A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS

An Inclusive City Growth Workshop
11th November 2016, 9.30 – 13.00

Social Infrastructure
Table 5 Session 1

Facilitator in bold facilitator – comments in bold
Respondents in regular text

These notes are a summary of the conversation

Session 1, Table 5

Holly Weir (Facilitator)
Keira Powell, Planning Policy Team, Islington Council
Ben Robinson, Community Links, Newham Council
Tanya Murat, Planning Policy Officer, Greenwich Council
Andy Gregg, Race On the Agenda
Michael Atkins, London Borough of Bexley
Kelly Amonson
Vernon Herbert, NHS Healthy Urban London Development Unit
Yvonne Field, The Ubele Initiative
Gill Slater, London Borough of Bromley

Some questions are more about the quantitative aspects of social infrastructure. Let's begin broadly by asking what elements of social infrastructure are essential to support a diverse population in London? What areas should be prioritised in future?

Re parks, we're at the local planning stage. We're grappling with the government's idea that you can designate parks as local green spaces. Croydon have done it, which is great, but it should come from the community. Bromley has active members and inactive members across the borough. Those people can bring their parks to the table for a layer of protection equivalent to green belt, but local authorities are looking to squeeze something off their estate. Will the Mayor or GLA have a role in saying, "In London, we think this"? It says, "The community will tell you."

The big issue will be equality. There are places where that social capital isn't available. We'll be looking to GLA to have some sort of redistribution mechanism, or the richer outer London boroughs will get all the stuff. Islington has the least open space in the country and will suffer the way some leafier areas won't.

How can GLA address wealth imbalance through policy and plans?

Deals done around access to space are not out in the open. New organisations of communities, particularly ones that are reconfiguring, are excluded from the process. By the time you know space is available, new guys are moving in.

Around the Royal Docks area and south of Stratford, this happened. The scale of development is too big for older dock workers to participate. We worked just to get them involved in shaping it. No opportunity for them to be heard. The new Olympic Park is surrounded by deprived communities, but they don't access it. People commute to use it. The council sees that as green space strategy. The new housing and dock areas are all private spaces; there's no ability for local community to have access. Perception is that the spaces are designed to exclude them, even if they don't do it physically.

Let's move on to some more specific aspects of social infrastructure. Need for schools across London? Should GLA take strategic approach?

We need to look at role of Education Funding Agency. They're proposing sites for schools in inappropriate locations – listed buildings, metropolitan open land etc. We want to see robust policy from the GLA, saying this is not appropriate for schools. Where development takes place, in strategic locations with a lot of population growth, we have to enforce proper social infrastructure in those areas for schools. We need to bring local authority, education funding agencies and developers together to provide schools.

What do we do about free schools? In Hammersmith, Toby Young's free school supplanted a number of schools used, in large part, by black and Asian minorities. You need to tell us what we need to do to make a change in our areas to prevent this.

Back to open spaces. I previously worked at Groundwork. The key challenge is that local authorities have limited funds, but we worked with local communities on funding applications. We were successful. The councils often matched us. Then we developed local open spaces. I worked in Haringey and Islington. In some wards you get groups – educated, middle class women – taking time to work on securing funding. In other areas – where it was more needed – it was difficult to identify members of the community who were empowered enough to be involved. Vicious circle. What can GLA do to support groups established in communities to make the most of limited funding opportunities? In terms of schools, if people have issues and are not empowered, they tend to be silent. Louder people, like Toby Young, are heard instead.

On schools, in Bromley we are seeing mass growth in numbers not allied to growth in housing. We have a fairly low target from the GLA. More intensively occupied housing stock. More than half of our schools are green belt or MOL, so we're trying to downgrade them to give flexibility to expand. We're being hit with free schools, but the first thing we know about a free school is they have a website or are in the paper – we're the last to know. We're fortunate to be at the point of getting that site out, but for others not at that point they need support from GLA to get a development plan document out quickly. We need to decide the best sites for us. We need to make the decision as a council. It needs to have been given a good look.

I agree with the GLA, if we could find something around strengthening the need for developers and local authorities, particularly in low-opportunity areas. Significant growth for low-opportunity areas. The potential for new schools, that's where the focus should be, if this could be given importance equal to the expansion of existing schools. We find it's quite an issue. How could that be done best? It's mentioned in policy about co-use of education facilities for wider communities. For the new schools, it's useful to keep this. It's the best use of them. Where we're tight on available land, it's the best use of space.

Should we be talking about shared uses in schools? I don't see it implemented. How can we deliver more shared uses in schools, perhaps with sports facilities etc.?

Making sure we've got good communication with education groups. Lots are worried about safeguarding issues. We can share their space, but it should be clear with all parties.

Are there any specific examples of success?

We had a nursery that said we couldn't use it.

The challenge is social infrastructure. There's never any ongoing commitment e.g. we had several hubs around the borough, five years later we shut them. They see the initial commitment as the event, not the ongoing commitment. In the Olympic Village, the flats paid for a community facility. The funds were halved the next year, gone the year after. There was a delay in moving into the gated community; by the time people moved in, the funding was gone. No long-term commitment to building social infrastructure.

Going back to schools, they are community hubs, but they close at half three. Why aren't they available to use?

Can't rely on communities to do it for free. If you believe in social integration, you fund to invest, rather than just as a token gesture.

As a housing organisation, we have community spaces as well. With the best intention, investments were made, but there's a disconnect between that facility and what we're expecting the community to do. A lot of organisations establish – with the best will – volunteers to run it and licenses for premises, but they can only do it for one or two years. In the last three months we have had to hand back the license to three well-run community spaces.

How do you measure the impact of social infrastructure? How do you prove the impact of a city farm? The impact is long term; you can't do it in one year. Space is for communities. Can you judge in such narrow metrics? Even if we know it's great work, we can't prove it.

GLA need to take a long-term view on the effect of population change on communities. In my borough, at least three school sites were closed because of decline, then three other schools extended. It divided the community. There's a short-sighted view of how to deal with communities. Without protecting everything, assessing social infrastructure needs to be done more successfully. I'm not against swapping assets around, but in school situations strategic planning systems will provide a framework.

There's a gap between local view and regional view. GLA has produced numbers of community centres that are protected. When developers arrive there's a gap for local communities. But not much data on that kind of legislation regionally. Where communities have contested development, some have used equality impact assessment. In law, it's a tool that can be used. GLA needs to flag that.

Future Generations Act in Wales is similar to equalities impact assessment. It assesses the impact on future generations in Wales. It's early days – tick box – but lays down reasoning to do it.

Wales is doing positive things. Move on to health services. Is further guidance needed for health?

Problem is, the health organisation has become so fractured. GLA need to help us understand how to engage. You make progress with CCGs and their funds, and then find they have to run through more stages. The process takes three to four years. Developers can't wait.

Anything more specific?

Funnel them.

They don't know how to do it. Health also involves play, community space etc. But they don't know how to start funding different facilities. GLA needs to provide help for them. Fragmentation means there's no time. GLA should instruct who to work with, how to use their money.

There need to be short and long-term views. More looking over short periods of time, then look over long term – not to be so fixed.

That falls back with the council. We, as a council, haven't embraced fully that public health action benefits from social infrastructure. The concern is communities are not sustaining long term. Councils are looking to outsource to communities; to see how they will fare if the community carries the baton on.

On measuring impact, facilities shouldn't fall into council hands until they've worked with all the bodies that benefit. You just have them handed over. If you value it, you have to run it. But that impact is long term and diverse.

Do you think the principle of co-location of facilities – health, sports, schools etc. – is a positive thing? Can it help support?

If you think of a library and swimming pool, they share well. The reception desk is shared. That makes them, together, more likely to survive long term.

Thinking about relationships that make these co-location initiatives work, I'm concerned about the new generation of leadership. Instead of the usual suspects being able to support new people coming through, volunteers need to be time rich – retired, working from home. These leaders aren't nurturing the new generation coming through.

It's about growth, about being active in a meaningful sense.

Many programs aren't recruiting minorities from 20 to 30.

Re health, there's Christie's in the NHS, which deals with cuts by looking at selling off NHS land for housing. The real danger is that it's accelerating the contraction of local services. The role of GLA is to discourage that selling off, if there's no alternative vision.

I think part of the health crisis is because of the failing of health services to look at determinants on health (housing, jobs etc.) We bring in local GPs to offer mental health and benefit support – we know these are issues. You'd never be able to catch up with demand. That's the way funding works. Until they see social infrastructure as being part of the health

service, we can't move forward. We ask them to investigate because they're part of health outcomes.

Should also be working on the council for that.

Local issue is with GPs, spread throughout the borough, who are accessible. Looking at where there are new facilities, we can be endorsing those in existing services, making use of space, as a lot of private surgeries aren't using their space best. Although these are the most likely to be sold on. Suburban services that you can walk to, they're the areas most under threat. There's no level of protection for those, as opposed to ones in town centres. I don't know the solution to retain them, but they need to be used to best potential.

The suburbanisation of poverty. We're seeing poverty shift further out where there's not so much social infrastructure. Tower Hamlets has had more time to develop.

Ours is shocking: traditional GPs in converted garages, but it's not appropriate to say, "You can't do that."

Communication with the CCG is what we need to get issues talked about.

To move on: the different classes of social infrastructure. Sports and Recreation: formal or outdoor-type sports facilities. How can we provide better for those?

Think in terms of revenue as well as capital spending. It's going in the right areas, but no long term funding. It's not just about facilities.

Budgets need to be restructured for the long term. There's a lot of talk, but it never quite happens.

Existing leisure centres require mass revenues; they're the most expensive.

Secondary schools in Islington have invested in use of sports facilities and implemented a booking system. I'm unsure how successful they are.

A lot of sports facilities are making commitments to invest for extra use, but it's about maintaining them. It's a revenue issue.

Academies might be positive. It means in areas with them, there's potential to work with the schools. They act as businesses.

Not great for inequality, but better than being closed. Parks? Recreation? In the Olympic Park example, why aren't communities using it?

There are no physical barriers to stop it, but it doesn't happen. It's about how to encourage them. Funding for play has gone, so we need corporate funders, but it's not clear what services they're funding. It's hard to carry on convincing people to fund. Spaces need to be designed to encourage connections to communities locally. Spaces can be designed in a way that creates connections. Doesn't have to be limited to formal services – see the Community Links report Incidental Connections.

Parkland can generate other revenue. It's how to develop a way of targeting different groups and making it 'theirs'. They don't need anything other than a spark to get going.

The parks charge is an example of something springing out of nothing.

Things like base jumping etc. to attract different communities.

Social integration. There are strategies about providing interfaith events. Our view is if people aren't interacting, you have to find some meaningful connection. Although it's a good start, it's not enough.

Wise Women on Wheels – women over 45 trying to get interest in cycling-related activities. About to launch in Haringey. Will be interesting to see.

Weight has to be given to social integration. Systems aren't geared to resolve issues, because economy takes precedence.

A functioning economy in a city needs functioning societal integration. It needs to be funded and long term.

Dealing with so many types of infrastructure means some community stuff is lost, because you can pick it off individually.

It's about planning. Local authorities getting ahead of academies to plan, holistically, before they come and jump in on areas you have planned for. The key is thinking in a holistic and forward-thinking way. Trying to get the right people involved, instead of the 'usual suspects'.

Social Infrastructure
Table 5 Session 2

Facilitator in bold facilitator – comments in bold
Respondents in regular text

These notes are a summary of the conversation

Session 2, Table 5

Holly Weir (Facilitator)
Drew Stevenson, Paddington Development Trust
Jonathan Blathwayt, City of London
Steve Taylor, Director of Social Care, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Santa Pedone, Elephant and Walworth Neighbourhood Forum
Sam Williams, Arup
Peter Eversden, London Forum of Civic and Amenity Societies

This discussion might be more around the qualitative aspects: how to create a successful population. The key elements of social infrastructure are healthcare, sports, play, communications and facilities. What areas should be prioritised?

Anything that promotes children's independence, getting them to explore local community, should be promoted – a healthier, happier, integrated society. I want to converse about children's infrastructure, have discussion around play. I'd be keen to see a move away from formal play and into playable cities, where children can act on natural behaviours without risk.

Up to what age?

I use UN standard zero to 17.

Funding of facilities for that is important. Developed contribution needs to be thought about. The Mayor's SIL for Crossrail has reduced developers' feeling about their contribution – "If I've already contributed, why should I contribute to you?" 15% is supposed to be spent; that's often ignored. It's 25% if it's locally planned, but I don't see it. There's a failure to look at infrastructure with development. Being developer driven means land is built on for profit without a holistic view of use.

Why do you think it's hard to deliver?

Some requires space needed for homes. Giving permission for homes that don't deliver anyway. Taking away play space, community cohesion space. We have to think what we want to plan to do. Most Deputy Mayors can have some control; he can't. He's got to hope it happens. Mayoral policy can't dictate what happens on the social side, unlike things such as number of homes. Deputies can have more influence. We need to help Matthew do something more nebulous.

I see planning people ticking boxes, no-one asking, "Is this valuable?" More authorities are losing resources and time to consider. If something is child friendly it will probably deliver more value.

If it works for an eight-year-old, it works for most people.

Future developments should highlight that it is necessary to use wasted space. There are vast areas of 'No Ball Games' spaces. Sometimes, being in London, we should make those spaces valuable. Communities can manage the space. People can use them for food growing. Kids' facilities have to be planned, but I think there are uses that can be implemented in those spaces.

When estates are renewed, we've seen that as a social problem. Key workers are driven out. They have to move out from the centre, which means commuting. They have to live so far out they can't afford travel and they give up their job for something closer to home. We need to influence estate renewal so social infrastructure can be protected.

People shouldn't be displaced because of a renewal of estate.

That should be guaranteed.

Schools? Any suggestions about the role they can play?

If you try and do a calculation of how many are needed, you give up. A blind eye was turned. There's a mechanism where what the Mayor determines is carried through and definitely implemented. In a neighbourhood plan, what is the relationship between Mayor and the neighbourhood plan? What are the elements in the area that are important? First, what are the elements of strategic importance?

Encourage schools to open grounds outside of hours. They're locked up, but could be valuable local areas.

There's a growing trend towards protecting schools.

It's a very UK mindset. Netherlands, Japan – I was eating lunch in Japan and didn't realise I was eating my picnic in a playground. There needs to be a shift here.

Focus on the school, not what surrounds it. We need to engage the school with the process. It's difficult to get volunteers, but the teaching associations need to be involved.

Instant connection to schools. Even people without kids at the school can get involved. Academies don't have any interest in community.

The Mayor can plan for access to facilities. You shouldn't need a car to get to the library. As planning occurs, we need to ask what we need to hold on to. In Peckham, they're treating backlands as brown land. There has to be more influence from the Mayor in creating sustainable communities. They need guidance on what that means, how to do it.

Schools are complex because of GLA, local authorities. Different people are involved. They need to be more strategic in the sharing of resources. The outer London boroughs find it harder to work on schools because they're planning.

Wouldn't work for section 106. That's a really important point.

Once Crossrail's finished, then Crossrail 2. These SILs go on too long.

Social infrastructure is harder to quantify. You have to be as specific as possible in the GLA.

What powers is the Mayor going to get? This northern powerhouse, the government decided that responsibility should be given to the north but not to London. The Mayor needs to fight for similar responsibility. Local authorities need to have more capability to maintain social infrastructure. All of this is up in the air. The government hasn't favoured London.

One implication seems to be it would be good if London's plan had an end view. If the population rose by X, what would London's social needs look like? Then build that into a view. There are policies that say 30% social housing, but they need to say where that's going to go.

With the changes in the NHS, the strategic plan looks at hospital care for community-based services. Something around developing those one-place community services to get the right service to work for the right community. It's not really developing at the pace of where you cut off the supply and demand. You've got to get to grips with developing the right social infrastructure to meet those ideas. Some work in Kingston is trying to develop conversations with the local NHS. What deals can we do to develop that work? We're doing a lot to free it up. Often, the NHS locally doesn't know what's going on. They and we need to get on top of that, so we can realistically integrate.

We need to encourage attention to land for social infrastructure. Emphasis on land for homes. London must consume its own smoke. Otherwise there's nowhere for health centres, green space extensions. I'm conscious the Mayor hasn't been driving some local plans. We've had some in place since 2008, but they haven't been advised by the PPF yet. When they devised a local plan, it was great and very specific – you almost don't need neighbourhood plans. People contributed, but the Mayor needs to push harder to see that the modified plans are brought up to date – what a local plan needs to contain and what decisions need to be made to enable it. A lot is ignored.

Back to healthcare. How should we be delivering healthcare facilities?

The Mayor needs to be more involved with healthcare facilities. Local authorities didn't have the money to equip a prospective centre, so it got turned into a crèche.

Opportunities lost for someone then.

Green space can take pressure off healthcare services. Bring green space more into the debate. Prevent measures to reframe, so parks aren't just nice to walk in but are taking people out of the NHS.

People have traditional ideas about their use and how money is used to help these situations.

We need to pool social infrastructure – clustering. You can build your social infrastructure around itself: transport, GPs, schools etc.

There was a point raised in the transport workshop: local authorities need more control over bus routes. Why are they so far apart?

Town centre retail is declining, so is there potential there?

Plans for high street drop-in centres, on the way to the civic centre etc., would really help.

People need not just houses to live in, but facilities that allow them to live.

There are so many campaigns across London to reclaim space. The South Bank skate park is a successful example. Spaces like that, there are so many across London: community centres, spaces under threat because of development pressures. We've lost so many community spaces. The community centre in Covent Garden is now a luxury shopping space. The community in Seven Sisters has gained permission to refurbish the indoor market, but a developer has also gained permission to refurbish in a different way. There is a valuable community plan, but no one's looking at it. There should be more protection both for these plans and community centres.

Can we encourage the use of schools opening in the evening?

Large community spaces that can double up.

Even businesses can contribute. Hogarth business centres were open to be used as community spaces.
Could we incentivise that a bit? Also, a good example is Rio Ferdinand's project. They've gone to Central Bedfordshire Council to have signs encouraging ball games.

GLA has to watch private space; places where you must sandwich these things.

There's a lot of underused space, but sometimes a space is there with just a very small thing stopping it from being used.

In Canary Wharf and King's Cross, developers are saying, "It might technically be public space, but it belongs to me."

Humanitas has been providing students with low to no rent in old people's homes. That's a good example of joined-up thinking.

In Gateshead, they're strategically working with planners to place certain services and build that into communities – strategic thinking to make very creative stuff. Sure, it's easy in Gateshead, but there must be scope to have these strategic conversations.

We need to encourage creativity. If resources are limited, you need to be creative. Get people thinking more.

I want to introduce a slightly different point. My development trust doesn't do physical difference. Social and economic development of the poor parts of Paddington. It's more interesting than the physical stuff. You can do stuff, but if people don't have access to a good job, a good house, it doesn't matter. Provide additional funding for selected areas and provide bottom-up funding for those areas' needs and solutions to involvement in those needs. That kind of development goes into those community discussions to establish what those communities are going to do about it. What do they need? What can they do? Benefitting from advantages of other areas.

The volunteer community understands grants. The heritage civic groups – hasn't been explained what kind of money they can get.

People often don't have time to attend workshops where they can find out how to engage.

The anchor organisation model has worked – a sounding board for small organisations, which then represents them at bigger policy tables. We're talking about just providing physical infrastructure, but it's about enabling communities that use that infrastructure. If you have healthy communities and structure, they can survive. In Paddington, we had a big grant for which we – the small body – were accountable. When it ran out, because the local community had been empowered, they formed organisations to determine policies. Now we have £6.8 million a year in one of the most deprived areas.

There's not enough of that support. I blame member societies always looking at dealing with the council and not looking at volunteer groups, not helping them and nurturing them. They need to share their information about how to get grants, deal with councils. A lot is hinged on, "What can Matthew do? What's in the London Plan?"

Let's move more towards sports and recreational facilities. Do you think there's a need to supply accessibility, and how?

Make use of what we've got. Friends of Dukes Meadows is an example. The area was trashed by youngsters with nothing to do, so they won a lottery grant and worked out what they could do. It's now rich with facilities and the community think of it as theirs. They can use it and do things. Enrichment of resources.

Sports facilities can be heavily subsidised, but you end up with a swimming pool where three already-healthy people are doing laps, watched by six staff. Down the road, a playground serving thousands of disadvantaged kids is in danger of being shut down. The formal and the informal can hybridise more and help each other. Five football pitches and a pool? It's all the other stuff that keeps people going.

Privatisation is a problem. Tennis courts handing places over to companies who then charge money to use.

You can understand council desperation because of smaller budgets; that's why they monetise things.

I mean, Formula 1 closing down Battersea Park to the public. Fairs and circuses arriving frequently, making it feel like it's not yours.

Making money for councils. You can understand that they need the money, but it's a shame.

They shut down the adventure park in Battersea and replaced it with £25-to-enter Go Ape facilities. Then made a tiny park on the side, where it's free to watch the rich kids swinging around Go Ape.

Is it worth prioritising these spaces in the London Plan?

It works in some spaces, not so much in others. Top-down approach doesn't work. Soft play may be more useful than a squash court in certain areas. Tick-boxing doesn't work.

Westminster City Council is shutting down youth centres and we're running them. There needs to be transition funding so that can be done. One issue is youth facilities.

People can help to do that. Communities take over libraries when councils shut them down, but they don't know how to do it.

Sports facilities in Lewisham are community run. They're in a good position now, but before they had three to four years in limbo: couldn't agree with the council; couldn't get funding.

So our key message?

Make the most of what we've got, then work out priorities. It's not just about facilities; we need to show people how to use them. Ownership of space is so important.

Infrastructure, to some, means big centres etc., but should also include children's infrastructure. Stuff that works for everyone, stuff that is otherwise seen as informal and gets swept away by developers.

Our recreation grounds were where we spent all our hours after school.

My three key points are first, make use of what we've got. Re-use, including the NHS. Second, we need to say, "What do we actually need in which areas?" Link that to, what will the place look like in the future? Third, it's not just physical; we need social infrastructure to have a community that survives and grows itself, that can organise its own social growth.

We need to start reflecting on the way people work now, where they work compared to their homes. Central London has no population, so do we need GPs? But it takes a day off work to go to the doctor at home. Basing things around working people as well as residents.

Drop-ins?

You'd go to the optician near work, but not the doctor.

Is there something there to take pressure off out-of-London GPs?

But then that information would never get back to your GP. The NHS wouldn't get their heads around it. Does community justify a doctor?

It's also worth thinking about scrutiny of TfL land. What about social facilities they can implement?