

FUTURE HIGH STREET FORUM
3rd Meeting, 14 October 2013, 10.30 – 12.00
Bedford Swan Hotel, Bedford

Attendees

Brandon Lewis	Minister for High Streets, Town Centres and Markets (Co-Chair)
Alex Gourlay	Alliance Boots (Co-Chair)
Simon Roberts	Alliance Boots
James Lowman	Association of Convenience Stores
Martin Blackwell	Association of Town and City Management
Michael Green	British Council of shopping Centres
Alan Hawkins	British Independent Retailers Association
Liz Peace	British Property Federation
Helen Dickinson	British Retail Consortium
Jane Pritchard	Business in the Community
Jason Cotta	Costa Coffee
BIS Official	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
Graham Harris	Dartford Borough Council
Cllr Mike Haines	Local Government Association
Mary Portas	Mary Portas Agency
Peter Cross	John Lewis Partnership
Professor Neil Wrigley	Southampton University
Paula Vennells	Post Office Ltd
Michelle Lowe	Southampton University
Julie Carney	DCLG
Secretary	DCLG (Secretariat)

Apologies

Emma Jones	PopUp Britain
Graham Wilson	National Association of British Market Authorities
Joe Harrison	National Market Traders Federation
Neil McCourt	Tesco Metro

Welcome and Introductions

1. Brandon Lewis opened the meeting, saying how delighted he was to be taking on ministerial responsibility for high streets, town centres and markets. He welcomed attendees to the meeting, and recorded the Forum's thanks to Alex Gourlay for returning to co-chair the meeting before taking up his new role, and to Guy Laurence from Vodafone UK, who has also resigned to take up a new role. Brandon welcomed Mary Portas to the Forum.

Task and Finish Group One – Local Leadership

2. Jason Cotta invited ATCM and BITC to report to the Forum on the support they had been providing to town teams.

Support to Town Teams

3. Chris Hurst gave a presentation on behalf of the Association of Town and City Management (ATCM), providing an overview of the Town Team Support Programme (a two year package of support funded by DCLG). He explained that the support put in place by ATCM is aiming to provide locally based, expert and personalised support to town teams around the country.
4. Chris also explained that ATCM will be launching a database for holding shared learning and case studies. ATCM will be working with DCLG to identify and gather the best practice examples.
5. Chris finished by inviting Forum members to the ATCM World Café of Ideas at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in central London on 23 October 2013.
6. Jane Pritchard gave a presentation on behalf of Business in the Community (BITC), updating the Forum on the work of BITC, and in particular the High Streets Champions initiative. She explained that champions are now in place for twenty-two pilot town teams.
7. Lessons learn to date from the champions programme included:
 - Effective communications was important. When the champions programme launched, BITC found themselves very busy countering negative press interest.
 - Companies were finding involvement beneficial, with some spreading their learning and best practice internally.
8. Over the next three years, BITC planned to work with one hundred selected towns and eight selected companies to take forward further community engagement.
9. The Forum had a wide ranging discussion during and after these presentations, from which a number of key themes emerged:
 - Everyone involved in this area needed to promote the support that is already out there, and look at how accessing that support could be made easier. Among the ideas put forward was a central portal providing access to the range of support available, as well as allowing people to talk to each other and share best practice. BITC and ATCM both indicated that they could help take this forward.
 - The Forum should consider how best to showcase what is working around the country, share best practice and counter the negative media coverage of the high street.
 - It should also consider how to measure success, recognising that each high street is unique, as are challenges they are facing. It will therefore it will not be easy to identify measures that could be universally applied. ATCM are working with BIS to develop new key performance indicators that will address the social as well as economic measures of success.

Action 1	ATCM and BITC programmes are linked well together at a local level. They should discuss how best to ensure that the programmes work together at a strategic level.	ATCM BITC
----------	--	--------------

Interim Report from Task and Finish Group One

10. Jason Cotta introduced the Interim report from the Group. The report summarises the early findings from visits to Sydenham, Dartford, Rotherham and Bedminster, and key findings to date for what successful towns require, and the barriers that prevent towns achieving success.

11. Jason explained that the Group will be doing further visits before finalising their findings, and asked Forum members to consider a number of questions:

- Should the Local Authority be required to act as a backstop driver for pulling together a 'coalition of the willing', taking on responsibility for constructing an effective town team, where alternative local partners have not stepped forward?
- Should town teams be required to report annually on their plans and progress?
- Should we be asking big business to look at their own involvement, and increase their local involvement in town teams?

12. The Forum welcomed the emerging findings, and acknowledged that the involvement of local authorities is key to success. Local Authorities need to understand that seeing local businesses succeed in the long run increases their business rates income, and therefore time and resources is a worthwhile investment.

Update from Task and Finish Group Two

13. James Lowman provided an update on the work of Task and Finish Group Two, which is looking at the enablers and barriers for success. He introduced a short paper summarising the emerging actions from the various workstreams the group is looking at.

14. James explained that he will be following up with a more detailed paper, and was eager for Forum members to provide feedback on the emerging findings and recommendations before the Group reports substantively to the next meeting of the Forum in January. He would be happy to meet and discuss the recommendations.

15. Among the issues the Group will be reporting back on in January are:

- How to make discretionary rate relief work
- Improving car parking, including guidance, support and benchmarking, and simplifying consultation processes.
- Joint ownership models for town centres

16. Once the group has reported back in January, they will proceed on the other identified workstreams, including planning.

Action 2	Review and feedback on the detailed paper to be issued by Task and Finish Group Two.	All
----------	--	-----

Update from Task and Finish Group Three

17. Due to time constraints, Helen Dickinson provided a short update on the work of Task and Finish Group Three. She explained that the group was working with the University of Southampton and Economic and Social Research Council on the review of the existing evidence on high streets, and with the Future Foundation on defining what the future high street will look like. The objective is to provide the information that will allow local teams to build their local vision of their future.

18. Helen informed the Forum that her group expected to be reporting back substantively by January 2014.

Action 3	Secretariat to liaise with Task and Finish Groups Two and Three to ensure that there is sufficient time for the Agenda at the meeting in January 2014	DCLG
----------	---	------

Close and Date of Future Meetings

19. Brandon Lewis and Alex Gourlay thanked everyone for their participation. The next meeting will be held on 21 January 2014 at Eland House London.