

**CRP Lunchtime Launch 3 'Town Centre Futures'**  
**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021**



**Question and Answer Sheet**

**Q: Josh Newton, Activation Manager, Ellen MacArthur Foundation:** Do the speakers recognise opportunities for revitalising high streets in promoting the circular economy and more circular business models?

**A:** Definitely. Veolia are currently trialing innovative electric tricycles in Westminster in collaboration with Westminster City Council, designed for on-street waste collection. These offer a safe, efficient and clean air solution for street waste collections and play a part in promoting the circular economy to business models to provide a more holistic approach. Cargo bikes have been vital throughout the coronavirus crisis, for a fairer recovery as well as cleaner and safer, for example deliveries from foodbanks to the community have been made by bike – sharing and collaboration are key for making sure that people can live sustainably and that businesses can take up more circular solutions.

**Q: Rob Edwards, Lead Sponsor, Transport for London:** The report focuses on opportunities and actions to revive High Streets - are they worth fighting for or are we swimming against the tide?

**A:** High Streets are absolutely worth fighting for, and diversity is needed in our town centres. Once implemented, recommendations laid out in the report will ensure that High Streets are worth fighting for. High Streets are more than economic centres, they are the heart of our communities, and in an increasingly digital era, are arguably needed now more than ever to contribute to valuable human inter-action.

**Q: Patsy Buchanan, Director, Artist Consultancy:** What environmental initiatives are in place or planned for improving town centres?

**A:** There are many initiatives for improving town centres that support recovery in environmentally sustainable ways, that are also good for business. One example is implementing local electric vehicle charging infrastructure, please see a full Clean Air Villages case study [here](#) for details on the initiative in Shepherd's Bush. Other examples include cargo bike schemes, efficient waste collection via sustainable modes and micro-consolidation centres.

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**Q: Peter Horah, Principal Sponsor, Transport for London:** Does Town Centre Futures support a principle of subsidised shops to encourage people to shop local and abandon to use the car as a shopping trolley?

A: The amount of shopping that one can take away could be limited, looking at a more blended approach to retail, differentiating between convenience and comparison goods. Larger bulk goods could be delivered locally, and smaller goods could be carried on a bike or individually. Public transport needs to be an appropriate option in order to see a reduction in car use across different localities.

**Q: Mark Atkinson, Markets Development Officer, RBKC:** How do we get property owners and developers to see their 'assets' through more than a property lens?

A: As the economic impacts of Covid bite in more strongly, it is the strategic, long term management of 'assets' that will win the day. The best property owners and developers will pro-actively address presenting and managing their assets led by sustainability principles, in order to command higher 'added value' and higher yields / rents. All property owners and developers need to be encouraged to see things this way, via a combination of legislative, regulatory, incentivisation, civic pride, tools.

**Q: Charles Wright, Writer, On London:** Many different boroughs, plus the GLA, have responsibility for the central area. Should the Mayor be taking a clearer lead, or do we need a separate authority covering the central zone?

A: The existing individual authorities that cover the central zone are best placed to manage the area, using their local knowledge, facilitating beneficial linkages into their authority areas beyond the central zone, and inter-acting with Mayoral principles throughout. There is an existing network of sub-regional partnerships in London, that bring together appropriate groupings of authorities. Cross River Partnership already brings together the central area authorities, as well as Business Improvement Districts and other relevant bodies, to ensure that collaborative approaches are taken to common issues as often as possible.

**Q: Nicky Gavron, AM, London Assembly:** What impact do you think the E use class order will have?

A: Time will tell but in theory it will reduce Local Authorities' ability to control the mix of uses within town centres e.g. shop frontage policy and Article 4 Directions can't be used to restrict movement within Class E. Class E is very broad and theoretically this could lead to a significant shift in the mix of uses in centres. Arguably, the demand for commercial premises could continue to fall dramatically post Covid/Brexit and therefore a flexible approach could assist in ensuring the shop vacancy rate does not increase significantly.

**Q: Nick Bailey, Member, FitzWest Neighbourhood Forum:** What impact will the proposed permitted development right have to change retail and E uses to residential without planning permission?

A: A key area that needs to be explored further is how to effectively monitor and evaluate temporary use against agreed outcomes. The previous temporary changes to permitted development didn't lead to a significant increase in conversions from retail to residential use. However, office conversions to residential were taken up. Covid-related reduced demand for commercial premises in town centres could see a bigger uptake of this change of use this time round. The devil will be in the detail. Restrictions / caveats applied to certain premises sizes/types may be necessary rather than a free-for-all.

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**Q: James Delamere, Planning Policy Officer, London Borough of Islington:** How can town centres be curated effectively if the vision is lost through changes in Class E? Could the highest land value use create overconcentration of uses, which will then fail from over saturation?

A: The ability to control the mix of uses within town centres has been largely removed and Article 4 Directions can't be used to restrict movement within Class E. The demand for A1 retail will reduce and landlords will look for alternative uses. However, the highest land use value may not prevail, because occupier demand for premises will reduce across most sectors, potentially limiting the need for policies to control the mix of uses. The issue may be to ensure units are reoccupied rather than laying vacant, as opposed to controlling the types of use. Competing uses for the same premises should be a good thing.

**Q: James Fitzgerald, Managing Director, e-cargobikes:** In light of high court ruling, what's the panel's view on gig economy drivers and riders and the role they may play in the last mile space?

A: CRP has been advocating zero emission last mile logistics for over a decade now. This is feasible. The high court ruling about employee status for drivers and riders is welcome, in terms of trying to ensure that everybody has protected employment rights and that the economic recovery from Covid is fair for all sections of society.

**Q: Charles Wright, Writer, On London:** No mention of housing so far. Do we need more people living in these areas, particularly to make up for fewer tourists/commuters?

A: This is an interesting point – at the end of January 2021, trips in residential areas were up 12% across London, whereas trips to workplaces in the City of London were down 76% in the same period. There have been positive effects on footfall and spending in some outer London town centres and pedestrian trips have declined the least in residential areas. Residents of London and its hinterland should feel empowered to return to central London post-Covid, perhaps with an emphasis on day trips rather than long-term residential conversions.

**Q: Barbara Pattinson, Board Member, SE5 Forum for Camberwell:** How do we get help for Camberwell Town Centre?

A: The Town Centre Futures report explores Deptford High Street as a town centre typology. This has many parallels with Camberwell, and recommendations for Deptford include increasing access to health services and promote reuse of vacant commercial facilities by opening health facilities on the high street. Please see [here](#) for a full list of recommendations for different groups. The London Borough of Southwark will also be able to help the centre continue to thrive.

**Q: Mark Shepherd, Surveyor, Lasermeasured:** Does Westminster Council have a specific strategy to tackle the proliferation of betting shops? Will there be an opportunity post-Covid to tackle the issue on Westminster High Streets?

A: Betting shops are Sui Generis rather than part of Class E. This enables local Planning Authorities to include policies within their development plans to control these uses. Certainly, other Planning Authorities have already devised such policies. Westminster is the leading local authority on gambling licensing within the UK and the first local authority in the country to refuse two betting shop applications and review another for local area-based risk.



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**Q: Natasha Gray, Marketing & Communications Manager, Croydon BID:** With the extension of pavement licences and likelihood of increased outdoors Food & Beverage in the future, how can we ensure that this does not adversely affect littering, increased use of plastic containers and issues with rat infestations?

**A:** Better public realm guidance on picking up litter, better education into single use plastics and how to dispose of these. Hospitality industry, BIDs or local authorities may need to employ more staff to monitor outdoor premises. Careful management of these new arrangements can pre-empt any of these issues occurring, and the benefits delivered will be significant (including hospitality businesses re-opening, local spend, increased footfall, reduced traffic at key times, social inter-action, use of local areas).

**Q: Tim Lord, Chair, The Soho Society:** Should long-time residents of Soho move out to make room for more drinking and entertainment venues in a pedestrianised Soho?

**A:** There is a place for long-term residents, as well as al fresco dining and entertainment opportunities such as this summer's festival. Pedestrianisation of Soho over the summer of 2020 allowed for 90% of hospitality businesses to reopen - this year it will be key for all Soho residents to work together and collaborate to make the most of the area and new opportunities that the pandemic has presented.

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