

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 9 June 2010

Transcript: Oral Update

Dee Doocey (Chair): The Mayor is now going to provide an oral update of about five minutes on matters occurring since the publication of his report. As part of that, I know there is one question that I think has been asked by Mike Tuffrey which you are going to deal with.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Chair. Indeed, I am going to make a brief report if that is OK, taking in Mike's question. The principal thing I want to remind Members of is the continuing success of the London Living Wage (LLW). That has now been increased, thanks to the work done by Greater London Authority Economics, to £7.85. I think everybody in the GLA group who has a role in promulgating this should be congratulated. There are now 2,200 employees working with contracts from the GLA who are benefiting from the London Living Wage and almost 100 organisations across London who implement the Living Wage. We are campaigning for it. We have been successful. I think it was very interesting at the recent General Election how it played a part in virtually all parties' commitments and I think that it is an important thing for us to champion.

Mike Tuffrey has asked a question about air quality. Is that the issue to which you are alluding, Chair? The answer is that, yes, there is, as you know, a legal process going on with the European Commission. There is a historic infraction. We are trying to be compliant. We have put forward the Mayor's Air Quality Strategy and I am confident that we will be compliant on limit values for Particulate Matter (PM10) by 2011.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): There is an open question to my mind, whether the Strategy is adequate. What I wanted to do was not to reprise the discussion we had last time about the need for a central London clean air zone - which remains my view - but to ask that we take this issue to central government. Obviously there has been a change at the top. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is one ministry where there is not a Liberal Democrat minister in there. My concern is that Defra officials are still showing continuing complacency about the need not just to comply with this limit but the next one that is coming in 2015, and your Strategy was explicit that we need national action if we are to get London compliant.

We should have been compliant back in 2005. The debate is out as to whether we will or will not comply but we need to up the national game. I do not want to miss this opportunity - if the European Union (EU) proceeds with its threat of legal action - to take this message to central government.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I absolutely agree with that. Obviously we are doing things here in the GLA group that I think will be very widely admired in the sense that we are imposing very tough limit values for our vehicular fleet. We have a target, for instance, to have zero carbon taxis across the taxi fleet by 2020.

Now I was very interested when we had a conversation with the previous Environment Secretary, Ed Miliband, that that idea did not seem to have occurred to him as something that he could champion across the country. I think that is the kind of thing we should be looking to central government to support; it is the sort of programme that will make a huge difference to air quality not just in London but across the country and help this country to meet its commitments under EU law.

Murad Qureshi (AM): I did not know the coalition agreement covered air pollution. Since, Mayor, you have become Mayor, the urgency of the matter has been highlighted in two reports - one from the Assembly and one from the Parliamentary Environment Sub Committee - about the effect it has on life expectancy of Londoners. Both reports have shown the original figures were four or five times out of order and that this probably means that people are losing between two months to two years of their lives as a result of poor air quality. That is where I am coming from; not essentially from the angle of the process with the European Commission.

In the meantime, you have decided not to go ahead with the third phase of the Low Emission Zone. You intend to roll back the Western Extension of the Congestion Zone, which has had a beneficial environmental impact in that part of town, and also you have got rid of the six-monthly inspections of taxis. It is not really surprising that the Commission states, according to their latest data provided, that the areas, namely the Greater London urban area and Gibraltar have exceeded limits of PM10. Can you please at least tell me when the latest data was provided by your office to the relevant authorities?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will get back to you about when our latest submissions were made to the Commission. I can not give you an exact date.

Murad Qureshi (AM): I think it is fair to assume that, since you have been Mayor, since May 2008, you would have had to submit some figures for the calendar year for 2008 and that you have also had meetings with the previous Minister, Jim Fitzpatrick on this issue. I understand Isabel [Isabel Dedring, Mayoral Adviser on the Environment] has been in touch with the Commission directly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it fair to say there is a to-ing and fro-ing between us and the Commission on this.

Murad Qureshi (AM): An exchange of information.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Murad Qureshi (AM): You really do need to take some responsibility, I feel. The Commission goes further by suggesting that London did not have any real plans for cleaning up the air and would not be able to reduce pollution by the time the exemption period expires in 2011.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I do not think that is right at all. I think that, if you look at the Mayor's Air Quality Strategy, it is extremely ambitious and we do take this very, very seriously. I am struck, actually, by the lack of concern that has been shown by central government and, indeed, by the authorities in London over the last ten years. We are dealing with a chronic problem of pollution which you cannot solve at a click of your fingers.

We are moving ahead as fast as is reasonable towards zero carbon taxis and towards much lower carbon buses. One of the reasons we are bringing in the new bus for London is, of course, that it is a far cleaner bus and I think that those kinds of programmes could, with advantage, be imitated at a national level.

You make this point, Murad, about the Low Emission Zone. Actually everybody knows that we never scrapped the Low Emission Zone; we merely postponed it because I did not think it was right to inflict a very heavy cost on a key part of the London economy during a very difficult part of the recession. It will go ahead. I think it is right that it goes ahead before the Olympics and I am determined to bring it in.

As for your other points, I think they are really very trivial in comparison with the dramatic steps that we are taking and, indeed, that we are willing to take. The Commission knows the steps we are making

in order to meet our obligations under EU law. You are right: the point is not to do with EU law. It is to do with the health of Londoners and it is absolutely paramount that we should improve our air quality.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Indeed. This is my concern. Since you have been Mayor all we have had is two years of consultation and nothing really implemented on the ground. Does that complete inaction not suggest that you do not give it the regard that you should do and it could well make us the 'dirty man' of Europe before the Olympics comes into show in 2012?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand that you have a political axe to grind but I think you are being unusually harsh and unfair. If you look at what we are doing we are bringing in very, very clean buses, we are going ahead with a programme to modernise the taxi fleet, which will be very difficult but we will go ahead with it.

Murad Qureshi (AM): That is after 2011; well after 2012.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have to say, that I did not notice any evidence of such measures in the previous administration which you were proud enough to serve; nor did I notice plans on the scale that we have to boost cycling and to get people using completely zero carbon modes of transport.

Darren Johnson (AM): How confident are you that a multi million pound EU fine can be avoided?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it would be quite wrong of the EU to impose such a fine, I am very confident that we will meet our limit values for PM10s by 2011.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Mr Mayor, rather than bandying numbers around and shuffling paper between here and the Department of the Environment - or Climate Change as I think it is called now - as the previous administration did, and then sitting on inaction, would you agree with me that, actually, given that in this building in the last six months we have launched a hydrogen moped, a hydrogen taxi which Murad [Qureshi] attended the launch of just the other day; your own Electric Vehicles Strategy and, indeed, there will be five hydrogen buses running in London by the end of the year - that these are actually concrete advancements towards a cleaner air in London, rather than what persisted under the previous Mayor which was lots of paper and, in fact, hot air?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is absolutely right. I congratulate you, Kit, for what you are doing to promote hydrogen and the use of hydrogen technology. I think there is room for dispute about which is going to be the long term future for zero carbon zero tailpipe emission vehicles. Myself, I think that electric vehicles offer a great future for our city and that is why we are putting in 7,500. You asked for facts on the ground, Murad [Qureshi]: by 2012 we are putting in 7,500 electric vehicle charging points in public places, and there will be 25,000 by 2015. In London, we already have more electric vehicles and more zero carbon vehicles than any other city in Europe and those are some of the things that I think the European Commission should take into account when making its decision.

Can I make one point about the air quality in London because people, I think, do listen to Murad [Qureshi] and, quite rightly, they listen to people who are concerned about the air quality, and they are quite right to worry about children and vulnerable people being affected by air quality. This will be no consolation to those who are suffering at the moment but if you compare what we have with, say, the 1950s when 20,000 people died after the smog of 1952, air quality in this city has improved greatly. We have the technology to make it improve yet further.

Roger Evans (AM): I am impressed by so much of what your administration is doing, Mr Mayor.

There will be some concerns amongst the black cab trade about further costs being imposed on them, and they do feel - I have quite a lot of them in my constituency - that it does not help them in competing with other providers. Will Transport for London be imposing pollution targets on licensed mini cabs as well in order to ensure there is a level playing field?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am determined to ensure that there should be a level playing field and that there should be no discrimination against black cabs, which are a vital part of London's transport services.

John Biggs (AM): I am sure, Chair, that Londoners will want to congratulate the Mayor on the amount of compost his office produces as well but, more seriously, we do need to acknowledge that there is a risk, through his indecision, that Londoners will have to fork out up to £300 million to the European Commission and that is a very serious matter at a time of economic stress. Would you not agree that that is a reasonable charge to place in front of you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, are you talking to the Chair or to me?

John Biggs (AM): To you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not feel that that is a reasonable charge, no, because I think that the measures we are putting in place are very far reaching and very ambitious. I would like to see the kind of thing that we are doing being taken up across the country by central government and I think that the European Commission ought to take into account what we are doing, notably that our limit values for PM10s will be compliant by 2011.

John Biggs (AM): Can I allow you to extend the boundaries of progressiveness in your administration in the following way; Labour Members congratulate you on increasing the London Living Wage but would you be prepared to commit yourself to a piece of work to try far more vigorously to tackle the knotty areas where employers are unwilling to implement it? There are sections of the economy such as hospitality and so on where you have made utterances but, as yet, the progress has been very limited. We would be very happy to work alongside you in helping to improve the poverty wages of people in those areas.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): John, I am grateful for the spirit in which you make that suggestion; I am delighted by it. I will support that and I would like to work together with you in an effort of persuasion because, although you are right to say I have made speeches to the hospitality sector about the importance of this and the merits of the London Living Wage in promoting loyalty and in saving you employment costs in the long run, this is something that cannot be imposed, particularly in tough economic circumstances; you need to argue for it and, if you want us to argue together, then I am more than happy to do it.

Richard Barnes (AM): Mr Mayor, will you join me in welcoming John Biggs' conversion but will you also, at the same time, note that the greatest resistance to paying London's Living Wage over the past, certainly ten years since it has existed, has come from the National Health Service (NHS) and departments run by his government?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a fair point and it is a point that I have repeatedly made to government ministers. I can imagine that John [Biggs] feels particularly uninhibited in making that point now that those ministers in government are no longer of his party!

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, I think a lot of lower paid Londoners will welcome the initiative that you have taken on the London Living Wage and that you are driving it forward. Could you communicate the way in which you have done that to, perhaps, some other London borough leaders as well, perhaps the London Borough of Hackney, who, to this day, its learning trust is still advertising

on its website vacancies for £6 an hour? Also, could you remind it that, if it claims that it is going to be a London Living Wage supporter, then how is it that, as recently as February, it awarded a contract to the ominously named KGB Contracting to provide cleaning in the schools of Hackney and, as a part of that contract, not only does this contractor pay much less than the London Living Wage, because of the adjustment of the working weeks down from 52 down to 47 weeks, it is actually, one could argue, paying less than the minimum wage? This is from a borough that claims to be a supporter of the London Living Wage? So perhaps if you could, Mr Mayor, communicate how you have been successful to a borough that has been particularly unsuccessful in living up to its public pronouncements.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Andrew, as ever, I am grateful to you for that. I have the honour of meeting Jules Pipe [Mayor, London Borough of Hackney], whom you may know, later on today and if you would be kind enough to provide me a paragraph summarising that I will, of course, relay it to Jules.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you.

Len Duvall (AM): We on this side welcome sinners who repent! You once wrote that the minimum wage, which was a forerunner to the London Living Wage, "Puts up costs, reduces your ability to reinvest and palpably destroys jobs". That is what you said at that time. The Members opposite were saying the same thing about the London Living Wage. What made you change your mind?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are quite right, Len, in that I did write that, I think, many, many years ago. You have to be honest about the impact of the LLW at the margin. There will be cases where, for some employers, particularly people with businesses on very tight margins, they may find it difficult to apply. I think you should be intellectually honest about its impact.

I became convinced by it talking to people who were responsible for very large organisations, who had people on very low wages and who found that it generated loyalty and that it, thereby, enabled them to cut down on their employment costs in hiring and firing. I think that that is a powerful case that we can make to London and to London business.

Len Duvall (AM): Thank you.

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 9 June 2010

Transcript: Question and Answer Session with the Mayor

2063/2010 – Coalition

John Biggs

What is the greatest risk to London flowing from the new coalition Government and its recently announced policies?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): John, you ask what the greatest risk to London might be from the coalition government. The only risk I can think of is - at the risk of descending into political banter which I know you would not want me to do - is the risk that the coalition government should give way to another disastrous Labour government! That seems to be the biggest risk.

John Biggs (AM): I am sort of grateful for your answer but it would be nice if you had tried to answer the question more substantively. I could quote to you from a meeting the other week at the London Chamber's of Commerce business question time where you said, "We need to be fighting, no, struggling with the new Government" which obviously you have a lot in common with. The question in my mind is whether you have so much in common with it that you will defend its policies, or whether you see yourself primarily as a Mayor for London defending Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Forgive me. I thought your question was one of your jocular questions intending to get a rise out of me.

John Biggs (AM): None of my questions are jocular.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I now understand what you are driving at. No, you are quite right. Had Labour won the election we would have been in very much the same position; we would have had to be fighting very, very hard to make sure that it understands the critical importance to this country - never mind to this city, of investing in transport infrastructure, in affordable housing, in allowing us to meet our target of 50,000 affordable housing, and in keeping our streets safe. Those are the points that we need to make to the coalition government and we would have made exactly the same points to an incoming Labour government as well.

John Biggs (AM): So you will be picking a fight with the Government as and when it announces cuts in funding to those services?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly shall. I have absolutely no compunction in doing so. I believe that if you look at the great scheme of public spending there is no doubt that the axe could fall on many other things with greater advantage than on the things I have just mentioned in London.

John Biggs (AM): What would you say are the top three areas that you would defend against cuts in spending?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I have just given them.

John Biggs (AM): Which are? Transport, policing and...?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Housing.

John Biggs (AM): Housing. Can I remind you of your previous answers on the London Living Wage because I think, as Mayor of London, you have eloquently - and we are grateful for this - spoken up on behalf of Londoners on low wages, you have extended the London Living Wage by another 20 pence an hour and it does make a real difference to people. Is it not the case that cuts in services such as Sure Start Centres and such as affordable childcare services will have a far more cutting effect on those on the lowest wages in London? What will you do to speak up for Londoners on those?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course you are right. I will make it my job at every possible opportunity to stick up for the interests of all Londoners facing disadvantage or suffering because of cuts. I think you have got to be frank with people and say why are we in the position that we are in? It is because we have a net public sector debt in this country of £893.4 billion. That is a very considerable burden to be placing on future generations; it is causing us a huge, huge haemorrhage just to service that debt and to pay for that debt. I am afraid those are the financial circumstances that the last government, which you supported, has left us with.

John Biggs (AM): I think, this time last year, you were applauding supporting your Economic Recovery Action Plan under the Labour Government - which was classic Keynesian stuff. It talked about spending at a time of economic hardship, talked about not cutting services because that would attack the weakest and would multiply the risks of recession. It strikes me today that you are fundamentally confused as to which direction you are pointing in.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I do not think that is true. I know what you are driving at but there is a very, very clear distinction between spending on consumption and spending on investment. I want to make sure that, in this country and as we go forward, that we make the case for spending on things that will benefit our economy for the long term. There are things in London that will be of long term benefit to the national economy which I believe we should be fighting for very, very rigorously. Whether it is absolutely necessary for me to receive child benefit is another matter.

John Biggs (AM): Right, but for those Londoners on lowest wages, in greatest hardship, facing unemployment and with pressures of rents, pressures of fares - which have gone up of course - you are promising them a superb transport system but they may not be able to afford to use it. What are you going to do to defend the interests of Londoners whose incomes are threatened by the cuts we are told are around the corner?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do not forget everything we have done to protect the interests of those who are on low incomes and who need to use public transport. There are special discounts for those on Jobseeker's Allowance and other benefits. We, of course, have extended the Freedom Pass for those over 60 to 24 hours a day. I accept that it was necessary to put the fares up last year but I would point out that the fares went up by a smaller percentage than they went up under the last Mayor and fares in London, transport in London is still incredibly competitive, in fact cheaper than other cities in this country. It is my job, by promoting things like the London Living Wage, by making sure that we use our funds at our disposal to build as many affordable houses as possible to reach our target of 50,000 affordable homes and to make sure that people in this city on low incomes can afford to live here.

John Biggs (AM): Right. So when you meet, as your articles tell us you do quite regularly, with Mr Osborne [George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer], you are saying, "Save our capital programme but do not worry about the benefits. We can manage without those. We have been pampered for too long"

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, that is absolutely not what I am saying.

John Biggs (AM): So how are you championing the interests of the neediest Londoners, many of whom voted for you, and who need the leadership of a Mayor to protect them at a time of hardship and recession?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I have made it absolutely clear that I am passionately committed to defending the interests of the poorest and the neediest of Londoners mainly by doing what we can with our transport budgets to protect them, to protect people who are on low incomes and people who are in search of work, to protect the older people, to make sure that we keep free travel for younger people - which many people on either side of this horseshoe advocated getting rid of at one time or another. I have rejected that. I think we should have free travel in London for younger people. It is a benefit that everybody else has to pay for but it is very, very important, particularly for families on low incomes. It is one of the ways that we can help hardworking low paid families in this city and I am determined to keep it up.

John [Biggs], you must be in no doubt about this; I will have no hesitation whatever in going in to fight in the most committed possible way for the interests of Londoners in the course of the next budgetary negotiations. That is not just because I see that it is my duty to defend the entire electorate, which obviously it is, it is also because I think it is the right thing for this country. London is the motor of the UK economy. If people cannot afford to come and work in London and if they cannot afford to live in London you will starve the UK economy of petrol!

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, will you accept that among the lies spread by the Labour Party in the election was that Sure Start was going to be cut and that we have just heard that again this morning from Mr Biggs? I think you overlooked challenging him on that. As you know, Sure Start remains a central policy plank of this Coalition Government.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am grateful to you, vigilant as ever, for nailing a lie that almost went unknown. Thank you, you are absolutely right; it remains a key part of our programme.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Chair, would the Mayor make comment relating to what John Biggs just mentioned on the aspect of the poorest in London being the most vulnerable, and with cuts coming around the corner from central government the possibility that the London boroughs will be forced to increase Council Tax? I know it is quite early on in the year but would the Mayor make comment on the grounds that he may, once again, consider freezing the precept for next year to relieve any problems that may occur in the next couple of months or a year?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am indebted to the Member for suggesting that I should make a decision now about the Council Tax precept. I do not propose to do so. I think we should keep our options open and that is what I am going to do.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Thank you.

1936/2010 – Meeting with the Secretary of State for Transport

Caroline Pidgeon

What was discussed with the Secretary of State for Transport at your meeting with him on May 27th?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I met with the Secretary of State for Transport on 27 May 2010. We had a very good discussion. It was pretty much on the lines that I think John [Biggs] would have expected and understood in the sense that it was a great deal about the importance of transport infrastructure and I found a good deal of common ground between me and Philip Hammond [Secretary of State for Transport] in seeing the vital importance of defending that.

I want to make one confession to you which is that the Surrey Canal Road - an issue you specifically asked me to raise with him - I am going to raise with him but I did not raise at that particular meeting. Caroline, you must forgive me but it was my first meeting with the Secretary of State and we covered a huge variety of matters.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): OK. What I want to find out this morning really is, apart from the fact that you secured a cycle ride with the new Secretary of State, which you tweeted, what you achieved and secured for Londoners at this meeting. So, on Crossrail, did the Secretary of State confirm that the recent media reports that we could see huge cuts to the Crossrail budget of about £5 billion? Is that true or not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What he said - and I think it was reasonable for him to say this - was that an incoming government would want to kick the tyres very hard and to make sure that no value was being lost in the whole project and it was going to deliver value; but that he fully supported Crossrail and expected it to go ahead.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): OK. Did you discuss the possibility of cutting the number of train carriages or scrapping extensions to Maidenhead or Abbey Wood?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): So that was not discussed? He was looking at the whole project going ahead as is planned? The nod means yes?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is right. There was no discussion of lopping off this or that or changing the trains.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Fantastic. I think that is really very reassuring for Londoners and for all of us as we have worked so hard to try to secure Crossrail.

I am disappointed you did not raise Surrey Canal Road Station because you did promise last time that you would, Mr Mayor, and I hope that you will urgently because the timing of that is so critical and only £7 million is needed so, hopefully, you can raise that this week with the Secretary of State.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have apologised.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): In terms of other things, what about roadworks, for example. Did you make any progress on the issue of lane rental to actually get some action rather than just words?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think you will find that that becomes part of the Government's programme. I think it is a great success. It is something that we have generated in this place that was really something that originated in Transport for London (TfL) - the idea of getting lane rental. It is going to go ahead with it. It will require an Act of Parliament, as I am sure you know, but Philip Hammond is committed to that.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): So you have got a firm commitment that it is going to go ahead as soon as possible; legislative time permitting.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is my understanding.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): That, again, is good news for Londoners because I think we are all fed up of the roadworks and the issues around that.

What about the issue of Thameslink because there are rumours that Network Rail, I think, last week announced that they are looking for severe budget cuts. Thameslink is a possible area of savings. Was that discussed with the Secretary of State?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thameslink is of critical importance to London. It is something that we do not - and I am glad you raised it - raise often enough. It is a north/south Crossrail, effectively. It is a fantastically important project and I am determined to make sure that it goes ahead and delivers value and delivers all the increase in capacity that it promises.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): But did you discuss it with the Secretary of State?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not specifically remember a passage about Thameslink, no.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): OK. There are fears that it could be scaled back so I am glad you are going to be lobbying strongly for that as well.

What about the £108 million of cuts to TfL? It has been announced by the Department for Transport (DfT) we are getting these cuts. Are these still going to go ahead or did you manage to secure that, actually we will keep that money in your massive debate about infrastructure needed for London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am confident that we can avoid any cuts to infrastructure or to front line services as a result of any of the requests that have been made so far.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): But when you talked to the Secretary of State did you actually get him to realise that we need to have less cuts in London, because we need that money going into infrastructure?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Just to give you the flavour of the conversation. What the argument is really about at the moment, between us and central government is that we feel that, here in the GLA and in TfL, my administration has been here for two years and, as you know, we have made very substantial efficiencies already. We are in the process of taking £5 billion out of the budget for Transport for London. We have an efficiency savings target of £500 million this year alone.

What I was saying to Philip Hammond was that that really ought to be reflected in the requests that he was making to us about cuts. It was all very well asking the whole of local government and the whole of regional government to take cuts, but we had been in the vanguard of making cuts, and that should be properly reflected in his demands.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): OK. Thank you.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I am interested to hear that there was not any discussion about the dangers of de-scoping Crossrail and I was not sure from what you said as to whether or not you had actually had a very firm commitment that there would not be any de-scoping of Crossrail or any delaying of any sections?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The key thing to remember about Crossrail is that you cannot save money by delay, and that is the point that I made very, very rigorously and I think that is a point that is going to be understood in government. The essential point that it is making - which is that it has the right to kick the tyres and to see whether it can do anything - is a reasonable one. This is an incoming government facing colossal debts, 'a parless' national position, a catastrophic deficit left behind by the last government and it has a right, politically it has a duty, I would say, to see what it can do.

Now I will fiercely and, with your help, I think correctly, resist any changes to Crossrail or any attempt to do damage to the Crossrail project.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Can I ask you a bit more about how you are organising that resistance, for want of a better word? Can you tell me about your broader lobbying strategy to protect Crossrail, because it must be the big job of the summer? How are you mobilising or working with other public and organisations to lobby to protect Crossrail?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you look at the last 18 months/2 years, as soon as the recession kicked in it became clear that projects like Crossrail were going to be under threat. We then began, in City Hall, a programme working with business groups, with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), with London First and with all sorts of bodies across London to make sure people understand the vital importance of this project. Everybody knows it is going to increase London's rail capacity by 10%.

If you are going to have high speed links coming in to the London mainline stations, to Euston, you are going to need a big new system to help get those people off the Tube when they are disgorged on to public transport. That is why Crossrail is absolutely essential. The Central line simply cannot cope as it is currently constructed. Business groups across London are working with us to get that point over to government.

If you would like to be involved, Val, and if you are interested in joining the movement, then there is a wide coalition of interest in this city - which you know very well - who are determined to preserve it.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): We agree with the points you are making about the case for Crossrail and we have already offered our help and support for cross-party lobbying.

I am just trying to bring out a little bit more into the public domain what is actually going on at the moment. There are, for example, I think, 15 districts and borough councils, including 11 London councils, along the route of Crossrail. Have you been in touch with them? Has your office been in touch with them? Is there a coordinated drive to get all of those councils in to the Secretary of State and to do work?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer is, at the moment, I have been lobbying myself. There is a sort of 'Crossrailometer' which they have in Crossrail and they monitor all the times the word Crossrail is used by any politician anywhere! I think I have used it more times than anybody by a very considerable margin. I am talking, obviously, to the Government. We are working, as I say, with business groups. It comes up frequently in conversations with council leaders and with other interested parties.

What you are proposing is, I think, an interesting idea, which is that there should be a delegation of interested local politicians as well. I think we should pursue that. If you want to help set that up then we should do that.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Mr Mayor, I think what we are suggesting is that you are in a position to hold the ring in terms of coordinating a broad public sector campaign to protect Crossrail, that you ought to have a lobbying strategy that addresses the civil servants as well as the senior politicians and, certainly, there is huge concern in the regeneration zones which are affected by any potential de-scoping; Thames Gateway, the Woolwich, the Royal Arsenals. All of those areas are potentially very badly affected if there is a de-scoping. So I think what we want to know is, is this being run like a military campaign because there is such a short time to win the battle?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is being run like a military campaign. I think someone already mentioned Stalingrad. Who mentioned Stalingrad? I cannot remember who it was.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I think you promised to mount a Stalingrad-like defence, Mr Mayor. We would like to see your armoury on display.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will. Stalingrad obviously did not look very good at the end of the battle. I think I possibly need to get a better metaphor. That gives you some flavour of the determination with which I want to protect it.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I know there was some fantastic work done – by Colin Buchanan [Transport Consultant] and others – in building the case for Crossrail. Have you looked, for example, at whether there is any additional research that needs to be done to help defend the case for Crossrail? For example, you talked about housing. What about the potential for housing developments along the entire route? What exactly are you doing to make sure that Crossrail does not slip off the agenda?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I do not think that my colleagues in Government could be in any doubt of my determination to see Crossrail built. I have had several direct conversations with the Prime Minister about it and he has given me assurances which I propose to propose confidence in.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I think I will leave it there, Chair, although I have to say I was not entirely satisfied with that answer. I think intention is one thing but we want to see the delivery.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, there are a couple of areas where the new Government could make some savings on transport. The first one I want to ask you about is the ongoing non-use still of the previous Eurostar platforms at Waterloo which the previous Government singularly failed to act upon and to bring back into use when they would so much assist the lines coming into Waterloo from the Windsor direction and, of course, would save some millions of pounds in security currently being spent on mothballing those platforms. Are you going to talk to Philip Hammond about that or have you already?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, Dick, this is a matter that we have raised already with the previous Secretary of State and with Network Rail.

Richard Tracey (AM): Who did nothing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think we will return to the fray with the new Government and I think it had better give us a better answer than we have had so far.

By the way, I think one of the great pities at the moment is that Network Rail has still been very slow, I think, in putting in enough cycle facilities at mainline stations, in spite of all the promises we had from Andrew Adonis [former Secretary of State for Transport], remember, who used to go around talking about it. Absolutely nothing was done by Network Rail.

Richard Tracey (AM): The second point I wanted to ask you about, Mr Mayor, was about the Nine Elms project which, of course, is in my constituency in the east end of Wandsworth. We have talked a great deal about the possibilities of extending the Northern line into Nine Elms. The owners of the Battersea Power Station site have talked about tax increment financing of that project which would obviously be rather an innovative way to do it. Is this something you propose to talk to the Secretary of State for Transport about?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Not only do I propose it; I already have.

Richard Tracey (AM): You have? With what response?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It would be fair to say that it is something that the Treasury has not yet, in my view, completely seen the wisdom of. I think it is something it needs to appreciate. I think it is a brilliant idea. It is the only way, frankly, I think, that we will get the two new stations that we need on the Northern line and we should be militating for it.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Mr Mayor, we have heard comments - particularly on the other side - about the potential or imagined threats to Crossrail. I know you are supportive; very much so. Would you not agree, Mr Mayor, that the shocking financial mismanagement of the previous Labour Government could possibly threaten the delivery of many infrastructure projects in the country which are much needed, and has made life a lot more difficult for you and others to deliver Crossrail on time and on budget?

John Biggs (AM): What kind of a question is that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a very good question because, through you, Chair, I think that it is tragic that the last Government so grossly mismanaged the economy and put projects like this at risk. We have to work extra hard to protect Crossrail, but I have no doubt that we will be successful and, with the cooperation and willingness that Val [Shawcross] and others have indicated today, I have no doubt that we will prevail.

Steve O'Connell (AM): One other point, Mr Mayor. A point that I often return to is around the inequitable position on the supplementary business rate for businesses that are outside of the London area. I am sure that you will be lobbying - and hopefully you can confirm that you will be lobbying - Government to pass legislation to ensure that businesses outside of London that will benefit directly from Crossrail do make a contribution towards the bill?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right. I think it is crackers that places on either end of the line will benefit massively in uplift of their property values and other things from Crossrail and are not making any contribution.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Mr Mayor, on Crossrail. I wonder, with your conversations with the Secretary of State, whether you had raised the issue of the incredible omission of a station at Kensal Green and whether this could be corrected?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is a very interesting plan, which we are broadly supportive of if we can make it work, to have a turn back in that area and we are certainly looking at that.

Kit Malthouse (AM): OK. Thank you.

Len Duvall (AM): There was a complete gasp, I think, in terms of some of the statements that were coming from the Mayor and one of his colleagues. I do not quite understand this. Was it wrong then for previous governments and the previous Mayor to invest in something like the East London line that you so gloriously thought was so good, when you said it? I do not understand in terms of this mismanagement of the economy. When a Labour Government intervened to save financial services across the road [in the City], which you say you support, that invested in transport projects as well, and saved jobs, that is why we have got the deficit now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, that is not quite right.

Len Duvall (AM): What projects of the past in transport, then, do you think were mismanaged and which we should not be spending on them in the city? Which DLR line? Which East London line? Which river boat service that Members opposite want over there but do not seem to think that it costs any money? Which tram link in Croydon that you are quite happy to have but do not really want to spend any money on? Which of those projects do you think the Labour Government got wrong that has put us in this economic mess that your mates are claiming in national government?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are, obviously, quite a few programmes that the previous administration, let alone the previous Government, wasted prodigious sums on.

Len Duvall (AM): On transport? The bus service?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would mention the West London Tram, which cost £34 million.

Len Duvall (AM): That did not go ahead.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Does anybody notice a West London Tram? I do not think so. There was the Cross River Tram on which a prodigious amount of money was spent; there were the huge sums of money developing the Thames Gateway Bridge which was environmentally unsound and which it was our sad duty to can.

I think if you look at the history of the last ten years, and even on transport projects, you see a profligate misunderstanding of the value of taxpayer's money; a shameless demagogic approach to public finances; water cannoning money around the country in the desperate hope of buying enough votes to stay in government; before it was ejected, ordering civil servants - in contradiction of their duties - to spend money on schemes of one kind or another --

Len Duvall (AM): So saving jobs is wrong?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- in the desperate hope of retaining Labour seats. It was an absolutely scandalous way to run a country and it is a good thing that it has come to an end..

Len Duvall (AM): That is utter rubbish.

James Cleverly (AM): Mr Mayor, whilst nobody is going to defend some of the worst actions of the banking sector, I think it is rather intellectually lazy to try to blame the whole of the national deficit on the banking bail out; the maths just does not stack up. Whilst there needs to be some pretty major changes in the way the banking sector does business, we demonise it at our peril because it is still a major contributor to the tax take of this city and of this country and if this body is not willing to defend one of the largest financial contributors to the British economy, would you agree with me that we actually put ourselves in a difficult position moving forward?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly agree with that.

I just want to get back to the point that John [Biggs] and Len [Duvall] are making because there is a genuine intellectual dispute here. I think that what John and Len are saying is that all public sector spending that creates jobs and protects jobs is a good thing. I think that is their position. That is a respectable position. I do think that if you look at the shape of the British economy and the long term health of the British economy and the sheer proportion of parts of the UK economy that are now dependent on the public sector, you have to wonder whether it is in the long term interests of our country.

I think that, had a Labour Government been re-elected, it would have been in very much the same position of being obliged to try to think of ways of rebalancing the economy to get the private sector moving in the north east, in Northern Ireland and in parts of the country where, quite frankly, public spending has simply become too large a share of gross domestic product (GDP).

I understand where you are coming from [Len Duval]. You just believe in unlimited tax and spend. Well that seems to be what you are saying. I do not think that is a sensible way forward for this country and we cannot go forward that way because we have run out of money.

Dee Doocey (Chair): I am going to move on.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Whichever way you look at it, Chair, we have a massive deficit.

1919/2010 – Government Office for London

Roger Evans

Will the GLA be lobbying for the powers and budget held by GOL now that the body is being abolished?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer is, yes, Roger, we will, of course, be lobbying for those powers to be transferred to us and we welcome the abolition of the Government Office for London (GOL).

Roger Evans (AM): The Government Office for London appears to have a lot of oversight powers in areas like transport and planning, some of which could be done by this Assembly and are done by this Assembly anyway and, where there is duplication, there is no need for that to continue. Do you agree that those types of oversight powers should be devolved to the Assembly and to this organisation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Generally my hope is that this Assembly will start to play more and more of a role in the scrutiny of London politics. I think it does some very good work. I am thinking, in particular, of the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) in the long term and I am, in principle, in favour of that kind of reform.

Roger Evans (AM): Do you see any possibility maybe of devolving some of those powers further to the London boroughs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am a firm believer in double devolution.

Brian Coleman (AM): Will you support the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority's [LFEPA] suggestion that the powers held by GOL on resilience issues under the organisation of the London Resilience Forum, and emergency planning matters, should be transferred to the LFEPA?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think we are having a discussion about that. It is certainly the case that the London Resilience Forum should, in my view, be transferred to one GLA body or another.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Mr Mayor, along the same theme, talking about the powers of the London Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), you know that, the outer London boroughs in particular have a keen interest in the devolution of powers and funding downwards to those boroughs. Can you confirm again your commitment that, should the GLA family and the Mayoralty gain some control around the London HCA powers and funding, you will, in turn, devolve funding decisions, and funding itself, out to the boroughs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Of course, Steve. Thank you for the work you have done lobbying for that in Croydon where we are testing all this out. I think it is a good way forward. The single conversation is really all about trusting boroughs and giving boroughs the authority to get on with building more affordable housing. I think that if you give them slightly more freedom they will be able to deliver more affordable housing, which they need, and they understand that they need, just as much as we do.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, also in the proposals which the new Government put forward is, I think, to scrap the Minister for London position, which always seemed a rather curious one to me. Can I ask you, are you happy to take over the sort of responsibilities that the Minister for London had? Also, you may remember that one of the final dying acts of the Labour Government was to create a thing called the Select Committee for London. Do you not think that the powers - or whatever they were - of that Select Committee are much better carried out by this body?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. I think it is common ground amongst us all that the idea of taking away the powers of this Assembly and giving them to the Select Committee for London was a complete abomination. It was anti-democratic. I think whether or not you have a Minister for London is a matter of choice. I think Stephen Hammond [Member of Parliament for Wimbledon, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government] is going to do a great job in being, essentially, our link man to the Conservative Government, and we are going to work with him very closely.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

1745/2010 – Meat free Mondays

Jenny Jones

Based on the findings of your report, London's food sector – greenhouse gas emissions, which showed that meat has disproportionately higher associated emissions than other food groups, will you consider supporting the McCartney Family campaign 'Meat Free Mondays' which encourages a reduction in overall meat consumption?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I respect your views very much, Jenny, and I know where you are coming from. I just do not think that I could look at myself in the mirror if I stood up and said I was in favour of meat free Mondays. I am sure there is something to be said for this idea but I just cannot think of it!

Jenny Jones (AM): Would you agree to meet with one of the McCartneys and see if they can convince you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would be more than happy to meet with any representative of the McCartney family, who are landmarks of our national culture, under any circumstances.

Jenny Jones (AM): You do tell us quite often here about your green credentials. I know you are very proud of them. You do not think that reducing meat eating would help reduce our environmental footprint?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I just feel that, in a subject that is already under attack from a great many sceptics and people on the internet who like to go around debunking the overwhelming

scientific opinion, the key thing for us to do is to concentrate on what is really going to make a difference and to concentrate on the big science, and that means reducing carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles, from our homes and tackling the major problems.

I in no way wish to discourage people who may be vegetarian or have religious reasons for abstaining from meat, and that is completely fine and entirely a matter for them. I just do not think it would be sensible for me to make not eating meat a central part of our green campaign. That would be muddling the message.

Jenny Jones (AM): You cannot see that every little helps and that we have all got to do something?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you know what I worry about, Jenny? I think what it would do is play into the hands of those who say that the green agenda is all about bossing and meddling and trying to control people in the most intimate possible way.

Jenny Jones (AM): You are a hypocrite. This is about information. It is not about telling people what to do; it is about information. Anyway, thank you for saying you will meet them. I will pass that message on.

Roger Evans (AM): It is good to see the Greens making good use of their limited ten minutes, Mr Mayor! You may recall your predecessor was actually convinced by the Greens to issue a proclamation to Londoners about how many times they should flush the toilet, and in what circumstances, during the day.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It was at that moment that I decided I had to stand, I remember!

Dee Doocey (Chair): That was not a question. Can I have your question please?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I remember it was on the television and I thought, "This must end"! I saw it.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Mr Evans, your question?

Roger Evans (AM): I think the whole idea was that if you were standing you did not need to flush as I recall! Keep up colleagues! Would it be tempting for you to introduce a waste free Wednesday to ensure that public money is not wasted in future on this type of tokenistic gesture?

Dee Doocey (Chair): We will move on to the next question which is from Brian Coleman about Crown Estate, question 1798.

1798/2010 – Crown Estate

Brian Coleman

Will the Mayor condemn the decision of the Crown Estate Board to proceed with the sale of key worker housing in four London estates, including Cumberland Market, against overwhelming opposition from local residents and from politicians of all parties? Will he urge the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury to intervene in this matter?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not want to say very much about this, Brian, but suffice it to say that I am not happy with the way things are proceeding and we are going to reserve our position on all this.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, have you had a chance to review the proceedings of the [Assembly's] Planning and Housing Committee that took place in this Chamber yesterday, early evening? I suspect you perhaps have not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Brian Coleman (AM): Sir Stuart Hampson [Chairman, Crown Estate] and officials from Crown Estate appeared and failed to convince any Member of any political party - I think I am right in talking for colleagues on this - on the worthiness of its case. Is it not the case that its business case is fundamentally flawed and that it is, in fact, betraying its tenants, and generations of Londoners, who have relied on Crown Estate as a unique housing provider?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are almost certainly right, Brian. We have been here before, I think, under the previous administration with the Church Commissioners. I do not think we want to see the same mistake made again.

Brian Coleman (AM): Will you therefore use your particular contacts in Government and in the Treasury, to whom the Crown Estate supposedly report, but will you also, perhaps, look at the whole issue of the status of the Crown Estate, because last night Sir Stuart Hampson - in my view, in an incredibly patronising manner - virtually declared the Crown Estate was not a public body, did not have a public duty and, therefore, appeared to be responsible to we were not quite sure who? Will you, therefore, perhaps ask the Government to look at the status of the Crown Estate to clarify the anomaly so both politicians and tenants and Londoners know exactly what sort of beast they are dealing with?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that the reality is that no matter who you are and no matter by what right you possess title to land in this city, you have a duty to your tenants and to their continued welfare.

Nicky Gavron (AM): There is a very wide consensus now that what we need in London for key workers is not just part buy/part rent but also we need a new intermediate sub-market rented sector. It does not exist really in London yet and it is in your Housing Strategy. It does not exist apart from a couple of other examples which may be very useful.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sub-market rented sector did you say?

Nicky Gavron (AM): If you are a key worker and you cannot afford to rent in the private sector, you do not qualify for the social rented sector and you will never be able to buy, this is the sector for you. It is crucial. There is a huge swathe of Londoners now who would qualify for intermediate rent. You, yourself, in your Housing Strategy, are pushing the development of this. Not part rent/part buy but intermediate rent with institutional funding, patient money etc. Anyway, the Crown Estate is a shining example, a beacon, of this. All its tenants, practically - I think it was nearly 100% - overwhelmingly wanted to stay as residents and tenants of the Crown Estate because it has been an exemplary landlord.

The issue is now what will happen with this? We want this to go forward. We want this to really work. So if the Treasury --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You want the sale to proceed or you want ...?

Nicky Gavron (AM): No. I chaired the Committee last night. We do not want the sale to proceed. It is really about what you are going to do now. You could actually encourage the Treasury to issue a directive.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said to Brian [Coleman] just now, I do not want to say too much about it because obviously I do not want to tip my hand now, but I am not happy with the way things are going and I have made that point to Sir Stuart [Hampson] already and I propose to do so again.

Nicky Gavron (AM): If you will not issue a directive, what would you then do?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I would like to reserve my position on that now. What I will say is that I do not think that we should be making the same mistake that this body did under the last administration, where the Church Commissioners came forward with a very similar proposal and very similar arguments were made and very similar reassurances were given, and those reassurances turned out not to be valuable. I do not think we should get into that mess. I think you are right about the rights of the Crown Estate tenants and, without wishing to raise the temperature now or to get into some sort of war of words, we intend to do whatever we can to vindicate those rights.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Sir Stuart [Hampson] last night did say - his final summation was - that, in fact, it would not go ahead with the sale unless the conditions protecting the tenants, and that it should be intermediate rented in perpetuity, were safeguarded and that this may lead to no sale. I think that there is a role for you at this point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I agree with that. I actually agree with that. I think, obviously, what the issue will turn on is to what extent we can introduce legally binding commitments on the nature of the tenancies.

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): Mayor Johnson, firstly, can I thank you for the excellent letter that you and other leaders sent to the Crown Estate in March? What we got was a copy of your letter, but I do not know if it is possible to circulate what their response was? That would be useful. I think, from last night, what we got was they seemed willing to take on a number of points that had been put forward by yourself and leaders of the boroughs: Steve Bullock [Mayor of Lewisham], Jules Pipe, Colin Barrow [Leader, Westminster Council], Keith Moffitt [Leader, Camden Council] and Councillor Rahman [Leader, Tower Hamlets Council].

In terms of what you have indicated you are going to do, can you give us an assurance that you will look to using all your powers and also seek some really good legal advice? One of my constituents has done a little bit of work and it would appear one of the individuals who did this very same thing at the Church Commissioners is one of the persons who is leading this now. That seems outrageous that somebody who failed on promises with the Church Commissioners with the very same thing is now leading this so that really is something to attack.

Can I also ask you to confirm whether you did petition the Board in any other way other than this letter? Will you be liaising with the Constituency Members about this as soon as you have the opportunity, once you have carried out further actions that you are indicating?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will see if we can get you the response.

You are certainly right in what you say about the coincidence that the same personnel seem to be involved in this disposal as were involved in the Church Commissioners' business.

As for my previous interventions in this matter, I would have to get back to you but I do remember having a brief conversation, roughly on the same lines as that in the letter, to the Property Development Forum that took place in the Marché International des Professionnels d' Immobilier (MIPIM). I think I also made a verbal intervention on these lines.

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): Thank you for that because the letters from my constituents have not been answered yet and that is something that maybe your office could look through. You might well have been inundated, given that there were a number of letters, but people who are in quite a bit of distress have not had any responses.

Can I just say, there is no option for some of the residents here. There is a lovely lady who wrote to you and she reminded you that she has lived in her home for over 50 years so the threat to the loss of her home is something that is causing her deep distress. So, will you intervene and will you use all powers that you have?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly shall and I thank you for the way that you are representing your constituents. I am sorry that they have not had answers yet and I will make sure that they get answers as soon as possible.

Kit Malthouse (AM): I wanted to underline that in my constituency, I have the Millbank Estate which is part of the disposal programme.

I wanted also to ask you to look very carefully at some of the guarantees that have been given. At the Committee meeting last night it was Andrew Boff who pointed out that the current guarantee on 90% of all new vacancies going for affordable housing will mean that there is a 10% each year diminution in the number of flats that will be available. We managed to extract from Sir Stuart Hampson that meant, over a period of 15 to 20 years, there would be no affordable housing because it is 90% and then 90% and then 90%, so it reduces. In fact, this idea that is being promulgated as some guarantee in perpetuity is nonsense. It is very important that we get those guarantees right. I wondered what influence you might be able to bring to bear, particularly on that guarantee, and what conversations you had had around that proportion? Anything less than 100% will result in a reduction over time. Police officers and fire fighters will be turned out of their homes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Plainly the issue here is that we should be very, very cautious about accepting any of the guarantees because we have seen, previously in respect of the Church Commissioners, that those guarantees did not turn out to be of any value whatever. I am minded to use all legal means at my disposal to vindicate the rights of the tenants that everybody round this horseshoe is representing.

Kit Malthouse (AM): One of the other things that became apparent last night, as Brian Coleman has alluded to, is the peculiar legal status of the Crown Estate. It appears to be a completely autonomous body which is accountable to no one and, as Sir Stuart Hampson pointed out, even if the Treasury wanted to direct it to do things, it cannot do them. It does not have to do what the Treasury tells it because of the way it is set up by the Act.

Given that you are looking at generally and discussing with the Government Mayoral powers across London and the strategic importance of the Crown Estate to central London - it owns vast tracts around Regent Street and other parts of the capital - and this issue, do you think there is a case for the Crown Estate being accountable to you, as Mayor of the city, as the holdings are largely London? Could you persuade the Treasury, who currently benefit from all the income that flows from the Crown Estate, to redirect that money to the Greater London Authority for the benefit of Londoners who largely pay the rent on their properties?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think that anybody would dissent from that suggestion around here. I can imagine the Treasury might. I am grateful to you, Kit for it, and it is certainly something that I will want to be exploring with friends and comrades in Government.

Generally, what I do not want to do now is launch a great war of words. I want to sort this out quickly and make sure that the Crown Estate understands that it is the very, very strong view of democratically elected people in this Assembly that what it is proposing to do is not acceptable.

Kit Malthouse (AM): One of the things that became apparent to the Committee last night was that, actually, the Crown Estate does not care what we think and it certainly did not care what 1,500 residents think. Only 2 indicated support for the transfer and the other 1,498 were against. It became abundantly clear last night that no matter what anybody says it is going to ignore the views of London.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Your question is?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well it is not because it will not be allowed to.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, will you ask Sir Stuart Hampson, if you manage to meet him, about the motive behind the sale? When questioned last night at the Planning and Housing Committee, Sir Stuart indicated that the reason it was doing it was it did not want to contravene the Act that set it up because it had to maximise its income. When I asked him why it was that he was not contravening the Act in 2009, 2008, 2007 and 2006 but, magically, in 2010 it is contravening the Act, he said that there had been a review of its property portfolio which justified this particular action. He would not reveal when the previous review was. I would like you, if you could, Mr Mayor, to enquire when that previous review was and why it is, at the time of that previous review that it did not seem to be contravening the terms of the Act that it is now.

Could you also ask what particular projects it has at the moment which means it needs a windfall of £250 million? Bearing in mind, Mr Mayor, that originally the Crown Estate was set up as a gift from one particular monarch - and I cannot remember who - or a land deal, do you not think the Crown itself should be consulted before any of that is actually disposed of?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think you make the point very well, Andrew. If the Crown Estate is not, in a real sense, an emanation of the State and, therefore, has a duty to its tenants, I do not know what is.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you.

2023/2010 – Serious Youth Violence

Joanne McCartney

Police figures for 2009/10 show that serious youth violence, knife and gun crime are up on the preceding year. Are you satisfied that enough is being done to combat this problem?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Joanne. You ask me whether I am satisfied that enough is being done to combat youth violence, knife and gun crime. We have got to be realistic about this. This is a huge problem in London. It has been for several years. We are working absolutely flat out with the police to deal with it. You may have seen what we did the other day with publicising some stuff around Operation Blunt 2. Londoners will be familiar with what is going on. We have taken huge numbers of knives off the streets. We continue to attach extremely high priority to this. It is absolutely vital that we do this.

Nobody in their right mind could claim that this is a problem that has been eliminated. This is not something that we can claim we have disposed of. The figures continue to be unsatisfactory in the sense that there are too many knife crimes. There is too much youth violence in our city. I would

point out that youth violence is down 10.7% on two years ago when I was elected. The number of youth murders is, overall, significantly down and murder, overall, is down 16.2%. Crime overall is down considerably as well; 5.8%. So there are reductions.

I do not want to sit here and claim that we have got this thing beat because it is a tough one and it will take time and it will take patience and it will mean us dealing, consistently, as a society, with the root causes.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you for that. I think the figures around the most serious youth violence and knife crime are particularly troubling. The last figures for the year to date, particularly the last quarter, had a great peak in serious violence.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They did.

Joanne McCartney (AM): It was up nearly 19% I believe.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It has since come down again.

Joanne McCartney (AM): It has since come down.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are right. You are right.

Joanne McCartney (AM): They show today it is still slightly higher. I know that the police are so worried that they now have weekly meetings with 13 boroughs, where this is an issue, to try to look at this week by week. The main tool in the box that is being used at the moment is stop and search. Your Deputy wrote an article for the *Evening Standard* a short while ago saying that he is acutely aware that the approach is controversial but asked what choice do we have. You came to power, in part, because of your strong stance on youth violence and knife crime and you put into place a Time for Action plan. How is that going? Are we going to see some short term gains from that plan?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In terms of the suppression, yes, we have taken 9,500 knives off the streets and youth violence is down 10.7% and, overall, deaths from knives are very considerably down on two years ago.

Time for Action is a programme that is trying to deal with the root causes. The only big short term gain that I would point to in Time for Action is the Heron Unit, the Project Daedalus at Feltham, which you will be familiar with. That is basically about trying to stop some of the most vulnerable kids who end up in Feltham from re-offending, by having a triage system in the unit so that you take out the ones who are most capable, we think, of being reformed, or being put back on the right path, and you give them special attention. The result has been extremely positive. I can get you the figures but there have been quite a few going through the Heron Unit now from London streets who have benefited from that system and I think we have had one re-offender. Bear in mind that, normally speaking, when you put kids through the penal system, I think you have 75%/80% incidents of recidivism. So that is something that is very, very important and we intend to continue with it.

The other aspects of Time for Action are about mobilising society and trying to give these kids alternative ways of finding the self-esteem and the excitement and all the other things that they get in the gangs. In particular, we are looking at expanding the uniformed groups of one kind or another - the Scouts, the Guides, the Cadets. There are about 75,000 kids in London who take part in them, but there are a huge number on the waiting list who cannot get involved, who cannot join in and we want to expand that by expanding the number of volunteers.

Then, for the kids who are particularly alienated, vulnerable or difficult we are setting up an individual mentoring programme by recruiting 1,000 male mentors for some of the most difficult and disadvantage and alienated kids.

There are other things that we are doing as well. If you had come to the Mayor's Fund annual report that took place yesterday in Shoreditch Town Hall you would have listened to some of the things that we are also supporting. This is a major social problem. These kids are growing up, I am afraid to say, without enough by way of discipline or support or boundaries or all the things that you and I grew up with. No matter how well meaning, no matter how much money and no matter how much effort we put into it, it is very, very difficult for us to replicate that, but we can try, and we are trying, and that is what Time for Action is all about.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I would welcome any information on Daedalus or any other information.

The use of stop and search and the amount of officer time that it takes is very labour intensive. The police service is, undoubtedly, going to face considerable budget pressures. Are you satisfied that the police will be given the resources they need to tackle this issue and that it remains the priority it is at the moment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am. It is very, very important that the police continue to be adequately supported. It is one of the things I was saying to John [Biggs] just now. It is one of the three top things for London. I am determined that, at the end of this Mayoral term in 2012, there will be more officers on the street than there were at the beginning. I will fight, fight, fight to make sure that happens.

Joanne McCartney (AM): One of the best ways of preventing youth violence and crime in general is to ensure young people have training opportunities and jobs, particularly in that 18 to 24 year old group where social services do not really apply.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I should have mentioned what we are doing on apprentices. Yes.

Joanne McCartney (AM): We have heard in the last four weeks that the Government is cutting the 40,000 future job fund places and a lot of them were earmarked for London. There are quite a number of university places being cut which will particularly affect that age group. You have said you are going to create apprenticeships but that is not going to make up for the range of other opportunities that have now been lost because of the Government's programme. I am wondering what lobbying you are doing on that and if you are looking to undertake further action, particularly for that age group?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are doing a huge amount, particularly through the London Skills and Employment Board, and we are launching a campaign to persuade London businesses that apprentices make business sense for them and that if they take on apprentices they will not only be doing a great thing for society, getting someone off the dole and changing their lives, but also they will be getting a valuable future employee. Clearly it is something that we have championed in particular in the GLA group but we want to see it much more widely taken up across London.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Have you lobbied the Government about this loss of training and job opportunities for our young people and have you made representations? If you have not, will you do so?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have certainly made general representations about the need to maintain support for skills and training in London. If you direct me to the relevant announcement I will, of course, take that up with the Government.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Chair, I think most people here know this is a particular subject close to my heart, especially since I have been dragged over the coals both here and in Barking and Dagenham regarding knife crime. Would the Mayor now agree that the figures of minors murdered this year are now level with that of 2008? 2008 - that is the annual year - 36 minors were murdered by knife. This year I think it is around 15/16, so far this year

Kit Malthouse (AM): It is 11; the same as last year.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Different statistics.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Yet again you have got your numbers wrong.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Different statistics. Different people. Do you want to drag me over the coals again?

Dee Doocey (Chair): Allow Mr Barnbrook to ask his question and do not interrupt please.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): The fact is the problem of knife crime amongst minors this year is equivalent to that of 2008.

Kit Malthouse (AM): No, it is not.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): I am not asking you the question! With regards the fact that your Government is now making comments and statements about mandatory sentences with people found with knives, would you be willing to go back to your Government and lobby it - that anybody found with a knife is given a mandatory sentence?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly think that there should be stiffer sentences for people found carrying knives. It is one of my anxieties that the justice system does not support the police in the way that it ought to.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Thank you.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, a little while ago we heard the tragic news about a young girl, Agnes Sina-Inakoju, who was shot in Hoxton. She added to a very sorry list of fatalities amongst young people as a result of gun crime. The irony is that Agnes was, herself, part of a scheme that tried to teach young people about the consequences of their actions and, unfortunately, she paid a price for that.

I fully support the actions that have been taken by the Metropolitan Police Service with regard to diversionary activities for young people and intervention at the appropriate times, but is there not a danger, Mr Mayor, that the young people who are getting the attention are the ones who are already involved in gangs and who are already taking part in anti-social behaviour and the sub-conscious message that could be going out is that, in order to get the attention of the authorities and in order to get your trips and your activities, you have to be involved in the gangs and the anti-social behaviour. In doing the good work that you are doing with regard to motivating young people, can you remind the boroughs that it is up to them as well to provide positive activities for young people before they ever consider getting involved in the gangs that are out there.

Just one small word on violent crime - and I am fully aware of the statistics that prove that violent crime has been reducing. In terms of violent crime amongst young people and crime amongst young

people, I think we have to accept that a lot of that crime is not reported and that crime now appears to be nastier and involve more weapons. Will you talk to the boroughs about getting those people before they even get involved in crime? That is when the time for engagement should be happening and that is when a lot of boroughs are falling short of their duties

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are making a very profound point, I think a lot of our rhetorical focus is on the kids who have gone wrong and we do not talk enough about getting the things to do for the kids who need exciting things like the projects that we are trying to support under London. That is why we are doing it. I think that if you get them young and you get them into exciting, interesting and fun things when they are impressionable, then you have got a much better chance of avoiding them getting involved in crime.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you.

1817/2010 – Birmingham Airport

Richard Tracey

What consideration have you given to studying growth in the use of Birmingham Airport to relieve Heathrow pressure by transporting travellers there by high speed rail link?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Dick. You are asking whether I would consider using Birmingham Airport in order to provide temporary relief to Heathrow. If High Speed Two (HS2) can genuinely hook up London and Birmingham in the way that it is proposed, then patently that does offer a very interesting prospect of using Birmingham's airport capacity to relieve London. I do not think that I would want to repose too much confidence in it, or regard it as a real long term solution. It is something that we are going to look into. We will study it, we will model it and we will certainly discuss it with the Government.

Richard Tracey (AM): I am pleased to hear that because I think we are all wrestling with the question of whether, really, London itself needs any greater airport capacity, with the existing airports and with all the problems about overflying the capital to get to Heathrow. At the same time your study into a possible airport in the estuary obviously seems to meet with a certain amount of opposition from our political colleagues in Kent and so on. So I think that Birmingham does become a really likely and viable option.

If the high speed link goes ahead it will take 45 minutes to get from London to Birmingham and I believe it takes 45 minutes now to get from Liverpool Street to Stansted, which is one of the London airports and, indeed, over 30 minutes to get to Gatwick. I would encourage you to talk to the Birmingham authorities if I may because they are keen on expanding Birmingham Airport which is a real prospect.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are. You are quite right, Dick, and it is right to think completely laterally like this. Literally, laterally or in a northern way. There is spare capacity at Birmingham - enough to take another nine million passengers - and, patently, it is something that we should be thinking about.

Richard Tracey (AM): Yes. Thank you.

Darren Johnson (AM): Richard [Tracey] just mentioned the Thames Estuary Airport. We have had a range of different comments from you over the past few months with different degrees of enthusiasm. Is it time to put this whole project out of its misery now and just end any work on the Thames Estuary Airport?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think so, no.

Darren Johnson (AM): So you are still going to spend money on entertaining this fantasy, in spite of having no local support and no national support for it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Dick [Tracey] has just raised a very interesting point about Birmingham. We are going to pursue that, but I think it would be wrong of us not to look at all possible solutions for London's long term aviation needs.

Steve O'Connell (AM): On the same point around the Birmingham Airport and possible extension of a fast link, my only concern, Mr Mayor - and I would be interested in your comments around that - is the environmental damage that may spring from a fresh fast track rail link. I would like to be assured that it would be on an existing track because, at the end of the day, we could be protecting an environmental problem within our town merely to pass the environmental damage across what is a very crowded island. Mr Mayor, I would welcome your thoughts around the high speed rail link and whether you would also express some caution before we get too carried away with ourselves and before we plough up most of the shires between here and Birmingham?

Dee Doocey (Chair): Mr Mayor, before you answer could I ask you to contain your answer to Birmingham, because the next question is a question from Murad Qureshi on City Airport. I just do not want there to be duplication.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously I do not represent either Birmingham or the intervening territory but I can imagine that there will be considerable rejection, not least from people living in the Chilterns, to the proposal for HS2. I think we are very far from having a national accord on this matter.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Mr Mayor, one last point. If you could share with me congratulations of the present Mrs O'Connell on her 50th birthday and she decided - and she will kill me for this - to come up here to be entertained by your good self and our Assembly

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I feel very guilty in that case because I have been under strict instructions from the Chair not to try to entertain anybody and to be as terse as I possibly can but many congratulations. Happy Birthday.

Richard Barnes (AM): Mr Mayor, can I remind you, you do represent people who will be affected by the HS2 running through South Harefield, Ruislip, Hillingdon and parts of west London. Before a route is finalised I would trust that we as an Assembly, and you as a Mayor, would talk and consult with people who will be adversely affected by any new route, as against using existing track.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Whatever happens, it is vital that any HS2 route makes sense for London. That is why I think it is important that there should be a link with Old Oak Common and that the line should go into Heathrow without some unnecessary loop.

Richard Barnes (AM): Agreed.

2011/2010 – City Airport/Thames Estuary Airport

Murad Qureshi

What was the outcome of the last Thames Estuary Airport Steering Group meeting?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The outcome of the last meeting of the Thames Estuary Airport Steering Group was that it had a good discussion. I was there for part of it. It is preparing various reports which I will receive in due course.

Murad Qureshi (AM): OK. Mayor, we were surprised that it was happening during the election period, on 29th. As far as we could see, nothing has been posted so far, not even an agenda, and Doug Oakervee attended by video link.

The two questions I want to raise are your pursuit of some powers over the Port of London Authority in your attempt to get a Board Member at the Port of London Authority (PLA). I was wondering whether this is a cunning plan to give legitimacy to your intentions in the Thames Estuary, given that it has got a jurisdiction there and you do not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The PLA?

Murad Qureshi (AM): Yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Murad, as ever you see a cunning plot that I had not even thought of!

Murad Qureshi (AM): You will not deny you are not pursuing that though are you? You are not denying that you are not pursuing a Board Member on the Port of London Authority?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We certainly do think that there is a very good case for us having more say over the Port of London Authority and that is what we are lobbying for.

Murad Qureshi (AM): I am trying to work out to what purpose though?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are several reasons. We want to encourage greater use of the wharves that are through the city. We want to, in particular, increase the use of river transport. We think that we can be gently influential - and Dick Tracey has done a lot of great work on this - with the PLA to get more people using the river. It is a great way to get around this city and we think that, by getting some kind of more formal relationship between the GLA and the PLA, it would be possible to build up river transport.

Murad Qureshi (AM): OK. I just hope you are not getting ahead of yourself on the Thames Estuary part.

Last week when I was at the Heathrow Airport Consultative Committee it was reported that the numbers of those employed at Heathrow Airport has increased, up to 75,000. That is probably due to security people being employed. What security of employment are you going to offer them in your discussions about shifting the focus of aviation to the Thames Estuary Airport? Most of those people work in Hounslow, Hillingdon and Ealing and they may not want to move.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Heathrow is a great airport and nobody is proposing to close Heathrow. The problem is that to get to Heathrow you have to fly over so much of the rest of London. The difficulty, therefore, is to expand Heathrow without gravely inconveniencing the lives of Londoners. That is why I am against the third runway.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Can we keep to the question please? The question is not about employment.

Murad Qureshi (AM): It was actually because I think that needs to be on the agenda of the Thames Estuary Airport Steering Group as and when it meets.

Dee Doocey (Chair): The question was what was the outcome of the last Thames Estuary Airport Steering Group meeting.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Indeed.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): On the Thames Estuary Airport did you discuss this project with the Secretary of State or with any Government Minister over the last few weeks, or have you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have had a series of general discussions about aviation generally, making many of the points that I have just made to Murad [Qureshi] with colleagues in Government over the last three years.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): OK. In terms of a new Government, can you perhaps name any member of the Government who actually supports your plans for a Thames Estuary Airport?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can certainly name a great many members of the Government who are passionately opposed to a third runway at Heathrow and who have successfully kyboshed the third runway at Heathrow who are, therefore, amenable to ideas such as the one that Dick [Tracey] brought before us earlier on, to exploring aviation solutions around London, on the assumption that simply relying on high speed rail for the next century may not be provident.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): No, I am talking about the Thames Estuary Airport which this question is about. Are there any members of the Government who actually supports your plans for a Thames Estuary Airport?

Dee Doocey (Chair): You are getting away from the question, Caroline.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I take it there are none. Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you would be wrong if that was your assumption.

Roger Evans (AM): Residents in my part of London are concerned about the increase in over flights which they are suffering, the noise particularly but also the pollution aspects of the change in the flight paths and increasing flights out of City Airport - which is mentioned in the title of this question even though it did not make it into the body. Could you update us on the current position with regard to expansion of City Airport, with our Environment Committee due to visit and due to carry out a review of the decision?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I think I said to this Assembly last time, we are looking into that matter. Plainly the decision to expand flights at City Airport would have a greater impact on the lives of people in this city than perhaps was at first appreciated and it is something that, I think, needs to be considered very carefully.

Jenny Jones (AM): Can you explain to me why this fantasy airport of yours is any different from the schemes that Ken Livingstone [Mayor of London 2000-2008] had that you described as fantasies? Things like the Cross River Tram. The Cross River Tram was supported by hundreds of thousands of people in south east London, but your fantasy airport is only supported by you. Why is this any different?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You keep talking about this fantasy airport.

Jenny Jones (AM): Why is it any different? You condemned Ken [Livingstone] for having fantasies. You are doing just the same. Is this a problem of being a Mayor?

Dee Doocey (Chair): Jenny, that is not a question about the outcome of the last Thames Estuary Airport Steering Group meeting.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me make two points. The first point is, in a way, I think I am entitled to think about issues in a long term way and, I think, one of the reasons to have a Mayor is that you have got to think about the way the city relates to the rest of the national economy, you have got to think about the whole Greater London area and I do think it is part of our function to look at the long term future of aviation in this city.

I think it is perfectly reasonable for me to have a long term vision of expanding prosperity and opportunity in the east of London and, maybe, it would not be so crazy to think of a Thames Estuary Airport which would have many advantages.

Jenny Jones (AM): But Londoners already complain about flights. You have got all of these people over here. Their residents are complaining about the flights.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hang on. For a part of London that has been neglected. The second point is I would make a distinction between my visions and the delusions and fantasies of Ken [Livingstone], the former Mayor.

Jenny Jones (AM): Fantasies.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Unlike the former Mayor, I have not wasted hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money. I have not fire hosed money down the drain, unlike the previous Mayor, on ludicrous plans that he never brought to fruition.

Jenny Jones (AM): You are wasting my money.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am working very carefully, methodically, logically to advance the proposition that you cannot simply rely on Heathrow forever if there is going to be no third runway at Heathrow

1900/2010 – Dalston Junction

Andrew Boff

Was it worth demolition of the Dalston Theatre and other heritage buildings, the construction of 20 storey blocks of flats with no affordable housing and the expenditure of £40 million on a slab of concrete just so that one bus (the 488) can stop at Dalston Junction?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Andrew, I am told that you have scored a media coup on this matter this morning and you have been on the telly, or something, on this and I congratulate you on that.

I am afraid I am just parroting what it says here because I did not have the advantage of seeing you on the television this morning. I am told that the claim that the bus stop at Dalston has gone £24 million over budget is not something that we can stand up. We are looking into it. I am going to take up your point this afternoon, with David Brown [Managing Director, Surface Transport, Transport for London].

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. The £21 million I found out about before the question so that is why it does not actually feature in the question comes from the London Development Agency minutes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. Right.

Andrew Boff (AM): What this was, Mr Mayor, was a vanity scheme by TfL who promised a grand new bus interchange at Dalston, the cost of which would be a £40 million slab of concrete to be built over the East London line extension. For that Dalston lost heritage buildings, the tower blocks that are going to be built on top of the slab are going to have no affordable housing in them whatsoever, and it actually turns out, as anybody visiting Dalston would like to see, that what we have actually paid for, because of this carnage for the local heritage in the area.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Your question, Mr Boff?

Andrew Boff (AM): What we have actually got is one bus stop for either £40 million or £60 million which the London Development Agency (LDA) seems to confirm in its minutes. Mr Mayor, this happened because this regeneration scheme did not listen to local people. What I am asking you to do is to look, if you may, Mr Mayor, at the history of this scheme and make sure that this never, ever, ever happens again. It is an appalling waste of public money. Public money that should have been going into solving some of the deep social problems of the area. Instead, what we have is a bus stop. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Andrew, I am grateful to you for drawing this to my attention in the passionate way that you have and I will certainly take it up with TfL and see what it has got to say about it.

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): Andrew is confusing two things. The issue about the heritage building that was lost is absolutely on the other side of the road to the slab and that is Dalston Theatre. No one has performed in Dalston Theatre since about 1995. On the other issue about the slab, it is absolutely on record: It was £39 million that was spent on that slab. I do appreciate that Andrew lives locally, but I do wish that he would actually stay with facts.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Your question, Jennette?

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): Will you copy me into any correspondence that you have with Andrew Boff on this because my constituents do not need further confusion on this matter from Mr Boff raising this matter at this time?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have told Andrew that I will look into the matter that he raises. Whether it is £39 million or £40 million; it seems to be a lot of money to spend on a slab. So I will look at it.

Andrew Boff (AM): I am more than happy for Jennette to be copied in and I welcome her late attention to this scandal.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Andrew indicates he is happy for you to be copied in.

1843/2010 – Royal Parks (2)

Tony Arbour

Can you confirm that when the Royal Parks Agency comes under your jurisdiction, you will scrap the planned parking charges in Richmond and Bushy Parks?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. The answer is yes, Tony.

Tony Arbour (AM): Good. Are you aware that the Royal Parks Agency has just submitted a planning application to put in the paraphernalia which is required for charging for parking in the Richmond and Bushy Parks?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hope very much that the plans that it is putting in to effect will be ditched before the transfer of the management of the parks to the GLA, which is due to happen. Even if it goes ahead, we will scrap the parking charges planned.

Tony Arbour (AM): Do I understand from what you have said, therefore, that you're taking of control over these parks very soon?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it can be done very quickly. I will have to check. I am not certain that we need primary legislation to do this but I will have to check.

Tony Arbour (AM): That would be marvellous. Are you anticipating that the funding of these parks will come over to you, or are you going to be expected to fund these from the precept?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. It is very important that there should be no budget dump as they call it and it is very important that we should be given the dowry of the funding for the parks along with the parks themselves.

Tony Arbour (AM): OK. Simon Milton, when he said that there would be no charging for parking in these parks, appeared to limit to your Mayoralty. Is there any way that you can entrench free parking in the parks?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know that I could fetter the discretion of any future Mayor but, clearly, it is one of the risks of having a different Mayor.

Tony Arbour (AM): Can we hope, therefore, that in your second term as Mayor that you will -

Darren Johnson (AM): Has he announced he is standing?

Tony Arbour (AM): That is what I am seeking to establish! There will be no charging in the park so long as you are Mayor. You may even wish to be Mayor for life, as your predecessor wished to be.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it highly likely that there will be no parking charges in Richmond and Bushes Parks for a very long time to come.

Tony Arbour (AM): Would it be your view, Mr Mayor, that a sensible way of dealing with getting additional income from these two parks might be the installation of honesty boxes, as we have in our cathedrals and museums?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a very interesting idea. We will certainly be prepared to look at it. Can I suggest you take it up with Anthony Browne [Mayoral Police Director for Economic Development] who will be taking a keen interest in this matter?

Tony Arbour (AM): Thanks very much.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, when taking over the Royal Parks Agency will you ask your officers to look at the way that the City Corporation runs its open spaces - Hampstead Heath, Epping Forest and other places - and the collaborative manner in which it runs them, with genuine representation from community groups and elected representatives involved in the management of the parks?

Secondly, will you ensure that events that are held in the Royal Parks continue to enjoy community support? In particular I am thinking, for example, of the very successful Camden Green Fair which was held in Regent's Park over the weekend, whereas the failed proposals for football fan zones did not enjoy public support in my constituency. So will you ensure that, when it comes to events, these are events with genuine community support?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. There can be no better way of making sure that the wishes of Londoners are better reflected in deciding which events should take place in the parks, and which should not, than to give the parks to the GLA and have a measure of democratic oversight.

Kit Malthouse (AM): In respect of parking charges, can I invite you to consider that while Tony Arbour's residents enjoy free parking in the Royal Parks which you are guaranteeing, my residents do not in their local parks and, therefore, my residents are, in effect, subsidising the maintenance of Richmond Park for the pleasure of Tony Arbour. We would welcome the introduction of honesty boxes in the Royal Parks in central London for the relief of the extremely high charges that are levied on my residents for using the parks. I wondered whether you would bear that in mind before you favour the residents of south west London over those of central London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am grateful to Kit for his suggestion and we will certainly look into his suggestion, though I do not think I can offer him any immediate relief on that point.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Just on events, to echo Brian Coleman's words about community support for events, if you do take over the Royal Parks - which I sincerely hope you do - can you give us some guarantees that the large scale events which take place, particularly in Hyde Park and Regent's Park, which cordon off huge tracks of the park and make them unusable by residents and, in particular, from a noise point of view has caused persistent problems, will come to an end and that parks will return to what they are supposed to be, which is parks rather than pop venues?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Right. I can see that taking over the Royal Parks is not going to be an easy business and I can see that this is going to be what they call a political poison chalice, but I do not care because I think it is democratically important that we should take it over. I think that what the inevitable result is going to be is that there will be all sorts of points made like that and I am afraid, from time to time, I am just going to have to say to the beautiful, lovely, well-heeled residents of wherever it happens to be, that they are, from time to time, going to have to put up with a bit of noise. That is the reality but we will be as sensitive and as amenable to their wishes as we possibly can.

What I cannot say now is that, in taking over the Royal Parks of London, we have a plan to repastoralise them, to put cows back or to turn them back into Royal hunting forests or whatever they were originally proposed for. They are there to be an amenity for the whole city, they are there for everybody to use and to enjoy and, from time to time, there will be events and there will be things that we want to put on in the parks that will be greatly to the benefit and enjoyment of all Londoners, particularly Londoners who do not have the good fortune to live near a wonderful Royal Park.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Just relating to our previous subject of the Crown Estate, one of the issues that the Royal Parks face, particularly Regent's Park but also Hyde Park, is that properties within the park - houses and others and there were a few - that are rented, the money from those properties flows to the Crown Estate, rather than being reinvested in the parks. One of the things that you could lobby the Treasury for, to alleviate the need for the Royal Parks to run these vast events and thereby prejudice other private sector venues such as ExCeL or O2?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Or parking charges.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Or, indeed, have to levy parking charges, is to receive those very, very substantial rentals, particularly in Regent's Park, for reinvestment in the parks.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are right, Kit. That is something you and I have discussed in the past. We are certainly on to that. I know Anthony Browne will be taking it up.

Kit Malthouse (AM): OK. Thank you.

Richard Tracey (AM): I want to lend support to my colleague, Tony Arbour, who represents, of course, Richmond, as part of his constituency, because my residents in Putney are very grateful for the removal of this threat of parking charges, and so will the Member of Parliament for Putney, Justine Greening, be very grateful.

The fact is that Richmond Park is very much larger than Hyde Park and Regent's Park and others that colleagues here have mentioned. Frankly, for the local people to be able to enjoy Richmond Park they do need to get in there in their cars to the car park in the centre of the park. So I think there is a slight difference in the arguments here.

The other thing, Mr Mayor, may I ask you, when you do take over Richmond Park particularly, will you consider reopening Robin Hood Gate because there was another slightly zany decision taken a few years ago by the Royal Parks Agency and the Government then to close it and it has caused quite a degree of traffic chaos since that time. Wandsworth Council would very much welcome any intervention you can make.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Dick. I think your point about the difference between the central London parks and outer London parks that are not quite so well served by public transport is very well made.

The point about Robin Hood Gate I will look into. That is what I say on that.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can see this is going to run and run, this one. We are all in this together. Come on.

Darren Johnson (AM): Following up on your previous comments, would you agree that some of the important rock concerts and other things like Blur's reunion in Hyde Park last year play a really important part in the cultural life of London and not simply a money grabbing exercise, and are something that are enjoyed by many, many Londoners from across the city, and that events like that should continue?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I am delighted to hear the Member for the Green Party calling for the trampling of all manner of flowers and the destruction of the undergrowth and shrubberies of all kinds in the name of popular enjoyment!

Darren Johnson (AM): Absolutely!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What it shows, if I may say so, are the limits of Green politics and that, from time to time, even the environment must give place to common sense!

2005/2010 – London Taxis

Richard Barnbrook

Do you envisage many black cab taxi drivers being forced to give up earning a living as London Taxi drivers when age limits on Taxis are imposed on the fleet in 2012?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I do not think that taxi drivers will have to give up earning their livings and it is very, very important that we protect a trade and a service that is, as I say, of huge importance to transport in London.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Right. Thank you, Chair. Obviously I do not want to twitter on about this. I do use black cabs when I can. Not as much as Mr Coleman but I do use them if I lose my motorbike or my push bike. I was at the two demonstrations previous to Wednesday's with the black cab drivers round Aldwych and they were seriously concerned about this scrappage scheme. I would like to ask, how are the negotiations going with central government on a scrappage scheme for the black cabs for 2012 and 2015 regarding the amount that are going to be taken off the streets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The context of all this is that black cabs, although they are wonderful, do constitute a serious proportion, 20%, of particulate exhaust emissions in central London, where the problem is at its worst, so we have got to help the black cabs to make their vehicles cleaner in agreement with the representatives of the cab industry. We have agreed our age limits and I want to see us moving to more fuel efficient vehicles

Richard Barnbrook (AM): That is all quite beautiful and green, Mayor, but what I would like to know is how are the negotiations going with central government on a scrappage scheme? What sort of recompense will come to the black cab drivers if these vehicles are taken off the road in 2012 and 2015?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What we are proposing is that, from 2012, there should be a 15 year age limit.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): 15?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): 15 year age limit for taxis in 2012. I think that is reasonable. These vehicles will have done a lot of service and I think it is important that we should move towards cleaner vehicles and to improving our air quality.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Mayor, I fully understand this. Not everybody here does. What you are not answering here - and I am going to come to this again and again in the next minute and a half - what scrappage scheme have you discussed with the Government and what recompense will be going out to these black cab drivers that may have four years to pay off a car they have bought second hand down the line as it goes through, over that 10/15 year period? One particular guy, for example, has got four years left on. It ends in 2015. By 2010 it is going to be over 15 years old. What compensation will the Government give to these black cabbies to get their cars crushed?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are talking to Government about the possibility of help with a scrappage scheme, but the reason I am not making much of it is that we do not have the details agreed by any manner of means and I do not want people to run away with the idea that there are huge sums of public money available to buy in these vehicles because we are in very difficult circumstances.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Let me put it another way --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think that most black cab drivers will agree that 15 years is a good age for a vehicle by 2012. Anybody who is behind a black cab in traffic will know that some of them really do pump out a lot of fumes and a lot of particulates.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): The question is, Mayor, you are quite willing to move back the time for the Low Emission to 2012; why are you not willing to do something quite positive regarding these taxi drivers?

Dee Doocey (Chair): Mr Barnbrook, you are out of time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would like to do something positive. I just do not want to promise here and now to the Member unlimited public funds for a scrappage scheme when it is not yet agreed.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): £10,000 is money from the cab drivers.

1967/2010 – Health services in London

Mike Tuffrey

What scope is there for the GLA to have more of a role over health services in London? How would you ensure any new powers are matched by increasing accountability to Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think, Mike, there are lots of ways. I think we should have a strategic impact into the way health services are generally configured in London. I think there is a role for greater democratic accountability to this body.

I think the primary way that this body should be responsible for healthcare in London is in promoting public health. So many of our policies and so much of what we talk about and so much of our conversation earlier on today was about air quality or transport or modes of transport. We are there to promote healthy living in all kinds of ways. I think that there is a lot that we could be doing here in this body on public health. That does not mean we have to become the lead nanny in the city, but there are things you can do, with the very considerable public health budgets, on a pan-London basis. If you look at what happens in London, the money is divided up across the city. I think a bit of concerted action would pay dividends.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I am very pleased to hear you say that because the reason I put the question down was I was concerned that, in the discussion about the changing governance of London, health has not been present. It was not in the Conservative mini-manifesto, A New Settlement for London's Government.

It seems to me there is an opportunity, with the abolition of the strategic health authority that is now going ahead in London, with NHS London effectively being abolished and commissioning being done elsewhere, to beef up our input into planning in London, to take the London only issues. Unless we act now that will go by default. Will you agree to join with whoever - including ourselves in terms of talking to Andrew Lansley [Secretary of State for Health] and others in Government - about ensuring that the regional input to health planning in London is cemented in and does not go, by default - as at present it does, because we have a Health Strategy done here which everybody then just ignores.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I think there should be greater regional input. I had regular conversations obviously with Ruth Carnall [Chief Executive, NHS London] and Richard Sykes [Chairman, NHS London] and the London Strategic Health Authority (SHA). I am very grateful, by the way, to Richard [Sykes] for all the work that he did.

There is a slight limit here to our power grab mentality. I am concerned that we should not bite off more than we can really chew with the health service. I think there is scope for us to be consulted and to have a role in looking at the strategic priorities for London. You may disagree and I would be interested if you do but I do not think we should be trying, in this place, to run healthcare in London.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): No, no. It is about strategic input. Not hordes of bureaucrats running things but writing in, for example, a duty to have regard to your strategy which currently is not there; they can just ignore it and they are ignoring it and they have done for years.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is reasonable. I personally see real opportunities in the public health side of things. I think that there are huge sums of money being spent on this but they are being spent in penny packets across London in all sorts of different schemes with no real concerting of effort. This is something that we could make a big difference on.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I have got a practical suggestion for you on that. Currently within the Government Office for London - which, certainly from this side, we are very pleased is being abolished - there is a regional public health group, which is an offshoot of the Department of Health. If we are not careful that will simply go upwards so the consequences of abolishing GOL will be London's public health group will go national. We should be making a particular bid - and get Pam Chesters [Mayoral Advisor on Health and Youth Opportunities] on to it - to bring that down because nation civil servants will just take stuff off nationally unless we watch them. So that is a very practical thing. Will you look at that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will. We have had a good conversation already with Ruth [Carnall] about this. I would be grateful if you could take it up with Pam [Chesters] --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Yes, I will do.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): She is very much of your way of thinking.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Good. A third suggestion is around the London Ambulance Service which is the only emergency blue light service that is not part of this. It seems to me the London Ambulance Service could become a functional body, as with fire and police, and then we would get joined up. Already there are patient transport issues that would team up across with TfL, and the whole civil emergency side would team up with other work that is already going so. So that would be another one that could be brought down to regional level.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I like the idea. I think possibly I had better take it up with representatives of the emergency services, from TfL.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Yes, but they will not like it of course because it is change. It does not like change. Just a bit of history for you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me look into, Mike.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): When the Conservatives set up the Greater London Council (GLC) originally they put the London Ambulance Service under the GLC, and it was only taken off the GLC in, I think, 1971. So a bit of history. Bring it back. Thank you, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can you tell us why it was taken off?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Presumably because they wanted to nationalise it, to take it up nationally.

Roger Evans (AM): Under the previous Labour Government there were proposals, which are now set aside gladly, to close King George's Hospital in Redbridge and transfer services to elsewhere. Unfortunately, when the health service in London was making those types of proposals, it did not consult Transport for London very well about the provision of public transport for the new services so, regardless of what happens in future, can you make sure that Transport for London works more closely with the health service in London so that it actually knows what each other is doing and they are providing services which are of use to residents?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Plainly that was one of the objections that people had to the various closure programmes; that they did not take sufficient account of people's ability to get to the Accident and Emergencies that were under threat and, certainly, we will make sure that TfL is fully involved in any future consultations.

1825/2010 – Local Implementation Plan Funding

James Cleverly

Given the increasing financial restraints which will inevitably affect councils, will you consider giving local authorities greater flexibility to decide how they spend their Local Implementation Plan funding?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely, James. Good question. We have already taken steps to do this as you know; to give the boroughs more flexibility to spend the Local Implementation Plans (LIPs) as they see fit.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. I would welcome - and indeed the conversations I have had at borough level they do welcome - the increased flexibility in the utilisation of LIPs funding but, as is always the case with boroughs, they like what you have done and they would like you to do more of it.

The situation we have at the moment is that your Transport Strategy is far more sympathetic to the needs of outer London than previous versions of Mayor's Transport Strategies but it is, by definition, a London-wide document. Would you agree that the boroughs are actually in the best position to be able to get that detailed needs assessment done, with regards to transport in their borough areas?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly think that the boroughs have a very important role in contributing to an assessment of their transport needs but, clearly, it is the job of TfL to make a strategic judgement about the whole city.

James Cleverly (AM): I certainly would agree that it is the role of TfL to put in the broad parameters but I will give you an example. In Bromley there is a desire to use LIPs funding for a car park. Now, at face value, that would seem to be in contradiction to your Transport Strategy but the car park in question is to enable people not currently served by surface rail to park closer to a public transport node which will assist them in modal shift, rather than their habit currently of driving the whole journey length. So you can see some things which, on the face of it, might not seem naturally to fit within your strategies actually can be important. Could you envisage projects like that actually being able to draw down from LIPs funding in the future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Plainly a car park that facilitates the use of public transport may well cohere with what we are trying to do with TfL. I think we have got very broadminded transport engineers at TfL. If they are made to understand the benefits of this project for modal shift and for getting people to use public transport, then it may very well be acceptable. Without being, here and now, to study the plan I think I would be unwise to comment in detail.

James Cleverly (AM): I understand it is going to be very difficult for you to give assurances at this time but if the appalling financial legacy that we have inherited from the previous Government means that the LIPs funding going to borough levels is reduced in totality, will you ensure that any reduction in that is matched with an even greater flexibility in usage to give the boroughs the best opportunity to maximise the financial efficiency of what funds they do get?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will do whatever we can to maintain and to maximise borough flexibility that is consistent with the broad objectives that we have and the duty we have to serve the needs of the entire London population.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor.

1828/2010 – Outer London Commission (1)

Steve O’Connell

What benefit will residents of outer London see as a result of the work of the Outer London Commission?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Steve, the Outer London Commission has, I think, made a good and very worthwhile contribution to our thinking about how to promote the needs of outer London. You have just heard some of the thinking from James [Cleverly] about flexibility on transport. It has been a very valuable exercise. I think that one of the important functions of the Outer London Commission is to emphasise the vital economic role that outer London plays and the huge potential it has in generating jobs and growth in the future in London.

Steve O’Connell (AM): Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. First of all I would like to echo the comments of James [Cleverly] about welcoming the flexibility around LIP funding. That has been greatly welcomed by outer London boroughs. I would also welcome things like the investment infrastructure in the East London line. I would also welcome your support for moving civil servants from inner London to outer London. So there are some pieces around the work that are particularly applauded.

Mr Mayor, I tend to think - and it is the thoughts of some other colleagues - that the work of the Outer London Commission has been something of a missed opportunity. I would like your comments around that. I know at the beginning it was flagged up, the premise of super hubs, and I can see why that would not be popular with those boroughs that were not designated as super hubs. Clearly, I was very supportive of Croydon of being so.

My question to you, Mr Mayor, is that the principle behind your Mayoralty being fair and equitable around the treatment of outer London boroughs, unlike your predecessor, was an absolutely spot on idea from the beginning. You put together a thoughtful number of people within the Commission. One of them is my leader in Croydon. Having studied the work and the conclusions of the Commission, I have to say that I sense it is a missed opportunity and I have to say that I sense a disappointment within the people of outer London as to where we have arrived at after the lengthy work of that esteemed body. Could you comment on that disappointment that I tend to feel, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand what you are saying. The Outer London Commission, if you remember, ran up the flagpole this idea of the super hubs and, basically, that one did not run at all. There was not much enthusiasm for a super hub concept. But I do think that the work of Sir William McKee [Chair, Outer London Commission] and others has been valuable. Lots of points are made about what kind of affordable housing to build, the vital importance of building

family housing, of not building on green space, of being sensitive to the needs of road users, of thinking of ways - as James [Cleverly] was just saying - of integrating public transport and the motor car. Not, for instance, proceeding with new local taxes on motorists and not having new local congestion charges.

I think that there has been some very, very valuable work done by the Outer London Commission and I am grateful to it for what it did.

Steve O'Connell (AM): All I will say, Mr Mayor, is I would urge you to breathe some life into the project for the outer London boroughs. As you are aware, you are, by reputation, a Mayor for all of London - as I have said earlier - unlike your predecessor, but the outer London boroughs do look to you for support. I would urge you to breathe more life into this project and whether the work continues as the Outer London Commission or, indeed, the work continues within this Assembly to take that further.

I have one last question for you. In the Outer London Commission it does come up with some conclusions and recommendations and one is it sees a potential for road user charging in the longer term. Will you, Mr Mayor, rule out road user charges whilst you are in office?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will. One of the risks in the future is there may be a Mayor who decides to impose road user charging on the people of outer London. I think that would be a retrograde step. It is not the way that other cities are going across the world. I do not think that would be the way to go for outer London.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know it has its supporters in the Labour Party, this proposal.

James Cleverly (AM): Mr Mayor, the needs of outer London will evolve. Can I ask you to ensure that you do not regard the work of the Outer London Commission as being a singular piece of work not to be repeated and that the needs of outer London are always part of the planning process that you go through? May I also remind you that a number of colleagues of yours around this horseshoe are the representatives of outer London and would be more than happy to ensure that you are constantly reminded of the needs and desires of our residents.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. I am grateful to you, James and to Steve [O'Connell] and other Members here for all that you do to champion the needs of outer London and they are very, very dear to our hearts here.

Richard Tracey (AM): Just briefly, Mr Mayor, I think, if you are going to take forward the thinking about outer London, may I suggest that you might look at reorganising the Commission? I got the impression there were far too many academics that were, perhaps, not really in touch with the needs of outer London and you may well find that there are other people that could be much more representative.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I take that point. I hear what you say. Tony Pidgley [Commissioner, Outer London Commission], I think, served very well on the Commission. William McKee. We will look at that. I am told by John Biggs there were too many lefties on the Commission!

1792/2010 – Ministerial Appointments

Brian Coleman

Will the Mayor congratulate Bob Neill MP, former Conservative Leader on the London Assembly, former Havering Councillor and GLC member and former Leader of the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority, on his appointment as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Communities and Local Government and note his particular briefs of Fire, Thames Gateway and Olympics? Does the Mayor not think it is a refreshing change to have a Minister with relevant knowledge and expertise?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes!

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, is it not a refreshing change that, not only do we have a Minister in Bob Neill [Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department of Communities and Local Government] who knows about London issues but, of course, in Baroness Hanham [Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department of Communities and Local Government], who knows intimately on London issues and local government matters? Whereas we have had to put up with, I think, 12 Fire Ministers in 10 years, do we not wish these Ministers a long period of service and will you ensure that they deal intimately with you and Members of this Assembly on a regular basis?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think you are right to single out both Bob [Neill] and Stephen Hammond [Member of Parliament for Wimbledon, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government]. They have already done excellent work for London and we will continue to work very closely with them.

1972/2010 – Institutional Investment in Private Rental

Mike Tuffrey

What progress has been made in London with the HCA's Private Rental Sector Initiative?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. The honest truth, Mike, here is that this is something that I think the HCA has not made - and this is not the London HCA, but the HCA nationally - as much progress as it should have done, and as I would like to see. The great opportunity, as I think it was Nicky [Gavron] was saying earlier, is to get the pension funds to help support the rented sector and help invest in that. That is proving slower than we had hoped.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Good. Again, the purpose for putting down the question was to make sure that you have not taken your eye off that ball. It is very important that the shape of our housing market in the UK is unlike some other European countries in the private rented.

My concern - and I would just ask you to respond on this point - is that the HCA had identified six big sites where the private rented initiative might be piloted, and I am concerned that, with the round of expenditure reductions that inevitably are going on, we do not lose the proverbial baby with the bath water and that, because it has been tied to particular sites that might now not be able to be brought forward, we must not lose the focus on the private sector rented initiative.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, you are absolutely right. We are pursuing it. On the six sites, there are commercial discussions going on with some interested parties but I cannot give you those names, for obvious reasons.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): So long as it has not been forgotten. That is fine. Thank you.

1818/2010 – Crossrail

Richard Tracey

8 of the 37 Crossrail stations will be outside London. Would the Mayor agree that if the Government is looking to reduce the financial burden of Crossrail, it should ensure that businesses in the towns outside of London that directly benefit from Crossrail pay the same supplementary business rates as London businesses?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think, really, the question has already been asked by, I think it was Steve O'Connell, about making sure that regions that benefit from Crossrail pay up, and the answer is certainly, yes. We are continuing that campaign.

Richard Tracey (AM): I am pleased to hear that and I was pleased with what you said to Steve O'Connell. I think the significant thing is that, certainly in parts of the west of London, there are some very large companies and some very large industries that will be benefiting from Crossrail. For example, in Slough alone, Mars; O2; Nintendo; Black; Decker and Dulux Paints. All of those who, surely, ought to be making some contribution to this. There are a whole lot more out there in Silicon Valley; I think it is called, out round Maidenhead. They are not. Meanwhile, our boroughs in London, and the companies in them, are being expected to pay. That is surely unfair, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are right. It is a point that I made at the last Crossrail summit. It is a point I continue to make. If there is any doubt cast on the future of Crossrail, which there should not be and there will not be, it would be outrageous if that source of financing was not looked at as a matter of urgency.

Richard Tracey (AM): Yes. Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It should be looked at anyway, is the point I want to make.

1776/2010 – Bus fare increases

Darren Johnson

Will you guarantee that the proposed cut of £108m in the transport grant for London will not lead to a further increase in bus fares beyond the RPI+2% already published?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have thought about this, Darren, and I am grateful to you for the suggestion. I am not going to make any commitment now about the fares but I see absolutely no case for altering our current planning assumptions.

Darren Johnson (AM): So you will definitely rule out any emergency fares increase between now and 1 January 2011?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is highly unlikely.

Darren Johnson (AM): If you are planning to stick to the same plan on fares then that will mean that the £108 million funding gap will come from cuts then?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said, I think, earlier on to Val [Shawcross], I am confident - there is an argument going on at the moment between us and the Government about the requests that it has made. There is a conversation, I should say, going on. We think it very important the Government should recognise that we have already made substantial savings but, in so far as we do

make cuts, then let us be absolutely clear that this will not affect the infrastructure investment or front line services. We think that we can do it. We think that we can make efficiencies in the way that we are already doing. You will be aware that we have proposals in hand to take £500 million out this year alone and £5 billion over the lifetime of the plan.

What I do not want to do - and what I have said to Ministers - is give you a false impression that this can be done easily because it will not be easy and there will be difficult choices that have to be made. What I will not do is whack up fares and I will not tolerate cuts to vital pieces of London transport infrastructure.

Darren Johnson (AM): OK. So, in terms of not affecting the infrastructure then, are you guaranteeing that all the cycling super highways will go ahead and that there will not be cuts in that area?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am determined that we are going to have, I think, two cycle super highways ready to go this year. Let us see how we go with them. There are another ten which are planned. I want to get them going as fast as possible.

Darren Johnson (AM): OK then; bus services. Can you give a guarantee not to cut bus services beyond what is already planned?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not want to make cuts to front line services. Nor do I want to whack up the fares.

Darren Johnson (AM): But you might be forced to make one of those two choices.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, that is not my intention.

1910/2010 – Western Extension (1)

Tony Arbour on behalf of Victoria Borwick

There are a high number of renewals due in November and December. Will those residents have to renew or can their annual certificate be extended until the 24th December?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am afraid it is difficult for me to answer this question without prejudging the outcome of the consultation which is in hand on the removal of the Western Extension Zone (WEZ), but we are working on the proposal that Victoria suggests.

Tony Arbour (AM): OK. Thank you very much.

1943/2010 – Topping up Oyster Cards (1)

Caroline Pidgeon

Why is there a minimum top up of £5.00 for passengers at Ticket Offices?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think we do this just for reasons of efficiency, Caroline. I think it just saves time and money and hassle if you can reduce the number of low value transactions that staff are obliged to conduct at ticket offices. We think that it is reasonable to have a cut off point at £5. If you have received huge numbers of representations on this then I am very interested,

but I would point out that there are other methods available to customers who want to top up their Oyster Card.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): An unemployed constituent of mine got in touch with me and she went to Ealing Common Station to get a Tube and she only had £2, just for the minimum fare. The ticket machine was actually out of order and so she went up to the ticket office to be able to put the money on she could travel and they refused to do that because of the policy being £5 as a minimum. My constituent was, therefore, forced to walk in the rain to Ealing Broadway in order to be able to do this. Will you agree to review the policy so that staff will use their discretion at a time like that when the machine is not working, that they should be able to top up?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That does seem very unreasonable. That is plainly crazy. I apologise to your constituent that she had to walk in the rain. I am sorry; it was Richard's [Barnes] constituent.

Richard Barnes (AM): Caroline Pidgeon is a London-wide Member.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Yes, so any Londoner is one of my constituents.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well whoever's constituent it was I apologise to her.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you cannot top up your Oyster Card with the machine then it is blindingly obvious that there should be flexibility shown by people at the ticket office and she should have been allowed to top up her card.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): You will ensure that happens in future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will make sure that, in so far as it is possible for us to show flexibility on this matter for people who cannot use the machine, then we should do that.

Jenny Jones (AM): I am wondering if this minimum £5 actually contributes to the huge amount of money that is locked up in Oyster Cards, because we have had reports in the *Evening Standard* that there is a lot of money lying unused in Oyster Cards. This £5 topping up business must contribute to that. Does Transport for London see this as a little slush fund that it can use?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have in my head that the total value is £34 million. Is that right? I cannot remember it was.

Jenny Jones (AM): That is a sizeable amount of money isn't it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would encourage people to use their Oyster Cards and to make sure that they find them at the bottom of the sock drawer or wherever they are, and make use of the cash that they have on them. In so far as there is a fund of the kind that you describe, it is not a slush fund; any interest accruing is immediately used for the improvement of transport in London.

Jenny Jones (AM): It does seem to be a problem though doesn't it? If you do have this minimum; that it causes people problems.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not certain that the two things are related.

Jenny Jones (AM): If there is £34 million and there are only 8 million Londoners, not all of whom have an Oyster Card. You are locking up money.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are an awful lot of Oyster Cards in circulation and one of the problems is that, until we raised the deposit, I think people were a little bit too - because basically there was no charge at all for an Oyster Card.

Dee Doocey (Chair): The Green Group is now out of time so we will move to the final question.

Jenny Jones (AM): If there is £34 million and there are only 8 million Londoners, not all of whom have any Oyster Card. You are locking up money.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There you go.

1858/2010 – London Media Centre (2)

Andrew Boff

Will the LMC leave any legacy for London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The London Media Centre, Andrew, will leave a legacy for London in the hearts and minds of the many members of the international media who use it and benefit from it.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, on previous occasions you have intimated that all Olympics have had a London Media Centre. Of course this was an innovation that was introduced in 2000 and we did not have the media centres before then. We just had the formal ones.

Now the London Media Centre is in addition to a whole number of initiatives which are taking London taxpayers' money and yet not included in the £9.3 billion budget. Are we busting through the £9.3 billion by stealth? I am talking about initiatives like the £3.9 million for the host city volunteers' scheme, £4.6 million for the 2012 employment legacy, £9 million for Compete4, £9.9 million for the Olympic local employment and training framework. None of this is being included within the £9.3 billion that Londoners thought was going to be the maximum expenditure for the Olympics.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is, I think, a long term benefit to the city in having a London Media Centre. You cannot possibly expect to invite the international media, those who cannot get into the site, to London, and hope that they will write remotely positive things about this city if you do not lay on any kind of facilities for them. Atlanta had a pretty catastrophic experience with the international media. I do not think it would be in the interests of this city to see that repeated.

Your general point about money that is being spent that is, or is not, inside the £9.3 billion for the Games, you are patently right, Andrew. There are expenses that are going to be incurred as a result of hosting the Olympics that do not fall directly within that envelope. That does not mean that the Games are wrong for this city or wrong for the country. I think they are going to be a fantastic thing for London.

Dee Doocey (Chair): The Conservative Group is now out of time as well. Thank you very much indeed, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you.