



London First submission to the Mary Portas High Street Review, August 2011

1. London First is a business membership organisation with a mission to make London the best city in the world in which to do business. Our membership includes around 200 of the capital's leading employers across diverse business sectors, including retail, hospitality and leisure.
2. London First welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the independent High Street Review being led by Mary Portas. More than 574,000 people work in retail in the capital in over 40,000 shops, and the sector contributes £21 billion in GVA¹. While the West End's international shopping destination is well known, London also has an extensive network of town centres and high streets which play a vital role in local communities. As with many issues, no single body has sole responsibility for the wellbeing of London's high streets and the challenges are highly complex.
3. We are also responding to other Government consultations, such as Local Government Resource Review² and on the draft National Planning Policy Framework. These consultations should be coordinated with the Portas Review as, taken together, they could have a major beneficial impact on high streets and the incentives for local authorities to support locally based economic growth.
4. In 2009, London First established a Retail Commission³ to investigate ways to encourage and sustain a diverse retail sector in London. Its recommendations, summarised in appendix 1, have already been submitted to the Portas Review, as we believe many will have national applicability.
5. In addition to our Retail Commission recommendations, this paper suggests three further measures Government could take to promote the development of more prosperous high streets.

Examine whether more could be done to promote 'meanwhile uses'

6. In April 2009, Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Business (BIS - under its previous name) published best practice guidance about town centre management.⁴ Where the guide relates to high streets, the Portas Review should establish the effectiveness of the guide and consider what if any impact the guidance has had.
7. Part of the guide addressed 'meanwhile uses' – enabling the temporary use of vacant property. A good example of this in London can be seen at the Royal Docks in Newham. The council, in conjunction with a property trade magazine, ran a competition to find innovative temporary uses for the Royal Docks in order to breathe life back in to an area which is suffering from blight.⁵

8. The 2009 guide flagged some potential barriers to meanwhile uses such as uncertainty, in some circumstances, about whether planning permission is needed and the fact that often some funding for redecoration and minor repairs is required. It also acknowledges the legitimate concerns of property owners who, for a variety of reasons, are not always keen to allow the temporary use of their private property.
9. These are not insurmountable problems and the guide suggested some solutions. Arguably, if there are problems with securing a meanwhile use, local authorities are best placed to facilitate discussion around these problems and also provide a solution. For example, the cost of redecorating a shop might be prohibitive for a charity seeking temporary space but could be easily borne by a local authority. The Portas Review should consider whether more could be done to promote meanwhile uses.

Consider the use of the community infrastructure levy by communities

10. The Government has amended the Localism Bill to allow for a 'meaningful proportion' of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to be passed onto communities and, in theory, spent in accordance with the wishes of the community. There are a number of concerns with this policy not least that the Government's intention around how this process will work is opaque.
11. However, should this amendment to the Localism Bill make it into the final Act and the Government develop the 'meaningful proportion' policy, consideration might be given as to how this money could be used to support infrastructure requirements of new developments on ailing high streets. Potential uses include new street lighting, the removal of street clutter, and transport and accessibility improvements.
12. It is hard to elaborate further at this stage but it is worth the Review team noting the potential availability of a funding stream to support ailing high streets – albeit that seemingly the community (whoever they may be) would have to want to spend the money on high street improvements over other priorities.

Involve property owners in Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

13. Since their introduction in 2003, BIDs have become an established mechanism to revive ailing high streets and to also improve successful high streets. The growing number of BIDs across the country is testament to the commitment of businesses to invest in their local areas to improve the shopping environment for customers.
14. The original BID legislation in the UK, unlike in other countries, did not allow property owners to participate formally in the BID. This position was changed by the Business Rate Supplement Act 2009 however the secondary legislation to enable the change to have an effect has not been forthcoming. The Government should now introduce this secondary legislation.

15. Formally involving property owners in a BID would provide further impetus to the work that BIDs do to improve the experience of shopping on a high street. Property owners are often long term investors in their areas and have as much interest as the businesses that rent their property in seeing a thriving high street with good public realm and a clean and safe environment.

For further information, please contact

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Appendix 1

London First Retail Commission 2009 – summary of recommendations

Chaired by Jeremy Newsum of Grosvenor, the Commission developed a toolkit of 20 key recommendations, each assigned to those relevant to the ownership and running of day to day activities in high streets from individual landlords and retailers through to the Mayor of London and the Communities and Local Government department. The work was based on individual interviews, expert round table discussions, a seminar involving both public and private sector representatives, and five detailed case studies. Recommendations in summary:

Understand your town centre

- Define your centre, its scale, character and function
- Develop an evidence base to understand why people visit and to identify deficiencies, and use this to plan positively
- Reform approaches to vitality, questioning how a town centre is performing against its market potential and community expectations
- Prioritise stress areas, targeting action and funding accordingly

Manage your town centre

- Include your town centre in local authority's economic development role, considering the potential for retail-led regeneration
- Support the use of Business Improvement Districts or town centre partnerships, as appropriate
- Endorse and adequately resource town centre managers
- Create a safe and secure environment by encouraging crime partnerships and planning out crime in new developments
- Provide small business support, including through business training, mentoring from larger retailers, and Small Business Rate Relief
- Integrate street markets into the retail offer
- Incubate independent retailers by providing short lease units and 'pop-ups'

Plan for your centre's long term health

- Promote a mix of retail, leisure, housing, office and civic functions which have the potential to keep a town centre vibrant, safe and secure
- Improve the environment and public realm
- Develop a coordinated approach to transport management, prioritising accessibility for higher spending pedestrians

- Release non-core retail where there is overprovision, allowing greater planning flexibility and diversity to support a town centre's viability
- Manage local authority ownership for long term sustainability, taking a long term view on the mix of occupiers and securing positive anchor tenants

Market your town centre

- Provide accessible information for the local community about what the centre offers
- Encourage promotional and community events which increase footfall and promote a unique identity
- Consider implementing a loyalty scheme across small independently-owned shops
- Produce a local retail directory

¹ Office for National Statistics regional monthly labour market data, June 2011

² http://www.londonfirst.co.uk/documents/Response_to_Local_Government_Resource_Review.pdf

³ http://www.londonfirst.co.uk/documents/LF_retail_comm_report_final.pdf

⁴ Looking after our town centres, CLG, DCMS, DIUS, April 2009
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1201258.pdf>

⁵ For the winners of the competition see
<http://www.newham.gov.uk/News/2011/March/WinnersofcompetitiontotransformeastLondonsitesannounced.htm?Printable=true>