



# **Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru The National Assembly for Wales**

## **Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes The Enterprise and Business Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 6 Hydref 2011  
Thursday, 6 October 2011**

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,  
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.  
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol****Committee members in attendance**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Byron Davies     | Ceidwadwyr Cymreig<br>Welsh Conservatives  |
| Keith Davies     | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Julie James      | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Alun Ffred Jones | Plaid Cymru<br>The Party of Wales  |
| Eluned Parrott   | Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru<br>Welsh Liberal Democrats                          |
| Nick Ramsay      | Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor)<br>Welsh Conservatives (Committee Chair) |
| David Rees       | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Kenneth Skates   | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Joyce Watson     | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Leanne Wood      | Plaid Cymru<br>The Party of Wales  |

**Eraill yn bresennol****Others in attendance**

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Martin Blackwell   | Prif Weithredwr, Y Gymdeithas Rheoli Canol Trefi<br>Chief Executive, Association of Town Centre Management |
| Andrew Godfrey     | Rheolwr Polisi Cyhoeddus, Boots<br>Public Policy Manager, Boots  |
| Russell Greenslade | Prif Weithredwr, Ardal Gwella Busnes Abertawe<br>Chief Executive, Swansea Business Improvement District    |
| Juliet Luporini    | Cyfarwyddwr, Ardal Gwella Busnes Abertawe<br>Director, Swansea Business Improvement District               |
| Sian Wilton        | Boots Cymru<br>Boots Wales   |

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol****National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Siân Phipps      | Clerc<br>Clerk                         |
| Meriel Singleton | Dirprwy Glerc<br>Deputy Clerk          |
| Ben Stokes       | Gwasanaeth Ymchwil<br>Research Service |

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.31 a.m.*

*The meeting began at 9.31 a.m.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon  
Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Nick Ramsay:** Welcome to this meeting of the Enterprise and Business Committee. The meeting will be held bilingually, and headphones can be used for simultaneous

translation from Welsh to English on channel 1 or for amplification on channel 0. The meeting is being broadcast, and a transcript of the proceedings will be published. I remind Members and members of the public to turn off their mobile phones and other electronic equipment. There is no need to touch the microphones: if all goes well, they should operate automatically. In the event of a fire alarm, please follow the directions from the ushers. We have no apologies today: we are at full complement, and there are no substitutions.

9.32 a.m.

### **Ymchwiliad i Adfywio Canol Trefi: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth Inquiry into the Regeneration of Town Centres: Evidence Session**

[2] **Nick Ramsay:** Welcome to Martin Blackwell, the chief executive of the Association of Town Centre Management. We have a range of questions to ask you, but would you like to kick off the session by making an opening statement? Otherwise, we will move straight to questions.

[3] **Mr Blackwell:** The ATCM is publishing its business plan today, and it says that our mission as an organisation is that town-centre management will lead in the creation of vital and viable town centres that effectively serve their local communities and offer first-class experiences. That is what we are all looking for: town centres that act as a service centre for the local community and meet its needs. If everybody accepts that premise, that is where we are moving forward from and that is what we are trying to do. The ATCM itself is a not-for-profit organisation. It has been around for around 20 years, establishing partnerships of various types in town centres, so we have the experience to bring something to the committee.

[4] **Byron Davies:** I have been reading your submission with interest. As you have just said, you are a not-for-profit membership organisation with 514 members. Could you give us an idea of the types of roles and responsibilities that your members carry out in Wales and how you are set up to finance them?

[5] **Mr Blackwell:** We have members throughout Wales: not just in the larger communities, but also in some of the smaller ones, which are interesting. They are almost all employed by local government. The one exception that springs to mind is Swansea, which is a business improvement district. However, they are largely local authority posts, which is not the case everywhere in the UK. The roles and responsibilities vary enormously, as they should. We think that initiatives should be developed locally, depending on local needs—local solutions for local problems. That is not a cop-out. Typically, town-centre management is a mechanism for co-ordinating action across the town.

[6] You will find that there are almost two camps: the public sector and the private sector. So, town-centre management is almost a translation service between them, because they often speak different languages—as you can imagine in the business community and so on. Also, within local government, there is not exactly a silo mentality, but a town-centre manager tries to co-ordinate all of the activity that is delivered by the public and private sector. So, that role of co-ordinating things is crucially important. We are seeing some of those roles being lost because of pressure on funding. We have seen almost 50 town-centre managers across the UK lose their jobs in the past 18 months. That is worrying, because, if they are this critical bridge between the public and private sectors, I think that their role will become more important. What we do not want to see is the baby being thrown out with the bath water.

[7] **Byron Davies:** Okay. Finally, I see that you have got 17 towns and cities in Wales that are listed. Is that an exhaustive list?

[8] **Mr Blackwell:** Yes, but some of those are local authority county borough councils and they may cover several centres. So, it is not a complete list of all the centres that have some form of town-centre management, because some TCMs will cover two, three or four centres, particularly in smaller locations.

[9] **Kenneth Skates:** You mentioned that the primary service provided by town-centre managers is one of co-ordination. Can you outline what the main challenges are for town centres and how else town-centre managers assist in facing those challenges?

[10] **Mr Blackwell:** Town-centre managers have to balance two things; one is the operational activity, and the other is taking a strategic view. Taking the operational element first, that entails doing things like marketing and looking after safety and security—in some places, they are heavily involved with closed-circuit television systems and retailer security systems. In some places, town-centre managers will run the market or look after car parking. So, it is a broad-ranging role that can, depending on what you want to do in your locality, be almost all-encompassing, looking after everything that happens in the town centre. We have a number of networks; they are on a regional basis. So, there is the ATCM Wales, but we also run some thematic groups, and one of them is looking at street operations. It is about training town-centre managers and helping them to network. Are you familiar with the term ‘chuggers’?

[11] **Kenneth Skates:** ‘Chuggers’?

[12] **Mr Blackwell:** Yes. It is an abbreviation of charity muggers. These are people who will stop you in the street and ask, ‘Will you sign a direct debit form for Save the Whale’, and so on. A TCM has to look at those sorts of things, along with how you deal with A-boards on the street and how you make sure that the flow of traffic is good. So, it is all those operational things. The TCM has an overview of the town that you might not have if you are just a traffic engineer, for example.

[13] The strategic side is important as well. It is about being forward thinking. If you do not have a strategy for your town centre, you do not know where it is going to go. Town-centre managers can help with putting these strategies, master plans or whatever you want to call them in place, to look at how the town would develop over the next two, three, five or even 10 years.

[14] **Kenneth Skates:** Are there any specific, unique problems facing town centres in Wales, compared with the rest of the UK?

[15] **Mr Blackwell:** It is a question of scale, sometimes. The same sorts of problems appear everywhere, but if you look at vacant units in town centres, you will see that the average is around 11 per cent, but the figure is higher in Wales, second only to Northern Ireland, so that is a worry. At the same time, the rate of employment in town centres and in retail is higher than average. I do not know the figures off the top of my head, but that suggests to me that you still have quite a lively and vibrant independent sector, which it is important to support if you can.

[16] **Nick Ramsay:** Before I bring in other Members, we have had some evidence that, with regard to a strategy for town centre regeneration, there is no point pursuing a one-size-fits-all approach or even a strategy that is uniform in any way. Do you agree with that? When you are working with different areas, are there common themes that could be dealt with in a common strategy, or is it purely a case of fitting a strategy specifically for whoever comes along at any point?

[17] **Mr Blackwell:** I think it is a combination of both. There are common themes that

will appear almost everywhere in places of a similar size. You are not going to get the same problems occurring in Neath and in Cardiff, because they are different places. Market towns and major cities are different sorts of places, but there will be common themes. However, every strategy has to be developed on a town-by-town basis. The critical thing, which is often missed, is that it must be done in partnership. That means bringing together the public and private sectors. You need the views of the private sector—they have to be brought to the table, and you will only get that strong partnership if they are genuinely part of the process. I am not talking specifically about Wales, but, in some places, it is difficult—the local authority and the elected members find it difficult to do that. They cannot let the responsibility go—they are still responsible—but they need to allow some of the decisions to be made collectively, and that is not easy.

[18] **David Rees:** Obviously, in Wales, we have quite a variety of towns. We have market towns, small and large, and industrial towns. I assume that some of the issues that you have raised will be common across those but that there will be a great variety of issues, partly because of the history of those places.

[19] **Mr Blackwell:** Yes, but there will be—am I allowed to use humour? [*Laughter.*]

[20] **Alun Ffred Jones:** You could try.

[21] **Nick Ramsay:** Yes, please do. As long as you are laughing with us.

[22] **Mr Blackwell:** When David Cameron announced the high street review with Mary Portas, the headline for the story in the online satirical publication, *The Daily Mash*, was:

[23] ‘High street inquiry takes about four seconds’,

[24] with Mary Portas saying immediately that it came down to car parking and supermarkets. It is a bit more complicated than that, but there are key issues such as out-of-town retail and, crucially, car parking that will make a significant difference to how a town centre performs. There are still too many places where there is no car parking strategy. There is no strategy to look at what we want to do—whether we want to encourage people to come in during the day or during the evening, whether there should be a price difference between prime parking spaces right outside retailers and spaces five minutes’ walk away, for people who are prepared to walk. Often, there is no strategy. Again, town-centre management is about trying to pull all of these things together so that there is an overarching strategy that will look at things such as planning—where we are going to allow growth out of town, if we are—what our strategy is for car parking and what our strategy is for marketing. These are complex issues and you need professional management to make these things happen.

[25] **Leanne Wood:** I want to go back to the two statistics that you gave earlier on vacant units and rates of unemployment. You said that Wales is doing badly on vacant units but well on the rate of employment in town centres. Could you provide us with some figures on the employment rates and, in particular, the ratio of part-time workers to full-time workers? It may be that we have more workers in Welsh town centres but that there are more part-time workers. Secondly, what do you think about the Government having a vacant unit strategy? For example, could some sort of subsidy be provided to certain sorts of retailers for taking over the vacant units more cheaply, so that the town centre is thriving and full-looking rather than full of boarded up shops?

9.45 a.m.

[26] **Mr Blackwell:** I would have to go away and do some digging on the numbers. One number that I did write down was that the average vacancy rate across Wales—although I

could probably get you a better breakdown—is 13.4 per cent, whereas the national average is 11.2 per cent.

[27] **Leanne Wood:** By ‘national’, do you mean at a UK level?

[28] **Mr Blackwell:** Yes. There are some interesting things being done locally to encourage people to fill new units—there are competitions, and grants are available for shop-front schemes. However, I am beginning to think that more needs to be done than what can be done locally. You deserve credit for the small business rate relief scheme, which was available in Wales well before it was available elsewhere in the UK. However, it is almost misnamed because, although it is called the small business rate relief scheme, it is not aimed at small businesses, but at people whose businesses have small rateable values. If you have a business in a town centre, it will not have a small rateable value and therefore it will not apply to you. What is interesting about the scheme in Wales is that it only applies to one property, so if the level at which this kicks in was looked at, you could find a way to exclude people who are in chains, for example. You would therefore be supporting small and independent businesses, which is good.

[29] **Nick Ramsay:** Eluned, did you want to come in on that point?

[30] **Eluned Parrott:** Yes. You talked about there being common themes in places of similar size, but that the strategy should be developed on a more individualised basis, and we can all recognise the sense in that. So, although we cannot have a standardised strategy for town centre regeneration, could there be a standardised approach to developing strategies for those centres? Are there things that the Welsh Government could do, for example, to develop an approach-based structure for town centres?

[31] **Mr Blackwell:** Yes, absolutely. That is one of the crucial things that can be done that would work well. The Association of Town Centre Management has been around for 20 years, and I have run training on developing effective partnerships and on writing a business plan for town centre businesses, so we have this experience, which has been learnt the hard way. I was a town-centre manager myself, and I am now the chief executive of the association, so I have done it.

[32] Another interesting thing to note is the lessons learnt from business improvement districts, which were promoted by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in Westminster, which takes us back a bit. The association ran the original pilot programme with Swansea as one of the original pilot areas, and it is still the only business improvement district in Wales. That cannot be right; there must be something wrong. I mention BIDs because we have learnt what the steps are to go through to establish a business improvement district, and they are very much the same as those that you would use to establish a partnership that could put together this strategy. So, the steps are there that you need to take to establish a strategy, and while it will come up with different things in different places, there will be common themes. So, yes, there is a process that we could advocate that you go through to get your particular strategy.

[33] **Nick Ramsay:** Joyce, do you feel that your question has been answered?

[34] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, I think so.

[35] **Nick Ramsay:** However, an aspect of the question was about the Welsh Government’s role.

[36] **Joyce Watson:** Yes; I will ask about that now. We received evidence from the Centre for Regeneration Excellence Wales last week, which suggested that there should be a national

policy and implementation programme from the Welsh Government. Do you agree with that?

[37] **Mr Blackwell:** I am not quite sure what exactly it is advocating. A national policy and implementation programme for what, master plans or—

[38] **Joyce Watson:** A programme for taking forward town centre regeneration.

[39] **Mr Blackwell:** This is not a cop-out, but I would need to understand more about what is being advocated before I can answer that.

[40] **Nick Ramsay:** This ties in with the idea of a strategy. We took evidence from the Minister, who said that there was no point in having a strategy that tried to have a one-size-fits-all approach to each town. However, it was said that there should be some kind of joint approach.

[41] **Mr Blackwell:** The role that should be played is one of facilitation, rather than one of going out and doing it for people. People must do it for themselves. However, if you could put the wherewithal in place, and the mentoring and training, if needs be, so that someone can lead on this locally, that would be worthwhile. I do not think that you need a national body or a national strategy for Wales that says ‘You do it like this’.

[42] **Keith Davies:** Yr wyf am ddilyn i fyny ar gwestiwn Leanne Wood am leoedd gwag yng nghanol trefi a rhoi hwb ariannol wrth ostwng trethi ac yn y blaen. Onid oes perygl wedyn—ni wnaf enwi tref yr wyf yn ei hadnabod yn dda, ond mae hyn wedi digwydd yng nghanol y dref honno—fod elusennau yn symud yno? A yw elusennau yn cael gostyngiad yn eu trethi? Y perygl yw mai dyna’i gyd fydd yng nghanol ein trefi. Tra’ch bod yn rhoi ffigurau, byddai gennyf ddiddordeb gwybod pa ganran o siopau sydd yn cael eu rhedeg gan elusennau yng nghanol trefi Cymru.

**Keith Davies:** I will follow up Leanne Wood’s question regarding empty properties in town centres and giving a financial boost through rate relief and so on. Is there not then a danger—I am not going to name a town that I know well, but this has happened in that town centre—that charities then move in? Do charities get rate relief? The danger is that there will only be charity shops in our town centres. While you are giving figures, I would be interested to know what percentage of shops in Welsh town centres are run by charities.

[43] **Mr Blackwell:** I cannot give you the figures, but I can talk about it in general terms. If my recollection is correct, a registered charity is able to claim large rate relief of up to 90 per cent, anyway. So, I do not think that there are significant differences there, but if charities are getting a huge discount, perhaps we need to try to find a way of creating a level playing field so that it is equally attractive for non-charitable retailers to go in. However, even if you put in those conditions and make it more attractive for people to move into empty places, it would have to be in the context of the overall offer. For example, the current situation with car parking is that, if a large out-of-town retailer or business park does not charge for car parking, there is no rateable value on that car parking space, but if you charge for a town centre car park, you pay business rates. Therefore, that means that you must charge more money. We all know that local authorities are strapped for cash, and car parking is one of the ways to help with that. So, you can successfully put incentives in place to bring retailers and others in to fill some of these units, but the overall environment in which they trade has to be of good quality, so that means looking at the street scene and having someone there, such as a town-centre manager, to work and ensure that it is safe and secure and to do the marketing. So, almost paying someone to fill a unit does not mean that they will be successful in the long run, because of the wider environment.

[44] In addition, with small businesses and independent traders—I declare an interest in

that, until recently, I ran a small business, a bookshop, because it was my passion, but it had to close, and I created a vacant unit, unfortunately; so, I understand these things—there is a real need for support and for someone to talk to them to understand their needs. If you go out to talk to these businesses, you will be amazed at what they tell you. Some of them will say, ‘Actually, I am really struggling here; I might need to close’. Some will say, ‘When my lease comes up, I am not sure how to negotiate it with the landlord’. Others will say, ‘Actually, I am doing pretty well; I am looking for bigger premises, but I don’t know where to start looking for them’. So, a programme for someone to go out to engage directly with small businesses and understand their needs and their future needs as part of this strategy would, I think, pay real dividends.

[45] **Keith Davies:** Yr ydych yn fy arwain at fy nghwestiwn nesaf. Nid yw rheoli canol trefi yn un o swyddogaethau statudol awdurdodau lleol. A gredwch y dylai fod? Sut y byddech yn perswadio’r Llywodraeth bod angen rôl statudol i reolwyr canol trefi? **Keith Davies:** You have led me to my next question. Town-centre management is not a statutory function of local authorities. Do you believe that it should be? How would you persuade the Government that there should be a statutory role for town-centre managers?

[46] **Mr Blackwell:** I am not sure—this is going to get me in trouble with all of my colleagues around the UK—that it should be a statutory role. I have said that there needs to be a real partnership, but, if it becomes a statutory role through local government, it becomes a local government post in the public sector, so it becomes more difficult to engage with the private sector. One thing that could be done better is that there could be more engagement with the private sector. The fact that you have only one business improvement district in the whole of Wales after seven or eight years of legislation tells you something about that engagement. Some town-centre managers are striving hard and have good engagement on a local basis with the private sector. However, with this partnership working comes responsibility. If you genuinely want to be in partnership with the private sector in your town, you have to consult it and take its views into account.

[47] I would like to say one other thing on the independent and the small sectors. There is a very interesting programme in North America, which has now been expanded to Australia and South Africa, which is called business retention and expansion. The evidence, collected over a decade, suggests that 80 per cent of employment growth comes from working with indigenous and local businesses. There has been a huge effort in this regard over the last 20 years. People are always looking at attracting inward investment—in other words, trying to get someone from outside to shift their operation to your area. Cardiff has done that very successfully, but, in most cases, you are just shifting jobs from A to B. A real effort, working with indigenous and local businesses, has paid tremendous dividends in these cases. It has now operated in over 1,000 places in North America, Australia and so on. So, that is about understanding local businesses, helping them to survive and then grow. That is where local growth is coming from. It also means that the profits that they make stay locally. There is not the leaky-bucket syndrome, where they go offshore somewhere. That strategy of working with and supporting local businesses will pay real dividends in terms of business growth and employment, but it is not quick.

[48] **Keith Davies:** Ai rôl llywodraeth leol yw hynny, ynteu rôl y Llywodraeth ganolog? **Keith Davies:** Is it a role for local government or for central Government?

[49] **Mr Blackwell:** Both have a role. Central Government could put together some pilot programmes and provide some funding for people who wanted to undertake such programmes. However, it is largely for each locality to make its own decisions.

[50] **David Rees:** You mentioned partnerships in your paper, and you have also referred to



them several times this morning. You have mentioned in particular the involvement of the private sector in those partnerships. We have one BID in Wales and 17 towns with town-centre managers. What is your experience of developing those partnerships? How difficult has it been sometimes to engage with the private sector?

[51] **Mr Blackwell:** It can be remarkably easy, but sometimes it can be remarkably difficult. It comes down almost to a state of mind. That is, is there a genuine willingness to engage with the private sector, understand it and ensure that it does work in partnership? You get situations in which the local authority will do something with the best intentions and it has a serious impact on the private sector, and it will say ‘Why did you not tell us about that? Why have you done this?’ So, there is a responsibility with this partnership working.

10.00 a.m.

[52] Specifically on business improvement districts, as I told you, we ran the original national pilot programme, but we also ran a BIDs academy for the East Midlands Development Agency. It put about £200,000 into the programme, but got a payback of £2 million or £3 million. There is one BID in Wales and 109 or 110 in the UK altogether. Collectively, they have produced more than £250 million of private sector investment. That is a big chunk of anyone’s money that has come from the private sector on a voluntary basis. The Swansea BID has just been renewed. It has been voted in by its levy payers for a second term, so they must think that it is doing some good.

[53] **Joyce Watson:** I want to understand the difference within the private sector. You talk about the difference between the public and private sectors in their thinking and approach, but how do you then manage the difference in the private sector? I am thinking of a town that has expanded and grown in different areas, but it is still the town. I and others will know about the tensions within the private sector, because it wants the footfall here or it wants the footfall there, or it is not even on an even keel, because private small business also meets private big business. So, how do you manage not just this tension that can sometimes exist between public and private, but also the tension between private and private? That tension does exist.

[54] **Mr Blackwell:** That is the art of town-centre management—you have 10 or 20 people around a table representing different interests. In my early days as a town-centre manager, we had a problem with accessibility, namely getting into the place, car parking and all those sorts of things. I organised a group from a two-tier local authority—one was the borough council and the other was the upper-tier county council—as well as someone from traffic control in the police, one of the large retailers, someone working in the management of car parks, someone from the local bus company, and someone from the taxi drivers’ association, which may have been a mistake. We got all these people together and we had a good dialogue about accessibility. As they were leaving, one of the guys said to me ‘That was really helpful, Martin—we ought to meet and talk more often’, and I realised that they did not talk to each other. So, part of it is about getting people around the table to discuss the issues that are facing the town on the operational side, and also to discuss where you want to go in the future. As I said earlier, these decisions and responsibilities often lie at the door of the local authority, but it is great if it can take input from the private sector. You do not necessarily get the independents and the multiples agreeing on everything, but if you can have those arguments within four walls and agree a strategy for the way forward, it is better than not talking at all.

[55] **Nick Ramsay:** You mentioned local authorities, and that is a neat link to the questions of Alun Ffred Jones on strategic growth plans.

[56] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Yr ydych yn **Alun Ffred Jones:** You refer in your paper cyfeirio yn eich papur at bwysigrwydd to the importance of strategic growth plans

cynlluniau strategol ar gyfer twf mewn trefi. Faint o'r cynlluniau hyn sy'n bodoli yng Nghymru, hyd y gwyddoch? A oes modd i gynlluniau datblygu lleol gyflawni gwaith tebyg, er mwyn cefnogi'r math hwn o ddatblygiad hefyd?

for towns. To your knowledge, how many of these plans exist in Wales? Is it also possible for local development plans to undertake similar work, to support this type of development?

[57] **Mr Blackwell:** I would be very happy to go away to do the research for you to find out where these plans are in place, and report back. I think that the LDPs have a role to play. I apologise that I do not know exactly how they are compiled, but I know that a number of our members have these particular LDPs in place and so the potential is there to build on that.

[58] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Mae gennyf un cwestiwn arall. Mae cyfeiriad yn eich papurau at yr economi gyda'r nos ac yr ydych yn dweud bod hwn yn bwysig ac y dylid cynllunio ar ei gyfer. Pwy yn union sy'n elwa ar y math hwnnw o weithgarwch? Nid yn unig ei fod yn gallu creu pob math o drafferthion yng nghanol rhai trefi, ond mae'n ymddangos i mi—fel, er enghraifft, yn Nghaerdydd—eich bod chi, y cyngor, neu'r Llywodraeth yn gwario'n helaeth ar ddatblygu stryd sydd dim ond yn llawn rhyw ddwywaith neu dair yr wythnos gyda'r nos. Mae'r cwestiwn ynghylch lle mae'r elw'n mynd yn un diddorol, oherwydd mae'r rhan fwyaf ohono, hyd y gwelaf i, yn diflannu o'r ddinas yn hytrach nag aros yn y ddinas.

**Alun Ffred Jones:** I have one further question. There is a reference in your papers to the night-time economy, and you say that that economy is important and should be planned for. Who exactly benefits from that type of activity? Not only can it create all sorts of problems in some town centres, but it seems to be—as, for example, in Cardiff—that you, the council, or the Government spend extensively on developing a street that is only full two or three nights a week. The question of where the profit goes is interesting, because most of it, from what I can see, disappears out of the city rather than remaining in the city.

[59] **Mr Blackwell:** I am pleased to have that question. I was interviewed by BBC Wales yesterday and the story was covered this morning, and it led with the bit about the night-time economy, which really interested me. The night-time economy is worth billions. It employs hundreds of thousands of people and involves tens of thousands of companies—many of them independent companies—as well as the chains. It is not that different in its make-up to retail on the high street. If town centres are to survive and thrive, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. is no longer enough. The assets have to be sweated; you have to make them work. We cannot roll back time and say that we do not want to have out-of-town retail parks or do away with the internet for shopping, therefore we have to find new ways of using our town centres. Using them in the evening and at night is very important. We have a programme called purple flag. You have probably heard of blue-flag status for beaches: the purple flag programme is for the evening and night-time economy and we will be awarding another nine purple flags this autumn. To get a purple flag, you have to be very careful about how your town centre is managed at night. We have a team of assessors who go out and spend all night in a place. They look at movement—how people get in and out—and the mix. If it is all about vertical drinking establishments, you have a problem. However, if there are restaurants—

[60] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Vertical drinking establishments?

[61] **Mr Blackwell:** That is, if it is just standing up and cheap booze, with every shot costing £1, that is not right, and a town centre would never get accredited by us if it had that type of activity. We have just done a pilot programme in Northern Ireland, because its licensing laws are different. We put four places through the purple flag programme, which was funded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. The original driver for this came from the Home Office in London. It was about trying to manage the night-time economy. The

Northern Ireland Tourist Board said that it was sure that it could get those things right, and we see it as a really positive thing. You are hearing from witnesses from Swansea later on its business improvement district. Ask them about its night-time economy: it is a crucial part of the economy of Swansea. If you ignore the evening and night-time economy, you are ignoring a whole chunk of the productivity, employment and turnover of that location. Therefore, it is 24/7 now.

[62] **Nick Ramsay:** Vertical drinking has clearly inspired a number of follow-up questions. Byron is first, then David and Julie.

[63] **Byron Davies:** On a social issue, it excludes quite a lot of people from the town centres, in as much as you get the drinkers in and keep older people out. I could give you plenty of examples; you mentioned Swansea, in particular. How do you reconcile that?

[64] **Mr Blackwell:** It is an important point. We have done research that suggests that there is a missing market, and it generally includes people who have similar hair colour to us, who do not go into town centres at night anymore because they think that it is unsafe. However, if you get people in to town centres and you find a way to attract them, they see what is like. Another programme that we support is called 'light night'. In Europe it is called nuit blanche or nota bianca—white night. It is about showcasing your town centre, getting people in, one night a year, to see what is on offer. We are running a study-visit to Leeds tomorrow. So, if you want to jump on a train to come and see it, you are welcome.

[65] It is about getting people who would not normally go to a town centre to come to experience it. The people who say, 'I never go to the town centre because it is not safe', probably have not been for several years. It may have changed dramatically, so, it is about getting the changes that you need so that there is a really good mix of culture and places to meet and socialise with people. If you break through that barrier and you get a different demographic of people to visit, then it becomes self-policing in a strange way. It looks after itself because you start to get families and people of a different generation in to the town centres, and it creates a more European feel. However, there are places that are still like the wild west, and that has to be managed properly.

[66] **Byron Davies:** That is the problem and I am thinking, in particular, about Swansea, where you have a great obstruction on policing, for example, and areas outside of the city, on a Friday or Saturday night, lack policing because of the concentration in the centre.

[67] **Mr Blackwell:** I do not want to speak for Swansea, but I know that money from its business improvement district levy is being put into such things as taxi marshals. Some of Swansea's BID payers during the day are also BID payers who operate in the evening. Therefore, they will be putting money in to working on those things. I will talk to them afterwards about the experience that we have had and how we might be able to help, because we have done this in a number of places and put strategies in place to help communities combat this issue.

[68] One figure that sticks in my mind relates to a business improvement district in Bedford, in England, which is a similar size to Swansea. The assistant chief constable of Bedfordshire Police says that the BID is saving his force £6,000 a week in policing, because of the activity that the BID is undertaking by introducing such initiatives as taxi marshals and managing the situation. So, there are solutions. Like everything else, it has to be managed.

[69] **David Rees:** [*Inaudible.*] We have examples of some town high streets where one half of the high street is retail and the other half the night-time economy. Therefore, you have half the high street empty in the day and the other half empty in the night. What is your view on developing a mix of the night-time economy and retail so that the town centre becomes

vibrant and not segregated?

[70] **Mr Blackwell:** Yes, I think that it needs to be a mix. We have to get retailers to think seriously about how they operate. That may mean that operating 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. or 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., as a retailer, is not what customers want anymore. I am sure that we all shop online on Amazon—[*Interruption.*] Okay, not all of us maybe—good—but, if you do, one of the problems you have is that you are never at home to collect your parcels. So, you end up traipsing to a courier or the post office. Perhaps there could be collection points in town centres, even if you do order things online, but they might need to be open after normal opening hours.

10.15 a.m.

[71] In town centres where there is still a vibrant office community or a major employer present, then retailers should be responding to that. I would say to them, ‘Do not open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. but open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and join up the evening economy with the night-time economy.’ Retailers have been very slow in responding to the needs of customers. I realise that that is really difficult if you are an independent trader, because you might already be working six days a week, and you think, ‘The last thing that I want to do is stay here for another couple of hours’. However, we are not advocating that. We are saying, ‘Look at when your customers come in. When do they want to shop with you? Talk to them, understand their needs, and that might mean that you open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. from Tuesday to Sunday’. However, if they do not ask the question to understand customers’ needs, they will never know. A lot of businesses are still stuck in 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and that is not what customers want anymore.

[72] **Nick Ramsay:** Julie James, do you want to ask a supplementary question on this? You might also want to sweep up the issues on business improvement districts.

[73] **Julie James:** Yes. You have started to answer the question that I wanted to ask. One thing that we have had evidence on from a number of people—you have touched on it many times in answer to several of these questions—is the issue of how you persuade independent retailers, in particular, about the change in customer behaviours, desires, and so on. The big chains tend to have that covered centrally. You mentioned the Mary Portas review, and many of us probably saw her programmes showing that nobody has a clue, really, about how to display stuff in their windows, and so on. That is not an uncommon problem in some of our towns. You have a tired feel to much of the retail offer, and then the retailers themselves blame a whole pile of other factors, which I am sure are contributory, but do not take responsibility themselves. I suppose that this is a very convoluted way of asking something, but you mentioned training packages, and so on, and our experience has been that the people who most need the training are the ones who do not think that they need it, and do not actually show up.

[74] **Mr Blackwell:** That is my experience, too.

[75] **Julie James:** How on earth can that be done?

[76] **Mr Blackwell:** There are some successful schemes operating through town-centre management schemes around the country. However, you are absolutely right. You go into some retailers or small businesses, and you think, ‘How the hell are you still in business?’ The answer might be that the business was formed by a parent, they own the freehold, and it is almost a hobby, and the other attitude that you get is, ‘What do you mean? I have been doing this for 30 years’—but the world has changed around them. I think that the leadership that you could show is in trying to create this atmosphere that is conducive to small business, and that does mean looking at their costs and overheads, and putting packages together. When

I was running schemes such as this, I never used the word ‘training’. If you go into a small business and say, ‘Would you like some training? It is free’, they reply, ‘No thank you’. You have to talk to them in a different language. ‘Perhaps I can help you with x, y and z?’ gets a better response. If you get this partnership structure together, whereby people are talking to each other and working together, then they do not feel so isolated. I also think that the North American model that I mentioned, where you go into a business and talk to the people and build a relationship with them, is really important. I have always said that the most important piece of equipment for a good town-centre manager is sensible shoes, because they have to go in, talk to people and build a relationship. That is one of my real fears—where we are losing TCMs, we are losing that connectivity between the public and the private sector.

[77] There are no easy answers, but there are some very good case studies of work that has been done successfully, and, if you wish, I could supply you with some of those.

[78] **Nick Ramsay:** Joyce is next, and then Leanne Wood.

[79] **Joyce Watson:** Just a brief question: you talked about the mix, and you talked about extended hours, and I agree with you. Do you also consider the spaces outside and between shops? We have outside space—every town has a central point or space. I think that most of us would agree that you are drawn to something by its attractiveness, whether that is something that is going on, or the way that it looks, or does not look, or whatever it is. How much time do you spend in looking at that particular aspect? We have all probably been to various town centres in Europe where you get drawn in because something is happening, but they are also child-friendly. That immediately excludes the bad behaviour that you were talking about, because the majority is well-behaved, and it is the minority that is not.

[80] **Mr Blackwell:** The child-friendly part is important, but a disabled-friendly environment is also important; in a way, they go together. The environment in which businesses trade is crucially important, and that has to be the responsibility of local government. Although it takes money, keeping it clean and so on is important.

[81] Another thing that we have seen is the loss of public toilets; they are being closed down. This is part of a factor that will attract or repel people from the centre. So, the whole environment, including things such as baby-changing facilities, is important. Out-of-town shopping centres have these facilities; they will provide them. If town centres are to compete, they must provide those things, but how do you pay for them? That is always the driver behind this, and that is where we think business improvement districts have more of a role to play in Wales.

[82] **Leanne Wood:** Before I ask about the general mix in town centres, it seems to me that a lot of the success of European cities is based on the space that they have, such as squares with cafes and bars around them. It is difficult to do that in retrospect. Can you see how planning could be used to create more open public spaces in our town centres?

[83] **Mr Blackwell:** I was in Liverpool recently, where the council had done a master-planning exercise, and realised that it wanted to create a public space and a way through between two important streets. It meant knocking a building down. The owner of the building heard of this plan and the planning officers thought, ‘Oh God, here we go’. However, the owner came forward and said that he could see the purpose and benefit for the greater good. That suggests that you need a master plan that covers the spatial aspects as well as the activity. We still have many good public spaces in our town centres—

[84] **Leanne Wood:** Linking to parks is another issue.

[85] **Mr Blackwell:** Yes, absolutely. These things link through very well. It is more of a

question of managing what we have, and then starting to plan for the future. Managing what you have is quite important. I saw a case study in Vienna, where an artist was employed to create seats. There were not enough spaces in Vienna for people to sit down; as you walked through the town you could see people perching on bollards and all sorts of things—you can walk through your own towns and see this now. So, a blank template of a bench was created, and artists and schools were asked to decorate them. They were all unique, and were put around the city centre. Someone then took photographs of them all. When they got the photographs back, they realised that the people sitting on the decorated benches matched the personality of the bench—it is like when people say that dogs are similar to their owners. It was interesting to see which bench people chose to sit on. Just having a bench for people to sit on to have a conversation is important, and is often overlooked.

[86] **Leanne Wood:** Things are going the other way. Benches are being removed, because young people seem to be congregating around them.

[87] **Mr Blackwell:** Yes, but is that a bad thing?

[88] **Leanne Wood:** I do not think so, but it is happening.

[89] With regard to the mix of premises, will you outline some of the main factors that affect the mix of residential, retail and commercial premises in town centres in Wales?

[90] **Mr Blackwell:** Every town centre is different. We are seeing people moving back into town centres, which is a good thing. I cannot talk about specific locations in Wales, but I know some of the figures for larger settlements. For example, a decade ago there were 800 people living in Manchester city centre; now there are about 10,000 people living there. There is a lot of empty space, because they have overdone it—that is the way that things tend to swing. However, people are moving back into town centres and into premises above commercial premises, which does create conflict sometimes. Which came first, the noisy pub or the residents? As people move back into town centres it is creating a buzz and a clientele for businesses. It is a much more sustainable and European way of living. People in French, Italian or Spanish cities live in much higher densities.

[91] **Leanne Wood:** What are the factors that bring people back to live in town centres?

[92] **Mr Blackwell:** I do not think that I am qualified to answer that question. It is beyond my area of expertise. I could guess, but it would be a guess.

[93] **Leanne Wood:** Do you think that it is important to have workplaces and living spaces close to each other?

[94] **Mr Blackwell:** Yes, absolutely. We have seen office space moving out of town centres, and, in some cases, the local authorities are the culprits. They take 300, 400 or 500 jobs out of the town centre and move them to an out-of-town retail park, and then wonder why their town centres are going down the drain. If a town centre is to survive, as I said at the beginning, it is about more than just retail. A town centre is important because it is a service centre for the local community. That includes retail and the night-time economy, but it also includes the dentist, the hairdresser, the library and all of the public services.

[95] Town centres are also transport hubs. As the price of fuel increases, there is strong evidence to suggest that people are driving less. To get to a large out-of-town retail park or a supermarket you have to drive. A town centre is more accessible, and if you live in the town centre you carry your shopping home. So, in the longer run, it is a sustainable way to live. It reduces people's transport costs and prices have come down for residential units. That is part of the reason why people are moving back into city centres.

[96] **Nick Ramsay:** You are now straying very neatly into our final line of questioning. Byron Davies would like to pick up on the issue of integrated transport, and then we will bring the session to a close.

[97] **Byron Davies:** We have heard from the Centre for Regeneration Excellence in Wales that sustainable integrated transport plans are not always incorporated into town-centre regeneration strategies. Do you agree with that? There seems to be some sort of conflict. For example, Sustrans would encourage people to cycle into towns but that is quite impractical in many of our rural towns. How would you comment on that?

[98] **Mr Blackwell:** First of all, I will say a quick word on cycling as a mode of transport. We have seen extensive cycling networks being put in, but they often stop at the edge of towns, because the difficult bit is finding a cycle way through to the town centre. So, you have got these radial cycle paths that come towards the town centre and then stop, because they are not joined up as that is the tough bit. Again, having a strategy for this is important. I am sorry; I have lost my thread now.

[99] **Byron Davies:** I asked about cycling into towns, Sustrans and the fact that a lot of our towns are very rural. Is this practical?

[100] **Mr Blackwell:** ‘No’ is the short answer. Public transport in rural areas has to be heavily subsidised; it is never going to be cost-effective. That is why living in town centres is going to become more important. This perhaps sounds esoteric, but I read an interesting report noting that oil is going to run out—it might take 30 or even 50 years, but it will run out. The US has set itself up with all these communities on six-lane highways, and the ghettos in the future will be out of town, not in the city centres. So, town centres will become more important in the decades to come for all sorts of reasons. We should start to think about that now, because accessibility will be a crucial factor.

[101] **Nick Ramsay:** That was the final question. I thank you for coming in today to give us your views. I think that we could have spoken to you all morning. You have certainly got us all thinking. Please do not go away thinking that our interest in vertical drinking exceeded our interest in Amazon; that was just the impression we gave you. We will feed all of your views into our inquiry and we will keep you posted on our findings when we publish them in due course.

[102] **Mr Blackwell:** It has been a pleasure. Thank you.  
10.30 a.m.

### **Ymchwiliad i Adfywio Canol Trefi: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth Inquiry into the Regeneration of Town Centres: Evidence Session**

[103] **Nick Ramsay:** I welcome Russell Greenslade, chief executive of the Swansea Business Improvement District, and Juliet Luporini, Swansea BID director. Thank you for coming to see us today and for your written evidence. I am sorry that the previous session ran on slightly, but we were all engrossed in the interesting information that we were getting. Thank you for agreeing to come along today to speak to us as part of our inquiry into the regeneration of town centres. We have asked a number of questions of previous witnesses on the BID in Swansea, so we look forward to hearing what you have to say in response to some of our questions. Would you like to make some opening statements before we dive into the questions?

[104] **Mr Greenslade:** Certainly. Swansea BID started in 2006. In March 2011, we had a re-vote, which succeeded with a 63 per cent majority. The aim of the BID is to increase foot

flow into the city centre and to make it a better place to live, work and visit. The underlying aim is to regenerate the businesses within it and increase wealth and prosperity for all.

[105] It is a not-for-profit organisation. We have our own BID board of directors, which is made up of local councillors. We also have a city-centre manager and traders, who are very important in influencing the direction in which the BID goes. The businesses vote on what we do. Juliet is a BID director and a levy payer as she has a business in the city centre.

[106] When we were voted in, car parking was the No. 1 priority. The five key priorities on which we deliver on a daily basis are: safety, security, marketing, cleansing, and supporting and attracting businesses. I am willing to answer any questions that you have on those areas and anything else that you would like to raise.

[107] **Nick Ramsay:** Thank you for that.

[108] **Keith Davies:** Sut yr aethoch ati i ysgrifennu'r cynnig? Pa heriau a oedd yn eich wynebu? Beth oedd yr her fwyaf? **Keith Davies:** How did you set about writing the proposal? What challenges did you face? What was the greatest challenge?

[109] **Mr Greenslade:** As Martin touched on previously, Swansea was picked up as a pilot BID. The local authority was crucial in the decision to run with it and in getting the re-vote through. It paid for the re-vote and the ballot. Once it goes through those stages, a private limited company is formed. The biggest challenge was overcome before I joined BID, but I have spoken to my predecessor—Juliet will probably know more about this—who said that the biggest challenge was talking to businesses to get them all on board and educating them as to what they would get. It is all about the return on their investment. The BID is an additional 1 per cent on their business rates. This could range from £50 to £15,000. So, we are dealing with all kinds of businesses. However, it is all about talking to businesses. That is what I have been told about the difficulty of starting the BID: it was a challenge to get businesses to understand what a business improvement district was and how it differs from a local authority. They work very closely together, but they are separate and totally different.

[110] **Keith Davies:** Bu'n rhaid i chi wneud ail gynnig, a cymeraf ei fod wedi bod yn llwyddiannus. A yw'r gefnogaeth yr ydych wedi ei chael gan y busnesau wedi newid er 2006? **Keith Davies:** You had to make a second bid, and I take it that it has been successful. Has the level of support from businesses changed since 2006?

[111] **Mr Greenslade:** I will pass you on to my colleague Juliet, who has been a business owner in the city centre for many years.

[112] **Ms Luporini:** There is a much greater awareness now of the need for businesses to have a voice and for their needs to be met. It is a challenging and constantly-changing environment for businesses these days, and now that businesses are far more aware of what the BID can deliver, and given that, possibly unlike some parts of the public sector, there are many legislative problems, we can deliver what the business needs, whether it is recycling or any other service, on a much quicker basis. From that point of view, the BID is now seen as a really key part of Swansea.

[113] **Julie James:** We have just heard from the town-centre managers. Could you tell the committee how you work alongside the other structures that are in the city, because Swansea has a number of things that are happening all at once? The interaction is quite interesting.

[114] **Mr Greenslade:** The partnership working is critical. We work with city centre management, along with the regeneration department of the local authority, South Wales



Police and the Safer Swansea Partnership—we all work together. It is critical that we have a partnership working strategy going forward. It is equally critical that businesses know what we do and we know what they do. That is why we work with them to deliver events in the city centre, with safety and security rangers, and we have our own stand-alone projects, such as free parking with NCP for one hour, which has been successful. So, in answer to your question, partnership working is critical. There is also a city centre partnership board, which includes the BID's chairman. He feeds into that bigger board and gives updates on what we have delivered and our results.

[115] **Julie James:** With the Chair's indulgence, I know you are trying to put a positive spin on it, and we all like to do that, and the BID has been great. However, there are problems with some of those areas in Swansea and the committee wants to produce a report that addresses some of those issues. So, we would like to hear, not necessarily now, about some of the things that you think could be improved, as well as the things that have been successful. As you know, I am the AM for the city centre in Swansea, and I know that there are tensions between some of those issues. We would like to try to get that right for elsewhere, so it would be interesting to hear of your practical, on-the-ground experience. I know, Juliet, that you have many ideas of what you would do differently, so it would be good to hear those as well.

[116] **Ms Luporini:** Things have moved on in the last 9 or 10 months. I am the chair of the supporting and attracting businesses committee, and we decided that we needed to go further up the ladder in terms of the council officers attending the meetings. They have met that challenge with a lot of hope, if you like. We do not agree on everything. As you know, we still think that car parking is a huge issue in Swansea. We have a lot of out-of-town development that we cannot go back on, but we need a more level playing field. The message at the moment is that we are working closely together, in a partnership, to alleviate some of those tensions for the benefit of everybody and for the efficient use of resources and funding. That would be the reality of it.

[117] **David Rees:** You are the only BID in Wales in a city centre—we have few city centres, and a lot of large towns. In your experience, what are the characteristics that would be important in putting BIDs into other areas, particularly in towns?

[118] **Mr Greenslade:** We were recently approached by traders in Mumbles to discuss the possibility of them setting up a BID. The devil is in the detail with a BID. It takes a long time to set up a BID. The pros of that include the town itself. There is also another area, Brynymor Road in Swansea, which is just a road, and traders there are very interested in setting up a BID. They can see the value of a BID, because the return on investment would be fantastic for them on their business rates. The difficulty is talking to the businesses and getting the manpower for setting up a BID. It does take time and you need a lot of support for it. That is the critical thing: generating that.

[119] **David Rees:** Do you therefore think it is a good proposal? We have heard various opinions on BIDs. Is setting up a BID a good proposal for more towns across Wales to focus on?

[120] **Ms Luporini:** I think it is. If you can get people involved and interested in doing that, it can only be conducive to a good business environment. For example, in one of our groups, we have an energy buying group. Acting as a bigger organisation, businesses can buy into that and reduce their costs. So, there are many ways by which they can benefit in terms of fixed and variable costs by forming a BID and buying into that.

[121] **David Rees:** As a small business in that sense, how do you think small private businesses would feel about this initially? A lot of town centres have these independent retailers, and they do not necessarily get public sector support. Do you feel that they have a

desire to get involved in this?

[122] **Ms Luporini:** I think so, and more so than the multiples. I am from a very small private business, which has been going for 41 years. We are the ones who face hard times and have to adapt our business. We still have to pay those costs. If there are large energy or recycling costs, at the end of the day, the books have to balance, and we probably do not have access to the sort of loans that the multiples have.

[123] **David Rees:** That being the case, have you been invited to get involved in any other applications, to provide your experience of how it works?

[124] **Ms Luporini:** We do that.

[125] **Mr Greenslade:** As I have said, I have been to Mumbles to talk to some traders there about it.

[126] **David Rees:** I was thinking beyond Swansea.

[127] **Mr Greenslade:** No, we have not done that. I have spoken to Scottish BIDs. As you know from the report, Scotland has an overarching BIDs company. Its managing director says that there are more and more smaller towns going for BIDs. I do not know the finer detail of how they work as a BID because the legislation is different to ours. However, if they are doing it, although it is not a case of copying and pasting, there must be a reason why. However, outside Swansea, we have not got involved in anything else. I think that Merthyr is in the process of setting up a BID. We would welcome some interaction with that to see what we could offer in terms of our expertise. As I said, we have been going since 2006 now, and a lot has gone on in that time. Obviously, having a successful re-vote has been critical.

[128] **David Rees:** Your paper mentions Scotland, but it did not say whether it is mainly cities or towns involved. So, is it mainly small towns?

[129] **Mr Greenslade:** In Scotland, they hit the cities first—Edinburgh, Aberdeen and so on. They are now looking at a tourist BID, which would be a separate entity altogether. However, more and more towns are now approaching this to see what they can do to support businesses. Sometimes they are looking at just streets. That was the feedback I got from the managing director when I phoned him to get the information. It is clearly working. I think that they have about 17 BIDs and more in the pipeline. They are getting voted through, so businesses clearly want it. It is all about the business plan and the consultation. As I said, you ask, ‘If I’m giving you £50, what is my business going to get out of it, as a small retailer, as well as the nationals?’

[130] **Nick Ramsay:** Given that you have been going since 2006, are you surprised that you have not really been involved directly before now in the process of setting up that BID?

[131] **Mr Greenslade:** Yes and no. As I said, it was very much a pilot scheme in 2006. It was very closely linked with the local authority, and we have to develop that coming out of it. The other side of it is that developing BIDs is very much local authority-led. It is also up to the city centres to develop the BID. It is not up to a Swansea BID to go to Newport and ask whether it wants to set up a BID. It has to be led either by central Government or by a local authority.

[132] **Leanne Wood:** Are the chambers of trade involved?

[133] **Mr Greenslade:** No, not as far as the Swansea BID is concerned. We do an awful lot in Swansea as it is. We would love to go out there and say, ‘We can help you’, but,

practically, it is really a public sector-driven thing.

10.45 a.m.

[134] **Nick Ramsay:** We have a couple of questions on the local authority aspect from Joyce and Ken. David Rees, I will bring you in after that if that is okay.

[135] **David Rees:** May I just come back on that quickly first, Chair?

[136] **Nick Ramsay:** Yes.

[137] **David Rees:** You mentioned where it comes from. Did Swansea have a strategic vision for the town centre before the BID was set up?

[138] **Mr Greenslade:** There was a Swansea 2020 strategy, which was local-authority driven, about what the city centre should look like and about the plans that were going through. So, to say that we created it is wrong; it was part of that Swansea 2020 strategy, which involved major development and regeneration work, as well as a retail strategy.

[139] **Joyce Watson:** I will go back to the role of Government and local authorities, which you started to talk about. Can you outline the nature of your relationship with Swansea council, and to what extent has the council engaged or consulted with you regarding its regeneration activities in the BID area?

[140] **Mr Greenslade:** We have a very good relationship with the local authority, as my colleague Julia touched on. We now have heads of service involved with our sub-groups and I have monthly one-to-one discussions with the city centre management, so, we all sing from the same hymn sheet. The authority contributes £10,000 a year towards BID management costs, and it also supports us with officers for questionnaires and other bits and bobs. So, we have a very good relationship with the local authority—with the heads of service and with the leader. In fact, we were in a meeting last night with the leader at which we put across our points for traders in the city centre. You must have that leadership with local authorities in order to run a BID effectively.

[141] **Ms Luporini:** We are currently working with the local authority on the action plan that has been jointly produced between both organisations.

[142] **Kenneth Skates:** Do you have regular involvement with the Welsh Government?

[143] **Mr Greenslade:** No. From what research I have done, I gather that the Welsh Government, or the Welsh Assembly Government as it was at the time, provided £30,000 towards the start of the BID. That involvement has petered out since then, unfortunately.

[144] **Kenneth Skates:** What is your assessment of the Welsh Government's approach to town centre regeneration in recent years?

[145] **Mr Greenslade:** I can only talk from a BID point of view, and your question is bigger than that. As it states in the report, we would welcome some input at sub-group or director level from the Welsh Government so that we can tell businesses, of which there are 800 plus in the city centre, what the Welsh Government is doing. We have the representation at a local level, but not at a central Government level, which is critical, because businesspeople want to know what is going on—they want to plan and to know whether they should invest in their business or whether they should move to another hub in the city centre. They need to know what is going on, so communication is important.

[146] **Kenneth Skates:** Okay.

[147] **David Rees:** On the local authority issue, you mentioned earlier in your evidence that you wanted to get senior officers to your meeting. I therefore assume that it is important that not only do junior officers get involved, but also senior officers, so that the decision-makers are there.

[148] **Ms Luporini:** Yes. We have junior officers there as well, because they obviously have a role to play. However, for businesses to be able to plan ahead, in an uncertain environment, they need as much information as possible with regard to what is being planned for their city centre and how problems can be solved together. So, it is important that we pool our resources. There is no point in us all heading off in different directions with different objectives. We have to agree, and we are probably closer to knowing the immediate needs of the businesses than the local council.

[149] **David Rees:** So, to strengthen that point, if authorities get involved, it is important that they get involved at a high level not at a low level.

[150] **Julie James:** I could not agree with that more. We have quite an extensive range of contact across the city centre, ranging from politicians to officers of various levels. This is not necessarily a question, but, just to reinforce the point, it was quite an effort to do that. However, it was worth it, was it not? It got things moving in a big way.

[151] **Ms Luporini:** Yes, definitely.

[152] **Julie James:** On a different point, you make reference in the paper to funding streams. You mentioned the legislation in Scotland and the fact that it is clearly having a better run at it than we are—and I do not know whether the legislation is important to that. Do you want to elaborate on that? Are there any funding streams or legislative changes or things that the Government could do that would help?

[153] **Mr Greenslade:** I cannot remember whether it says so in the report, but we generate about £465,000 to £495,000 a year. Although it is a big lump sum, it is quite a small pot of money considering what we do. We need to look at what central Government can do in order to help—not necessarily to match fund—but to look at our projects and say that it can give us money towards them, whatever the mechanism may be. For example, as noted in the paper, Scotland has an overarching BID company that is funded by central Government. The company is run by a private company, such as a BID, and it goes out and sets things up in Scotland. That is the way that it works. It is up to the Welsh Government to decide whether it would like to entertain that. I do not know what mechanisms it has in place, for instance whether it could match fund. We have just found a unique gum-cleaning machine that turns gum into dust in the city centre; it is fantastic. We have managed to put in £15,000, and we went to the local authority and asked whether it could give £15,000. There may be ways that central Government could try to help us deliver on that. There may be ways that it could fund a night-time ranger for us. As Martin said, the night-time economy is a big thing.

[154] **Julie James:** Chair, will you just indulge me with another question on that? Are you in contact with the regeneration people in the Welsh Government?

[155] **Mr Greenslade:** No, but we are in contact with the regeneration people in local government.

[156] **Julie James:** I have recently been involved in a meeting between the people at the two different levels. Apologies to the committee, but, on a personal note, I can sort that out for you.

[157] **Nick Ramsay:** I was going to indulge myself with a question on the gum dust machine, but that can probably wait. [*Laughter.*] Eluned Parrott has the next question.

[158] **Eluned Parrott:** I want to return to an issue that you have mentioned a few times now, which is the return on investment. How do you work out what the return is on the investment from the BID? How do you factor in other elements in the economy that might be affecting things? How do businesses know categorically that the BID is bringing them a return?

[159] **Mr Greenslade:** When we brokered the deal with the NCP car parks, where we operate one-hour free parking, we asked it what else that it could do for the staff in city centres. It is one thing to bring people in, but it is equally important to give something back to the staff. Through the BID, they can now park all day for £3.50, as supposed to for £10.50, which is saving them £7 a day. Recently, MEET International, which has 40 of the tickets, paid its BID levy back in two and a half months from its savings; that is how it is equated. My colleague and I, and the BID directors, see businesses every single day, so we know how much levy they pay and then we tell them what they have had in marketing, recycling, and so on. One of our members saved £76,000 because it joined the energy buying group, and it pays £1,000 a year towards the BID. That is the basics of it.

[160] **Eluned Parrott:** From that point of view, it is about the cost savings that you are measuring as opposed to business growth.

[161] **Mr Greenslade:** Yes, it is all to do with the bottom line, really. The more that we can develop for businesses to help them save money, and, as you say, grow, the better. We also have an overarching marketing strategy, which businesses in the city centre are very much a part of and interact with.

[162] **Nick Ramsay:** We have a question from Joyce Watson on out-of-town retail, and then from Byron Davies on the night-time economy.

[163] **Joyce Watson:** How has Swansea city centre been affected in recent years by the major out-of-town retail centres, such as Morfa retail park and Liberty Stadium enterprise park?

[164] **Mr Greenslade:** I can give you some very rough figures, because we have foot-flow canvass. I will then hand over to my colleague, who is in the trade. Out-of-town shopping centres were down 1.9 per cent and the city centre was down 1.1 per cent in foot flow. So, that could be interpreted to suggest that, for the first time, out-of-town shoppers are coming in to the city centre. As I say, those are unofficial figures. However, when you go to see traders, they say that people go to out-of-town centres where there is free parking and so on. However, we have the free hour parking in Swansea centre, which is heavily used, so we try to counteract it and give the positive back. I will hand over to my colleague who may know a little more about this.

[165] **Ms Luporini:** To add to that, since we have had the out-of-town developments, the key thing is that most people want to go somewhere that is easy to access and to park for free. They do not want the added cost of paying for parking. So, that is a huge thing for us to combat, which is why car parking is always a priority when we look at any of the committees and what we are trying to do. Possibly, the perception of local businesses is that rates, rents and all those sorts of things are far cheaper out of town, whereas, in the city centre, we are paying a great deal for rates. I know that, in some parts of the country, during these more difficult times, rents and rates have been reduced where possible. That needs to be considered quite strongly in order to help businesses. Those are the perceptions, so we have to deal with

not only competition but with a playing field that is not level if you are paying for car parking in a city centre, which you have to access, and you have ease of access and free parking elsewhere.

[166] **Keith Davies:** Yr wyf yn gweld Abertawe mewn ffordd wahanol. Yr oeddwn yno wythnos i ddydd Sadwrn diwethaf gyda fy mab sydd yn y brifysgol yn Abertawe ac yr oedd yn dweud wrthyf—yr wyf yn edrych ar y map ac mae'r ardal gwella busnes yn cynnwys Sainsbury's a Homebase—bod parcio am ddim yno ac mae ef yn cerdded i mewn i ganol y dref o'r maes parcio hwnnw. Ni fydd hynny'n gweithio mewn trefi eraill. Yn ei farn ef, mae digon o leoedd i barcio yn Abertawe a digon ohonynt am ddim. Onid yw hynny'n wir?

**Keith Davies:** I see Swansea in a different light. I was there a week last Saturday with my son, who it is at Swansea University, and he told me—I look at the map and see that the BID includes Sainsbury's and Homebase—that free parking is available there and that he walks into the town centre from that car park. However, that will not work in other towns. In his opinion, there are plenty of places to park in Swansea and plenty that are free. Is that not true?

[167] **Ms Luporini:** I do not think so. In terms of the legislation, you are supposed to shop at Sainsbury's and Tesco and park there for a limited amount of time, about two hours. People want to be able to come into a town centre and leave their car as long as they want to in a car park without having to go back around a one-way system and find another car parking space. I can appreciate it from a student's point of view—

[168] **Keith Davies:** Heb sôn am Tesco a Sainsbury's, mae Parc Tawe yn rhan o'r ardal gwella busnes. Dyna lle'r oedd ef yn parcio, lle mae'r ali fowlio a'r pethau hynny. Mae pobl yn gallu parcio yno am fwy na dwy awr, byddwn i'n meddwl.

**Keith Davies:** Setting aside Tesco and Sainsbury's, Parc Tawe is also part of the BID. That is where he was parking, where the bowling alley and those things are. People can park there for more than two hours, I would have thought.

[169] **Ms Luporini:** Is it more than two hours?

[170] **Mr Greenslade:** It is a maximum of three hours, and it is policed heavily. A number of shoppers have complained, as they thought it was a BID free car park, but they got clamped. It is policed very well and so are the Sainsbury's and Tesco car parks. You have the Odeon, the former UCI, Toys R Us and other big retailers down that way as well.

[171] **Nick Ramsay:** Interesting though that is, we do not want to stray into charging arrangements at individual car parks across Wales.

[172] **Keith Davies:** The point that I was trying to make, Chair, is that a lot of parking is available within easy walking distance of the town centre in the BID area, which is not true of other town centres in Wales.

[173] **Ms Luporini:** I would still disagree with that, to be honest. It is different as a student, because you will want to find somewhere to park all day and you might find a back street in Mount Pleasant or wherever. However, the people from the socioeconomic group who are probably spending the most money want to come in, park easily, know that their car is safe and secure, get their children out, shop, and return to the car park and so on.

[174] **Keith Davies:** You have made your point.

[175] **Nick Ramsay:** Joyce, do you want to finish this bit off?

[176] **Joyce Watson:** You have talked about some of the ways that you have addressed the impact of out-of-town retail centres. Unless you have something new to add, I will assume that you have given me everything on that. However, what changes do you think are required to local planning policies in Wales that will better protect town centres from the possible negative impacts of out-of-town retail centres?

[177] **Mr Greenslade:** There has been a lot in the press lately about the enterprise zone. We have touched on it in our paper and, as I said in that paper, I am not an expert. However, many businesses that I have talked to have mentioned it because of how it would impact on them and how it would work with the BID. To central Government, the feedback from Swansea businesses, large and small, would be, ‘Why can’t Swansea city centre be an enterprise zone?’ I am sure that you will get that from other city centres and towns. However, from our point of view as the only BID in Wales, I feed that back to you here.

11.00 a.m.

[178] **Byron Davies:** My question is about the night-time economy, which is very relevant to Swansea. I will quote the written evidence provided by the City and County of Swansea, because it paints the picture well. It says:

[179] ‘Whilst the night time economy is an important part of the City Centre function, it has to be recognised that a poor night time reputation can deter efficient day time functioning. A narrowly focused night time offer, concentrated on a drinking culture, can lead to the centre proving unattractive’.

[180] I would suggest—and I would be interested to hear your views—that that is very true of Swansea.

[181] **Mr Greenslade:** Swansea is a very condensed area for the night-time economy—there is Wind Street and Oceana nightclub on the Kingsway. Twenty six thousand students come into Swansea at certain times of the year, which has a massive impact on the economy, and it may reflect the statement that you quoted. We work very closely with the police, the Safer Swansea Partnership and everyone else to try to join the day-time economy to the night-time economy, which is why we are going to invest in a night-time ranger as part of our business plan. You not only have bars and clubs, but also Frankie and Benny’s, which is the place where I would take my daughter, and it is about keeping families in town. The reason for that is that it is a security presence, and we are working to rectify what you mentioned about the detrimental effect on the day time, but also so that staff who are leaving the city centre to go to their cars will want to stop off and have drink on Wind Street after work on Wednesday; it does not have to be at the weekend. So, we are very conscious of that and we are consulting with numerous partners to rectify that problem the best we can, but it is very much a combined effort to try to work on that.

[182] **Byron Davies:** I raised this point with the earlier witness. It is a social matter and it is about excluding other people from the city centre during those times. What do you feel about that?

[183] **Mr Greenslade:** Excluding who?

[184] **Byron Davies:** Perhaps older people who might want to go to have a coffee or a night out in Swansea and feel threatened by the behaviour of people in and around Swansea, in areas such as Wind Street and Kingsway.

[185] **Ms Luporini:** Culture is the hardest thing to change in any environment, whether it is a business or a town. We have to work on that over a long time. I was in Wind Street recently

on a Friday evening, and I was pleasantly surprised to see quite a few people of my age. There is a good mix in Swansea. It is vital to have plenty of restaurants of different calibres, which we do on Wind Street, rather than just a lot of pubs where people want to have cheap drinks. From a BID point of view, after Wind Street on a Friday night, the pressure is on cleansing, because you have extra upheaval and an extra cost for that. There is extra pressure with policing, taxi marshals and all of those things, which make it a much better environment, but it costs.

[186] **Byron Davies:** I will repeat the point that I made earlier in that it has a knock-on effect outside of Swansea, particularly with regard to policing and ambulances. That is a very difficult thing to overcome in terms of image.

[187] **Ms Luporini:** It is—it is about people's perception, really.

[188] **Byron Davies:** It is a reality as well.

[189] **Julie James:** To follow that up, we heard from the previous witness, from the Association of Town Centre Management, about the efforts that town-centre managers can make—I know that you have a town-centre manager in Swansea, as well as the BID—to persuade retailers to come out of their traditional boxes and mix in with the night economy. He talked about trying to persuade people to stop opening from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and to open from 11 a.m. till 7 p.m., or whatever. What do you think of that as a strategy for joining the night-time economy to the day-time economy?

[190] **Mr Greenslade:** 'In principle, it is brilliant' is the straight answer to that. We undertook a recent exercise, coming up to Christmas, whereby we e-mailed our members asking them when they would be open over Christmas. A handful of independents got back to us in writing and verbally, and most of the nationals got back to us with their opening times, because they know in September when they will be open. Independents have to get extra staff in and so on, so they have to consider whether it is worth opening and what marketing support they will get to make it worthwhile. In an ideal world, joining up the twilight to that would be brilliant. It is a matter of getting the hook to get the shops to stay open all night: that is the bigger picture. It needs to be addressed on an individual level, rather than considering what can be done on the national level.

[191] **Alun Ffred Jones:** A yw'r cynllun rhyddhad ardrethi busnes presennol wedi gwneud gwahaniaeth yn ninas Abertawe? Pa newidiadau yr ydych am eu gweld yn y cynllun hwnnw? **Alun Ffred Jones:** Has the current business rate relief scheme made a difference in the city of Swansea? What changes would you like to see to that scheme?

[192] **Mr Greenslade:** Based on a meeting that we had recently, it has been well accepted. The traders would like more to be done, so that it has more of an impact. There is a scheme, which I evidenced yesterday to the leader, operated in Rotherham where the local authority pays 50 per cent rent and helps companies coming in. It provides business rate relief, pays half the rent and finds the property for them. I do not know whether it is worth having a look at what goes on up there on a bigger scale, but I gave that paper to the leader of Swansea council last night.

[193] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Could we have a look at it?

[194] **Mr Greenslade:** Of course, I will send it to you.

[195] **Eluned Parrott:** What specific role do you play in marketing Swansea city centre? How does it compare to the work that the City and County of Swansea undertakes, and how



does it complement it? Or does it duplicate it?

[196] **Mr Greenslade:** The idea of the BID is to not duplicate the work of the local authority. That is why partnership working and synergy is critical. For instance, we are going to be joining forces with Gorseinion park and ride in the period running up to Christmas, concentrating on the west Wales market coming up to the Swansea area, for example. Our overarching marketing strategy is quite a generic message: come to Swansea, which is west Wales's premier shopping destination, and we have 248 bars. We go to parts of Swansea such as Wind Street, coming up to Christmas, and ask which businesses would like a radio campaign to advertise their Christmas parties—in Lava Lounge or No Sign Wine Bar, for example. We join forces and put that out there. That is backed up by the press and by a magazine called *Swansea Life*. It is a targeted marketing approach, and we try to keep all the businesses as happy as we can, which is challenging.

[197] We are also strong on marketing with Twitter and Facebook—we have nearly 1,000 followers. That is a good, strong marketing message. We have working groups on which we sit. As you said, we are not duplicating anything, but we work in partnership when it comes to distribution, leaflet design and so on. We are a private company, separate to the local authority, but we work closely together.

[198] **Leanne Wood:** You said quite a lot in your paper and in your evidence about the gains that you have made on free parking. What are you doing about public transport?

[199] **Mr Greenslade:** At present, we are talking to the local authority about park-and-ride offers, particularly for a time that we can monitor. That is what we are doing on public transport for the time being. That is not to say that it is the only thing that we will be doing, but we have budgets and funds, and we work with other people if we want to develop public transport. We have a good relationship with First Cymru and we have bought park-and-ride tokens previously as part of a BID initiative, so we have not only looked at car parking; we have looked at other means of transport, but we are governed and guided by what businesses tell us in our consultations.

[200] **Leanne Wood:** That was my next question: how concerned are businesses about the provision of public transport in order to protect the town centres?

[201] **Mr Greenslade:** Car parking is No. 1. Our group is called 'car parking and transportation'. Businesses want to bring people in, with whatever means it takes. That is what they are focused on.

[202] **Leanne Wood:** Is the private car seen as what most people would use?

[203] **Mr Greenslade:** Buying a car is probably the second biggest investment that people make in their lives, after their house. Businesses tell us that. We work with First Cymru and the local authority operates a park-and-ride service.

[204] **Leanne Wood:** Could I ask one final question? Have you seen any reduction in the number of cars coming in to the city centre since the price of petrol has gone up? Has there been a correlation there?

[205] **Mr Greenslade:** I can only talk about the figures that I get from the NCP regarding BID's involvement, which is the free hour. It is quite good—we are up 1,500 cars on this month last year, when you look at the free hour. Where they go after that is up to them. We get stats on that in order to pay the right amount of money, to ensure a return on our investment and so on. That speaks for itself, to a certain extent. Talking to businesses such as your coffee shops and your hairdressers and your national banks, they heavily market the free

hour, because they guarantee their customers that it will not take longer than an hour for their mortgage appointments and so on.

[206] **Nick Ramsay:** That is the end of our questions. Are there any other points that you would like to add for our inquiry before we close this session?

[207] **Mr Greenslade:** Just what happens from here? What is the next stage? Is there anything else that we can provide you with? Is there any other evidence that you would like to see? I think that you can see that what we have done in Swansea works. Obviously, the BID is a very good concept—

[208] **Nick Ramsay:** I think that your next evidence is required sooner than you expected, because Keith Davies has a final question.

[209] **Keith Davies:** Looking at your map, you cover the whole of Swansea city centre, really, but there is one area of Swansea that I would like to ask about—the area from the station and the High Street, down to the middle of town. I would like to know what you are doing about that, because that is the issue in other city centres in Wales.

[210] **Mr Greenslade:** We work closely with a company called Coastal Group, and its investment in Swansea now is phenomenal—millions of pounds of development. In the High Street especially, the wraps have just come off the front of its building, and a new theatre has just gone in there—the Evening Post Theatre—so a lot is going on there. The train station has had central Government money for rejuvenation, and both Juliet’s group and my group are working with landlords to see what we can do in that area, such as putting vinyl in empty shop windows to make it look more appealing when you come out of the train station into Swansea. Coastal Group is developing that area as well, and the local authority has just moved more staff into Alexander House at the top. That came from a conversation that the BID had with the local authority to ask what it could do to help, which was taken on board, and it reacted very well. There is a lot going on in the High Street. I take your points on board, because obviously, I walk around the city centre almost every day, but there are three floors of new office space in there, the Coastal Group is moving up there—and I believe it employs 300 staff—and there are 76 flats going in for young professionals. That is without the development going on by Barons, which is just down the road. All of a sudden you will see a big difference, let me put it that way—it is going to be focused on a cleansing regime. We have battled to change the loading bays there, which has now come to fruition, as well as introducing 20-minute parking, so that people can pick stuff up—because you have Argos there, and Leisure Quest and so on. So, the answer to your question is that there is an awful lot going on, and we are trying our best.

[211] **Ms Luporini:** The other side of that is that in every town or city there is a street where you get most of the anti-social behaviour, and unfortunately, that is High Street in Swansea. It has certain institutions that attract that element to the city, and that is something that we have to work on. It will not be changed overnight.

[212] **Nick Ramsay:** I thank Russell Greenslade and Juliet Luporini from Swansea business improvement district. You asked about the next stage; we will be speaking to more witnesses and looking at more evidence and then we will compile a report in due course, of which we will send both of you a copy. I hope that you continue not to be surprised by your peer group as you are out and about in Swansea. I am sure that this is beneficial. Keep up the good work, and we shall communicate with you in due course. Thank you for being here today. With that, we will take a brief break, before we see the final witnesses.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11.15 a.m. a 11.22 a.m.  
The meeting adjourned between 11.15 a.m. and 11.22 a.m.*

**Ymchwiliad i Adfywio Canol Trefi: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth**  
**Inquiry into the Regeneration of Town Centres: Evidence Session**

[213] **Nick Ramsay:** I welcome Sian Wilton, the retail manager in Wales for Boots, and Andy Godfrey, the public policy manager for Boots UK, to the Enterprise and Business Committee as part of our ongoing inquiry into town-centre regeneration in Wales. We will be compiling a report in due course on this issue. Before we start with the questions, would you like to make any opening statements? The committee would be grateful to hear any comments that you may have.

[214] **Ms Wilton:** Good morning, everybody, and thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak today. I am Sian Wilton, the retail manager in the west division for Boots, which includes the flagship stores in Cardiff and Swansea. I have worked in retail for over 30 years, and I am the Welsh lead for retail for Boots. My colleague Andy Godfrey is public policy manager, based in Nottingham, and he covers all retail policy, including crime, transport, business engagement, and many of the issues that are a concern in town centres, many of which we will probably talk about today. From our evidence, I hope that you can see that we are committed to Welsh town centres and high streets and have been since the 1890s. We are keen to look at new ways of working that open dialogue between the Welsh Government and retail, and we are keen to see a clear policy and responsibility within Government.

[215] Retailing has been a great success story and is at the heart of towns, cities and neighbourhoods. Good retailing is about great products, great people and a great service, but if we are going to trade profitably, we need customers to be drawn into a compelling, safe and accessible high street offer, and to enable that, we need good policy, partnership and collaboration between Government, local authorities and retailers, which is why we are here today.

[216] **Nick Ramsay:** Would you like to add anything to that, Andy?

[217] **Mr Godfrey:** I could not add anything to that. That was fantastic. [*Laughter.*]

[218] **Nick Ramsay:** I should have thanked you for the evidence. It is due to Boots and its long history in Wales alone that we are interested in speaking to you as part of our inquiry. Joyce Watson, you have the opening question.

[219] **Joyce Watson:** You mention in your paper that 97 per cent of your stores are in town centre and high street locations. Why has Boots chosen to focus particularly on town centres, rather than out of town? Do you have any plans to increase the number of out-of-town stores that you operate?

[220] **Ms Wilton:** Our preference is to be where the business is and where the opportunities are. Our core business is pharmacy, and that plays a large part in the community. We would go where there was a business opportunity. Clearly, in Wales, the biggest opportunities are in the town centres rather than out of town. However, that is not to say that we would not go to out-of-town locations as well.

[221] **Leanne Wood:** What are the main challenges that town centres in Wales face? I understand that a drop in footfall has been a particular issue here. Do you have any understanding of why that is?

[222] **Ms Wilton:** Footfall is a big issue. Swansea, which is one of my stores, has seen a significant decline in footfall, probably over the past two years. It has been significant over

the past six months. In contrast, we have invested hugely in Cardiff, and we have not seen that footfall drop. However, in other towns in south Wales, in the Valleys towns, it is hard. Business is hard.

[223] **Leanne Wood:** What do you think the reasons are for that reduction? Lack of money?

[224] **Ms Wilton:** Consumers do not have the money they had. In Swansea, there is a high level of public sector employment, and consumers are very cautious in their spending at the moment. In the past few months, we have seen footfall rise, but people are not spending as much.

[225] **Leanne Wood:** Given that you are a UK-wide organisation and that Wales is faring particularly badly, are you aware of anything in particular in Wales that is making the situation worse?

[226] **Ms Wilton:** There is high unemployment in Wales. In some towns, such as Newport, we have not invested and they are not attractive environments. By contrast, we have made significant investment in some towns, such as Carmarthen, and those are thriving. So, I think it is dependent on the location, how partnerships have worked and how we have built the businesses and worked collaboratively with other retailers.

[227] **Leanne Wood:** So, there are two things: the attractiveness of the town centre, and the disposable income of the people who live in the area.

[228] **Ms Wilton:** Yes.

[229] **David Rees:** You mentioned partnerships just now and in your paper. How many partnerships are you involved with in town centres? It is clearly an important theme in the evidence we have so far.

[230] **Mr Godfrey:** There are lots of different sorts of partnerships across the UK—I heard Martin Blackwell speaking earlier. There are 110 or so business improvement districts and they are growing quite fast. We were talking about this earlier, and I can see that number reaching 150 in the next 18 months. Beneath that, there are some looser town-centre management initiatives in which the private sector is engaged. Beyond that, there are looser still comings together of businesses and local authorities, particularly in smaller communities, to work in a much more informal way. We absolutely support the principle of proper, genuine and sustainable engagement. From our experience, that tends to be through BIDs. We are seeing those evolve better in small locations than in large locations. There are many small towns and market towns of 15,000 to 20,000 people doing this.

[231] I was in Cornwall recently talking to the BID managers for Newquay, Falmouth and Camborne. They are in the process of developing BIDs. Camborne is quite a rundown community, but there is real passion in that community. Obviously, that fits very nicely with Boots, because we are part of that community as well. So, we are happy to lead on that. In fact, personally, I chair one of the largest BIDs in London, the Heart of London BID. So, I have seen business improvement districts from the inside as well.

[232] **David Rees:** There is only one BID in Wales, so how many other partnerships are you involved with in Wales? Clearly, there is a difference, in that case.

[233] **Mr Godfrey:** There are a number of issues here. Certainly, for a partnership to get off the ground, there must be a genuine private-public sector dialogue. It is great to see the work that has been going on in Swansea over the years. I was a store manager there many

years ago, so it is good to see that dialogue happening. In fairness to business, for business to get involved, there must be a purpose to it where it is genuinely shared decision-making and where there is a proper role for businesses to play. Where that is occurring, you see business being prepared to support it. It is interesting to see that despite the present economic climate, well over 80 per cent of business improvement districts are still getting a ‘yes’ vote.

11.30 a.m.

[234] **David Rees:** I appreciate that, but to go back to my question, there is one BID in Wales and I am concerned about the other partnerships that exist in Wales. How many other partnerships exist here?

[235] **Ms Wilton:** I know that Cardiff has a partnership, because there is a Boots store manager in Cardiff who is the chair of the Cardiff retail partnership. However, there are fewer partnerships than we would like.

[236] **Mr Godfrey:** I am sorry if I did not make that clear. The message that I was trying to give is that there is an opportunity there.

[237] **David Rees:** I am aware that there are opportunities, but I wanted to know how many partnerships currently exist.

[238] **Mr Godfrey:** There is currently one BID. In terms of town-centre management members, there are looser groups where the private sector will contribute in some cases, and in other cases there will perhaps be another dozen groups that will be largely local authority-run, and those will be a real mixed bag between providing a worthwhile contribution and a local authority employee carrying out what the management of a certain area of the town wants on behalf of the local authority.

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| <p>[239] <b>Alun Ffred Jones:</b> Yr ydych yn cyfeirio yn eich papur at nifer y siopau manwerthu sydd wedi gorfod cau, ac yr ydych yn dyfynnu ffigur o 7,500 o siopau wedi cau rhwng Ebrill 2008 a Thachwedd 2009. O ganlyniad, mae bylchau ar y stryd fawr o ran adeiladau gwag. Beth yw effaith hynny ar y busnesau sydd ar ôl—busnesau fel eich rhai chi—a beth y gall y Llywodraeth ei wneud i geisio ymateb i'r sefyllfa hon?</p> | <p><b>Alun Ffred Jones:</b> You refer in your paper to the number of retail outlets that have had to close, and you quote a figure of 7,500 of shops closed between April 2008 and November 2009. Consequently, there are gaps on the high street in terms of empty properties. What impact does that have on the remaining businesses—businesses such as yours—and what can the Government do to try to respond to that situation?</p> |
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[240] **Mr Godfrey:** With regard to the impact on the businesses that remain, I could take you to sites around the country where there are 30 per cent vacancy rates. Once you reach that stage, the whole area is in a very dangerous spiral of decline, because footfall is falling, it is less attractive, fly posting and graffiti become an issue and the area generally becomes increasingly unattractive, and that leads to other businesses choosing to close.

[241] In terms of the challenge of what to do, I am afraid that many things need to be done, and I hope that that came through in the paper to you. We have already made the point about the need to work collaboratively between the public and private sector, which is vital, and the issues of trying to ensure that the playing field is, at the very least, level with other choices of shopping, which is very important. That picks up on issues such as planning, car parking and so on. So, a great deal needs to be done across many areas, and, more than anything, our message would be that if we are looking at our town centres, we have to think of them and respond to them in a collaborative way across departments, rather than seeing it as, ‘Today, we’re going to deal with crime, tomorrow it’s accessibility and the day after it’s a public

realm issue’.

[242] **Nick Ramsay:** Eluned Parrott, do you want to ask about the Welsh Government’s role in this?

[243] **Eluned Parrott:** You suggest in your paper that the Welsh Government needs to think and act in a more holistic manner with regard to its support for town centres. Can you flesh out exactly what you mean by that, and give us your perspective on the Welsh Government’s approach to town centre regeneration in recent years?

[244] **Ms Wilton:** From our perspective, we feel that retail has been neglected by the Government. We think that it is crucial to the Welsh economy, and, as a business, we feel that if we could open up some engagement, such as a forum that would meet twice a year to share best practices, the retailers’ view would be given to the Government and the Government would recognise that retail is important. The retail sector employs 10 per cent of the workforce in Wales. I have worked in retail for 30 years and I have never seen it so hard in business. If we do nothing for our town centres, then that decline will continue. So, engagement with the Government is really important.

[245] **Keith Davies:** Bu i Eluned ofyn am Lywodraeth Cymru, ond beth am y sector gyhoeddus yng Nghymru ac awdurdodau lleol? Sut y gallent helpu busnesau fel eich rhai chi? **Keith Davies:** Eluned asked about the Welsh Government, but what about the public sector in Wales and local authorities? How can they help businesses like yours?

[246] **Mr Godfrey:** I will pick up on that. The issue is that high streets are changing faster today than ever before. When we were children, most shopping was done around a certain centre. There is now a huge amount of choice about which centres you choose to go to, whether you go to a town centre at all, whether you go to a supermarket or an out-of-town centre, and, increasingly, there is the use of e-retail. So, there is much more choice. My perception is that town centres will continue to change at quite a fast pace. To take the issue of e-retail as an example, people may use the town centre to see the goods and to get customer service, but they may well then choose to purchase the goods somewhere else. If that is the case, the size of the units that we will need in town centres will change, and the amount of stock that we hold will diminish. Equally, the level of turnover in town centres will fall, which will have an impact on the value of property in town centres. So, there is a range of issues to consider in issuing a response to the Government. However, town centres will continue to change at a fast rate and, therefore, sitting back and allowing them to chug along will not be enough.

[247] **Keith Davies:** Pa fath o gefnogaeth y gall llywodraeth leol ei rhoi? Nid oes hawl ganddi i roi grantiau ichi, ond a oes unrhyw beth arall y gall llywodraeth leol ei wneud i’ch helpu? Yr wyf yn sôn am lywodraeth leol, nid Llywodraeth ganolog. **Keith Davies:** What sort of support can local government provide? It does not have the right to give you a grant, but is there anything else that local government could do to help you? I am talking about local government, not central Government.

[248] **Mr Godfrey:** I do not want to go over the same ground again, but it is important to point out that it is the quality of the dialogue that we have between the private and public sectors at a local level that is critical. I was in Newcastle a few weeks ago, and I saw that it is now developing late-night trading—and I listened to what Martin said earlier on this point. So, between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. Monday to Friday, parking is free. Half of that cost is paid by the local authority and the other half is paid by the BID. In Newcastle, there is also a scheme to support 25 new, independent start-ups, which is being run by the BID. Once again, you could not do that if the private and public sector were not working closely together. Working

in collaboration provides you with a series of opportunities that you would not otherwise have.

[249] **Nick Ramsay:** Joyce Watson, I think that some of the issues on management and partnerships have been addressed, but there is a question on the statutory role that you might like to ask.

[250] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. I have a question on town-centre management. We have heard evidence this morning from town-centre managers, and it is not a statutory function, so whether the role exists or not will depend on local authority management. Do you think that local authorities should be made to have a town-centre manager?

[251] **Mr Godfrey:** Allow me to answer an associated question first, which leads into that one. The bit that is missing here, which was asked earlier and on which I do not think you received a full answer, is that something that the Welsh Government could do that is crucial is to link up a town centre that may have issues, but which wants to work more collaboratively, and to ensure that an effective partnership is put in place. I will use Cornwall as an example, as I visited it a few weeks ago. In Cornwall, the county council has employed Mel Richardson, who established a BID in Truro, got the successful BID ballot and then stepped back and handed it over to a manager. She then moved on to do exactly the same in Newquay and Falmouth and she is now doing the same in Cambourne. In other words, the role and the skills that are needed to set up and develop the potential for a BID is quite different from that—you saw Russell earlier—required to manage it. That is the crucial role. If you look at where partnerships are developing apace, you have that structure in place to bring pipe dreams to reality. The Scottish Parliament has a team—perhaps ‘team’ is generous, because there are about two individuals—responsible for that facilitation, for bringing sites such as Stornoway and Kirkwall from just thinking that they need to work more closely together to the stage where they can get to a BID ballot and put someone in place. That is the really important bit that is missing.

[252] As for making town-centre managers a requirement on the local authority, that probably would not be a bad thing, because of what I have said: with change happening as fast as it is, if the issues around town centres are not managed, we could, at worst, lose them in some cases. There is an awful lot to go at here, and I cannot imagine how you could deal with the issue of maintaining or strengthening your community centre or town centre without having someone focused on it. I would like to think that everyone would want to do that, but, if they did not want to, I guess you are saying that we should challenge them to ensure that they do.

[253] **Nick Ramsay:** You point in your evidence, as did witnesses earlier, to the situation in Wales and Northern Ireland being worse than elsewhere, in terms of vacancy rates in particular. You have spoken about the new city strategy in Scotland. Would there be an argument for a similar strategy in Wales? Or is Wales in a different situation and so would not benefit from that?

[254] **Mr Godfrey:** This is not something that is specific to the UK or Wales—right across Europe, most countries are going through these issues with their urban centres, and many of them are facing up to the same kinds of issues that we have been describing, in terms of e-retail and the development of large supermarkets. Carrefour has been around for many years, and it is finding some real challenges now in creating some identity and character to keep people visiting. This is very much a common issue. However, I would also say that, across the UK, most Governments are at an early stage of developing policy. Scotland had a regeneration fund, which was an interesting idea and focused people’s attention on the importance of town centres, and now it is asking, going forward, how it ensures that it co-ordinates policies across the Scottish Government to provide genuine support for town

centres. Last week, at the Labour party conference, Jack Dromey was beginning to look at a response to the issue. He shared a stage with us at a fringe event on a report called ‘Future High Streets’ that Boots led on, and which was produced and hosted by Business in the Community; it has also submitted evidence to the inquiry, including, I think, a copy of ‘Future High Streets’.

[255] **Kenneth Skates:** Your evidence is clear that you overwhelmingly support BIDs, and you question why Swansea has the only one in Wales. You also suggest that they could be better suited to towns, where there could be some element of local ownership. What are the characteristics that make for a successful BID area?

[256] **Mr Godfrey:** We have talked for a long time about the role of BIDs in Wales, and there used to be a view that BIDs were for big cities, and, as we do not have too many of those in Wales, that therefore it was not really applicable to Wales. That is quite wrong. If you think about it, in smaller communities, where people have much more ownership of the community and feel part of it, it is easier to move forward with that kind of collaborative working than in a city. So, if you look at the way the last 20-odd BIDs have evolved, around two thirds of those have been in smaller locations. There is a national BIDs survey produced every year that monitors their growth, reviews how they are developing and looks at particular issues. The present one is looking at the role and response of BIDs in the recession, when the pressure is on town centres. I know about that because I am a joint author of it. It is basically put together by the University of Ulster.

11.45 a.m.

[257] I would encourage you to have a look at that. I can certainly send you last year’s report and the new one will be out in November. To add to that, we support the principle of BIDs. We know about BIDs; we know what makes a good BID and a bad BID. We have never worked the figures out, but we would probably vote in favour of 70 per cent of BIDs and against 30 per cent. So, do not see me as a pushover. If it is not right and if it does not really meet the requirements of the business community—that is very much driven by our local store managers—then we would not necessarily support it. It has to win our vote.

[258] **Joyce Watson:** You talk about size, but size means different things to different people. I represent Mid and West Wales, where the largest town is Llanelli, in terms of population. The second is Carmarthen and then the populations get quite small. Population is obviously a factor in any business, because it is about footfall. How small is small? How small is it before it is not viable?

[259] **Mr Godfrey:** That is interesting: how small is small? The smallest BID that I know of is a site in Scotland called Clarkston, which is a very small district centre—a parade of shops. Birmingham is a better example, perhaps. There, you currently have a city centre BID, which is the retail BID, you have Broad Street BID, which is the leisure community BID, and you have Colmore Row, which is a large office area in Birmingham city centre. Then, when you start going further out, you have smaller sites such as Erdington, Kings Heath, Acocks Green and Northfield, which are all developing BIDs. So, BIDs can be quite small and very much community focused. Another interesting one in Scotland is Bathgate, which is an old mining town where there is a real fierce pride among the local community, which wants to ensure that its town centre has a future.

[260] I do not think that you need lots of resources. Often, there is a real will and a lot being delivered at local level, but it needs to be joined together. That was happening in Tavistock, on the way down to Cornwall. It was coming up with some fantastic events and activities, but needed someone to pull the whole thing together, bring the enthusiasm and unify the support. That might mean that all you need is to raise £50,000 or £60,000 from a BID to provide a



resource and a small pump-priming budget to make those things move forward.

[261] **Nick Ramsay:** The follow-up question to that is: how large is large? However, we are not going to get into that. [*Laughter.*]

[262] **Julie James:** I want to follow up on what you said about the partnerships that you work with and so on. The committee has heard from a number of witnesses about town-centre managers and BIDs. Some places have both of those, and some places have neither. Would your recommendation be that we just let the town come up with what it needs or would you favour a town-centre manager, a BID manager or both? We have had a bit of a conflict between people who like BIDs, people who like town-centre managers and people who like both. I am not quite clear where we are with that.

[263] **Ms Wilton:** I think that town-centre managers work, but it is about everyone working together and having real ownership of their town. I do not think that you can be prescriptive about what every town should have, because it differs, but the main thing should be that every retailer should be engaged. If they are not engaged, the town centre will not progress. So, it is unique to each town and it will depend on what that business needs. At the end of the day, it is about people talking together, owning their town and marketing it in a way that makes it unique, so that we have customers coming into the towns.

[264] **Julie James:** You do not see a conflict, for instance, in having a town-centre manager and a BID at the same time?

[265] **Mr Godfrey:** There are relatively few of those. What I tend to see working best in large city sites—Plymouth, for example—is having an umbrella, which may well be the public sector manager, which picks up broader things than the BID, such as tourism and working within the region and so on. Then, beneath that you have the BID, which is focused on the delivery of clean and green programmes and so on within the town centre. So, that is fine. In smaller locations, I would have real problems with having a town-centre manager and a BID, because you are asking me to pay for two different things that seem to me to be doing the same thing. There are sites where there is a population of 100,000 that have both. I struggle with that.

[266] **Julie James:** In the UK and Europe there are out-of-town retail sites that can have a detrimental effect, according to the various witnesses that we have heard; we have seen that for ourselves as well. However, we have also heard from witnesses that, sometimes, they can have a positive effect on towns. I am not clear which is which. You said earlier that you were in some out-of-town retail sites, but that you were mostly in town centres. What is your view on this issue? How do you decide whether to open a shop in a town or out of town? What effect do you think that they have? I wonder what the general view is from the retailer's point of view.

[267] **Ms Wilton:** I think that they both work, and it depends on the destination that a consumer wants. If someone wants to go shopping in a town and have a nice leisurely lunch and do other activities, the town is the right place to go on a Saturday. If they want a quick convenient visit to an out-of-town site, or if there is a specific store that they want to visit, then that is right as well. So, they both work. Clearly, our customers want both. They offer different things, and it depends on what the consumer wants at that time. They both fulfil a need in the community.

[268] **Julie James:** So, you would not be recommending that the Government should attempt to stop any further out-of-town retail. Should we try to limit it? Should we try to rearrange our planning so that people go into towns? Or do you think that it is just a fact of life and that we should live with it?

[269] **Mr Godfrey:** We have a town-centre-first policy, and we talk about that a lot. In fairness, where town centres have moved, and where demand has moved, we cannot isolate ourselves and carry on King-Canute-style, ignoring the change. Having said that, if we are serious about wanting town centres and having them as the centre of our communities, we have to ensure that that happens going forward. That does not mean ruling anything in or out, but we need to recognise that, for many of us, we are only going to buy things once, so if it happens in one place it is not going to happen somewhere else.

[270] **Nick Ramsay:** Keith Davies, do you have a question on the retail sector?

[271] **Keith Davies:** That has been covered.

[272] **Nick Ramsey:** Byron Davies will ask a question on transport.

[273] **Byron Davies:** Leading on from what has been said, and given your 97 per cent presence in towns, you say in your submission that the growth in transport, and road transport in particular, is one of today's most high profile environmental issues and that appropriate arrangements for parking can make or break a town centre. Do you think that customers can be lured away from using cars and going to out-of-town shopping centres? As my wife always asks, if you are pregnant and have a child, are you going to pay 90p at the car park machine in the town centre and walk to Boots or wherever, or are you going to go to Tesco or wherever?

[274] **Mr Godfrey:** No; I think that cars will continue to play an important role in retail. However, I think that we have to look again at the question of what a town centre is going to look like in the future. Almost certainly, leisure and community will play a much greater part in town-centre life. Cultural activity will play a greater part and retail less so. In some town centres, that is happening, because at the moment there are lots of empty A1 usage spaces that we are not doing anything with. In other cases, it might be gentler and could be managed. However, if we are going to use town centres much more for leisure experiences, as you see in many towns in France, for instance—where you drop in to see the rest of your community, to spend time with them and to do a little shopping while you are there—we have to accept that cars will play an important role within that, while also recognising that public transport, cycling and so on has a role to play.

[275] **Byron Davies:** That is quite a big statement. The local butcher and baker will not be pleased to hear that.

[276] **Mr Godfrey:** Look at what is happening to the number of small businesses that have been affected over the past decade and the diminishing numbers. That is me with my hammer and sickle. However, I think that there is an opportunity here. If we are starting to see town centres much more as community hubs, the counter argument says that the independent retailer providing a unique offer with real quality will be a real attraction and that we should not see them as places where we do the bulk shop, when we are not looking for items of a particular quality.

[277] **Julie James:** Developing that, on the transport theme and so on—on the basis of no scientific evidence at all but my recent holiday abroad, so I apologise—I was very struck by the healthy independent retail offer in this small town with unique stores, which was coupled with a take-it-to-your-car service. That was like a light-bulb moment for me. You could buy something quite bulky in an independent store and then a little chap on a bicycle took it back to your car for you. They had collection points in most of the car parks. What do you think about schemes like that to encourage people to use these businesses? I have been a pregnant mother with a pushchair and so on and I cannot think of anything worse than trying to carry my shopping on top of all that. What do you think of an integrated transport strategy that also

has a service to help people with their shopping? Would that make a difference?

[278] **Ms Wilton:** I think that that would make a huge difference. Clearly, there would be a cost, but it would make a huge difference. It would be amazing if we could have services like that in some of our towns. You are right—if you have a double buggy, it is hard. It is hard for mums shopping in towns. Anything that we could do to make it easier would be great.

[279] **Mr Godfrey:** The other thing that is going to happen that I think will support what you have just spoken about is the growth in pick-up points for e-retail. The problem is how you get those goods to your house. It would be much easier if there was a point in your local town where you could collect the items. Those sorts of ideas are evolving and being developed at the moment. So, we may see the two options.

[280] **Julie James:** Do you not think that that conflicts with the retail offer, making it easier for people to shop online?

[281] **Mr Godfrey:** It becomes part of the retail offer.

[282] **Ms Wilton:** It brings people into town.

[283] **David Rees:** You mentioned earlier that you like out-of-town and town shopping. I assume that you are looking for a level playing field, to ensure that the town has a fair go at gaining the credit. On the mix, are you looking at town centres becoming more like service centres, so that people go there to deal with services and not just retail?

[284] **Mr Godfrey:** That is how I see things moving, yes. At the moment, the largest 30 cities across the UK are continuing to grow apace. Retail is relatively strong in those centres. Shopping out of town and on the edge of towns is continuing to grow. It has grown a lot previously. It is now growing much more slowly, but it is continuing to grow. However, from a retail perspective, most town centres—be they towns, small cities or market towns—are contracting. That is happening, and we must think about how we use that space and the role that town centres will play going forward. It goes back to the community issue, which, of course, is important to us as pharmacists. However, it is also really important to look at the broader issue of community cohesion.

[285] **Ms Wilton:** We have just got agreement in Llanelli to have GPs in our store there. That is a fantastic opportunity to provide that sort of service to people coming into the town centre. It improves accessibility and offers extended hours. It is a start for us, and it is something that we want to look at further, because it adds attraction to the town and increases footfall.

[286] **Kenneth Skates:** It appears to me that what you are suggesting for the future is that town centres should try to contrast rather than compete directly with out-of-town developments and that they should place their focus on the experience rather than the daily task of going shopping. Is there a risk of out-of-town developments attracting cafes, restaurants, cinemas and leisure services that, perhaps, we should be seeing in town centres? If so, is there any way that we could restrict the American-style growth of out-of-town shopping/leisure malls?

12.00 p.m.

[287] **Mr Godfrey:** There is some good news, I think, here. I know that, when Bluewater was first opened, the architect said that if you were to get someone to shop there, you would keep them for an hour; if you could get them to have a cup of coffee, it would be two hours; and if you had events that attracted them, it would be three hours. He said that the problem

was that they would never do that as well as a town centre, because a town centre has that unique offer of retail, leisure and culture that cannot be designed and built in a shed-style retail park. So, town centres should be in a very strong position to respond to that.

[288] **Joyce Watson:** I asked a question earlier about the appearance and use of public space. What are your opinions on that? If you say that it is the town centre that is able to keep visitors longer, what can be done to make sure that that happens, and that they stay for the three hours?

[289] **Mr Godfrey:** I heard you talking about this in the earlier session. You have to have a really clear picture of what that town centre will look like in 25 years' time, both to encourage me as a retailer to say that I want to come in and commit to that town centre in the long term, and to join it all up so that the overall offer meets your requirements. I mentioned earlier that I chair a BID in central London, the heart of London—that area around Piccadilly and Leicester Square—with a turnover of a few million pounds a year. I know that that is not something that you will see in your towns, but the point that we are looking at is the connectivity. In that area of London you have some very nice bits, and then some areas where it is difficult for the visitor to know what to do next. You do not have green spaces, or somewhere to sit and relax, and you do not know where to go if you want to stop shopping and chill out and have a bit of leisure time. Joining the whole town centre together and having a pitch that says, 'This is what we want the whole of the town centre to look like', providing all those different services that we were talking about earlier, is absolutely crucial. What we have to do is create a more attractive reason for visiting town centres, rather than necessarily going backwards to a time when we did not have the competition of supermarkets and out-of-town developments, because they are there. What we want to do now is give people a reason why they should choose their town centre rather than commute to shop elsewhere.

[290] That is not a defeatist attitude. What was interesting about the Carrefour experience, listening to our CEOs speak at a conference yesterday, was that Carrefour has a massive turnover—£900 million a year has been quoted—but is making very little profit. A lot of consumers in France have been turning away from the sort of shed feel, because it does not give them a very nice experience. Carrefour's challenge now is to create more individuality, activity and buzz, which has not existed before. But how do you do that in a large warehouse? I am biased, am I not?

[291] **Nick Ramsay:** Are there any final points that you would like to make for the inquiry before we close this session? I see not. That is fine—you have been very helpful. I thank Sian Wilton and Andrew Godfrey for coming to speak to us today in a very full evidence session. It has been really helpful. We will be compiling a report in due course, which we can let you have a copy of, and if there are any further issues that we want to raise, we will get in touch. I apologise in retrospect for the temperature in this room. I think that Leanne Wood turned into an icicle by the end. Apologies for that. It is a combination of the temperamental weather and the air conditioning system, I think.

[292] We were going to have a private evidence session, but I propose that, due to time constraints, we roll that back to the session this afternoon. Are Members agreed? I see that you are.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.05 p.m.  
The meeting ended at 12.05 p.m.*