

**FUTURE HIGH STREET FORUM**  
**4th Meeting, 21 January 2014, 9.30 – 11.00**  
**Eland House, London**

## **Attendees**

Brandon Lewis (Chair)	Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
Alan Hawkins	British Independent Retailers Association (BIRA)
Brigid Simmonds	British Beer and Pubs Association
BIS Official	Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS)
Graham Harris	Dartford Borough Council
Graham Wilson	National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA)
Helen Dickinson	British Retail Consortium (BRC)
Hilary Hall	National Hairdressers' Federation
James Lowman	Association of Convenience Stores (ACS)
Jane Pritchard	Business in the Community (BiTC)
Jason Cotta	Costa Coffee at Whitbread
Joe Harrison	National Market Traders Federation (NMTF)
John Walden	Argos Ltd
Liz Peace	British Property Federation (BPF)
Martin Blackwell	Association of Town & City Management (ATCM)
Mary Portas	Portas Agency
Michael Green	British Council of Shopping Centres (BCSC)
Cllr Mike Haines	Local Government Association (LGA)
Mike Tye	Spirit Pub Company
Neil McCourt	Tesco
Professor Neil Wrigley	Southampton University
Stephen Aldridge	DCLG
Julie Carney	DCLG
Secretary	DCLG

## **Apologies**

Peter Cross	John Lewis Partnership
Paula Vennells	Post Office Ltd
Simon Roberts	Boots

## **Welcome and Introductions**

1. Brandon Lewis welcomed everyone to the meeting, and particularly the new members.
2. He explained that the focus for the meeting would be on the deliverables for the Group going forward. To ensure that meetings remain focused on delivery, the Forum would discuss and review papers outside the meeting, so that the agenda can focus on reaching decisions. In between meetings, Brandon will meet with Task and Finish Group Chairs to discuss progress and issues.

### Priorities for 2014 – Task and Finish Group Three

3. Helen Dickinson took the Forum through a short slide pack outlining progress by the task and finish group, and their proposed deliverables for 2014.

4. Four deliverables have been identified:

- A review of evidence is underway, coordinated by the University of Southampton. The aim is to bring together a single comprehensive and academic assessment of the evidence available, to provide a common baseline for the future work of the Forum, and for local authorities and other groups looking at regenerating their town centres. In addition to bringing together existing evidence, the review will identify evidence gaps and look at future scenarios.

Expected Completion Date: May 2014

- Overlaying the evidence review will be a shorter report providing an accessible summary of the evidence for the less academic reader, aimed at practitioners.

Expected Completion Date: May 2014

- Future Foundation have carried out trend analysis for the group, and prepared a presentation looking at the evolving characteristics of the future high street, and how consumers will think and interact with their local communities. The Group will be looking at the best way to communicate this work to a wider audience

Expected Completion Date: June 2014

5. In further discussion, Helen explained that the group will be looking at what comes next once these deliverables are completed, and how to ensure that their work feeds into the other task and finish groups, and is successfully communicated as widely as possible.

Action 1	Helen to discuss the future of task and finish group three with Brandon Lewis.	BCS/ DCLG
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### Priorities for 2014 – Task and Finish Group One

6. Jason Cotta reported on progress. He explained that a report has been completed covering findings from a number of meetings with those involved in regenerating high streets, and a review of the research on local leadership. This sets out a simple plan for towns to follow based on the identified common factors for success Jason will circulate the document for comment and sign of by Forum members after the meeting. It will then be made public as a resource for others to use.

7. The group has pulled together a resource base to support implementation of the plan, and intends to test the plan at nine locations, with support from local authorities, Business in the Community and the Association of Town and City Management. The aim is to demonstrate the model works. The nine locations will be chosen from a shortlist being put together by BiTC and ATCM.

Expected Completion Date: May 2014

8. Jason also provided an update on two other deliverables where task and finish group one has agreed to lead:

- The group will develop an online information resource bringing together the range of available information and guidance, and providing an interactive forum for those involved in town centre management and regeneration. ATCM has started work on this.

Expected Delivery Date: September 2014

- The group will also lead on developing a communications and PR strategy for the Forum and for high streets, which will focus on bringing together all those with an interest in celebrating successful high streets and town centres, and countering the current negative attitudes in the media. This will include development of a 'High Streets' brand, which can be used to unify communications.

Expected Delivery Date: April 2014

9. Jason explained that he will be approaching Forum members to seek support for the development and ongoing management of these deliverables.

10. In general discussion, the Forum noted the following:

- Managing the online portal and the communications strategy will need to be adequately resourced, with an identifiable lead.
- The high street brand needs to be owned by the sector, rather than Government. The Love Your Local Market brand is a good example of success, supported by Government, but not owned or led by it.

Action 2	Jason to coordinate circulation and publication of the report with the Secretariat	Costa / DCLG
Action 3	Jason to meet Brandon Lewis to discuss the deliverables in more detail, and how DCLG can best support delivery	Costa / DCLG
Action 4	TFG1 to further develop the comms strategy, and contact Forum members to identify resources	TFG1

### **Priorities for 2014 – Task and Finish Group Two**

11. James Lowman introduced the paper prepared by task and finish group two (FHSF 04-02), outlining the considerations of the group, recommendations to Government and proposed actions. He thanked his fellow task and finish group members for their contributions.

12. James introduced the following list of proposed deliverables

- A guidance document showcasing best practice in using discretionary rate relief, supported by a series of regional meetings to communicate with Local Authorities.

Expected Delivery Date: October 2014

- Guidance for local authorities bringing together good parking policies and best practice in managing parking provision.  
Expected Delivery Date: March 2014
- Establish a voluntary national system for benchmarking of car park provision. This system will need to be relatively sophisticated, to account for individual circumstances and identify best practice.  
Expected Delivery Date: October 2014
- Guidance to help people identify landlords, with the aim of pointing out some of the easy wins.  
Expected Delivery Date: March 2014
- Establish an expert group to advise on setting up a vehicle that could own and manage properties in a high street. This and the next deliverable pick up on the work of the Distressed Retail Property Task Force.  
Expected Delivery Date: March 2014
- Investigate setting up a new Investment Fund to provide loans to local property vehicles. This will include looking at financial models that can bring together public and private funding.  
Expected Delivery Date: October 2014

13. James also introduced a number of recommendations that the group is making to Government:

- Business Rates – An independent review of the Business Rates system. In discussion forum members noted that the retail sector had secured as much short term help with business rates as they could expect, and now need to look to a fundamental review to achieve a long-term change to their cost base.

In the immediate future, Forum members will be engaging with the review of the administration of business rates, once the Treasury discussion paper is issued.

Brandon Lewis reminded the Forum that as the Chair of the Forum and Minister responsible, there is a conflict of interest should the Forum members recommend this to Government. James and DCLG will discuss this issue outside the meeting, and agree how best to handle the potential issue.

- To enable greater responsiveness, review the consultation procedure required to alter car parking charges.

Brandon pointed out that the consultation on parking reform is open until 14<sup>th</sup> February, and suggested that this recommendation be submitted to that.

- Create a new legal duty of local authorities to assist in identifying landlords

Local authorities would be concerned about the cost implications of this recommendation, and the Government has no current plans to impose new duties on local authorities. The use of the Town and Country Planning Act

1990 in the way envisaged was also queried, and Liz Peace will investigate.

There could be a lack of understanding across local authorities about what powers they have in relation to properties that are an issue, and what they can and cannot do. Graham Harris and Mike Haines will explore whether guidance on this area can be produced for local authorities, working through task and finish group two.

- Introduce a monitoring framework for the Town Centre First policy.
- Write to Chief Planning Officers clarifying how the town centre first planning policy should be interpreted.

Brandon explained that implementing a monitoring framework would be a major burden for local authorities and government, primarily due to the resources required to gather and process the data. James acknowledged this, agreeing that it could be possible for outside organisations to gather the data.

Brandon offered to invite Nick Boles to the meeting between himself and James Lowman.

14. In discussion, the Forum noted a number of key areas that should be considered as this work progresses

- The Forum welcomed the business rates package announced at the Autumn Statement, which will provide much of the short term help the retail sector has been looking for.
- Small businesses do not always appear to be aware that they can claim small business rate relief. While it is important to ensure that local authorities are aware of and understand the benefits of discretionary rate relief, it is also important to ensure that businesses know what they are entitled to.
- DCLG will shortly be announcing the outcome of the consultation on including property owners in Business Improvement Districts. Being able to identify landlords will be key to their inclusion. It is also relevant in dealing with properties that are abandoned or an eyesore.
- In monitoring planning, there are a number of areas of detail around change of use that could be included but would increase the level of detail. Good, flexible planning in line with an agreed Local Plan is not an issue. Change of use should not affect the vitality of the town centre.

15. In conclusion, James explained that task and finish group two will monitor delivery of the agreed deliverables, and wait for a response from DCLG to the recommendations before deciding what to publish.

Action 5	James Lowman to agree with DCLG how best to present the recommendations from task and finish group two, to avoid a conflict of interest for the Minister as Chair of the Forum.	ACS/ DCLG
Action 6	Confirm whether the proposed use of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 can be accommodated	BPF
Action 7	Discuss guidance for Local Authorities on available powers for dealing with blight properties	TFG2

Action 8	Discuss with DCLG the publication of the findings of task and finish group two	ACS/ DCLG
Action 9	Ensure that Nick Boles is invited to the next meeting between Brandon Lewis and James Lowman	ACS/ DCLG

### **Close**

16. Brandon closed the meeting. As agreed earlier, future meetings will focus on decisions, while discussion and comment is managed between meetings. Meetings will continue to be held every three months, and last 1½ hours.

Action 10	Secretariat to arrange meetings for the remainder of 2014	DCLG
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