### Transcript

Sustainable Places: Rejecting Roads, Sustaining Streets

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Speakers *(order of appearance)*:

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PROF. YOLANDE BARNES:

Good afternoon, everybody, hope you can hear me, and welcome to this webinar. I'm Yolande Barnes, chair of Bartlett Real Estate Institute, and chair of this event, as well as presenting, and Sustainable Places is the new monthly online event series, led by The Bartlett where we invite leading thinkers in the built environment field to explore all aspects of the climate crisis and how it intersects with the built environment: From sustainability and green design to climate-adapted cities and housing. Today you have joined the May event of the series, called: Sustainable Places: Rejecting Roads, and Sustaining Streets and hopefully the meaning of what we're talking about here will become apparent. So we're going to, in this session, explain how integrated approach to real estate and urban design can improve health and sustainability, and we’ll start from macro point of view, with forces encouraging this, and then go on to more detailed examination of street functions themselves. And we are interested in how the built environment can actually make walking either possible or impossible, and in turn contribute to long term health and the climate crisis. So really the definition here of roads, routes, built for internal combustion engine vehicles from A to B, versus streets are about getting human beings from where they want to be, and so that's the basic premise. I'll introduce our second speaker, Ed Parham, an architect and director of innovation and design, welcome Ed. We’re going to hear from you, and I'm just going to set the scene for what I see has happened to our cities over the last 60 or 70 years or so and why that's going to be different in the future, and I’m going to talk about why place potential and place prosperity matters, particularly in the 21st century. So let's get moving. So, my proposition is that real estate, the built environment in the 21st century and the way that works to get built and invested in is is going to be different than the 20th century, and that streets are absolutely central to sustainability. The solution to sustainability goes way beyond what I think to date and has been sort of characterized by placemaking activity and ESG activity. So, what I'm going to suggest is that in the 20th century, form didn't follow function, it followed finance, and the way that finance has shaped our cities has been quite profound. And I'm not blaming these guys, but if you recognise these guys you know these are the Rolling Stones as they were in the 1960s, and I put them up here as representative of a generation, a generation called the baby boomers, that huge sort of post war generation. Why on earth would I put these people up here in a talk about the built environment? Well I think they’re very important in the way money has worked in investment, in the built environment, in as much as the first sort of new large middle class sort of cohort who started saving en mass, in pension funds, insurance companies and all those big institutions. And my argument is that these savers, maybe not these people in particular, they might have been doing other things with their money, but the generation of savers, gave us investment environment, where the name of the game was to take very large lumps of capital from the savers and the institution’s job was then to deploy it for capital growth, to grow the funds of these people. And I think that gave us particular form that big, massive, not necessarily even tall, but certainly massive and tall buildings, in single use, attached to city infrastructure like new road schemes, and this example here is close to UCL, its center point on Tottenham Court. And when it was built back in 1963, it went hand in hand with new road gyratory which never completed or worked. And interesting thing about the building, it never let, and it performed adequately as piece of investment because kept being traded at ever increasing rates, and the fact it was never fully let in it's lifetime as an office, actually didn't really matter and what I hope to show is that that's a feature, very peculiar feature of late 20th century, it can't be repeated, and going to change the nature of real estate investment. The other thing that's going to change the nature of real estate investment is that the baby boomers have now aged and are pensioners. And those same institutions that were investing all the money in big capital lump sums in big lumpy buildings in single asset classes are now having to find income to pay pensions, and that changes a huge amount in the world of real estate investing. The late 20th century economy if we look back on it and certainly historic terms this graph shows Bank of England base rates going back to 1694, so nice long run of data. We had a couple of centuries where interest rates averaged 4%, give or take, and see what we see at end of that graph, is the late 20th century, where postwar inflation and massive rises in interest rates were a complete aberration historically, this graph stops, point of quantititive easing, and yes inflation has definitely come back into the system and yes, interest rates were rising, but we're now talking about high rates being, guess what 4%. So it looks like we're back to, or potentially back to a much lower inflation low interest rate environment going forward. That's important, because it means there are significant differences between the drivers of growth in the late 20th century and what we're looking at now. And I’ve tried to characterize them in the slide here. What we’ve got is a 20th century situation with high interest rates, and now high interest rates, mean there are short pay back periods, the timescale of investments tend to be short term. In the 21st century, lower interest rates mean longer payback periods. That means real estate, amongst other investments, needs to be and can be much longer term, and its particularly important, sustainability becomes a lot more important if you are investing for 20, 30 or 50 years rather than a 10-year period. High inflation gave us money illusion, which meant that nominal prices rose on back of high inflation. In a low inflation environment, I think we’re heading back to, notwithstanding the shocks we have seen recently, means that the only way you can't get automatic rent rises out of inflation, the way to add value is through active management value adding and paying attention to cash flows. I think also something we haven't really fully taken into account is that we've seen the end of the downward yield shift stock which started in the 1990s which is inflated asset prices of all types, right across the piece, downward yield shift is now over. In a low inflation, low interest rate environment, asset values, including real estate, on a high plateau but cannot increase in the absence of that automatic asset price inflation, if you like, there can be no capital growth without rental growth. And so much more emphasis is very much more on what I call place call place prosperity and place potential, and its capability to generate income streams. And we've also seen the shift from the need for capital growth to the need for income streams. That, I think, changes the way we do real estate, and the way we build cities. So if I can translate all those factors, that concentration of capital that we saw in 20th century was facilitated by big road systems, big grids if you like, built for cars and lorries rather than pedestrian, and large buildings, massive buildings and single uses that can be easily managed within portfolios and deploy large amount of capital at once, and external infrastructure provision with the serial trading of land, that's been characteristic of real estate in cities in the 20th century. If we're moving towards the need for regular sustainable income streams, from investors, then, that requires something all-together different. It first of all, I think, requires a much greater degree of what I’ve called here land stewardship, and some call place-keeping and active management of property, simple buildings with complex uses and highly flexible and long-life use fit, so we avoid demolition of embodied carbon every time a use changes and disruption occurs, and the fine complex traditional streetscapes we have seen are attracting some of the higher values in real estate because they're in greater demand from users and more capable of generating those income streams. And so going to delve a bit more into that. So, what I want to show here, is the macro economic conditions had profound impact on the way we shape cities. If we look into the future, then actually the development of street for people for people as opposed to roads, for vehicles, is central to sustainability, and this is a graph that's been around for a long time, that simply demonstrates that, high density, more traditional European cities use less fossil fuels, because people don't have to use cars to get around on, compared to those late 20th century cities of North America and to some extent Australia and Canada. That very simple relationship between sustainability and urban form has been established for a long time. That really shouldn't surprise us, we're talking about sustainability and ability of places to adapt for future generations, well we have plenty of generation of streets have worked throughout history. This street is in southwest France, what interests me is you’ve got Roman pavement and the surface of the road exposed and excavated here with a little boy on it, but it follows the current street the same line, the street is still there. It’s lined with slightly newer shops and cafes, probably in terms of functionality, so having much the same purpose it did when first built. And this isn't peculiar to just Europe or western cultures. Streets are the way people have crossed continents, this happens to be Dharavi, Mumbai. And I don't want to romanticise poverty, but it’s typical of formal settlements across the world, but point I want to make is that human beings know how to build cities and the human habitat is a network of streets. This is an aerial photograph of Glastonbury, after the festival, and it gives a very good example, like a space syntax shows sort of main thoroughfares, side streets, back streets and desire lines that in this case formed part of the tent city. So this complex network of streets is something quite inherent in human behaviour.

And the kind of concentric rings, zoned theory of urban form, was a very peculiar 20th century phenomenon, well embedded in the development of many newer modern cities and goes hand in hand, not just planning but global investment classes, and we call them zoning use classes.

And pretty much similar, divided into these siloed special contents, retail offices, hospitality, residential and so forth, and of course we know about this is that all these sectors are being heavily disrupted, not just by the pandemic, but by technological change and social change and financial change, and environmental change, and this make them look more like the old fashioned 20th century, and not capable of accommodating what is needed in the 21st century, and the 21st century will be different, and why will be different? The emphasis will be on these income producing neighbourhoods, place prosperity, and what we find is that real neighbourhoods, and this is a slide I’ve been using since early noughties, it’s derived from initial study which has been repeated many times since, and looks at existing, prosperous, and complex, economically, socially successful places and sustainable neighbourhoods, if you like, and you can see that the content of these neighborhoods consists of far more than those conventional asset classes, but it's very rare that you'll see developers or investors actually actively building any one of these sorts of fine grained commercial uses and kitchens and workshops and so forth as part of their scheme, but that's what real neighbourhoods exist of. And we haven't got time to go in into this but study after study has shown that mixed used, fine grain, varied, messy urbanism if you like, incredibly costs less to build, and yields just as much if not more value. And so there are no hard-nosed capitalist, investor reasons not to be doing it. The question becomes why don't we. And partly because it's very complex to do something different. And I think the way the 20th century model is going, this is from HP's excellent book on healthy urbanism, and she makes the case that we need to think in a much more systemised way about healthy cities and sustainable cities and environmental sustainability goes hand in hand with social health, and mental well-being and all the other things we need in our cities in the 21st century and we can see straight away that it’s much more layered and complex, and yesterday the geo spatial commission came out with an excellent report that made exactly this point, and we have to think of much more layered and complex land use systems. So my argument is we need to rethink real estate as part of this, and reject, the segmented, zoned, planning use case classes and asset investment classes and think much more about the human activity that takes place in places, and an example of this I use, real world, up and running, student in hotel Florence, there are many other buildings like it, it’s a good example of a piece of urbanism which reopens and sort of creates a ground floor roots, reinstates the building as part of the streetscape rather than a standalone asset class, and contains hospitality, multiple uses and coworking and student accommodation, and hotels, food and beverage, and a whole load of flexible space that is actively managed on day-to-day basis. And I think the active management and stewardship of places is very much a part of the streets of the future, and the whole sustainability piece. So, in conclusion, I want to suggest that the ESG, the consideration of these very complex systems all together, and the governance of them, is actually the answer to real estate investors, is not as it were a difficult question for them to tackle. But actually, part of the solution of going into the 21st century environment of the financial environment, and economic environment as well as environmental and social. Therefore, we have to be thinking about systems, not silos, and streets, not roads, and at this point hopefully I'll be able to hand over to Ed to talk a bit more about his work on the integrated urban model.

ED PARNHAM:

Thanks, Yolande, I'm going to try and share. Okay, is that coming through?

PROF. YOLANDE BARNES:

I can see it.

ED PARNHAM:

Okay, hopefully everyone else can as well. I'm going to pick up some of those conversations and think a bit more about the way we design cities and places, and how to understand them better to enable the positive outcomes and think about the way we can contribute to whole series of different things. Quick bit of background for Space Syntax. We were a spin out from The Bartlett, over 30 years ago, we apply space syntax methodologies and tools to real projects, and we do that by leading design teams, contributing to other planners, the work of other planners and other designers and architects, we do training, we do research also provide digital outputs which might be datasets and might be particular tools. So, the starting point is thinking about what are the characteristic and places that are more sustainable and thinking about the daily activities and behaviours that contribute to these more sustainable outcomes. And that means across a whole range of different factors. Now, one of the things that we can see is that more and more research is being published, linking things like walking, being active every day to positive impact. Whether that is around health and wellbeing, mental or physical health. Also, in terms of reduction in or less greenhouse gas emissions as a result of people walking and cycling rather than driving. But also benefits in terms of supporting local business and local economies. So, we know it's really important to encourage walking because it supports all the impacts and benefits. These have all come from the gear change policy, which is that trying to get more people walking and cycling, it's about two years old now. But we also know now, and if people have seen this, there's a report that came out, put together by the RTPI, again a year or two years ago. And what this was starting to look at was actually if you look at most of the planning permissions have been granted between 2015 and 2020, there's still a huge proportion of them that are in places where there's a huge advantage to having a car, it's much easier to get to the things that you need to every day if you can drive, whether that is getting to work, doctor or school and those sorts of things. So there’s a question in here, we know there are a lot of benefits of places you can walk more, we’re finding really hard to deliver those places and really what we need to do, and what I'm really going to talk about if we want to enable positive outcomes and those outcomes happen through people walking and cycling more, we need to better understand the environments that allow these activities and behaviours to happen. Now, we have done quite a bit of work in the last few years around health, and health is really interesting lens to look at these outcomes through. And what it raises is complexity, and health is really good and also horrible to look at as well. If you look at this, this is system map produced by the Government Office for Science. And they're picking out all the factors that contribute to obestity, and there are loads and loads of things in here, and might do with socio-economic factors, individual characteristics of a person, whether they might inherit a certain increase risk of certain health outcome. And what's really helpful is they have started to characterize this map according to different elements. And really there’s a really important point in here, and that is first of all, you can see that this part of this system map over here is being characterized as the physical activity environment, that's how where you live, how easy it is to move around and has an affect whether you do walk or cycle to work, and affects how many calories you get through. And that contributes to these outcomes. Now, there’s something here, we need to be really careful to frame exactly what is possible. And key point here, a lot of these outcomes are so complex, because different factors interact with each other, and you might have no control over some of these, but you do have control over the built environment as planner or policy maker or designer, and can't guarantee that you will make somewhere that is completely walkable and everyone will walk. Even in the most walkable city, you still might have a terrible diet, and not do exercise, and just play Playstation the whole time, and you’re still going to be obese, but the important thing is to make possible to walk every day. And what we're seeing in these reports that are coming out is that actually a lot of environments that have been created, are making it really really difficult to be active every day. So it's about making an outcome possible, but not guaranteeing it. You can also design it the wrong way, and make it impossible. And so, this this kind of understanding, this kind of sequence of events that are happening, there’s more and more, probably every 3-6 months you see these stories coming through in the mainstream press, this one is quite old now, an anecdote of people living in new housing estates in Oxfordshire, they’ve moved into these brand new houses and are unhappy that they’re spending all their time driving. There's more and more medical research that starts to link the amount of activity you do every day, to outcomes like obesity. This particular paper,

this is also a few years old now, but this was finding that there was a reduced risk of obestity in people that travelled to work by public transit port, not even active transport, just the 5 or 10 minutes walking to the bus stop or tube at the end of each journey had a really positive impact and reduces the risk of obestity for people. We know that has a wider set of impacts on society as well and we can, there's more research looking at the wider costs associated with that. Now the really important thing is that if we can consistently describe and analyse the built environment, and start to understand it better, and we can then start to see where activities are possible, and what it is about the environment that makes it impossible, and we can use that to design better places and think about how to mitigate and improve existing places. So, the way that we do that, we have a type of modelling called integrated urban modelling and what this does is it starts to think about cities and built environments as set of systems, and we group those systems together into families, and we have a family of urban form, things like the street network, land use, density, and public realm, mobility, so different forms of transport and infrastructure. And what we do is take data on each of these systems, so take the street network, and we can start to analyse the street network in isolation so we can look for the hierarchies of connectivity within it. We can see better connected places and worse connected places and see how that changes across different scales, we can look at land use, whether there are certain distribution of land use and think about density, we can take public transport timetable data, we can spatialise that and link all these things together. So we can look at them all in isolation, but the really important point is that you can see how they work together from the point of a person, and to explain what that means, this is something called the Walkability Index, and what this does is it takes every building, and starts to go through only the spaces you can use if you are walking, it will start to then measure and categorize the land uses you can get to and will produce this index, so if you’re in a red building, you get to more land uses in 15 minutes than if you’re in a blue building, and this is taking into account the things like if there are pedestrian-only paths, it will be using those, if there’s motorway, that cars can drive along, but you can't walk along, it won't be using those to access wider land uses. And so we have this walkability index, we have that processed for the whole of UK, and last year did some research to understand where do people walk across the whole country, across England, we did a load of whole data science, regression models, and started to look at can we explain what are the consistent significant characteristics of where more people walked. And part of that was just exploring data, and these are quite interesting points to bring up, I think they highlight some of the questions about complexity, one of the things we can see is that if we’re just looking at demographic characteristics, and looking at age, how does age relate to the walkability of an area, what we start to see is that the most walkable parts of a city, often city centres, actually tend to have quite a narrow age range living in them, and tends to be people who are below 18 and over 44 don't tend to live in the most walkable urban centres. We can see, there are other characteristics that the more walkable parts of city, and places score highly on the walkability index tend to have smaller houses, and in some ways you might expect that, and that relates to the question of typologies and bigger residential units tend to be houses with gardens and because they take up more land the densities are lower, that effectively means the distance between things are further away. In some ways you would expect those things, but there’s something interesting in the way that you can start to see typologies, and location and ages all starting to mix together. You can also start to see another characteristic which is that if you’re looking at age and car ownership, what you find is that the number of cars per house increases with age, once people get above 45, it tends to be that suddenly there is big increase in number of two-car households, and so again you can trace it to maybe people are moving, maybe people are having families in their 30s, moving to places with bigger houses which are less central where you actually need a car to get around, so there’s a whole load of wider systems thinking that can contribute to this, but which is really important because you can use that to think about policy decision and allocate land and housing and what density it is and what type of units and how affordable it is and all those things need to fit together. The other thing that was quite is interesting looking at was the relationship between city size and car use, and we’ve got two measures down here, which talk, and measure the intensity of the street network, and talk about how that works at a very local scale, but also how that works across a whole city, and one of the things which is interesting in here, is that you can see in the places that have higher local intensity you get more people walking, and you get higher levels of people walking in the places you get really intense street networks, but when you get bigger cities, the bigger cities tend to have less people walking overall, but they have an increase in the number of no car households, the number of people traveling to work by public transport and by active transport. So it’s really interesting how there are these multiscale characteristics all happening at the same time, and fitting together. So we made a multivariate regression model. What we found across the whole of England was that if we took all of the local authorities, predict 330 local authorities, we could predict travel to work really accurately, we were getting a really good correlation, we’ve coloured these dots, so that you can see how they compare to the walkability index. What's really interesting is that you don't get places where few people are walking, you tend to get high levels of people walking in places that are walkable, what that means is that the explanation of the built environment is starting to really show where people are walking, you don't get these big outliers where lots of people walking and it’s a highly walkable area, so you only get loads of people walking, where it's not very walkable and high levels where it’s walkable. Now, this model has three components in it, it had places where more people walked, had higher populations in this age range, fewer households with children. And I guess this is picking up this wider system thinking and this question of lifestyle that if you've got kids, you’ve probably got less time available to walk to work, or you probably live away from those walkable areas. The really important thing we’re finding with this is the third significant component of the model is the walkability index, and here it is showing the MSLA area, instead of local authority area, so this is testing more than 7,000 different points rather than 300 and again, keeping a really high correlation. The really important point in this is that if you are local authority or designer, and you are trying to create somewhere that encourages walking, you can't really control your population, you can't change the age of population, and can't change the number of households with children, but the bit you have influence over is the walkability, and that means that you can design the built environment in a way that makes it possible to walk to work. The only other point I would quickly bring up from this is that one of the really interesting points is that we quite often heard the argument that people only walked when they couldn't afford to drive, and one of these we found was that wasn't the case, that was a really inconsistent finding so income isn't part of the model because it wasn't making a stronger correlation. So what are the characteristics of somewhere that’s walkable, and we can start to take the data that we have, and take the walkability index, red is showing more walkable and blue is less walkable, on the X axis what we’re looking at is the length of the facade and length of each block, and you only really get walkable areas in places where you get a facade length or a block length between 50 and 150 metres, so that means it’s easier to walk around, you can access more of the city if there are smaller blocks because it effectively reduces the distances between places. What we also found was that it's not just the local characteristics of the way that the urban blocks fit together, it’s also important how the blocks fit together in wider system of streets. Again, we could pull out a different scatter, and this point, again, we’re looking at the walkability on the Y-axis and this time we’re looking at the number of street segments that you can connect into from every individual street. What we're finding is places that are most walkable, mean that you can directly connect into between 4 and 6 other streets. What that means is you are part of street network connecting you into the wider city. That means can do two things with it. We can start to profile existing places, and we can look at where you’ve got all the conditions in place for high levels of walking and it’s not happening, you can look for the mismatches, and that then means you can start to speak to the people in those areas, you can be really precise, not just at city level, but zoom into the particular areas, and you could start to talk to these people to understand, it looks like your part of the city is very walkable, but very few people walking, why is that? Is it to do with feelings of safety and streetlighting and busy road and those sorts of things? We can also use that to see physical elements or physical characteristics that mean it’s not easy to walk, and be really precise about that, whether that is, there is missing connection that means the urban blocks are effectively very large which increases distances and whether there is a wide enough mix of land uses that make it possible or practical. The other thing we can do is learn from these characteristics and design new places and new cities, which build into them the characteristic that make it easy to walk around, so thinking about how grid of streets that work at particular scale and characteristic of urban blocks, the way that land use is distributed, we can start designing using those kinds of lessons. It becomes interesting when we talk about future places, that brings up a whole series of other questions. Now one of those -- one of these questions or one of these issues that comes up fairly regularly, and often comes up through tech, it's disruption to existing places. I don't know if people have seen this, but there is a whole set of conversations happening around what happens when we have self-driving cars in cities, and one of the impacts of that, if they cars are programmed to avoid a collision, one of the things is you won't need separate crossing and cross walks, as pedestrian you’ll be able to step out wherever you are and cars will stop, and the second impact of that is you’ll end up with everywhere gridlocked, and if cars are always avoiding collisions you could end up with a completely gridlocked city. One of the ways people have been thinking about this, this is quite an old example but it comes up fairly regularly, and one of the ways people are trying to address this interface problem has been to try to separate the two things. There’s been proposals for Manhattan to propose a completely separate network for roads to stop pedestrians crossing the street where they wanted to, to limit it to only certain places. And so there are constant questions as to how cities adapt around new technology, and I think we have to be really careful about this because actually, this was picked up in Yolande's presentation, this is mid 20th century thinking where the car is just beginning to be rolled out, if you pardon the pun, but the car ownership was increasing, and people were thinking how should we design cities to work with cars, now we might not have ended up with examples as extreme as this, where we have completely separate infrastructure, just for driving, individual land uses, which are completely separated. But did end up with the 20th century urbanism that was picked out in the graph about fuel uses, but across the UK we ended up with places like the new towns, it doesn't look exactly the same, but look at characteristics underneath it, you have a road network which is just for driving along, if you want to walk there’s no pavement along here, there is a network of paths that go over or under the road and go through the bits of landscape and connect together the big individual land uses, and this is the town centre of this town and actually a shopping centre which closes at night, so it’s a big single use zone surrounded by parking, connected by individual bits of infrastructure, that work just for one mode, and one type of technology, and we know there is whole series of negative impacts that are associated with that. So I think the really interesting thing is, actually the question for me is not should we be talking about shared mobility, but should we be talking about shared infrastructure? And this is where streets become really interesting and really important, and you can see that streets are really good at mixing together different modes at the same space and same time, you can mix people walking, cycling, and driving and buses and public transport. Streets can be really adaptable to become some of those messy spaces. Whether that's to do with the particular land uses or the activities which are happening in the ground floor of buildings, taking advantage of people walking past, and starting to take over bits of streets at certain times, or streets being close and forming markets at other times. They’re really, really adaptable. There’s also another example I wanted to show quickly. There is a lot of thinking around, particularly when you think from tech point and from self-driving cars, that's really only looking at streets as doing one thing, which is about moving people. If you take this example, this is Kingsland High Street in Shoreditch, this is the same building, and see graffiti at the top, this is the front of it facing the people, the entrance to the shops and restaurants and things, you need to accommodate all the messy dirty things, so where does the rubbish get collected and deliveries come in? Where do people working there park or leave their bikes and things, and that's where streets become really adaptable, and flexible. So the summary of this really, is that, the towns and cities which are more sustainable, and by more sustainable we mean moving around less by car, have a set of consistent measurable physical characteristics, so that’s things like the street networks, the size of the urban blocks, the size of plots that make up the blocks, a mix of land uses, if they're designed in the right way around people, about being able to move easily on foot and to be legible to people, they can be really sustainable and can encourage activities which are positive and have more sustainable outcomes. And I think the real key point of this is if we become too hung up on designing these systems around an individual technology, then we risk upsetting the kind of key point which cities are really good at, and I think we need to is think of streets as mixing multiple slow mode of transport, which prioritise people, and if we do that the right way, then we can make it possible for these positive outcomes. So with that point, I'm going to stop sharing and hand back to Yolande, and see if we’ve got questions.

PROF. YOLANDE BARNES:

Thank you very much indeed, Ed. That was fascinating, we have got some great questions which I’m going to try and summarise in a kind of conversation with you rather than go through one by one. There was a very good point made about blue/green infrastructure, and I’m conscious I did leave that off my illustration of all the messy fine grain uses. I think what you said about block lengths and so forth and walkability makes an argument for, dare I say, a much finer grain attitude to blue/green infrastructure than perhaps has been the case in the past and we need to consider that small scale as well as bigger scale.

ED PARNHAM:

Actually, that's a good point. If you took the example of new town I was showing you, and one of the characteristics of that new town is that everything is separated by really large swathes of green, and people aren't especially happy using them, they don't feel safe, they’re not busy because of the way the wider network works, and because of the way land is distributed, they tend be empty and people feel not very safe. A kind of comparison, or something that might be interesting to think about, is if you look at centre of Chicago and look at the loop, it has a canal that goes all the way around the centre. One of the differences between the way centre of Chicago, and somewhere like Skelmersdale works, I know strange comparison to make, but one of the differences is in Chicago that canal doesn't break up any of the street network. There is a bridge every 60 to 100 meters. And so that blue infrastructure is completely integrated in the city and it doesn't create a barrier or something which is difficult for people to move around. So I think there's something in there which if we’re thinking of this smaller fine grained blocks, integrating within that becomes much easier, and it becomes less of a barrier to people moving.

PROF. YOLANDE BARNES:

Amsterdam is an absolute exemplar of that fine grain, that blue/green infrastructure. There are some lovely questions, one is talking about friendly sustainability which I really like the idea of, a friendly sustainability which I think perhaps is common in both of these talks is the refocusing, because there is a lot of questions about how on effort do we do this. So how do you developers do it? And what do we do and seems to me that putting the emphasis on human activity instead of say the movement of cars or the top-down economic uses actually facilitates this fine grain urbanism much better and I like the way the integrated urban model actually combines, not just how walkable a place is, but where people are walking to and what they're walking to, so the presence of the right mix of scale and amenities as well.

ED PARNHAM:

I think there is another point of think about as well. I think one of the risks, I think, if you link it into the conversations around things like 15 minute city, I think it's good that people are talking about it, one of the risks of it is as soon as you give something a name, and it becomes a thing, it has a set of physical attributes attached to it, and I think one of the risks around the 15 minute city, is that people only think about things very locally, and you could potentially end up with cities with very small local centres which are somehow independent from each other, and what is really important, and what makes cities the things they are is the way that they work across lots of scales at the same time, and it’s partly how your local centre is part of wider network of centres. Bill Hillier, one of the founders of Space Syntax, had a way of talking about centrality, and this idea that what he meant by centrality was that it was these more active places that were not purely residential, and that the intensity of centrality varied across the city from a very strong major centre that you might think about, to local centres that were all connected through a network of streets, and really, this idea of centrality pervades the entire city and is more and less intense in different places. The important thing is to be able to think about how cities work across multiple scales at the same time, and really it should be 15 minute city, and 10 minute and 5 minute, and 30 and 45 as well.

PROF. YOLANDE BARNES:

Maybe the answer is to stop thinking of particularly residential use just a single kind of sleeping use. If we think about home, and what we love and like about home, it's not just a housing unit, it's as much about what happens when we step outside the front door, isn't it? And, I think this is where these very segregated use classes really are unhelpful, that actually we live in neighbourhoods and need to be thinking about what makes a good neighbourhood, and how we maybe start dividing the big street blocks into more neighbourly places, and are a bit less hung up, about the economic, especially in this post-COVID working from home era, what sort of economic activities are taking place under the roof, I don't know what you think about idea of classifying active frontages rather than specific economic use.

ED PARNHAM:

I think that would be great, I think the other thing about this is the whole, I guess the environment planning policy, which is often about identifying land for housing and how do you allocate housing growth and accommodate housing growth, not how you accommodate urban growth, it's a different thing, and I think it’s partly when you were talking about asset classes, that's mirrored in policy a bit. And if we get away from allocating housing numbers, to say – okay, you need certain number of people live here, and that can happen in urbanism, not just in housing, I think that's a key point as well.

PROF. YOLANDE BARNES:

That actually, I think, argues very much for this cocreation sort of idea of doing things with communities, and you know with them rather than two them, I suppose. It often strikes me that so called NIMBYs often have it right, and are often concerned about provision of all the other services of new populations arriving, and are probably more cognizant of what is needed in local neighbourhood to make it better than any top-down planner or developer can be. So, yeah, I'm conscious that we have to sum up now. But, we’re arguably talking in a systemized approach rather than a siloed approach, turning upside the down, the model of top down imposed development of our cities and urbanism, to a much more bottom-up, fine-grained, people-centered approach, and I think if have to summarise what sustainability means in this context, maybe that's a way to do it. So, I'm being told we’ve got 1 minute to go. So, all that remains for me to do is to thank you very much many, Ed, for what I think was an amazing session, thank you very much for that, and to say that next month we'll be having another Sustainable Places webinar, and that will be about getting towards COP28. So, look out for more news on that and we look forward to seeing you in a few weeks time. Be well, thanks again, and have a good afternoon, everyone.