The key people are people who are powerful people within that community. I guarantee if you didn't have the powerful people, the ordinary people wouldn't have a chance. The powerful people have a change without the ordinary people. When you're creating your neighbourhood forum it clearly states that you're meant to prove you're well represented. Lots of forums clearly aren't but they're getting away with it.

On the railway arches thing, it doesn't have to always be Starbucks. In Deptford, the arches are all artisan. They're not all Starbucks. It doesn't have to be. They're clearing out the arches, we don't know what for.

Then that again goes back to who's moving into London? I'm from the South East. We've seen huge amounts of gentrification. Spaces in Peckham where people came to do their nails. Really famous for nail art bars. Now they're being cleared out. Rents are going up. They served the local community. Now you have lots of people moving into the area, not saying it's always bad, but high-end delis are coming in. Do they serve the new community or the old one?

Culture goes missing. If you have stretch like that with nail art bars, that becomes famous over time. Part of the culture. You'll get people coming to visit that space like they visit Hatton Garden for jewellery.

Not saying we don't like having cool new drinking bars but there needs to be space for old and new.

It's the exclusion of old that becomes the problem. I go to Starbucks every now and again, although I prefer the other coffee shops. Not an objection to them, it's an objection to the fact that all the ordinary small shops get excluded. The small tool shops where you could get a hammer and a nail. All that kind of stuff provides local stuff. What's now been replaced by the Pound Shops. Small shops that sold plastic bits and pieces. They're part of community. One of the major problems is that lots of these communities are losing their hearts. They're failing to provide the services that are needed by local community. They're all chasing the gentrification ideas because everyone is going to be part of a gentrified community. We still need all the ordinary things that used to be readily available. Now they're not. It's not just in terms of the service. All those skill sets that people used to have, fix things, do things for you, all those people are disappearing. Now what we've got, if you want to know how to make a cup of coffee, 50 people can tell you. If you want to know how to repair a fuse, nobody knows. That's the imbalance that's the problem.

Do you know about the snowflake? A delicate thing. When we all stick together look what happens. The developer has to go back to the drawing board to sort out that block that's 21 storeys high in a greenbelt area. The River Lea, part of regeneration. Have you heard of Create London? Create London have a Chicken Town in Tottenham Green. It's a social enterprise. They give the kids the healthy chicken for £2. The whole idea is to wean them off the high

streets. When a whole heap of people from different backgrounds get together and look at the plans - they had to go back to the drawing board.

I'm keen to pick up on Chicken Town, design quality and tall buildings. Chicken Town, the interesting thing about that model, during the day, the chicken that's sold is affordable to allow school kids to have the healthy option and still have their space that's their own and not part of school or home. In the evenings they run it as a restaurant with higher prices catering to the newer community who have more disposable income and use that to cross subsidise. In a way they're addressing the push and pull, the gentrifying force, dare I say it, an existing community.

There is a lot of possibility for that model but that's where you've got something, the social enterprise, and the community. The problem is the third element, the developer. They're not interested in the social enterprise or the community. They're interested in profit.

This ladder is quite interesting. I can show it to plenty of my community. They will always go for tokenism here. We're constantly having consultation that is meaningless. I'm an ex-governor of a school that's having a multi-million pound refurb. I've been in the meeting; 'We need to make this consultation as smooth as possible. We're going to do it in this way because it creates the least confrontation with the local community.' This is why they call them exhibitions now. They do it in a way to take the community's power away so you don't have this tradition of them standing at the front and rows of community lambasting them, and for good reason. They break that up through techniques.

The language you're using. It's the difference between consultation and participation. That's why we've put participation on here. It's about partaking in decision-making.

The chicken and the egg. You need the developer, but we don't want him to make massive profits. Councils don't have the money to do it on their own.

We do need them but we don't want them just parachuted in.

They need to know our point of view.

Government and politicians are talking to developers as if they are some way part of the community. Developers are in business to make profits for their shareholders. I don't criticise them. That is the business model. In a well-balanced structure there is legislation and rules that curtails the development's more malign effects on local community. They're coming to make lots of money. As long as we're clear about that we're in a good place to start. The problem is the council seems to see developers on the council's side. We get all this participation until it's coming out of our ears but we actually get council and developers taking all the energies from community, all the ideas, and totally ignoring them. You get incredibly intense frustration. In Lambeth, judicial reviews, but, 'No you haven't, you ignored everything we said, and did what you said you were going to do in the first place.' We had 2 reviews in the last year, which have agreed that the council hasn't done consultation. From a community's point of view, lots of people have spent months working to develop ideas, look at the things, come up with alternatives. Seriously viable alternatives. All the financial and architectural. All of it's just been ignored.

That's an opportunity for community capital building. Across these communities over London, they're all doing things like that. After 12 months of doing that, people in the community know a lot about things, but where is all that energy going? All that ability? Why aren't they potentially gaining qualifications? I mean a lot of people aren't interested in that but there are other ways.

We want to see influence.

Young people coming in on situations. I've done infrastructure renewal where we painted a 100-year-old bridge. I got involved in the project insisting there was community involvement so people could gain something extra or local schools were involved in creating artwork.

Not even just an opportunity to influence decisions, but the opportunity to gain skills?

Get something out of it. Developers are getting profit.

Retail tends to be around transport hubs, although there is intensive residential putting in, in that area, and little thought about the impact of that station. Already you can't get into the station in the morning.

We haven't talked about culture. We have a nice library here in this picture. The libraries are closing. The one live music venue that can't afford the rents anymore. It's closed.

How do we influence, with big developments? Where are we going to go? We have the night Tube going. Where are people going to go?

I was reading this thing about Halloween. All those things kicking off. Guys on their bikes. It brought to my mind, the more you close down nightlife, the more you're going to get people finding other ways to celebrate. Halloween is massive amongst a lot of people who don't do a lot of religious festival. Atheists treat Halloween like it's Christmas. I believe people are always going to find ways to socialise, relax, and cause a bit of mayhem. If you're closing spaces that have traditionally contained that, where people let loose, even a fight at the end of that night that's controlled, because you've got security there, everyone shakes hands, you're creating potential for bigger explosions.

It's about high streets and town centres. We're the same, Kensington and Chelsea. We've lost live music venues. A large community of musicians. A lot of drummers. They sit on one of the greens every single Sunday. Been doing this the last 18 months after our live music venue was shut down and turned into a gallery. They've been out on the green every Sunday and played their drums. The police have started to come in. Part of the African Caribbean community that started the carnival and have been thrown out of somewhere making a profit. The name of the venue was Fly Over Portobello and now it's Westbank Gallery and it's closed most of the time.

What issues are causing these places to close?

High rent.

You also get the problem there, you get a successful music venue. A developer builds a block of flats, people move in, and then complain that there's music. That way, we have a dead silent society. To be quite honest, if you buy a flat next to a music venue, you have to expect music.

There has to be honesty. You're telling me estate agents are telling the people viewing that flat, 'You have a music venue open until 3:00am?'

If you're going to buy a flat, have a look at it.

Some people don't check.

Some people move to an area because it's cool and then after 5 years, 'Let's have a baby, now I don't like the noise anymore.' They've decided they want to settle and they try to change the culture of the place they've moved to.

Big danger of gentrification. The lowest common denominator. People are led to believe that they have a right to change their entire environment when their personal life changes. Instead of, 'I live over a pub, I expect noise.' We don't do that. These days everyone complains and the council are very compliant.

The business rents are too high.

People say gentrification. My experience is regeneration that's the problem.

What is it about that?

It's about who's doing it and who's running it. There is no doubt there are areas in London where the local community desperately want change. Want things to be improved. They want clean streets, fixed lampposts, their rubbish collection done properly.

To be a safe area.

Then you find that people take advantage of that. Regeneration, you're treating the area as if it's dead. It's just a corpse that you need to build on top of. That's what we're really getting. You're doing that in Brixton, Camden, you're doing that in Notting Hill. You're doing that in world famous cultural venues with heritage. Where else are you going to do it? For me these are the beacons that are there.

In 2011, our high roads, especially in Tottenham, 5 years ago, all of this money started coming in from the Mayor's office, central government. What did they do? Massive big regeneration department. Over 30 of them in it, in Tottenham. The thing about it is, the young people, and they ask me, 'Where is all the money going?' We had a massive consultation for 7 months, 3,700 people got involved. It was done by Soundings, a fantastic organisation. They just ignored it. 172 pages. That's why I'm on the board.

We've been asked to choose the top 3 things we've talked about to feed back. There will be a presentation at the end.

We don't object to, we recognise a need for more housing. Our concern is the type of housing. Housing at social rent levels is what we actually need. We need to ensure when we're talking about developing high streets and town centres to be highly sensitive to the locality. Involved and controlled by the local community. I think it's the buy-in of the whole of the community that makes somewhere successful.

My job is historic environment. It's not just the needs and the shops but the way it looks, the design. You keep the best of the old buildings.

I have lots of arguments about design. In the last London Plan, for everything, they have recommendation and exceptions. One of the exceptions for exceeding density was 'high quality design'. I said, 'What's high quality design?' It has to be determined by local authority. 50% exceeded requirements because local authorities left developers to it. The idea of high quality design is meaningless. What does it mean in terms of materials, the public spaces including green spaces, accessibility, that kind of thing? Someone has to say, 'What does that mean?'

You have a problem there. Our local council is giving away so much. They're getting consultants in for so many things that they're losing their own expertise. The council is giving everything over. Who's representing the community? The council is meant to but they've had complete brain drain. Our elected council in Kensington and Chelsea are north of the borough where this is going on. They're Labour but they're overwhelmed by Conservatives.

Do you think this is where the Mayor's office could knock some heads together and intervene?

I've been asked to give us some definitions of what good design looks like. Once you have guidelines about what makes for good design, you've got something to argue about. At the moment it's what anyone wants to call it.

Do you think that's about participation?

I would see the Mayor's office as being responsible for drafting it.

It has to be sensitive to each area. That comes back to history. In our area, we've got all new builds everywhere. All demolished because of a clearance in the 1960s but you have an original Victorian pub on each pub corner. In my mind they should be listed. They're the one connection to that moment in time. Just like Trellick Tower.

There are parameters like green space, accessibility, the distance to the nearest bus stop. There are design parameters you can build in. In terms of public space, we do have standards for internal space and size. National standards. Still no national standards for externals. There's a long-term problem.

We want the Mayor to support localism.

Housing zones. Talk about housing zones.

To crudely summarise the top three: One thing is about community led regeneration rather than just regeneration. Capacity building to make localism be a real thing.

Necessary to think about participation, not just consultation, and decision making at every step of the way. Underlying that, you recognise a need for new homes and change and regeneration but you want that to address local needs.

Not just thrown in on top.

From the bottom up.

Homes for local people to live. Not blocks that stand empty.

Just because they've made the council's budget balance.

Some capacity issues in the boroughs. Councils don't have the resource to support you in the way that you need. They rely a lot on consultants and you feel their intrinsic expertise is being lost. Second one is about diversity and local culture. You all seem to value the high streets having intrinsic things that were offering things to local people. That was maybe under threat as a result of change. You're seeing development coming in. Not offering skills or training. They talk about it but they don't follow through.

Internationalised. You can get globalised. Starbucks rather than specialised coffee shops.

Nightlife.

When you come out of the tube station you should be able to identify the character by distinctive local culture.

Arguably, the future of that; people come out of the station, 'Great, Starbucks,' straight in there.

People in the community have to be on the board at the top table. It's all council officers and councillors. I'm talking about people around this table who are active in their community. They have to be involved when the developer comes in.

As a very serious point to that, I attended Friends of the Earth base camp here. There was a Friends of the Earth lawyer who clearly explained there were changes in the planning system that completely cut out people. Brought councillors and the developers together on the same table. This was all passed through the Houses of Commons at 4 o'clock in the morning. We're not the ones who are going to be able to do anything about that. I'm interested to hear what the Mayor is going to say about that situation.

Around high quality design. There was a conversation about how that needs to be defined. That could be something that's participative. It needs to be a local approach and place-based approach to design. Something on the Lea Valley isn't the same as Lewisham town centre. Anything else to add? We also talked about mixing uses. Doing it well.

Mixed use is a bit problematic. The railway is in the middle of the area. There are lots of complaints that adjacent properties are less valuable. Seen as a bad thing.

Design. The business of scale. Its' not over scaled and over tall, bit monolithic blocks. Does take into account the character of the surrounding area.

We have the super tall buildings in particular. The Paddington Pole. You've got an issue there, what's been said is it hasn't gone away because the developers will simply come back to the table.

In Finsbury Park we have 2 tall towers coming. I know Haringey on another site close by are going to put up a building. It sets a precedent.

They'll get more. The idea of having a cluster is a good idea. The idea of starting one is a bad idea.

Thank you very much.

Session 1, Table 10

Alex Marsh, Greater London Authority (Facilitator)
Olivia Tusinski, Greater London Authority (Facilitator)

David Lewis, London Forum

Jo Wilson, Future of London

Matthew Jaffa, Federation of Small Businesses

Peter O'Brien, London Borough of Haringey

Robin Brown, Hayes Community Forum / Just Space

Will McKee, Old Oak & Park Royal Mayoral DC

We are from the GLA regeneration team. We have a broad list of questions to discuss, and various maps and printouts to reference. Please introduce yourselves.

David Lewis: I'm the executive of the London Forum. They're very proud and possessive of their high street. We certainly have scepticism, regarding it important that the nature of the high street must change.

Matthew Jaffa: Federation of Small Businesses. This has long been an issue, supporting micro businesses on the high street who feel they are being priced out. A balance between micro, small, medium and large.

Robin Brown: Freelance planner in Hayes. Also part of a London-wide network, Just Space. We participate in opportunities available in the planning system to express our voices. I'm personally connected to Hayes local town centre. A lot of the other community groups are likewise protective and possessive of their local centres.

Jo Wilson: from Future of London. We work with London boroughs and housing associations. I work usually more around housing, but I thought this would be interesting. We did work earlier in the year on bids, commissioned by the GLA, showing that bids are very much here to stay and have a significant role, particularly around greening and environmental change. There may be opportunities moving away from retail.

Will McKee: Chair the Outer London Commission, which produced a report on London town centres. Old Oak, Chief executive of accessible retail.

Peter O'Brien: Regeneration manager at Tottenham Hale. We're seeking to establish a new district centre on the high street. We're looking at what a 21st century high street looks like and how it works in a contemporary setting. It's an interesting challenge.

The 600 high streets account for 54% of London jobs outside of the CAZ. When you look at the development, it accounts for 1,000 plus hectares of development land. They are very important not only in the civic life of our economy, but also they play an important role in strategic function.

Is that 1,000 hectares for all of it or just outside town centres? Is that ground space?

Some will be within town centres. It is ground space. This is a dense piece of research from 2010 (referring to high street map), mapping out all of these high streets. This conversation is under the umbrella of growth. What represents good growth in the context of high streets and town centres?

There was the idea of preservation and wanting to retain things and understand what those characteristics are.

The small businesses, shopping centres that are most cherished are ones that have independent, small shops. They're very much under threat. When they become too successful, then the rents go up. The innovative small businesses are forced out. It may be a hopeless cause, but the character of the retail is an aspect that a large part of the population does value.

Are you suggesting we should seek to protect the businesses rather than the actual buildings?

Ultimately the businesses, yes, I wouldn't rule out redevelopment of the buildings, which are typically low rise. Then the problem is the rents go up and it becomes non-viable.

There is a tension when talking about issues like rent rises. At the GLA, is it our role to protect individual businesses, or protecting the principle of affordable, accessible space? Low threshold entry space allows businesses to thrive.

When I was at Croydon, the only way we could make it work was to actually subsidise the businesses from the rate. That's one of the difficulties. I have 4 points. It was said that town centres have traditionally been determined as successful or not, mainly on retail performance. That has to change. Good growth in the future is diversified growth, with a number of economic forces, rather than just relying on retailing. In that context, the return of public sector services to the town centre. The second point is we can't just talk about retail as if it's homogenous. The economics are quite different for small and large businesses. They want big boxes, that's the only thing that works for them. It depends if you think the market or the public sector will pay for this. That will influence your choices. Mostly the public sector can't afford to pay for anything.

There is comparable tension in relation to public services. It would be nice to bring public services back to town centres. The evolution is centralisation and relocation. It would be very difficult to find sites for them in their present form. What do you see as possible?

In Essex, a local authority persuaded a shopping centre developer to build a new public library in the shopping centre. It moved from the outskirts back into the centre. It brought diversification.

Space and its protection is a critical aspect. Something I struggle with in terms of public sector objectives. Look at Tottenham for example and look at the small businesses. There is a significant lag between the residential market and the high street. Kentish Town wasn't particularly desirable in the '70s. It took 30 years to catch up. It's still largely small independent businesses, but the profile of those businesses has taken a long time to change. Sometimes you need to flush out the old to allow the new to grow. Today, if you look at it, there are so many retailers looking to do interesting and exciting things, with a clear demand

from the population. Yet they struggle to find spaces on the high street. It's not really the public sector's role to say, 'It's time to move on.'

Brokering is an interesting issue.

In terms of good growth, it's got to be flexible, but also not a one size fits all approach. We see more and more small businesses in operation for years, but simply being told by land owners that they want an anchor tenant in the property because they get more revenue. That sticks in the throat somewhat. In discussion with Tottenham, the key is that we need to retain small business space. Where you have a successful high street working, parking is a big stumbling block because they can't get people to stop and shop. The Mayor wants to reduce car usage. We want to give flexibility. There's an incentive to put working space at the bottom of a development. Rather than just getting a Costa or Pret in there. It needs flexibility.

I think inevitably it's going to reduce. Some kinds of circumstances and space can be defended.

There is non-residential, a challenge for all these categories. It's having the space available for other things to happen that creates opportunities. Everything is crowded out by residential. If you look at this high street map, you intuitively know that these never-ending high streets, there probably isn't enough dynamic retail to fill them all. If you have other types, you have diversity.

I want to question the dynamism. That's a loaded word. We have statistics of jobs and businesses located on high streets. They move, look like secondary and underutilised, but they do provide important sources of employment. We did a study with UCL students on ethnic traders occupying secondary parades. They were all part of developing London as a more cohesive city. They traded with local people and their ethnic counterparts around large parts of London. They were a glue to the area and to society. That's an important theme that the Mayor is emphasising, social inclusivity. They are important centres of activity, going beyond an economic function. Those were the areas ripe for development. We see anonymous blocks of residential. I take your point that you don't want to import residential blocks and crowd out activity. We should recognise the value, not in monetary terms, of what is already there.

I agree. I worked in Southall before Tottenham, which is very diverse. They tend to be the businesses that struggle first. There are often several of them, 8 or 9 shops doing broadly the same thing in a small space. Rents are so low, it becomes a subsistence living option. They tend to get crowded out.

A lot of these long linked high streets are quite busy roads. In terms of making them better as social spaces, there's a big difference between big lane high streets or small parades, or with a market. There was a huge resistance to pedestrianising some streets. In outer London, there is the need for cars. Pedestrians spend the money. In Hackney, they closed that and the owners said the bus lane would reduce footfall. It didn't, it actually enhanced it. There is no one size fits all. The private sector could pay to make those environments better. The public sector renewing shop fronts is a limited thing. If you take this idea of environmental improvements, a lot of the businesses have really cottoned on to this agenda. The fresh air zone, really recognising the importance of that for a vibrant shopping centre. They can make them more social spaces.

Are you an advocate of BIDs?

I think they are on the environmental agenda. Partly supported by GLA, but the bigger ones have taken this agenda of if you want to make people shop, you need to make a nicer environment, through sustainability measures. I think they already have, but there are only 52 or something. A lot of the smaller BIDs aren't thinking about that. It's mainly inner London.

Is there a more involved vision for the public? Barking have now actively, at some risk to themselves, started buying up property in the town centre as part of a vision of managing the town centre.

That's what they used to do.

A shopping centre can say they have a book seller, a florist, they're missing a pharmacist.

Curation.

They might have more control.

That's crucial. I'd much sooner own the land. You control so many variables.

It's a hornet's nest for a local authority to be in that position. You decide what that future looks like. It puts the authority in a very challenging position.

The people who oppose public sector, a democratic approach to curation, is that market led?

There is a subtlety. If you actively intervene and acquire the land, you can have a development project with a partner and then retrieve the land if you understand the market well enough.

In Tottenham, we have a fine grain approach to sites not in use, to bring them back into use. We ran a tender exercise, put effort into promotion to see the sort of places we were looking for. It was a nice place to go for a drink. The feedback from the community was there was no place to go for a drink. It was brought back into life. Huge interesting, huge political fallout in terms of what that signalled. Despite the fact we have evidence that this is what a lot of people want, it became a huge thing for the borough to undertake. We have a thick skin, so we take a bullish approach. I'm not sure how many we can get through politically before people see it as gentrification.

Westminster, Berwick street market. Westminster own it. They want an authority to manage the whole thing. All the traders want to make a community group. They can run it for what the residents want. Presumably Westminster wants money in return, and bring in someone to manage it.

That general topic in the street market, can add vitality to a place, beyond simple economic function. I'd like to speak up for their protection.

That goes to the heart of decision making. You procure a service. Local authorities want the most value money-wise, but how do you get across a short-term decision to get funds in losing diversity in the long-term? You're cutting costs and making revenue. More is retained if you spend it on small businesses. You're up against it in the short-term.

We focus all of our energies on small independents. The big chains can look after themselves. New builds become a horrible spreadsheet. Trying to make everything stack up is a constant challenge. At a London plan level is the balance between housing priority and every other priority. It's usually a rearguard action from people like me and other parts of the GLA.

On a different issue, this is more than just about retailers. They acquire ground floor and upper floor retail. Do you try and increase the provision of housing on the footprint of the development you've got? Or do you build a purpose designed piece of retail? It might have a lot of flats above. One of the opportunities we've got is to re-engineer a fringe town centre into something purpose built, rather than something customised. It's a really important policy to think about.

We are starting to look at it. The issue is for fringe town centres, but equally for central core towns, fragmented ownership. We have competing land interests. There are examples of CPO processes, and we know CPO is a blunt and sometimes nasty instrument.

The inherent value of that site could be greater. People who might not be land owners but would like to be land owners can see that opportunity. By creating the potential for enhanced value, you make it easier for non-public sector developers to come in.

The issue is signalling and coordinating a role in stimulating first instances. We are in discussion with colleagues about pilots to demonstrate that.

Can we have more piecemeal development? Then we can retain the small scale, idiosyncratic townscape that we have. It's all part of the character of the high street.

The Commission said in its report, talking about zone A areas, if you want to make a significant contribution, the scale has got to increase. You need 5- or 6-storey town centres.

We haven't said anything about major retail town centres. Major centres are expanding mathematically in a contracting retail market.

The economics of retail is changing. Most town centres are multiples. We're talking about working in badly shaped sites with expensive parking. For those people, that economic model doesn't work. They want to go to boxes. Other than the small retailers, the economics are changing. They're moving to the best town centres.

Brent Cross is doubling in size. Battersea Power Station is under the radar as a major centre. On the development of the Power Station, they're in the first phase of residential development. They've gone to inordinate lengths to not have chain stores, but to have one-off businesses. Whether that will survive into subsequent phases, I don't know.

They are specialist and local, not competing directly.

The amount of retail space permitted makes it difficult to imagine there won't be multiples.

What does it mean for how quality design should be and look like?

When we talk about design, we're not talking about narrow aesthetic, but how these places function.

When faced with Tottenham Hale, we could have gone for 'Westfield light'. The local community preferred that idea, because they quite like going to Westfield. We took a firm view of not wanting to make an environment of inwardly facing boxes. We wanted more of a traditional streetscape. It's hard to visualise in Tottenham Hale. Our thinking behind it was important. The experience of shopping centres is they work really well in the first 15 years of their life when they're fresh and new. Older ones don't do well, and it costs a fortune to change them. You have a long period of decline until you do something major. The other model is a lot more flexible and more resilient to change. It can diversify to the more experiential model of high streets. Restaurants, getting your hair done. We think that model of a traditional street layout has much more value than shopping centres.

I think Preston took that approach. They roofed over the streets, kept the format, but it became enclosed.

In Durham shopping centres are appearing left, right and centre. An old-fashioned town centre made the choice that it would just appear as a street connecting back in a loop. It has all the multiples that you'd expect to see, but it's a street. My personal view is the traditional street layout has great resilience that internal environments do not.

One notable feature of town centres is that they're likely to be in conservation areas. It's quite a dilemma that requires a good deal of imagination and innovation to change their function whilst avoiding destroying the conservation area.

The traditional street topology, will that be reconciled with these traditional high streets? Where is the residential?

We're proposing a 21st century version of the traditional high street. It's large urban blocks on a European city scale. Residential is above. Genuine mixed use development. Grid pattern structure as you see in Glasgow or Manchester. It's well tested.

Birmingham and Paris brought to Tottenham Hale.

You have tall buildings down to the traditional urban block.

You retain the traditional street structure, but you put in new developments.

We're actually creating it for the first time. We had large scale industrial with massive urban blocks. We've introduced a street that matches the environment, but is actually new.

You can fuse the block structure while fusing with the experiential businesses?

What fits for part of the district centre is different to the next layer of the onion, more light industrial. The tools you want in each vary massively and what you can afford to do in each varies hugely. It's hard to imagine large scale affordable work spaces. In the next layer out, it's easy to imagine policies that say to leave it alone, or you must introduce affordable work spaces.

Night time economy, the importance of using spaces between buildings. The quality of frontage on most zone B and small shop frontages is appalling. If they really want to make it a place you'd like to go to, they have to do something about the quality of frontages.

What incentive do owners have? It's in their power.

Do we emphasise local determination with businesses recognising businesses? They might speak with different voices. Will the onion approach be in the new London Plan?

I like the idea of simple rules but with flexibility to change in imaginative ways. On a high street, allow the local authority to figure out how you allocate the space. Building a new workspace doesn't pay for itself. The rent is so low that building the building in the first place won't cover it. How do we get more workspace? Take 5% or 10%, build pure residential and then intensify the workspace.

You have simple rules with a built-in safeguard for community engagement.

What are the 3 key points from our discussion? Diversity and flexibility were general points. There was a point on setting simple rules.

You want 3 points about high streets, and 3 points about town centres. Intensity and diversification.

Value is interesting. Cheaper frontages in Peckham give opportunities. Business ownership as well. It's not featured in planning policy. Industrial areas. How you apply value to that, it gives an interesting non-monetary aspect.

Town centres are more than just retail. That was an important point.

Erin Byrne, Greater London Authority (Facilitator)

Duncan Clarke, London Borough of Sutton

Edward Clarke, Centre for Cities

Heather Cheesbrough, London Borough of Croydon

Ian Bridge, London Borough of Sutton

Mark Brearley, Cass Cities

Peter Pickering, London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

Stephanie Pollitt, Director for British Property Federation

We have some material here (shows stimulus). The first is looking at how London works. Traditionally in planning terms, London is described as a town centre. With a hierarchy within that. International centres, metropolitan, major. This highlights something more intangible, thinking about London's high streets. There are some interesting statistics. Over 50% of London's jobs outside the Central Activity Zone around central London are on high streets. Big employment hubs. 47% businesses outside central London are on high streets. Two thirds of London's developed land is within 200 metres of high streets. Thinking about new homes, high streets have a lot of potential to be areas of growth. Two thirds of Londoners live within a 5 minute walk.

Low threshold enterprise space. How we can support that slack space? Following from Jules and John Lett's presentations it's clear London is experiencing an enormous amount of growth in houses, jobs and need for green spaces. A lot of pressure in London. One of the key things we wanted to talk about was the role of town centres and high streets in accommodating that growth, but also what we mean by good growth. We have a few specific questions but we'd like to have a conversation. (Shows stimulus) here are two maps of London. Within the London Plan, there's a hierarchy of town centres identified, these dots. There are international centres, metropolitan and district centres. The other map shows land uses. It highlights roles that high streets play. We often think of London as a series of centres, there's something happening where it's a network of connected places.

Often where you live, you might use your high street rather than your town centre. There's a local perception of how London works. One of the questions we wanted to talk about was how that should be represented in planning terms.

Some research that's been done by GLA has identified a few themes affecting London's high streets and town centres. One is a slightly strange phrase; Low threshold enterprise space. One thing we've been noticing is that whilst London's been experiencing growth, there's been pressure on things like affordable workspace. How do you describe slack spaces? New businesses or creative industries, artists, community organisations, are finding it hard to get hold of cheap space. Question mark over how we can ensure that that kind of space survives in London.

Community participation. One of the key themes the Mayor's been talking about is about how London's growth can be more inclusive. How can Londoners feel like they have a say? Thinking about local tenant's organisations, community arts organisations, BIDs, what is the role of those organisations in the future of London's high streets and town centres?

The restructure of retail. We're seeing more and more online shopping. That's having an impact on London's town centres. We're seeing that high streets and town centres might have to adapt and change. Thinking about what that means.

Another 3 issues that have been coming up are around fragmented ownership. One of the issues in town centres particularly is how difficult it is to bring forward large-scale regeneration. Or even have a joined up vision for a town centre, for example, because you have so many people who own land. It ends up being a very complicated thing to create a vision for a place that takes into account everybody's views.

The other thing is about high quality design. Venues, how they can stick together in a way that's integrated. A key thing that came from the Mayor's manifesto, supporting existing character. We talked about that a lot in the previous group. Thinking about that diverse and distinctive local nature of high streets and town centres and how new development and gentrification and growth can support those existing characteristics instead of damage them.

The first question is quite broad. What should be the vision that high streets and town centres play in the future? Different views here. Boroughs, think tank, academia. Are there any key issues that are coming to mind?

In terms of fragmented ownership, that's something we launched this year. About 2 years ago we had a chat with DCLG. We had a chat about how to solve this issue. We went away, brought together a business plan with some of our major investors, L&G, and so on. Looked at how that could work. The idea came about. It would be asset management. A good example is Marlborough High Street. How that's managed. We launched investment zones this year so can link these together. A lot to be said for pulling together fragmented ownership. Allows you to get the right tenant mix, understand that particular high street. In terms of good growth on high streets, it has to go beyond retail. It's also about housing and infrastructure, connectivity, transport. It's much bigger than it was a long time ago. The high street plus community uses is going to be key.

From a borough perspective, in terms of Croydon and Redbridge, is that something you're picking up on? Other councils? Are you thinking you want a more proactive approach to leases or should that be market led?

Fragmented ownership on the high street is an issue. I'm thinking of 2 particular blocks at the moment. It's not fragmented ownership, it's just lack of ambition by the land owner to do anything. Both of them are blots on their respective centres. We've spoken to the landowners. They're quite happy with the return they're getting and they can't be bothered to do anything else.

What kind of uses?

One is a small 1970s shopping centre with about 10 units. The other one is a shopping frontage with about 5 units.

Does the council have any land holdings within the street?

It does.

Are you looking at bringing forward development on those sites or keeping those as long term?

The council owns the largest shopping centre in the borough. That's leased for let. Sublet to the tenants. Its' also looking at reconfiguring some of its land holdings. That's a part of the regeneration project.

Through development or disposing of those?

Disposing, re-developing, land acquisition by a bigger site.

That potentially might end up being one of these opportunities where you have a chance to curate the tenants and uses of these sites.

It's the 'do nothing' land lords that are the bugbear.

The first thing you mentioned, this conundrum of high streets and town centres. It's time the Mayor made his mind up. Do we want a high street city or a town centre city? We've had many decades of this conceptualisation of these town centres. Now we've got this greater understanding of what the actual fabric of London and the economy of London is on the ground. That could take you to say, 'Wait a minute, maybe we want a city of high streets'. The continuity is more important.

What do you mean? I tend to think of them as very much overlapping. What's the difference?

The conception of centres is that you would be consolidating into something more circular than a diagram and you would encourage the renewal of the majority of the high streets. When you look at many high streets, there have been systematic acts to dismantle them. Whitechapel High Street, Old Kent Road. Many decades of stripping out and trying to push a subset of the use types, principally retail and some leisure, into centres. That's a very different kind of city than what we had, actually than what we still have.

Certainly in suburban boroughs I wouldn't have said that. The high street is the town centre.

I have to disagree. I know Hounslow very well. Hounslow High Street and town centre are two different things. The high street is one of the longest I've ever come across. The town centre really struggles. You try and consolidate it. I think this is a really interesting diagram (refers to stimulus). I think they are two different things. I don't think the policies that try and conflate together do what we try to achieve. If you look at these statistics down here, high streets have a really interesting role. Having active, interesting commercial uses on the ground floor can encourage that. Trying to turn every high street into a town centre, we know we can't do it. That's why town centres are failing. If you recognise that they are two different things.

They have some similarities but the centre is a much more intense lot together. High street, more variety, some parades of shops, and some residential on the ground floor whether we like it or not. It's about trying to make them into walk-able key routes and try and stop lumbering them with this town centre hierarchy.

I agree with you. Of the 35% of London's economy that is outside the city, a significant proportion of that has no planning designation that's in any way protecting the non-residential accommodation. Or promoting new growth. The exercises that led to this didn't do that, but compare that (points to town centre boundaries). A lot of this that isn't covered by the boundaries. At least, of that 35%, you get to at least 10 to 15% of London's economy actively under threat and being stripped out now because of the lack of any policy acknowledgement. The policy still says the reverse. That can all be stripped out, is what the policy says roughly.

We've got effectively a high street in Croydon, and we're seeing the changed use from retail to residential. A very long road, Portland Road. A lot of high street characteristics. There was no real policy support to retain the retail use. You've got PD now. Technicality that meant we retained the retail use because it was A3 instead of an A1. I think that when you get a lot of high streets where you have really poor quality residential conversions, for starters, that really undermines the role of that street and the character. I think we've got to think much differently about what kind of uses we allow there. What do we safeguard? I don't think it's the end of the world to let some residential in there. There aren't enough commercial uses for long high streets anyway, but protecting where you have a parade of shops. Also some broader things around it.

If you have a long high street, the outer peripheries are not in use, isn't there an argument to shrink it?

It doesn't always work like that.

I appreciate that but there's an argument to shrink it down.

Only if you've got a major not in use. That's dropping away rapidly towards a trajectory of London having a shortage.

Then it goes back to asset management.

What geography do you want the additional accommodation that you have to take?

Are you saying that because residential trumps retail when it comes to rent or returns, there's always a threat for retail spaces that aren't doing so well?

Non-residential spaces, not just retail.

Good point. A development issue.

Also planning.

What's that got to do with the London Plan?

The London Plan should have a view on that.

The Mayor should be arguing more powers, more exclusion from development.

Not just committee development. Planning application led changes.

The latter you can already do. It's the former that's the main issue?

It would be good if the Mayor could give a view. An Abercrombie view of the world, a 1930s view, and a view of the world that's slightly acknowledging that something's shifted in London around the best geography of day to day non-residential stuff.

Live-work. Lots of these high streets show examples where you can do live-work really well, and in the past we've had a retail shop that's been vacant. Say an artist, craft person comes in and does something. A small one-man band, SMA. Lives in this premises. An opportunity for it as well. Going back to many years ago, people did a lot of living and working in the same premise. Could help struggling high streets.

Seems like 2 different types of high street. One that's struggling, and one in areas where it's so high value that their retail units or other uses are under threat of residential. It seems like separate issues. The ones struggling, there might be a case for intensifying or cutting off the edges. Increasing the amount of residential or office space to get more footfall in them. The arguments for the other ones are about protecting space, having thriving areas for local communities not taken over by flats. Conflating the two and describing a high street quality for London.

Town centres and high streets are two different things. High streets are often struggling because they're not protected by any policy. If you have a high street that's doing well, it's often protected through some kind of policy.

Like a town centre strategy.

You're saying high streets that are struggling because of that? Struggling to keep their retail offer?

Keep their commercial retail ground floor usage.

They are just vacant.

Struggling is a major part of the London challenge. It's going to drop away quite rapidly. If there was further liberalisation within non-residential use, a lot of that space would be taken up. London has a non-residential accommodation shortage, getting towards a crisis. Affecting the weaker categories in the market.

The ones that are struggling, you say they lack protection. I say they lack footfall, customers, all the things that make a business work.

I'm arguing that you can have a commercial use, not necessarily retail, requiring vast quantities of footfall. We should be encouraging them.

Also relates to wider thinking. Would be good to have a strategic view. The Abercrombie plan, London Plan, has this view that centres are about some subsets of the economic and civic life. Not schools. Not really healthcare. They could have a scattered, random geography. All other things equal, where would you tend to prefer to have schools? What sort of geography? Interrelationship between public life and general mixed footfall would you want? A relationship between that and the daily uses of the city. If all the schools were on high streets that would be a better city.

The Mayor is saying town centres are going to become housing areas. What is the impact of high-rise housing? On viability? Take the shops out of frontages because it's more profitable to have more housing? The ambition to drive new housing towards town centres and high streets is going to have a knock on effect. If it's going along sort of how it's going now, it's going to undermine some town centres further.

Take out everything but pale blue from that diagram (refers to stimulus) and it's happening. Southall and Peckham, all that blue is going. The high streets are getting shorter and all the accommodation is being moved, even though there is a crash coming. There is already a gentrification pressure but it will get worse because there is not enough accommodation. That policy assumption is allowing removal of all that darker blue stuff.

The rhetoric being used is about a balancing act, uses, employment and housing, but there is a perception that non-residential uses are potentially unsupported. Is there call for more specific policies protecting non-residential space?

Yes or encouragement and differentiation between heart of town centre policy, and the geography of large footprints like leisure.

Yes, your primary shopping area.

The other part of it, the mix in development and relationships with frontages and depth space. It's about mixed use.

Do we think those policies work on a London wide scale or they need to be place based?

I think it has to be locally led.

The core of what kind of city we want.

I agree, strategic vision the Mayor can set out. Highlight what can be done. Also a set of national policies which are restricting that. I think it's unrealistic to look at any of this without national development. Which applies to pretty much all of London apart from the CAZ.

London is very, very different to the rest of the country.

That's exactly my point. I think the national policy is overriding. You're completely right that London is exceptional. As is every other city in the UK. Just no way it should be a national policy. Should be led by the Mayor. Crazy to think you have a planning policy that can't set 90% of brownfield land used for housing. That cramps what you can do in high streets.

What is the role for the Mayor in lobbying at a national level?

There's a limit to what the Mayor can do, not what he can ask for.

Pretty close to a consensus across London. The kinds of things the Mayor should be lobbying for nationally.

At least with aspects of planning.

Around language and what's being delivered. I suggest there's an intrinsic issue around the values that residential creates compared to non-residential uses. If a London plan was to say, 'We want to prioritise employment space,' without specific policies, it's difficult to secure that. Is that what you're noticing in the boroughs?

Yes it's basically major housing led mixed used development. Homes, high rise, with two or three units on the ground floor.

Housing estates.

It doesn't attract the high street retail. We're trying to get businesses in.

It's good to see this proactive attitude in the boroughs, you really want to see the high street delivering. All well and good, but when it comes down to the detail, how are we going to ensure that London boroughs are really tuned into what they need to do? Also whether they have the resources to do so, and the knowhow? You have the issue of fragmented ownership and the issue of disparate owners. They're quite happy, a little pension pot, for it to do what it does, and why bother? So it's trying to change a lot of different attitudes closer to the ground to make that overarching thing work.

The Mayor could do a lot to embolden boroughs, help with resources where they have a sympathy to a more nuanced approach to development. Housing need trumps everything. In some boroughs, the ones most involved doing battle with Southwark, the answer to every question is, 'There's a housing crisis.' You have to answer, 'Yes matey, but there is also a crisis of non-residential.' The only argument is, 'There is a housing crisis.'

It is about nuance. There needs to be a separation of town centres and high street. Then you have a plan that shows linearity and connectivity of the high streets. Then it is down to individual London boroughs about how they do develop policy. It's all very different.

I don't agree you need to support the high streets and town centres. I think they're the same.

Separate aspects of the policy framework and the way it gets formed on maps. One of the biggest core-planning roles of town centre designations is around hierarchies. That feels to me a distinct planning instrument separate to geography of mixed accommodation.

In terms of scale, certainly. I agree with that, from village to town to city, your scale is different. High streets and town centres, I don't think there's a difference.

You need to go to outer boroughs and suburbs. There is a lot of linearity of high street that's not in the town centre.

We did a lot of research.

If this shows high streets, it's not the same as town centres.

This (referring to the stimulus) looks at the clustering of non-residential uses. The red is retail. The rest is employment based. If we're going to get into the detail, should the town centre boundaries, because these boundaries are designated, be extended to include high streets or should they be treated as different?

They're two different things.

From Sutton's point of view? One of the issues is that you have a slightly mandatory or arbitrary town centre boundary. What do you do 10 metres from that boundary?

The town centre boundary is drawn itself by the roads really. What's a town centre and what's a high street? I'm not that bothered. I want to go back to what Ed said which is quite pertinent. National policy really clobbers boroughs who are trying to plan. Office to resi has been a complete disaster. Sutton's lost 80,000, 63% of which was occupied.

Not just that, also planning permission.

It's really clobbered, and it's clobbered Croydon and Richmond and Wimbledon and Kingston. If you want an office in South West London, you won't get one.

Why is it? This feeling is very much shared by London Forum. Why is it? The attempt in the House of Lords. He's suddenly backed out. Does anyone know why?

He's supported by Lord Tate and was afraid to rebel against his own party.

That's all we hear as well.

Almost on the brink of it.

There's a decision made nationally that housing is a priority. A national, political priority. Also a problem about residences around suburban identification. Greenbelt. If you want to build houses in cities, not in greenbelt, don't want to intensify suburbia, build in towers, there's nothing left apart from converting offices. The only thing we can politically say yes to is this office to resi conversion. That's why.

We absolutely need the Mayor to speak up on that. At least a quarter of London's economy is under threat.

I wouldn't say the retail to resi has had a big effect. Just because it's difficult to convert shops into nice flats so nobody tries. The other problem is that the use class order is woefully unsuited to the modern world.

In what way?

We're told to make town centres and high streets not a shopping destination but a leisure destination but the use classes don't allow us the flexibility between A uses, D1, D2 uses. What you need is a town centre use class all of its own.

All the liberalisations have been around non-residential shifting to residential. There's been no flexibility. Allowing many more of those flexibilities. They would seem positive.

There should be more flexibility within use class changes, between them?

A new use class called town centre uses.

Without having to come in for a planning application?

At the moment everything moves one way. No flexibility. Also, when you do convert office to resi, it's relatively easy. You can kick office tenants out easily. Hard to do the other way round. Residential leases are much longer. Not a physical thing. Just because of that. That means these changes are not something we can easily flip. It's a misnomer to call it flexibility. It's a conversation.

You're swimming against the dynamic of values. Not likely that we will see a shift in favour of non-residential, value wise.

No, not in a positive way.

The fact that office to residential didn't get any CIL or anything. Most of the controls on residential sizes.

Works very well some places outside London but should be locally controlled led by the Mayor.

Same as retail to residential. In a large number of cases you see appalling residential.

Sometimes super useful, most of the time it's not. That should be number one priority for Sadiq.

We've been asked to summarise the 3 key issues. Feels like the focus has been around protection of non-residential uses. That balancing act about rhetoric of the housing crisis.

The way the Mayor is trying to deal with the housing crisis is by saying town centres and high streets are where we're going to deliver this housing. The knock on effect of this. Reducing retail spaces, reduced opportunities, mix of uses, community space, leisure uses. The town centres. That strategic decision will undermine town centres.

If they become residential areas. The problems of noise.

Exactly. People who move into areas just off Oxford Street, then complaining about nightlife and lorries. 'You live next to Regent Street, what do you expect?'

Like people who move into (?) and complain about the noise.

This question about high street town centre.

Differentiation. The importance of high streets.

The fighting for more non-residential accommodation begs the question, 'On what geography?' The geography of the town centre network is not the total geography of high streets. Just a subset. If all the rest is up for grabs, we have a big problem.

**How policy can recognise high streets beyond traditionally designated town centres?
The Mayor doing something about lobbying the government about policy.**

Overtaking planning permissions. The Mayor could stop doing that as well.

Looking at use class order, is that suitable for what we want to see for town centres?

Bolder visions about what happens in high streets? Including lots of industrial, which is entirely valid.

More ambitious about mixing uses?

More creative. Live work.

Mixing residential with industrial?

Not talking about some massive iron smelting works. Quite light industrial.

Joiner's shops, bakers, car repair?

It's all media, communications, technology, digital, that sort of stuff.

**Something we've not really touched on but the technological change and the impact.
Whether that's an opportunity or a threat.**

Town centres are more places to go to, to have coffee and meet friends. Can anyone explain why there are still so many estate agents?

That point was made by the last group.

Some little piece by an intelligent young-

The shrinkage in the footage requirement of retail, that's just a modest piece of breathing space in the overall construction problem. It's not like, it was presented as this opportunity. 'Wait a minute John, it's not an opportunity for turning it into residential. This is just a temporary respite.' A small liberation of accommodation all and more that is needed for the diversity of non-residential stuff. Anyway it's London. Actually the more high street oriented small and middle scale retail is the winner.

A lot of people say what they want is more independent shops and less multiples.

That's the dynamic.

Yes, because of a lot of decisions that are made.

Big format retail is suffering the worst shrinkage of London.

Isn't that due to relaxation of out of town centre policy?

Also lifestyle choices and the way people are.
