• Suburban Taskforce
• What next for retail?
• Where next for the City of London?

Account of Forum meeting on Monday 1st March 2021 on Zoom
Full minute by James Mitchell at planninginlondon.com > LP&DF

Following welcome and Introductions and agreement to minutes of meeting on 2 December 2020 as published in PiL 116:

DISCUSSION TOPICS
Suburban Taskforce
Presentation and workshop led by Lucy Natarajan of UCL
What next for retail?
Presentation and discussion led by Tom Whittington, Director of Retail and Leisure Research at Savills
Where next for the City of London?
Discussion led by Alastair Moss, chairman of planning at the City of London Corporation and Andrew Reynolds, leader of the bid for and Eastern Cluster BID

Suburban Task Force
Presented by Lucy Natarajan, UCL

• As might be expected, suburban land uses and service levels differ noticeably from inner/central London.
• Residential tends to predominate whilst the level of services is far lower.
• There is no set pattern to this disparity, e.g. when you look at ward data; but wealthier suburbs tend to enjoy better social & community infrastructure provision.
• Generally, there is no recognition yet amongst outer London Boroughs of the need to re-think infrastructure provision in the light of increasing trends such as greater working from home.

Discussion: **Peter Eversden** of the London Forum noted how 48 Opportunity Areas in the London Plan all largely display a lack of social infrastructure to help facilitate future growth.

Michael Bach noted how suburban centres have been losing retail for some time; this is likely to be exacerbated by the GPDO changes, and policy proposed at increasing residential uses in town centres cannot expect to set up the level of catchment necessary to redress the fall in retail floorspace there overnight. It's a slow process – and there is no clear strategy regarding how necessary social and community infrastructure will be put in place to support long-term growth.

Eric Sorensen suggested we need to cross-subsidise that provision if/when new development kicks off in those areas.

Riette Oosthuizen queried whether the new CIL proposals will be used properly by London Boroughs (LBs) to provide that cross-subsidisation, and whether they would in any case accept proposed changes to the nature and character (decline in some cases as well as growth in others) of their existing suburban centres.

Mike Edwards of UCL noted how cash-strapped LBs have had to close social /community infrastructure in recent years – e.g. libraries – these have often been centralised on fewer sites, meaning longer distance travel by residents / businesses to reach them.

Nicky Gavron AM flagged up recent past research by the GLA and that the GLA were holding a meeting on 3rd March regarding the future of shopping and services in London's suburban high streets

James Mitchell talked about his submission 'a place to nowhere' which explores how some suburbs such as Harrow have lost their identify through urbanisation, and the protections other places receive via the green belt.

Meeting held on Monday 1st March 2021 on ZOOM

Chairman: Brian Waters
Vice-chair: Jonathan Manns
Hon Sec: James Mitchell

Presenters:
Lucy Natarajan
Tom Whittington
Andrew Reynolds
Alastair Moss

Participants:
Peter Eversden
Michael Bach
John Walker
Eric Sorensen
Angel Huang
Riette Oothuizen
Michael Edwards
Nicky Gavron AM
Deon Lombard
Tim Wacher
Eric Ruane
Geoff Southern
Jonathan Foord
Ming Tony Li
Nigel Abbott
Shani AB
Stuart Smith
Zaid Randeree
Cllr Nigel Moor
Andrew Rogers
Colin Rumsey
Deon Lombard

ABOVE:
Suburban Task Force
Lucy Natarajan outlines the scope of the study

Future for Retail – report on "Reimagining Retail"
Presented by Tom Whittington, Savills

• Tom Whittington took the view that the pandemic has probably accelerated trends in retailing that were already underway beforehand.

• e-Commerce now accounts for 25 per cent of total retail turnover – people are finding it less convenient to shop for many items in person when e-retailing is equally suited to finding and purchasing many goods and services.

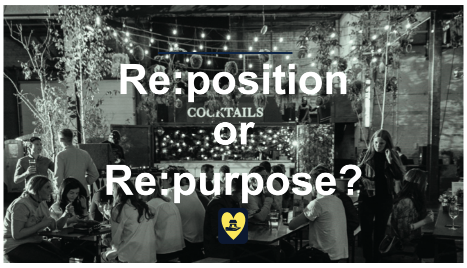
• Having experienced working from home for a long period and a better "work-life balance", many workers are likely to be reluctant to return to fulltime working in city centres – with the resultant impact on retail and leisure turnover there.

• Savills estimate we now have 142m ft2 vacant retail floorspace in towns 7 cities – with 40 per cent vacant long term.

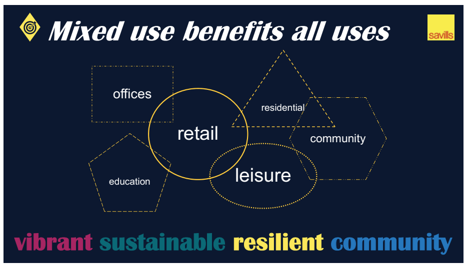
• Retail centres need to become more hybrid in nature – allowing mixed uses to develop quickly (by which I took him to mean the UCO changes are worthwhile) – they encourage greater footfall in centres and better, sustainable use of existing public transport links.

• Where greater residential presence is to be pursued in town centres this needs careful thought – otherwise conflicts of interest will arise (e.g. due to long commercial trading hours & higher ambient noise levels; whether family housing can easily be accommodated there with its need for privacy, garden & play space and general recreational open space, etc.).

• Strong partnership ties between freeholders,



>>>



developers and LPAs probably offer the best way of developing future town centre strategies.

• He thought LPAs also need to grasp the nettle and begin to accept that some centres should decline / cease. He noted how Nottingham is doing this in effect by redeveloping an existing shopping centre as a new park, so as to attract more people to the adjoining city centre.

Discussion: **Mike Edwards & Nicky Gavron** both cautioned against losing secondary retail space too quickly in the suburbs, where it serves as lower cost start up space for new retail and service industry uses.

Tim Wacher, RICS suggested de-rating retail in future to give it a better hope of survival against existing trends – and possibly look to greater VAT or turnover taxation as a more equitable way of treating it in future.

Tom Whittington thought retail rents are generally too high; landlords are known to be looking at short-term turnover rents after the pandemic's impact, but they prefer the certainty of longer term rental income which current leasehold arrangements offer.

Where next for the City of London?
Presented by Alastair Moss, Chair of Planning & Transportation Committee & Andrew Reynolds Chair of Eastern City Partnership gave an introduction into the status and importance of the square mile. *SEE his article in the last issue, PiL116.*

It is still the engine of the UK, and is still the largest financial capital in the world. Andrew is working and advising many clients about investing in the Eastern cluster.

Councillor Alastair Moss explained this latest draft local plan was agreed by the Corporation of London in January for submission, with an Examination expected later this year and adoption to follow during 2022

• Implement key aspects of Transport Strategy; safety, more space for people, continued public realm improvement

• It aims for further, sustainable (largely office and commercial) growth over the next 15 years, focussed on 8 separate areas which cover the entire Square Mile.

• The emphasis is to be on sustainable and adaptable new building – with tall buildings still encouraged in some areas – e.g. the "City Cluster" focussed on Leadenhall Market and stretching northwards from Fenchurch Street to Beavis Marks

• Alastair after speaking to stakeholders thinks most businesses will be adopting a hybrid model on returning to work

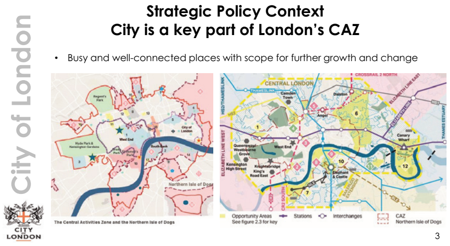
• Health and Wellbeing particularly important for offices and businesses

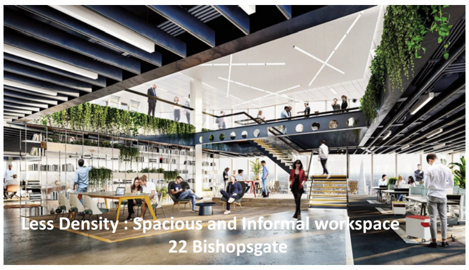
• A particular focus on outstanding cycling facilities to encourage cycling to work

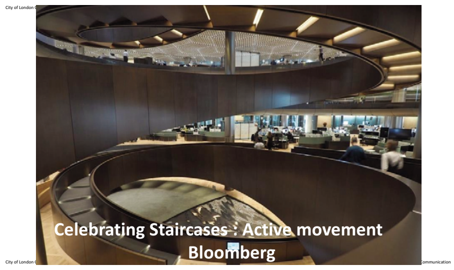
• Reduced traffic volumes and minimising the impact of servicing vehicles are to be sought so as to reduce ambient noise levels and make more street space available for pedestrians, together with an improved public realm with more facilities for people to take breaks and sit outside.

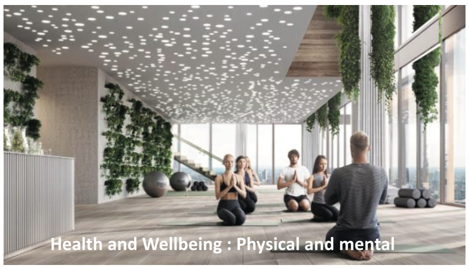
• The plan anticipates that large corporations will still be attracted to the City as an operational base – but the pandemic will inevitably cause a re-think on the way they use their buildings. Lower densities of people per m2 of office floorspace are expected with greater opportunities for collaborative working space and attractions to encourage staff to want to come in to

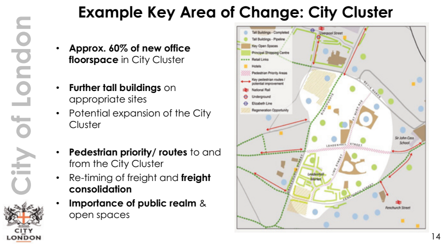
BELOW:
Where next for the City of London?
presentation by Alastair Moss

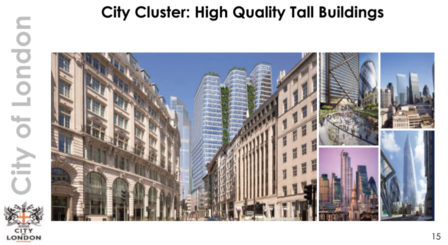












>>>

>>> offices

• He noted the Bloomberg Building at Mansion House as showing the way ahead here. It features a winding central staircase rather than banks of lifts in a central core to encourage a more vibrant workspace, the provision of many breakout spaces to encourage collaborative working and staff interaction, such facilities as secure cycle parking, changing rooms and showers and the provision of an arcade with restaurants and other services and spaces for sitting outside at ground floor level. Upper outdoor spaces are critical to this.

• As the City's air quality is improving with increased traffic restrictions – and the expected changeover to more electric vehicle use – buildings are expected to become more reliant on natural ventilation and window shading rather than air conditioning. "Greener" buildings are expected to become the norm, in particular using green walls and roofs to assist with shading and cooling as well as to provide pleasant rooftop breakout areas for staff and more general environmental gains.

Discussion: **Mike Edwards & Nicky Gavron** both cautioned against losing secondary retail space too quickly in the suburbs, where it serves as lower cost start up. This could be exacerbated by PDR. Once residential replaces retail and shops, it's changed forever.

Mike Edwards asked if Crossrail 2 would still be needed with increased working from home. Alastair Moss thought that any resultant freeing up of office / commercial floorspace was likely to be taken up by other new uses over time and that increase public transport capacity via projects such as Crossrail 2 would still be necessary.

Peter Eversden thought the street level pedestrian experience in the City was generally poor due to daylight loss. Alastair Moss said the Corporation was looking at improving street lighting and building designs generally – and drawing on the experiences of other areas where tall buildings had been developed – e.g. Paddington – to improve the pedestrian experience in the City.

Brian Waters noted the lack of success of developing a successful riverside pedestrian route alongside the north bank of the Thames through the City, compared to the South Bank. Alastair Moss said it was a very long term objective of the Corporation to achieve something more successful, but disparate land ownerships currently make that difficult to achieve.

The chairman thanked all presenters and participants for a stimulating and constructive Forum. ■

Brian, a former borough planning officer, represents RTPI Planning Aid for London on the Forum and has provided these notes and thoughts on the discussion for his colleagues.

Commentary by Brian Whiteley

The agenda included an item on the new London Plan (which came into force the day of the Forum). This had to be postponed to the next meeting in June, but we did hear presentations on the:

• Suburban Task Force – a report back on work to date by Lucy Natarajan of UCL by a group set up by the All Party Parliamentary Group on London's planning & built environment – see: https://suburban-taskforce.org/ - you'll see Rick is a member of an advisory board

• Future for Retail – a report on "Reimagining Retail" recently issued by Savills had its findings summarised by the firm's director of commercial research, Tom Whittington – see:https://www.savills.com/research_articles/255800/311530-0

• City Plan 2036 – an update on progress on the next iteration of the City of London Corporation Local Plan by its planning chair, Alastair Moss – see:https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-review-draft-city-plan-2036

Suburban Task Force

I sent some quick first thoughts back to Lucy Natarajan at UCL straight after Monday's meeting. For information they are set out below; I sent her a copy of a report referred to in the Q&As which she had not seen, the Mayor's Outer London Commission report from 2010.

Points which came up in her presentation and subsequent discussion were:

1 As might be expected, suburban land uses and service levels differ noticeably from inner/central London.

2. Residential tends to predominate whilst the level of services is far lower.

3. There is no set pattern to this disparity, e.g. when you look at ward data; but wealthier suburbs tend to enjoy better social & community infrastructure provision.

4. Generally, there is no recognition yet amongst outer London Boroughs of the need to re-think infrastructure provision in the light of increasing trends such as greater working from home.

5. Peter Eversden of the London Forum noted how 48 Opportunity Areas in the London Plan all largely display a lack of social infrastructure to help facilitate future growth.

6. Michael Bach noted how suburban centres have been losing retail for some time; this is likely to be exacerbated by the GPDO changes, and policy proposed at increasing residential uses in town centres cannot expect to set up the level of catchment necessary to redress the fall in retail floorspace there overnight. It's a slow process – and there is no clear strategy regarding how necessary social and community infrastructure will be put in place to support long-term growth.

7. Eric Sorensen suggested we need to cross-subsidise that provision if/when new development kicks off in those areas.

8. Riette Oosthuizen queried whether the new CIL proposals will be used properly by London Boroughs (LBs) to provide that cross-subsidisation, and whether they would in any case accept proposed changes to the nature and character (decline in some cases as well as growth in others) of their existing suburban centres.

9. Mike Edwards of UCL noted how cash-strapped LBs have had to close social /community infrastructure in recent years – e.g. libraries – these have often been centralised on fewer sites, meaning longer distance travel by residents / businesses to reach them.

10. Nicky Gavron AM flagged up recent past research by the GLA e.g. see: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/ files/high_streets_for_all_report_web_final.pdf - and that the GLA were holding a meeting on 3rd March regarding the future of shopping and services in London's suburban high streets.

Future for Retail – report on "Reimagining Retail"

1. Tom Whittington took the view that the pandemic has probably accelerated trends in retailing that were already underway beforehand.

2. e-Commerce now accounts for 25% of total retail turnover – people are finding it less convenient to shop for many items in person when e-retailing is equally suited to finding and purchasing many goods and services.

3. Having experienced working from home for a long period and a better "work-life balance", many workers are likely to be reluctant to return to fulltime working in city centres – with the resultant impact on retail and leisure turnover there.

4. Savills estimate we now have 142m ft2 vacant retail floorspace in towns 7 cities – with 40% vacant long term.

5. Retail centres need to become more hybrid in nature – allowing mixed uses to develop quickly (by which I took him to mean the UCO changes are worthwhile) – they encourage greater footfall in centres and better, sustainable use of existing public transport links.

6. Where greater residential presence is to be pursued in town centres this needs careful thought – otherwise conflicts of interest will arise (e.g. due to long commercial trading hours & higher ambient noise levels; whether family housing can easily be accommodated there with its need for pri-

vacy, garden & play space and general recreational open space, etc.).

7. Strong partnership ties between freeholders, developers and LPAs probably offer the best way of developing future town centre strategies.

He thought LPAs also need to grasp the nettle and begin to accept that some centres should decline / cease. He noted how Nottingham is doing this in effect by redeveloping an existing shopping centre as a new park, so as to attract more people to the adjoining city centre.

8. Mike Edwards & Nicky Gavron both cautioned against losing secondary retail space too quickly in the suburbs, where it serves as lower cost start up space for new retail and service industry uses.

9. Tim Wacher, RICS suggested de-rating retail in future to give it a better hope of survival against existing trends – and possibly look to greater VAT or turnover taxation as a more equitable way of treating it in future.

10. Tom Whittington thought retail rents are generally too high; landlords are known to be looking at short-term turnover rents after the pandemic's impact, but they prefer the certainty of longer term rental income which current leasehold arrangements offer.

City Plan 2036

1. Alastair Moss explained this latest draft local plan was agreed by the Corporation of London in January for submission, with an Examination expected later this year and adoption to follow during 2022.

2. It aims for further, sustainable (largely office and commercial) growth over the next 15 years, focussed on 8 separate areas which cover the entire Square Mile.

3. The emphasis is to be on sustainable and adaptable new building – with tall buildings still encouraged in some areas – e.g. the "City Cluster" focussed on Leadenhall Market and stretching northwards from Fenchurch Street to Beavis Marks.

4. Reduced traffic volumes and minimising the impact of servicing vehicles are to be sought so as to reduce ambient noise levels and make more street space available for pedestrians, together with an improved public realm with more facilities for people to take breaks and sit outside.

5. The plan anticipates that large corporations will still be attracted to the City as an operational base – but the pandemic will inevitably cause a re-think on the way they use their buildings. Lower densities of people per m2 of office floorspace are expected with greater opportunities for collaborative working space and attractions to encourage staff to want to come in to offices.

6. He noted the Bloomberg Building at Mansion House as showing the way ahead here (NB: for team members now based outside London, see: https://www.standard.co.uk/insider/style/exclusive-new-bloomberg-hq-norman-foster-square-mile-a3662641.html). It features a winding central staircase rather than banks of lifts in a central core to encourage a more vibrant workspace, the provision of many breakout spaces to encourage collaborative working and staff interaction, such facilities as secure cycle parking, changing rooms and showers and the provision of an arcade with restaurants and other services and spaces for sitting outside at ground floor level.

7. As the City's air quality is improving with increased traffic restrictions – and the expected changeover to more electric vehicle use – buildings are expected to become more reliant on natural ventilation and window shading rather than air conditioning. "Greener" buildings are expected to become the norm, in particular using green walls and roofs to assist with shading and cooling as well as to provide pleasant rooftop breakout areas for staff and more general environmental gains. He gave an example of the proposed Cityscape House on Holborn as an example: https://www.dezeen.com/2019/11/11/citicape-house-green-wall-architecture-shep-pard-robson/.

Alastair Moss said that he has never felt so much pressure from members to deliver sustainable, zero carbon buildings, with the first question nearly always around presumption against demolition.

8. Mike Edwards asked if Crossrail 2 would still be needed with increased working from home. Alastair Moss thought that any resultant freeing up of office / commercial floorspace was likely to be taken up by other new uses over time and that increase public transport capacity via projects such as Crossrail 2 would still be necessary.

9. Peter Eversden thought the street level pedestrian experience in the City was generally poor due to daylight loss and the Foehn effects of more tall buildings. Alastair Moss said the Corporation was looking at improving street lighting and building designs generally – and drawing on the experiences of other areas where tall buildings had been developed – e.g. Paddington – to improve the pedestrian experience in the City.

10. Brian Waters noted the lack of success of developing a successful riverside pedestrian route alongside the north bank of the Thames through the City, compared to the South Bank. Alastair Moss said it was a very long term objective of the Corporation to achieve something more successful, but disparate land ownerships currently make that difficult to achieve.

>>>

London Planning & Development Forum

NEXT MEETING

Likely to include discussion of the new London Plan

Monday 14th June on Zoom
email **jm@axiomarchitects.co.uk**
if you would like to 'attend' and receive the link