An aerial photograph of a city street grid, specifically North Finchley, is overlaid on a solid teal background. The image is semi-transparent and tilted slightly to the right. The street layout is a dense grid with several larger blocks and a prominent intersection.

# HIGH STREET REVIVALS

## NORTH FINCHLEY

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Joseph Partners

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# 1 INTRODUCTION



## 1.1

# BACKGROUND

### Summary

The decline of the British High Street is a much lamented problem – with very few effective solutions provided to date. However, a significant number of high streets are perfectly capable of being revived – but there is no easy solution – despite a number of people and institutions having worked hard to find one.

The challenge of how to revive declining high streets can be distilled into three primary, but rectifiable problems. The primary problems are briefly explained in the following pages and a statement on how to deal with the future rebuilding of high streets into attractive facilities follows.

The concept is being promoted by Jonathan Joseph, an experienced regeneration developer and development manager who has been responsible for creating some of the largest regeneration projects in the United Kingdom – together with his experienced professional team.

### Background

The Joseph Partners Team has spent the last 18 months closely examining the state of high streets in Britain and has concluded that a comprehensive approach must be adopted to deliver successful regeneration. Current initiatives are not working.

This section of the report explores some of the current issues and challenges faced by High Streets.

A number of high profile reports have attempted to distil the particular challenges which face high streets and to identify measures and interventions to address decline.

Many high streets are struggling to keep up with the impact of new technologies and shopping formats. Up to 150 million sq ft (20%) of current retail space across the UK is potentially surplus to modern retailing requirements in its current form (BCSC, 2012). 25% of UK retail sales are estimated to go to online channels by 2020 (BCSC, 2012). This may prove to be an underestimate.

These issues have been exacerbated by a prolonged retail downturn which has negatively impacted on both public and private investment. Brexit will not help to reverse these problems.

### **A new model for High Street revival**

Many Local Authorities have tried to kick-start this process through environmental improvements and town centre management initiatives. Whilst these are often of some benefit, they only take things so far and are unlikely to achieve real and sustainable change.

Following extensive research, we have focused on proposals for North Finchley which presents a number of opportunities for regeneration.

Our revitalised town centres will not only include refreshed retail and leisure uses but will also include other regenerative uses including flexible workspace, cultural uses and services, creating a viable, vibrant and sustainable high street to serve the needs of the local communities into the future.

### **Reasons for working with the Joseph Partners team**

The reasons for working with the Joseph Partners team are primarily the quality and experience of its team members. No claim is made as to whether the individuals or companies are better than anyone else, or that their skills are unique, but we are confident that the assembled team is easily as good as any other that could be assembled and that the individual components have all been selected to contribute to the overall

competence of the team in delivering the project.

The advantage of this particular team is that they have all worked closely together in the past on complex projects within the London Borough of Barnet and understand and trust not only each other but also the dynamics within Barnet that will influence the successful delivery of the project.

The Joseph Partners Team consists of the following key members:

- Jonathan Joseph - Joseph Partners
- Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners
- Martin Fleishman - Consultancy International
- Nabarro
- Strettons Chartered Surveyors

Further details of each company are available on request.

## 1.2

# RESPONDING TO KEY ISSUES

### KEY ISSUES

Our research has indicated three principal issues and challenges for typical town centres and high streets.

#### 1. The Length of High Streets



High Streets have generally grown too long, usually based on an over-optimistic view by developers and tenants over many years. Their physical extents have drifted from their historic fundamental areas of focus into unwieldy and very weak retail pitches on the fringes – diluting impact and attractiveness.

This could be rectified through careful studies of the ideal, contemporary high street, pedestrian desire lines, transport arrangements, and a substantial refocus on what is important for local people - which is likely to involve less comparison retail and more leisure and specialist retail uses.

#### 2. Control of Real Estate



The reasons for declining high streets are many and varied. Key issues include changing shopping patterns, changing types of consumer demand and a perceived lack of general shopping convenience. However, consistent surveys by organisations such as the GLA (via the Mayor's Outer London Commission) and others have shown that residents in surrounding areas appear to continue to value high streets for convenience shopping and some services. In parallel, there is a desire to see a better quality and variety of tenants who would provide attractive facilities – particularly leisure. However, there is currently no mechanism to enable comprehensive change.

Most high streets have very fragmented ownership and initiatives such as those promoted through the Portas Review (primarily marketing based) simply do not work without a common purpose amongst owners. Owners tend to concentrate exclusively on their own properties in order to achieve the highest capital value. This is generally secured by aiming to let their premises to the best financial covenant available, for the longest period of time and it does not matter to the landlord whether the tenant is a chain coffee shop, a betting shop, or something useful to the community.

#### 3. Managing quality and character



A legacy of public sector funding cuts is a lack of investment in the public realm. Too many High Streets feel unloved and are characterised by cluttered, tired public realm and streetscape. This has a detrimental effect on customer perception and loyalty. In addition, attractive historic fabric is neglected and should be revealed, with shopfronts and upper floors sensitively refurbished.

## THE ACTION PLAN

We have developed a four point action plan which responds to the immediate challenges.

### 1. Redefine the High Street



Research, consult and define the sustainable core of the target high street – where its limits should be, whether there is core demand for specific retail and other services and what form they might take. We will work closely with the local community to develop the concept.

### 2. Establish a context for change and comprehensive regeneration



Gain control of the freeholds in the high street through acquisition, and/or by joint venture with existing landowners. Regeneration comprising new development plots and comprehensive works, refurbishment, extension of retained frontages to deliver a step change in the offer and quality of the high street and its environment.

### 3. Curate spaces



“Curate” the occupancy of the core high street over a minimum period of 3-5 years (but always thereafter), bringing in desired and needed tenants and utilising Landlord control to incorporate flexible (and even discounted) lease terms, to encourage attractive and sustainable occupancy and community uses.

### 4. Intensify and re-purpose the periphery



Redevelop peripheral areas to provide much needed housing adjacent to the town centre, integrate high quality residential uses into the upper parts of retained shopping areas and carry out a significant level of public realm improvement, including works to shop fronts and signage. This will often include bringing adjoining areas into beneficial use. Concentrate on rationalising essential and convenient car parking to benefit both residents and retailers.

2

**NORTH FINCHLEY  
CONTEXT**

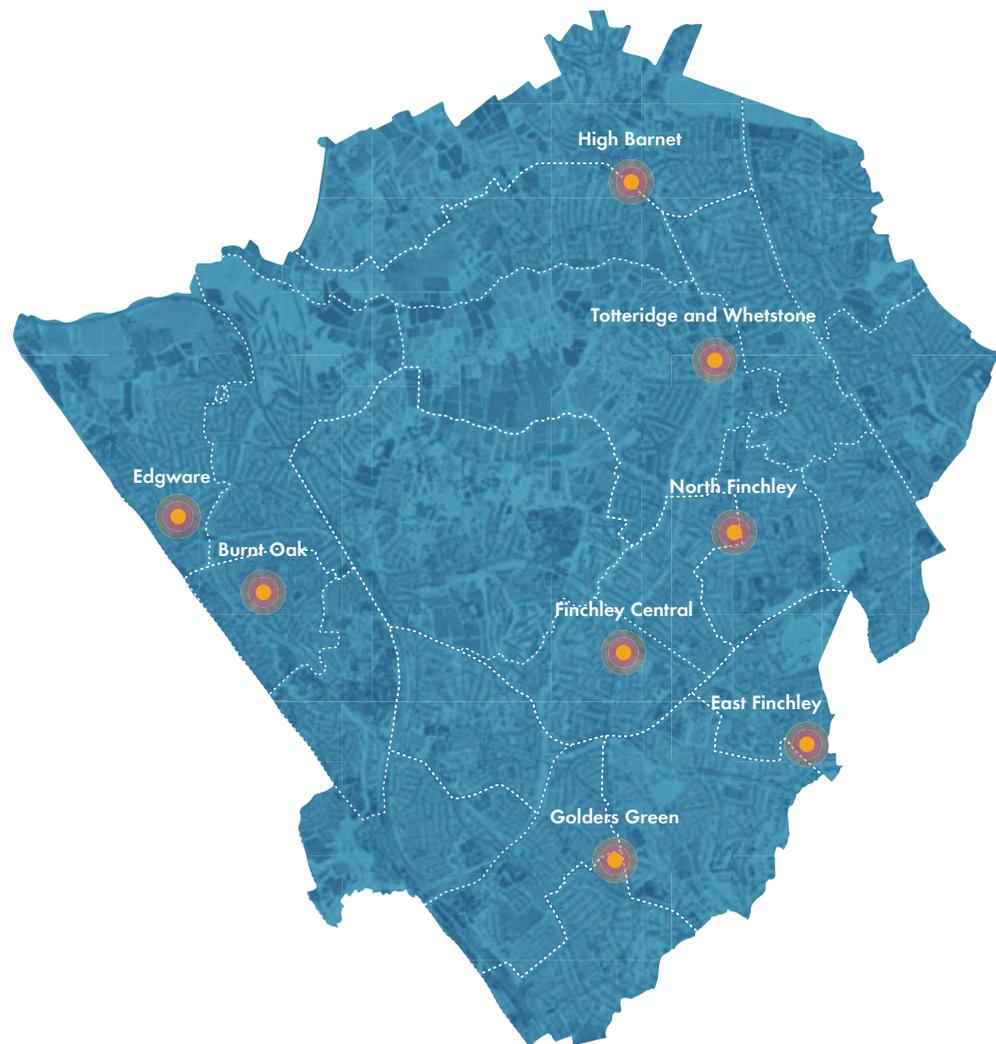
## 2.1

# LOCAL CONTEXT

### Town centres

The adjacent drawing highlights the location of the Borough's key District centres which sit below the Metropolitan scale Brent Cross centre in the shopping hierarchy.

North Finchley town centre is the London Borough of Barnet's third largest centre in terms of commercial floorspace. It also enjoys the second highest financial turnover in the town centre network. The centre is focussed along the High Road (A1000) and is linear in form. The centre has a variety of independent and also some well-known high street shops and is currently well used by shoppers – although its streetscape is often bleak. A high level of occupancy disguises a mix of very weak retailing.



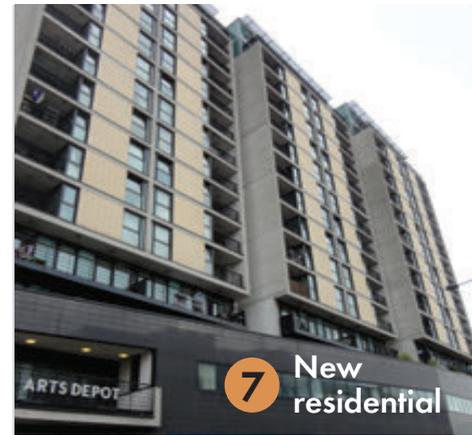
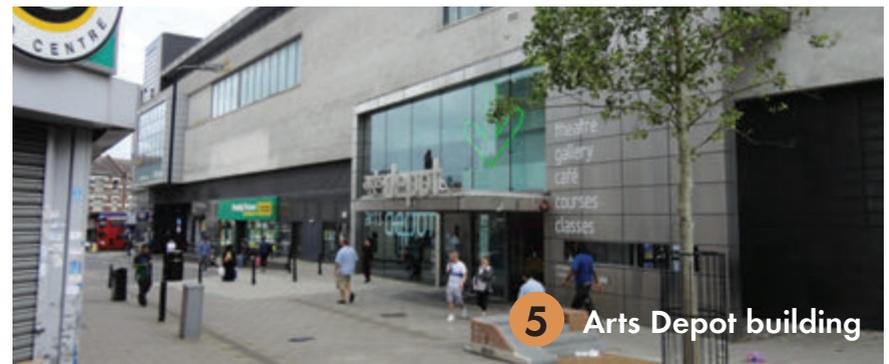
District centres in Barnet



Project area with existing elevations

— — Indicative Project Boundary





Existing streets, buildings and spaces in the study area (see overleaf)

## 2.2

### PLANNING POLICY

A key component for the High Street Revivals strategy is the current generally supportive position in the local adopted planning policy framework.

In London, the regional planning policy position, alongside the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides a very supportive context for the package of interventions identified through the High Street Revival concept.

A more detailed review of local planning policies confirms a high degree of alignment with the emerging proposals.

We will work with LB Barnet to establish what further policy initiatives are required to establish an appropriately robust, comprehensive and explicit basis for future planning applications and acquisition strategies.

## 2.3

### APPROACH TO SITE ASSEMBLY

There is a need for a range of physical works and interventions to create new buildings and to carry out works to the retained properties which are to be refurbished, reconfigured and extended along the length of the High Street. Early engagement with existing landowners and the community will be vital.

Initial Land Registry searches have demonstrated that within the regeneration area the land ownership position is acutely fragmented. The initial search results to date reveal approximately 227 freehold and 285 leasehold interests within the regeneration, with very few registered freeholder owners owning more than one building / unit – and a maximum of 15% owner occupiers.

We will work with local land owners and the Council to establish a critical mass of freehold ownership.

# 3 NORTH FINCHLEY PROPOSALS



## 3.1

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

### Our approach

The overall strategy and redevelopment options will be worked through and refined in consultation with local stakeholders and the Council and through discussion with local people:

### Spatial strategy

The key moves can be summarised as follows:

1. Retail activity should be concentrated along the High Road between the southern edge of the Arts Depot building and Lodge Lane / Torrington Park (i.e. one block south of Sainsburys). Depending on the exact extent, this might imply a modest reduction in the extent of retail frontage, and potentially an alteration in the town centre boundary.
2. There is potential to restructure traffic movements to allow the Arts Depot “island” to be anchored to the western “mainland”. A new public realm scheme along this section of Ballards Lane could be introduced, including a new market area.
3. A number of areas are identified as having potential for a comprehensive development strategy. A conservative assessment of residential capacity indicates that approximately 1,000 new residential units could be developed on these sites. It is assumed that frontages in the redefined retail core would continue to be in active A-class uses including a significant proportion of shops. Areas to the rear of the High Road or beyond the core extent of retail would be largely residential.
4. The ground floor and upper floors of the retained / refurbished High Street frontage has potential to be reconfigured in a mix of different uses. Alongside enhanced and more flexible retail floorspace at ground floor, upper floor residential uses could be reconfigured / extended with improved access, potentially with additional storeys of development above the shop units. There would be comprehensive physical regeneration involving not just new buildings but works to all existing buildings within the frontages that are to be retained to deliver a step change in the offer and quality of the high street and its public realm.
5. There is a severe shortage of new housing across London. High streets and town centres such as North Finchley provide an ideal location for high quality homes as they can accommodate relatively high densities in the context of high levels of public transport accessibility in town centres.

### **Key benefits**

The High Street Revival model brings the following key benefits:

- Affordability will underpin vitality: commercial rents will support independents and start-ups.
- Low cost space will be created for new ventures / community enterprises.
- Number of affordable homes in the centre will be increased.
- Together these will support the high street as a vibrant centre for its community.
- Independent businesses will be supported where appropriate and discussions with existing businesses will be initiated to secure engagement. Most occupiers will stay in the high street but often in refurbished or more suitable premises.
- Multiples will be re-arranged to support the better functioning of the centre.
- The number of homes in the centre will be increased significantly – creating much needed homes for local people, and supporting town centre vitality.
- The ability to create a comprehensively improved public realm.
- The enhancement of the retained frontages by physical improvements to all relevant frontage buildings and their reconfiguration / extension where appropriate.

## 3.2

# CURATION AND STEWARDSHIP OF USES

In addition to physical interventions, the project envisages a careful programme of curation. The curation and “re-base” of the high street is a unique opportunity. As noted in the introduction, the retail content of high streets has been decimated by a combination of supermarket competition, changing shopping patterns, physical degradation, high rents and inflexible leases. This can be reversed through our proposals.

There are examples where consistent ownership and stewardship has been largely effective – both in London (Marylebone High Street), Liverpool and Bath, and elsewhere, but these are rare.

A policy that improves the physical environment enables attractive leases to be offered to key tenants, will create a virtuous cycle of improvement, and ultimately lead again to modest rental growth.

Long-term stewardship is of crucial importance – the freeholder must be prepared to relinquish a proportion of current income in return for long term growth – and must work with the occupants to retain the new quality. The approach will also maintain room for organic growth – the conditions for flexible retail provision in response to market dynamics. This will be done in close association and partnership with the London Borough of Barnet whose participation in the long-term stewardship of the High Street is essential.

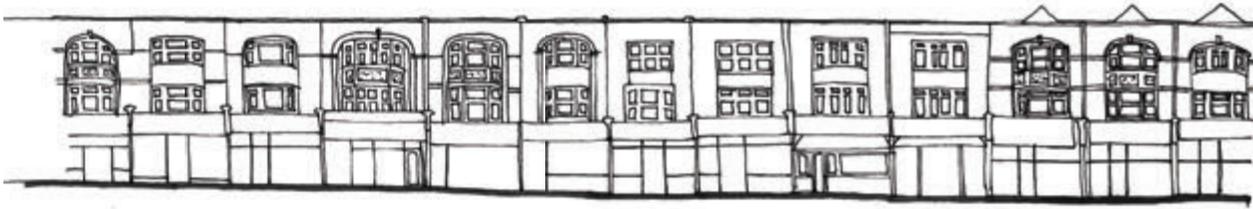
## 3.3

# REFURBISHMENT & INTENSIFICATION

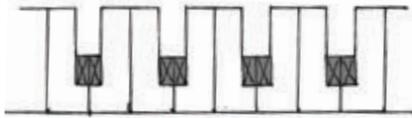
Parts of the high street environment at North Finchley are increasingly unsuitable for effective modern retail and residents. Access to flats is often through shared back lanes and can create an unsafe environment unsuitable for families, the elderly, and those with disabilities. Shops are often too small for modern retail uses and where food preparation may be involved are inflexible and environmentally unsuitable.

The adjacent case study illustrates how retained parts of the high street could be made to work more effectively for both its retailers and its residents.

The historic facade could be retained and refurbished maintaining the overall character. The fabric behind the facade could be removed and replaced by an adaptable development that houses modern retail facilities and accessible, good quality flats with properly planned building services. Service access would continue to be possible from the rear but the principal residential access will be placed on the high street, creating a more notable address and a secondary means of escape from the residential units. In addition, the high street would be inhabited for longer each day, increasing natural surveillance and activity along the street.



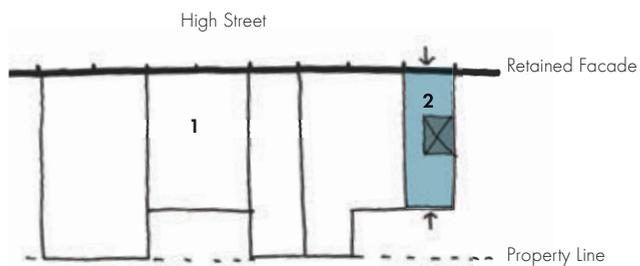
Existing street elevation



Existing plan of units (estimated and simplified)

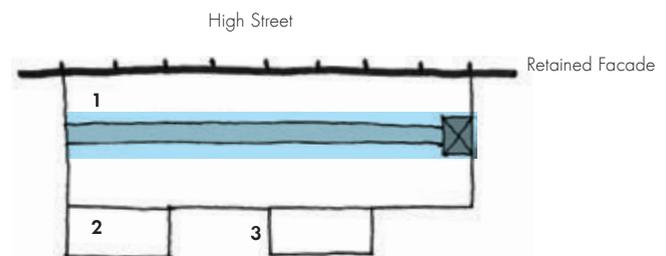


Proposed intervention



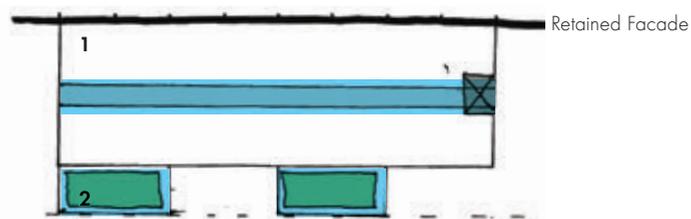
Indicative Ground Floor

- 1: Ground floors will be more flexible arranged in multiples of the typical 6m facade.
- 2: Residential entrance, with doors from the High Street and back lane



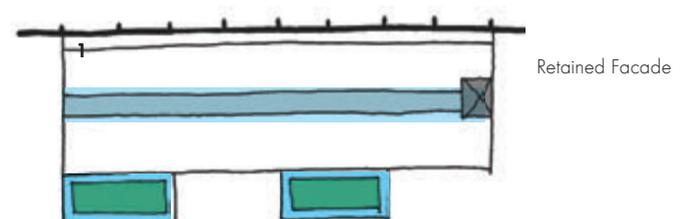
Indicative First Floor

- 1: A 16m depth allows for a double loaded corridor of single aspect units.
- 2: A mezzanine level to the rear creates storage for the retail units.
- 3: Opportunity to re-service the commercial space to allow modern, flexible and effective ventilation and extract of food uses



Typical Floor

- 1: Residential units
- 2: The roof of the retail storage allows for a roof terrace/garden



Fourth Floor

- 1: Additional storeys should be set back from the retained high street facade.



Proposed



## 3.4

# PUBLIC REALM, MOVEMENT AND STREETScape

### New streets and spaces

There is potential to restructure traffic movements to allow the Arts Depot “island” to be anchored to the western “mainland”. A new public realm scheme along this section of Ballards Lane could be introduced, including a new market area.

The overall ambition is to encourage greater pedestrian priority and to create a first rate environment for local residents, retailers, shoppers and visitors.



Existing



Proposed



### **An excellent high street environment**

The adjacent illustration shows how a balanced approach to the retention of landmark buildings, refurbishment and re-configuration of ground floors and upper floor extension or redevelopment could transform the centre. In addition, we are keen to explore opportunities to upgrade the streetscape in tandem with innovative on-street parking strategies focusing on greater flexibility for 1 hour stay spaces.



**Existing**

## 3.5

# DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY HOMES FOR BARNET

The project will provide an opportunity to deliver a wide range of high quality homes for the Borough. We will focus on the creation of attractive streets and spaces with a diversity of typologies and a contextual approach to scale, massing, architecture and materiality.

The team is able to draw on a detailed knowledge of designing different types of housing including single private dwellings, terraced streets, stacked maisonettes, mansion blocks, courtyard-based perimeter blocks and towers.



