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Supplement

LONDON'S LEADING ROLE



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Introduction

London is a world-class city and the driver of the UK economy. But it has a 19th century infrastructure inadequate for its 21st century needs. The West End is a fantastic place with the potential to be one of London's top destinations. But the congestion on Oxford Street, problems with planning applications and borough boundaries are threatening its existence, as businesses and shoppers increasingly move to facilities out of the centre. On 8 March, the Smith Institute and the Central London Partnership, with the support of the New West End Company, hosted a round-table in which participants discussed how to retain London's leading role.

Participants



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Central London Partnership



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MP for Normanton



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London's leading role

Can the centre of the city retain its importance?



Wilf Stevenson The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the opportunities and threats that London faces if it is to retain its pre-eminent role as a major world city in the 21st century. We need to look at how we can build on London's strengths: its financial services, tourism and retail offerings, while also confronting some of its problems, particularly the fact that it has a 19th century infrastructure, which is not coping well enough with a 21st century city.

According to the *State of the Cities* report, published today by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London is a world-class city where years of decline and decay have been overcome and there is now an opportunity to create a centre of economic and social progress which will shape the country for a generation. I would like to ask Pat Brown, from the Central London Partnership (CLP), our partner in this event, to say a few words now.

Pat Brown The CLP brings together the local authorities, the private sector and other players, including Visit London,

the Greater London Authority, Transport for London and the Metropolitan Police, to do things to improve central London. We do this in recognition of the fact that London is the driver of the UK economy. London's needs are often overlooked because people think it can look after itself, but the local authorities and the private sector, through CLP, have recognised that they do need to work collaboratively on issues which will keep London moving forward across borough and sectoral boundaries. The CLP have been doing a number of things which help to take London forward in a positive way, including creating Business Improvement Districts, improving the walking environment and the experience of being in and living in central London, and a plethora of initiatives which are changing London physically.

During the past year, however, we thought it was time to reflect more strategically on the future of London, and consider where we are going in the long term as well as the short to medium term. To that end, we have been working with our partners to come up with ways to make sure that ⁰¹



¹ London, and central London in particular, continues to be on the front foot and responds to the many challenges which are coming its way from across the globe. We all know that London's competitors are not necessarily Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham, but other world cities that we are collaborating and competing with.

We thought that this round-table discussion would be a fantastic opportunity to talk about those challenges, looking particularly at the role of the West End in London. We have been a strong supporter and partner of the New West End Company in their work on options for a better West End, just as we have worked with Westminster and Camden councils on their policies for promoting the West End. I see our agenda for today to be to air some of the issues which will help us in taking our strategic review forward – buses clogging up Oxford Street, terrorism, keeping the West End as a vibrant retail and visitor destination as well as a fantastic place to live – and, hopefully, help the New West End Company in the work it is doing as well.

Ken Livingstone We need to remember that for the 30 years after the war, the policies started by Attlee and Abercrombie were to manage London down to six million people. The Wilson and Callaghan governments effectively ended that

policy because once manufacturing collapsed and high levels of unemployment followed, you couldn't talk about managing a city down any more. There was a stasis until the "Big Bang". By sweeping away regulation, Margaret Thatcher opened the City to the whole world's financial institutions. They all came in and in the space of about ten years pushed aside the old guard which had been rubbing along for 200 years.

Since then, the financial district has doubled in size and we know that 80 per cent of the 600,000 new jobs that will come to London in the next decade will be finance and business services, which has huge implications for organisations such as the Learning and Skills Council.

I am more confident about London than at any time since I was first elected as a Labour member in 1971. So much is going right. This morning, for example, I visited President Lula da Silva, who wanted to see me to discuss what links Brazil can have with London. This is perfect because we are locking ourselves into relationships with China, India and Russia, all of whom see this city as a viable alternative to base their headquarters, as opposed to New York or Paris. In terms of Chinese firms due to list on the stock market, we are now running just slightly behind New York. All over the world, people see London as equal to New York as a place to

locate. There was a wobble back in 1998/1999 when we decided not to join the Euro, but now the Euro has come and gone and it hasn't dented us. It might have had an impact on manufacturing outside of London, but currency fluctuation is not a problem. It has not had the impact we feared. So we are in an incredibly secure position.

However, much of our infrastructure needs replacing. You can actually see the sewage outfall into the river because of the rain. The sewers need re-doing. We have started on the transport system. We have £10 billion going in over five years. Then we have Crossrail [a venture to promote and develop two new routes across London] which is being worked on by Bechtel at the moment. They are looking to make some of the cathedral-like stations fit for purpose rather than worship, and this is saving a lot of money, but it is still going to come in at about £10 billion. The £7 billion upgrade of the overland trains will result in a 40 per cent increase in capacity, which is what we need. And then there are numerous smaller projects. So now we have a real need for long-term capital investment just when the government are starting to move to a 40 per cent of GDP borrowing limit.

Somewhere, we must have a debate about how we exempt long-term capital investment, otherwise by 2010 we will have to start turning down planning applications for major office

developments in central London because the transport system will be at capacity. Tube stations, such as Camden or South Kensington, are now dealing with three times more passengers than they had in 1971. There is a huge investment still to come. The good news is that everybody in the Treasury and the Department of Transport knows that this is essential to the continuing dynamism of the London economy. And you will recall that the *Financial Times* identified late last year that the productivity of London as a region is 20 per cent ahead of any other region or city in the European Union. We are actually operating at twice the level of productivity of other regional cities, but in the short term everything hinges on getting the investment in. I am confident that we will get it, and if so that will secure where London is going up until 2025, which is actually my timeframe, as I'll be thinking of retiring about then.



Ed Balls There are three things that I want to say about the growing consensus of the importance of London as a city and the need for a policy agenda to adjust or catch up with modern dynamic cities and regions. The first is, as Ken said, that London is a highly productive, global city, which is absolutely integral to the success of the British economy. Therefore, what needs to be done is to make sure that London has a world-class transport system, a world-class infrastructure and, more broadly, the skills that we need. There have been, and continue to be, big challenges but those challenges have not slowed down this pace of development. If we continue to get it right, there is no reason why we should not continue to have an expanding, growing and dynamic London economy.

Second, although it is not always seen this way by some of the media, it really is in the interests of the rest of the country that London does well, grows and flourishes. Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham are all doing very well, but that does not need to be, and should not be, at the expense of the London economy. The dynamism and strength of this part of the country directly benefits the regions outside London and the south-east. It is not a zero-sum gain in terms of British economic development and there is no sense in which we should be holding London back in order to pursue a balanced regional agenda.

Third, when you think about policy issues, some of which Ken raised, I think that the London Mayor and the regional

development agencies show that in order to be successful economically in the next two or three decades, we not only need more investment, but we also need decisions to be made away from Whitehall. More powers and resources need to be devolved down to regional and local economic leaders. That is why Ken, I think, has rightly pressed for extra powers. Personally, I have always believed that we needed to go further in the devolution of decision-making away from the centre, especially, for example, in skills. I think the same thing is true

There is no sense in holding London back in order to pursue a balanced regional agenda

in terms of transport. While there is a substantial amount of devolution in London, we are still a long way behind having the same levels of devolution with regards to buses, railways or roads outside London and the south-east. The same is true in housing policy where we need to make sure there is a much tighter link between housing, investment, infrastructure and planning. That can only be done at local level.

Finally, the thing which we have learned from the success of London is that the city region can be a real driver of economic development, yet at the same time be inclusive and not lose ⁰¹



on sight of the need to include all communities. I think we have to be quite careful about thinking that the London governance model is the right one to universalise in other parts of the country, so I am quite cautious about the idea that city and region mayors outside London would be the right way to go.

Simon Milton I think that everyone is going to end up agreeing with what needs to be done in terms of transport, skills and infrastructure. It is how we accommodate growth that's important and that is going to be critical in housing as well. One of the subsidiary issues is how we maintain, or indeed improve quality of life in a city which is going to become more densely populated and operate increasingly on a 24 hour basis. Quality of life is about how easy it is to get about the city as well as policing issues, the quality of the street scene and all of those important things. What we might disagree about is how this necessary transport infrastructure is going to be funded?

Raj Chada Ken has identified the issue around skills. We know that 45 per cent of the economy is based on residents who are involved in the knowledge economy. The question is whether we can maintain that skills knowledge base and indeed, improve it. But also, what do we do for the rest? There is a real risk of increased polarisation in a knowledge economy. The issue that we have to be involved in, certainly at

the local borough level, is how we get that community cohesion between different groups of people. Community cohesion is not just about different ethnic groups but about the polarisation that can exist in London. Strategies need to be devised in terms of those issues.

The next problem is housing, which is in an unsustainable position in London. In Camden, there is a waiting list of 14,000 for social housing and a private housing sector beyond the reach of many. If we want to maintain the knowledge economy and those who are servicing that economy, how do we ensure that they are able to live close to their place of work to reduce the burdens on the transport infrastructure?

Wilf Stevenson We seem to have agreed on the problems. Do we have any solutions?

Tony Travers It is true that cities have revived from a low ebb. There is clear evidence from today's *State of the Cities* report that, in addition to London, Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester have also revived, and others are following. The question is how to allow those cities to capture some of the tax benefits of the economic success, to reinvest in

themselves? One of the interesting things about the London governance model is that because Transport for London has a large fare income, the congestion charge and access at the margins to local taxation, it has been able to put forward a substantial programme of investment. That route is closed off in other metropolitan areas at the moment, but it needn't be. The Lyons Inquiry, which is looking at local government finance, offers an opportunity to allow cities – London and others – to capture more of the benefits of growth to reinvest in a virtual circle.

Ed Balls It is not true that other cities are not allowed to follow the London example. It is just that other than Ken, no one else so far has been brave enough to go down that road. The congestion charge is a model which can be followed by other cities if they choose to go down that road. It is a tribute to Ken that he had the vision to do it. I would like to see other cities following London's example. I am not saying that that is the answer to your question because there are other ways in which we could seek to allow cities and local leadership to lever sources of income. I am not saying that the congestion charge is the only way but it is one example which other cities could have followed but have so far decided not to.

Tony Travers The thing which makes London completely

different is over £2 billion worth of fare income. The congestion charge is important at over £200 million, but the fare income allows an enormous capacity to borrow and therefore to reinvest. That is certainly not available in other cities. But there is an opportunity to build up from the idea of allowing cities to capture revenues – in this case, fares, but it could be other revenues – to reinvest as their economies grow. Since we are agreeing, it is a matter of finding creative ways of building out from the Transport for London model.

Ken Livingstone If the Lyons enquiry were to say that the business rate was to come back to local government, that would enable us to do some work, but if we were also locked into a national road pricing policy in which the revenues were collected and retained locally – a big shift from central taxation to local – that would make a huge difference. My staff has calculated how much I could borrow on a full road pricing scheme London-wide and it is more than you could ever spend. It is enormous. In the short term, the business rate would give local government flexibility, but beyond that, we are going to need a whole new range of imaginative taxes or the sort of facilities that the mayors in New York have that they can dip into. The only way you will get local councils to roll out congestion charges is if they can keep all the money. I would never have done the congestion charge if I had to give the money to the Treasury.

Ed Balls To be fair to the Treasury, in 1997/1998 legislation went through which allowed 100 per cent hypothecation

Local councils will only roll out congestion charges if they can keep all the money

precisely to make the point that we wanted to allow this to occur. It was to empower the local leadership, not as a way of raising central revenue. As Tony said, this is a principle which could be applied more broadly if people chose to.

Stuart Lipton How do we get fast track growth in a co-ordinated and appropriate way? How do we get quality with it, public space, public buildings and the government providing health centres and schools which exist next to each other and which bring together all the elements of the village green,



if I can call it that? We do not seem to be able to do that. If I go to New York, I know who is in charge. In London, I am not sure. We need absolute clarity across transport, housing and public space and then we would be able to address what Simon mentioned – crime, health, education and training. But it is very difficult as an outsider to see the real focus. In London there are dozens of organisations. Why don't we just get together and have a London focus group which speaks for Joe public, the ethnic minorities, kids and business?

Ken described the growing city. Why can't people live in high-density in Hackney or Tower Hamlets? In Southwark there are acres of land sitting there. And in Hackney there is land which has been there for 50 years. It is still war damaged and untouched, but there does not seem to be a co-ordinated vision between central and local government.

Pat Brown On the issue of the unified business rate (UBR), we put a very robust submission to the Lyons enquiry, based on the premise of retaining or receiving back 10 per cent of the rate which would then go into a pot to be spent on regional priorities, such as transport and environment, after discussions in partnership with business. It was quite obvious from the reaction of Sir Michael Lyons that this suggestion was ¹⁰



¹⁰ very unpalatable to the government. Anything that takes money away from anywhere else in the country is not going to win any favours, it would appear, with this present government. In the case of Westminster and Camden, massive outflows are going to the rest of the country.

Ken Livingstone When I was elected there were various calculations which showed that London was subsidising the rest of the country between £10 to £20 billion, so clearly, this is not a precise science. Our estimate is that 18 months ago that figure was somewhere between £1 to £9 billion, so there has been a shift. I suspect it reflects where we are in the business cycle. There is no way, given the imbalance of wealth in London, that any government will not insist that there is some subvention to the rest of the country.

The weakness in London is that the Mayor's office does not have any power to redistribute wealth within London where we have incredible inequalities. We all have to go to central government to argue about whether we can have another £30 million for child care support and things like that. That is the

weakness. When I said to Mayor Yuri Luzhkov of Moscow that 97 per cent of all taxes in Britain were collected by the Chancellor, he said that that was worse than when Stalin was in power, which is probably true. However, such an approach does not lead to creativity. If you look at what is happening in American politics, creativity at the mayoral and gubernatorial levels means that they are innovating.

I meet a minister a week. I am always asking for more money and more powers. They can't get any work done because of the constant stream of people coming to try to prize more money out of them. It is time that the government recognised the situation. We could achieve a lot more if we let go. I think that Downing Street now accepts that you cannot run Britain from the centre any more. It slows everything down.

Raj Chada I strongly agree with that. It is not just about how the money comes in but what levers you have to effect change? One of the difficulties is how other bodies affect London, for example, the police may have national targets which they have to meet, but how do we say in London, "Actually, these are the issues that we need to change"? At the moment, central government has some great rhetoric about devolution, but what in reality is going to happen? If you want certain problems solved, you will have to devolve that power to local councils.

Lorraine Baldry I don't know how true it is, but it is said that developers do not build on a lot of their land because they believe that's a good way of keeping their land values up. So how do you require people to build on land which has been vacant for a long time?

Stuart Lipton Essentially, we can build as much office space as we can. We want to let it as fast as we can and we can do a decent architectural job. There's no reason why we cannot use the same people to build housing. Developers in cities in other parts of the world who build office buildings also build housing. So it's not a problem of technical supply. This is a question of will. We need, somehow, to change perception. Margaret Thatcher deregulated the office market. Now we have to deregulate housing to solve this problem. And somebody needs to say, "Each year, we are going to build X thousand units and we are going to build them densely". "Densely" in Kensington and Hackney means two more storeys. The average house in London is probably six storeys, so if you were

building to eight storeys, you would increase density by 25 per cent. That is not difficult to do, but there is no real drive to do it. Why can't it be done?

Terry Farrell It has always interested me that cities are a kind of organic entity – they do work as one. What concerns me about London and its future is that it has not been governed in that way. I am a great fan of certain boroughs and the way they work. Two of the best ones we have here today. However, the boroughs are completely artificial in town planning terms. As a result, there is a kind of ad hoc free-for-all. London is an oddity in world terms – the oddity of Canary Wharf being where it is or that the City of London sees itself as a mono-cultural office city. These are accidents of politics and history. Over-arching pro-active creativity and vision in town planning does not tend to take place in London in the way in which it is happening in other cities.

I respect what the Mayor's office has done but what is needed is over-riding power that can make things happen. I have been involved in several housing schemes which straddled two boroughs, (one concerning a thousand homes), where differences in policy between the boroughs, or differences between local communities and the transport side of Transport for London, have held plans up or even meant that they have collapsed. We have not set up the framework for planning. The situation cannot go on as it has.

Gary Reeves I would like to move the focus to business for a moment. The New West End Company represents retailing in the West End. The area has the highest concentration of retail in Europe and it helps to drive the economy. In terms of context, 200 million people visit the area every year. It represents £234 million in terms of business rates and contributes £5 billion in sales. Listening to some of the issues that London has, clearly the West End has a role to play in how London develops. But if one looks at the facts of business during the past five years, 10 per cent of shoppers are going elsewhere, 40 per cent visit less frequently and with all the developments which are taking place around London, the prediction is that another 7.5 per cent of business will disappear out of the centre of London. Competitively, in the past number of years, our strategic work identifies that we have fallen behind world cities, such as Paris, New York, Milan and Barcelona.

What I would like to understand today is how we address the issues of accessibility and the quality of the environment in the central zone? I believe that the consumer – the shopper – has



an important part to play here, and whether one looks at research which we undertook ten years ago, four years ago or indeed, recently, the biggest points of dissatisfaction are the accessibility issues and the level of congestion. Clearly, the matter is complicated but how are we going to win gold in 2012, and how can resolving congestion issues unlock some of the opportunities for development in the public realm?

Sue West As a member of the New West End Company, I am very much in agreement. Our competition is not only Paris but shopping centres all around London such as Bluewater, which offer a much better shopping environment than the West End and Oxford Street. More than 250 buses pass by our door every hour. Accessibility problems and quality of life are major issues. The situation is not going to improve at all unless we do something about it.

James Bidwell The whole idea of focus and empowerment is really critical and the tourism industry is a very good example of that. Since Visit London [the tourist marketing board] ⁰¹



Ken Livingstone Let us focus on consensus. I would say that one of the threats to London is that across borough councils, irrespective of their political complexion, there is a growth of NIMBY-ism through the rejection of planning applications, particularly for housing and such behaviour is increasing on an annual basis. Greenwich rejects 6 per cent of housing applications, Lambeth rejects 44 per cent. The same schemes, the same developer.

All this great and dramatic change has been wonderful but it has also fuelled a feeling amongst some people that the city is changing too fast. For example, I am being told that we cannot have any more people living in Wembley. But the truth is that London is the lowest density large city in Europe. You could double the density and you would still not have reached the levels of New York and Paris. There is no courage on the part of borough councillors. The most dramatic way you see it is when you look at agreed applications to locate waste recycling sites. The average council in Britain is processing about 7 a year. Here in London, it is one-tenth of 1 per cent. They are all turned down. So most industry will not even come to London now. We have got to find 300 sites in the next five years to put in place the recycling we need when we lose landfill, and every single one of those, I suspect, will be turned down or have to go to appeal. That is becoming

a real constraint. All councils suffer from it. I make no exceptions. The government will have some difficult decisions to make shortly about what the balance of power is between my office and the boroughs on these matters.

Ian Henderson At the moment, everybody is agreeing but we are not actually addressing the issues. If I talk to people in the New West End Company, what are they worried about? Access. How are we managing the urban realm? The urban realm is being neglected. At the moment, we are not good at managing it. We have to find better ways of doing it. We saw the large scale redevelopments in Birmingham – the Mailbox shopping arcade, Brindley Place recreational centre and The International Convention Centre. How are we, in London, going to attract capital as Birmingham attracted capital to solve some of its problems? How do we foster the right environment to get the big funds and big developers to come along? We have got the dynamism. We have a wonderful chance of winning gold if we can get it right by the time of the Olympics. Ken has already pushed that furiously. I think that

⁰ for London] was formed, we have arrested eight years of decline in tourism and we have now had three consecutive years of growth. To see growth last year, given the July bombings, was no mean feat.

The bigger point is that it is all about content. London needs to see itself as a global city, a city that celebrates culture, creativity and diversity with this amazing catalyst – the 2012 Olympics – and it really must look outwards as well as inwards. We must build these bridges with Russia, China and the emerging markets. Tourism from Russia at the moment is growing at 200 per cent a year. Russian tourists will spend double that of any other tourists and a lot of it will be in cash. We do have to have the infrastructure. And at the same time, we must keep our content and interest while avoiding the homogeneity of the High Street. You see that in some areas like Notting Hill Gate. It used to be a very nice experience to walk down Portobello Road but it is constantly changing. That area is vital not only for tourists coming into London but also for Londoners and the whole issue of quality of life. Only clear leadership, focus and support will keep London interesting.

the West End has got to go for gold. That is the issue.

How do we reconcile some of the congestion issues? We have the big debate on Oxford Street: is it a thoroughfare or a destination? Is it sensible to have 300 big red buses ploughing up and down certain streets every hour, which will inevitably destroy the concept of it being a destination? We have to address these points otherwise that fragility will end up overcoming what is a wonderful potential. I think the West End is a fantastic place. We just need to get down to the nitty-gritty.

We have heard Terry talking about the organic nature of London. I think this is something we need to focus on. It is 151 years since the foundation of the Metropolitan Board of Works attracted capital into a number of investments including sewers, transportation, the Embankment and various other things, and that is the problem which we are not addressing. How do we attract capital to such schemes? You cannot push water uphill, but we need to find a way of facilitating people to put their pension fund money into the sort of investments which are going to help our city. We need to retain more capital and more of our locally raised revenue for the infrastructure because, while it is very exciting and dynamic, it is still quite fragile, by which I mean fragile to terrorism and, in the longer term, to being choked by congestion. Its own success will choke it.

Sid Sporle I agree that we do need to look at density, but it has to be hand-in-hand with good urban design. I would push harder for the provision of well designed, good quality, environmentally sound high-density developments. It is not difficult but they do cost a little more. I would also like to suggest that all section 106 contributions [the contributions made to create or improve existing infrastructures as part of the additional conditions of development proposals] should go to the Mayor to be used in a strategic way in London so you can assemble a pot that is worthwhile instead of accumulating £2 million here or £4 million there which doesn't do anything.

The role of local interest in terms of planning is important but, at the end of the day, some of these things require a slight distance and someone who is strategically placed to make that decision away from local influences. We do not have that at present.

Pat Brown This issue goes to the heart of the problem which is that London is both a world city and a home. A lot of what



we have been talking about is to do with how we square the need to support a world city with the necessary infrastructure required to do so, while at the same time accommodating the people who live here.

The point about the quality of urban design is fundamental to this process. As demanding consumers, no matter where we live, shop or work, we expect a place to work more effectively

The West End is fantastic. But is it sensible to have 300 red buses passing through every hour?

for us than we once did. Therefore we have to work on local design issues, which solve local problems.

Sid Sporle We must not talk ourselves down. Talking ourselves down is a good English trait. London is a huge success story. I genuinely believe that the government has not paid it as much attention as it should. The unified business rate in Westminster raises £900 million a year, and we get eight pence back in the pound, or £72 million. That is appalling. I think it is 1 per cent of the GDP that goes into Paris for renewal. We are not getting that. We are dithering with Crossrail. It has ⁰¹



cities, if a private project is good enough, the city will join in. In this city we never get that. Everyone is embarrassed to support a private venture and you cannot therefore generate public planning. It has all got to be section 106 money. It is not enough.

Ken Livingstone After the financial district, the single biggest economic centre in London is the area comprising Oxford Street, Regent Street and New Bond Street but it is coming to the end of its natural life. London's White City is about to undergo a major development. When the Stratford Shopping Centre opens, which will be bigger than Bluewater, no one will come into London unless there is a really special feel on offer. They will go out of London and stay there. It is going to mean huge redevelopment. We will retain all the nice facades, but behind those stores we have to think about a 30 to 50 per cent increase in capacity. I am quite happy to go and beat Transport for London around the head and say, "You will have to take the buses out of Oxford Street", to which they will say, "Ah, but a lot of them will have to go down Wigmore Street and other streets in the area", and I can hear the howls and protests coming now. You could actually take Marble Arch and Centre Point as two big interchanges where people can get off a bus and get on a tram and go backwards and

now gone back to 2016, hopefully. We are waiting for the Comprehensive Spending Review. We do not know how that is going to impact on Transport for London. Most spending on Transport for London is in terms of capital works. The government needs to be more responsible in terms of London. And London itself has to be more robust in its thinking and how it seeks solutions to some of its problems. We heard about the overflow of buses in the central area in terms of the impact it has on the environment. We need to be dynamic and look for solutions and test ideas.

Terry Farrell Get Oxford Street right. Get the Marylebone/Euston Road right and certain projects on the river. The trouble with urban design is that it does not fit neatly into planning as we do it. There is development control and large-scale two-dimensional strategic planning, but our streets and river banks cross border boundaries and this gets into ownerships in a way that I do not think effects other cities.

Stuart Lipton One of the reasons, Terry, is the great reluctance to use compulsory purchase to achieve that. In other

forwards all day long.

I have spent two years trying to get to a point where Simon Milton and his opposite number in Camden would come to lunch with me to discuss a joint master plan for the junction at Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street, where you cross the two boroughs, but they are not interested. They have their own plans. They are not prepared to bury their differences and come up with something which will make that absolutely awful part of London really attractive.

Simon Milton I have agreed to meetings on countless occasions but I am waiting for your office to give us some dates. I work very well with Raj and his predecessor and I have spoken to both of them about the need to work together on Tottenham Court Road. There is absolutely no difference between us on wishing to do that. We are up for being as radical as we can be but, frankly, the big problem is that the bus lobby within Transport for London will not permit anything to happen which might inconvenience one bus on one route. Arup, the engineering and construction company, came up with a fantastic master plan for the New West End Company,

which was very radical but which would require Transport for London or the buses to think very differently about how bus services are provided in London. It got dumped in the bin straightaway. There was not one single jot of interest from the bus lobby. I recently had a meeting with Gary and his colleagues from the New West End Company and some of my councillors about closing Oxford Street more frequently for events and shopping. Okay, yes, one or two of my councillors are very hostile to the idea, but the most hostile man in the room was the man from London Buses. We said, "What if we give you six months notice?" Apparently, there is no amount of notice that would be adequate to cope with what he said would be a substantial breakdown of public services on the buses in London if Oxford Street were to be closed on a Saturday in October.

Sue West But we did it, anyway.

Simon Milton Raj and I will make time, even before May, to come and have lunch with you Ken if that is what you would like.

Wilf Stevenson Will you take that on board, Ken?

Ken Livingstone We will get them all into a room very rapidly.

Wilf Stevenson Great, that's one tangible result from this discussion already.

Terry Farrell On the question of raising finance, one problem is that for infrastructure engineering you can always attract money because it is a self-contained entity. When you put Crossrail in and it hits St. Giles' Circus/Tottenham Court Road, it is going to double the amount of people coming out of the station but it is also going to reduce the width of the pavements.

How do you make that financially viable?

Stuart Lipton If you are going to talk about Tottenham Court Road, why don't you talk about how many 30 storey buildings are going to go up to a) improve the quality of life and get rid of the kebab salesmen and b) generate some value to pay for the amenities, otherwise it is a waste of a lunch, Ken. Don't pay for it.



Ken Livingstone But we are not that far off. The work which has been done on the Convention Centre at the eastern end of Oxford Street, if that is where we settle on for it, is going to provide a huge drive to regenerate that whole West End area, but it will mean a lot of buildings at that end coming down and a lot of very tall buildings going up. With Crossrail coming in, it gives you the capacity to service them. It will be the biggest literal change in people's vision and site lines in the city that we have had since Canary Wharf, and unlike Canary Wharf it is

We discussed closing down Oxford Street more often. London buses were very hostile

going to be right in the centre. I can hear English Heritage screaming already at the thought of it.

Wilf Stevenson Ken said that his perspective was the next 25 years. As we go round the table for the last time, can each of you say what you would like to see happen in the city during the next 25 years which will play to the strengths of the city, the tourism and the retail offerings, and to the ability of London to be a world-class city, one which all can live in and enjoy? ⁰¹



¹⁰ **Tony Travers** As in all discussions of the kind we have had today, there is an inevitable clash between the needs of London as a very large city requiring change and development and the needs of local neighbourhoods. That clash, which is here represented in some ways by the physical embodiment of the Mayor and the two borough leaders, is a real one and every

There is a clash between the needs of London as a large city and the needs of local residents

now and again will cause a great deal of difficulty, particularly over a large development such as the one which is envisaged for the east end of Oxford Street.

It is worth remembering that London is unusual, having a bottom heavy two-tier system of government with the central area divided between different authorities, thus the need for CLP and the New West End Company, in some ways. That situation is very unusual by international standards. Manchester is another example but still, it is very unusual. We are the kind of place we have become, and either the Mayor will

get more powers and the boroughs a bit less so that these developments can be driven through, or there will have to be a far greater capacity to organise meetings. If not, less will happen and this city will not be able to change so quickly.

What would I most like to see happen in London over the next 25 years? The thing that big and increasingly dense cities will require to operate are services that work. The more densely populated the city is, the more it depends on infrastructure, largely publicly provided but certainly publicly regulated. And more density is needed.

Simon Milton If I have to have a priority for the next 25 years, then it is major public realm improvements of the kind that Terry has talked about.

Stuart Lipton I would like to think about housing. I suggest to the two borough leaders here today that they should get three or four developers together, choose one of their projects and ask us to come and help.

Let us build high-density, really good quality projects. We will do it for nothing and we will think of interesting ways of financing the projects because we have to break the deadlock of housing.

Pat Brown Thinking about the West End, rather than just replicating the west end of Oxford Street at its east end, can we look at it in a more niche perspective. It seems that a lot of the retail areas which are highly successful are actually made up of niche retailers which continue to attract young people with disposable income to central London.

James Bidwell London is pretty successful – almost a victim of its own success. I see amazing momentum, with the Olympics as an incredible catalyst. For me, I would like to see that momentum kept going. I think we need very strong and single-minded, highly creative solutions to the issues we have discussed and we must have sustainability at the heart of everything we do.

Ian Henderson We need to keep growing. We need to keep thinking positively. As well as a think tank we need a do tank. Let us get rid of some of the slightly sterile thinking. We have been living with certain things for a very long time and I think they need changing. I think of central London as an urban

realm, and by that I mean that the residential side also has to be taken into account. We cannot ride roughshod over them. After all, councillors are elected by the residents. I think that if you give them the right environment, we will go for gold in the West End by 2012.

Terry Farrell If you look, as Stuart suggested, at the cities in the Far East and other successful cities, there is a much greater recognition than there has been in London of late about the fact that the city is one entity and it needs to have plans and ideas to create a vision for it, and powers to make things happen.

Gary Reeves For me, it is creating a sense of place in the central zone and, undoubtedly, to sort out the issue of accessibility.

Sue West Transportation. Absolutely.

Sid Sporle Pride in ourselves, improvement to the public realm and improvement in the public transportation system. I would also like to break the dead hand of the urban conservationists who want to set particular parts of London in aspic.

Raj Chada Sharing prosperity. I do not think you will be able to get a denser London, unless we have some greater redistribution for the people who already live here.

Lorraine Baldry I think it is recognising that central London is quite diverse because we have many historical, entertainment and residential areas. And I think it is about ensuring some connectivity with all of those things. The other point I would make is recognising that if in China they can build a new city, as they intend to do, of 50,000 by 2010, then we should be able to grasp the nettle and actually take a step forward to change and stop building the piddley two or three thousand homes a year, or whatever it is that we build. They are very small numbers in London. If China can build such numbers, then why can't we?

Ken Livingstone They also build an underground line in three years, but then they do not have our planning regime to cope with. That is one of their big advantages.

Well over half-a-million people have been left behind in this city and they are a resource. If we can get them back into real productive work they would generate wealth.



I think the overwhelming consensus out of all of this is the public realm. So much is wonderful about London but so much of London is an absolute disgrace, whether it is Tottenham Court Road or the Marylebone Road. We have to tackle these issues.

Look at Parliament Square. We are going to have two million people coming for the start of the Tour de France in 18 months time. That will be a good trial and warm-up for 2012. The cyclists are all going to cycle around Parliament Square for the time trials, and that setting is obscene for such a great city. Trafalgar Square has been a great success. It has got to be replicated, but not just at Parliament Square and the other big streets, but in all the small suburban areas as well. Because that is the other big issue we haven't even mentioned let alone discussed – we are long overdue for a massive renewal of the suburbs as well.

Wilf Stevenson Do I hear a call for another round-table, on the suburbs? Thank you very much indeed, everyone. It has been a very good conversation and has more than fulfilled our ambition for the event.

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