

GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN

RECOVERY

ROUNDTABLE

PUBLIC LONDON

MAYOR OF LONDON

The *Good Growth by Design (GGbD) Recovery Roundtable* series invites Mayor's Design Advocates and other external experts to discuss the most pertinent topics facing London's built environment in the wake of the global health crisis and its ensuing social and economic impacts.

This fifth *Recovery Roundtable* was held on 15th July, chaired by Philip Graham, Executive Director Good Growth, GLA and focused on London's public realm. Walking and Cycling Commissioner Will Norman introduced TfL's Streetspace programme, and twelve participants, including Mayor's Design Advocates and other practitioners from the public, private and civic sectors each contributed their ideas for how London could address the immediate challenges to the public realm posed by Covid-19, and how this might create an opportunity to embed longer-term improvements to the public realm.

Participants addressed ideas ranging from the physical to the intangible, including infrastructural improvements, street design, the return of the local, importance of high streets, child-friendly design, behaviour change, and the critical role of equality and inclusion in any projects taken forward.

The following is a summary of key reflections and propositions for how London can react to this challenge, and the role that the Greater London Authority could play in the recovery.

MEETING NOTE – 15th July 2020

LUCY MUSGRAVE

Publica, Mayor's Design Advocate

Expand focus: 'The Public London Charter development we have done was focused on privately-owned public realm, but now that that's understood, the Good Growth by Design Public London inquiry should be boldly focused on creating civic amenity on highway space and publicly-owned land.'

Child-friendly: 'Last week I was part of the discussion around child-friendly cities, which raised a whole series of issues about rights and inequality for what's happening now in terms of Covid, but also in terms of the climate emergency. There is an opportunity here to join all these things up.'

Nighttime economy: 'Amy Lamé has commissioned amazing work for a toolkit for London boroughs to adapt their evening and nighttime strategies. As we socially-distance, we also need to extend our hours, as all of our working and movement patterns are changing.'

JULIAN LEWIS

East, Mayor's Design Advocate

High streets: 'The accelerated testing over last months has shown us that we need to reappraise our streets and spaces and there is an opportunity do that. I think we've become quite lazy in our thinking about what high streets are. Could we think of them more as destinations? Could they be the equivalent of a park, or a gallery? A place you would go to, not just pass through, in particular in areas of open space deficiency.'

Kerbs: 'If we talk about high streets that way, then we can start to mess around with the kerbs. The kerbs are where you have this challenge between movement and access. If we are going to continue to be as radical as we have been in recent weeks, then we should focus on crossing points, and parks and green space, to have a really bold picture.'

ESTHER KURLAND

Urban Design London

Accelerator: 'People's reactions to public space have changed during lockdown, it's been an accelerator for the themes and wishes that many [urbanists] have been working on for a long time.'

Importance of the local: 'We've been doing interviews with people about how they feel their homes and neighbourhoods work during lockdown, and a lot have said they've started to meet their neighbours more, and enjoyed being in the street. It's where you see the same faces and can build up connections.'

Reclaim space: 'The first stage of changes has been focused on preventing a car-driven recovery, by creating cycle lanes etc. The next stage is very much about how to reclaim those spaces for communities.'

JAMES AUSTIN

Sustrans

Not high cost: 'The last few months have shown that it's not just about high cost infrastructure. One of the lessons we're taking is that schemes can be delivered fairly cheaply, which means that the benefits of healthy streets and low traffic neighbourhoods can spread to many more communities.'

Behaviour change: '[Walking and cycling] represents a huge shift in many Londoners habits. We will need to [invest in] community engagement and behaviour change, as well as infrastructure, in order for it to succeed.'

Streets dominated by cars: '80 per cent of public space in London is streets, which are massively dominated by motor vehicles, despite the fact that almost half of Londoners don't have access to a car.'

Tactical measures: 'As businesses reopen, we would recommend some tactical measures, such as the removal of on-street parking except for disabled access, and removing excess car lanes to help speed up bus services and allow for additional space for walking and cycling.'

Equity: 'It's imperative that this work reduces rather than exacerbates inequality. Improvements in walking and cycling infrastructure should be of great benefit, so long as that good practice is applied across London equitably, and we engage seldom-heard voices in design and refinement.'

JOHN DALES **Urban Movement, Mayor's Design Advocate**

Parking: 'A huge challenge with high streets is parking. The idea that high streets are places where you simply don't park at the kerbside (leaving that space for buses, deliveries, etc) is an important possibility that we could be moving towards. This will require effective messaging and communication above all.'

Networks: 'One of the obvious challenges is to create effective networks; and it's much easier to do so if we are focusing on a poly-centric city, making it more attractive to make shorter journeys on foot or by bike than it is to jump in the car.'

Confidence: 'Anne Hidalgo's success in Paris recently [is a reminder] for us to be more confident in these ideas. While these kind of transformations generate a lot of negative noise, we should focus more on the largely silent majority that seem to like the outcomes that what we're talking about will achieve.'

ANISHA JOGANI **LB Croydon**

Silver lining: "While it is often challenging to demonstrate the benefits of improving civic infrastructure, a silver lining of the current situation is that it presents and opportunity for us [as a local authority] to strengthen our negotiating power.'

Feedback loop: "In an effort to meaningfully engage with communities and stakeholders, we are looking at creating a 'feedback loop', where we can immediately capture the responses as to how the new spaces are being used and perceived.'

Economic benefits: "One of the challenges is to set out the economic benefits for an improved public realm, in addition to the health benefits. This needs to be clearly researched and communicated, to create new value models that account for health and social returns on investment.'

ELEANOR FAWCETT **Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation**

Impact on commuters: 'Park Royal is one of London's biggest industrial areas, and it has been impacted severely by Covid, I think because they have had to continue to use public

transport for their commute. These are key workers in hospitals, delivery drivers, working in kitchens, who can't do their jobs from home.'

Cycling in industrial areas: 'The push to encourage cycling and walking has generally been talked about in terms of high streets and town centres, but I think it's also highly relevant to our industrial areas. We are working to make cycling to work much more attractive, with cycle lanes, bike lockers, and also to just clean up the streets.'

Outdoor activity: 'The public realm is also critical for outdoor activity. Many industrial employees are having to eat their lunch in their car because there's nowhere within the factory for them to safely socially distance. We are trying to think about quick interventions, with seating, shade, and so on.'

CLLR CLAIRE HOLLAND
LB Lambeth

Inequalities: 'Covid has brought into sharp focus the inequalities in the way that we allocate space in our public realm. We have had to waive normal requirements for traffic modelling to make necessary changes, but we feel we have a clear mandate to do this to protect public health.'

Resources: 'Like many boroughs across London, we're reclaiming the neighbourhood for walking and cycling, but we need more funding and resources for cycle training, storage, etc.'

Reclaim space: 'In our high street recovery programme, we're creating more space for business activity, for tables and chairs and pedestrians, but we don't really have the space for it, so we have to create it from the carriageway, which is challenging the way we normally work.'

Inclusiveness: 'As we are re-allocating space and reshaping the public realm, with less time to consult and engage, we need to ensure that we do all we can to involve protected groups and to make sure that we get the design right.'

SHAMISO ONEKA
LB Haringey

Inequalities: 'Access to green space in Haringey – both private and public – was already unequal, which has made staying at home a lot more challenging for disadvantaged people, namely BAME people, the unemployed, young people, and the people at the intersection of these groups.'

Street Space bids: 'We have submitted bids for two low traffic neighbourhoods, and 22 school streets, as part of TFL's Street Space programme. These bids are around schools that have the highest percentage of BAME students, and in areas of high deprivation and low air quality. So we are trying to focus our investment in those areas that are already disadvantaged.'

Stop and search: 'The use of stop and search in the borough has increased during the pandemic – disproportionately policing of BAME communities. And although crime overall has fallen since lockdown, reported hate crime has risen. These are really key issues when we're talking about public realm and equal access, and how people feel safe.'

PAT BROWN
Central

Charter: 'I'm delighted to see the Public London Charter, which is framed positively around what you can do, as opposed to what you can't do. It's a real invitation.'

Example - New York: 'In New York, there are 8,000 restaurants who are using the streets to trade because they cannot do indoor dining yet. This has been driven by very simple guidelines, and the community organisations who have been leading the change.'

Clear communication: 'How do we speak to people in really clear ways to invite them in and to talk to communities, particularly disadvantaged ones, to set out what good looks like, and to invite the bottom up activity in our streets and spaces.'

MANIJEH VERGHESE **Unscene Architecture**

Access: 'One of the things we are interested in is how we can understand the ways in which different users would typically use the city, and how this can be redesigned to improve access, their sense of ownership, and how often they use public spaces.'

Larger spaces: 'How can we open up larger private spaces – such as golf courses, or even school playgrounds on weekends – to the public? It goes back to suggesting different activities, because at the moment a lot of public spaces are just generic.'

Indoor spaces: 'As the weather will soon start to get colder, and we may go back into a second lockdown or have to live with social distancing long-term, what larger indoor areas are there which could be made public? Such as lobbies, sky gardens, convention centres, or other spaces that could be re-thought.'

LIZA FIOR **Muf architecture/art , Mayor's Design Advocate**

Bread and roses: 'It's important that we remember, in the ethos of healthy streets, that it's not just about what's defined as 'essential', but that a true healthy street includes some ingredients of joy. It's both bread and roses.'

Evaluate experiments: 'Others have talked about the value of trying things out, and it's important that we capture these experiments. It would be very useful to look at academic partnerships, to evaluate the experiments that are happening, so that these ideas aren't forgotten, and aren't embedded.'

Public institutions: 'We should also remember the seemingly less significant elements of the high street, such as a generous library that can be host to civic activities, as incredibly important as we come to winter.'

FURTHER READING

[Draft Public London Charter](#)

[Public London: The regulation, management and use of public spaces – Centre for London](#)

[Exploring London's Public realm \(Londoners perspectives\) – GLA City Intelligence Unit](#)

[Streetspace for London](#)

[TfL Small Change, Big Impact guidance](#)

Mayor's Design Advocates, Advocate Organisations and GLA staff are inputting into a [shared repository](#) of literature, which is a useful resource in framing built environment issues in the COVID context.

UPCOMING ROUNDTABLES

Housing design

CONTACT

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