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MAGNIFIED STREET LIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

High streets are fundamentally ‘local’. They evolved from the main streets of villages and along busy Roman roads into and out of cities to serve the needs of the community and the passing flows of people, vehicles and money. As a result high streets are at the centre of towns and neighbourhoods, occupying prime positions in the urban fabric; two thirds of Londoners (5 million) live within a five minute walk of a high street (Design for London, 2010). Their local position makes them natural places of commercial and social activity. High streets provide convenient goods, services, jobs, investment, and housing. They also bring people together by providing a valuable public space and a sense of place in our increasingly multi-cultural and populated cities. In many respects high streets are the pulse of the city.

But this pulse is slowing down. Across the UK one in six high street shops is now empty and on average 20 shops are closing every day (Felsted, 2012). The combined pressures of online shopping, new shopping malls, and a long recession, have reduced many high streets to a fainter and less attractive beat. In response, the Coalition government has provided initiatives and funds to put high streets back “at the heart of every community” (Cameron cited in Jones, 2011). However, in the spirit of ‘The Big Society’, the government has been detached from their implementation. The task to save the British high street has been left to the ‘local community’.

Different approaches have been proposed and some tested to save the high street: A ‘hi-tech’ approach embraces the digital world as an ally, using new technologies to enrich the in-store and online customer experience; a ‘chain store’ approach attracts larger retailers to pay higher rents and to drive public space improvements so that the high street competes with malls as a place for shopping and leisure; a ‘village’ approach lowers rents to draw independent shops to the street to provide variety and an aesthetic that appeals to the British nostalgia for the Victorian high street. These approaches aim to enhance the social and economic activity of the high street—yet they are limited.

In spite of the heated debate around high streets, there is, extraordinarily, little data on how they are functioning. We carried out an in-depth study of a high street in Hackney called Narrow Way to improve our understanding of what the high street consists of and how it might address an uncertain future. Narrow Way’s particular situation offers an opportunity to experiment with an approach that uses the existing assets of the high street—physical, social, economic, political—to enable it to evolve with, rather than against, changes. We reimagine the high street as more than a contiguous row of shops but as a living space with many uses, where the shops move beyond their default setting to enhance the street as a local asset.



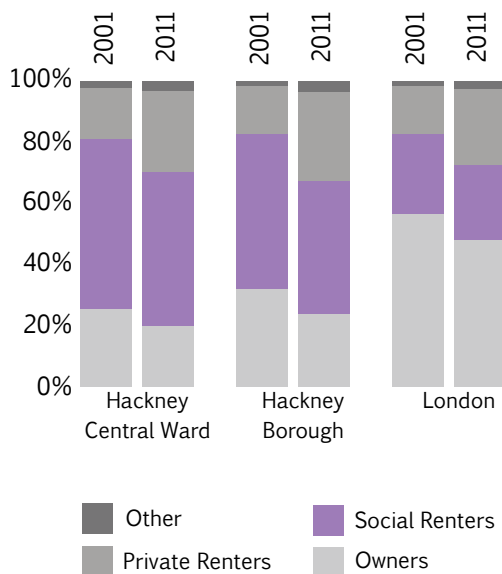
△ 01 View of Narrow Way from the North

SITE ANALYSIS

Narrow Way is located in an increasingly popular area of East London. Hackney, with its green space, Victorian and Edwardian terraces, and high performing secondary schools, is attracting young families and professionals. The rise in house prices in the past year has been dramatic. According to one local estate agent there has been a 30 to 35 per cent increase since 2011 (Campbell, 2013). In addition, southern parts of the borough, Dalston and Shoreditch, have experienced a renaissance with new technology and arts related economic activity, and a new hip identity. To the east, large investments in the Olympics site and Stratford have pulled shoppers away from Hackney. Stratford's Westfield shopping centre, just three train stops away from Hackney Central, attracts 800,000 visitors a week (Parry, 2012). Amidst all these different forces, Narrow Way is poised for change.

The high street is intricately tied to its surroundings. In Hackney Central, the ward where Narrow Way is located, over half of the population lives in social rented housing. Its main thoroughfare, Mare Street, runs north-south and is bisected by an Overground train line that effectively splits Hackney Central into two shopping locations. To the north is Narrow Way, the core retail area and home to historical and natural assets, such as St. Augustine's Tower and St John-at-Hackney Churchyard. To the south the retail pitch is more scattered; a supermarket, Tesco, draws shoppers from across the borough. Further south is the 'Hackney

Civic Campus', which was recently developed to transform the area around Hackney Town Hall into 'the civic and cultural heart for the borough' (Hackney Council, 2010). New developments are planned in the area; a 'Fashion Hub' to the southeast that will consist of high-end clothing stores besides an existing Burberry outlet store; to the southwest, a new Travelodge hotel and student housing; and Pembury Circus, a residential development to the northwest.



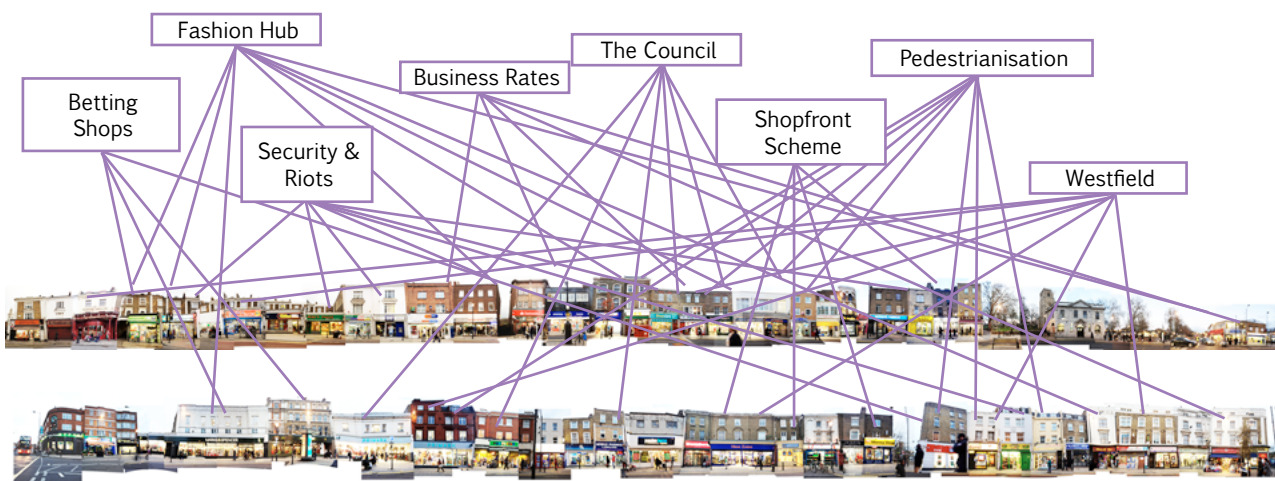
△ 02 **Changing housing patterns**
Data source: ONS 2001, 2011



High Street System
Civic and Cultural Institutions

△ 03 **Narrow Way in context**

(1) Narrow Way (2) Hackney Central Overground Station (3) St. Augustine's Tower (4) St John-at-Hackney Church (5) Tesco Superstore (6) Hackney Civic Campus (7) Fashion Hub [under development] (8) Travelodge hotel & student housing [under development] (9) Pembury Circus [under development]

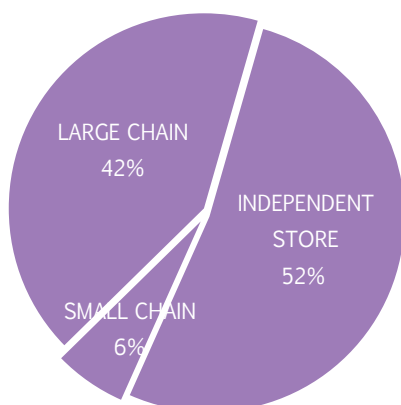
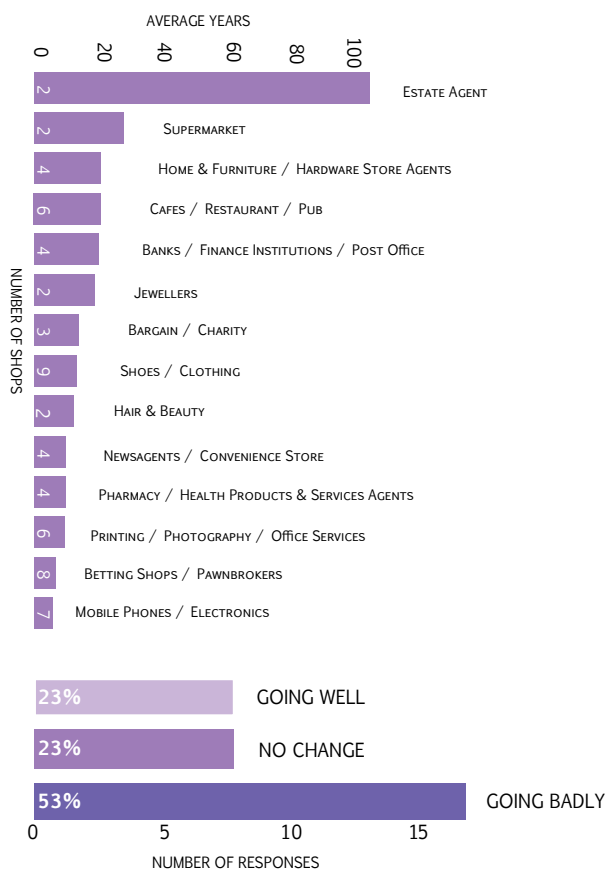


△ 04 Origins of the proprietors



△ 05 The different voices of Narrow Way

Through interviews and conversations with the shopkeepers different issues and concerns were revealed



# of shops	size	area - sqm
3	XL	500sq m >
8	L	200 / 500sq m
28	M	100 / 200sq m
3	XL	10 / 50sq m
7	XS	50sq m <

Narrow Way is a busy and bustling high street, with around 70,000 footfall movements per week (The Retail Group, 2012). It absorbs flows of people travelling to and from Hackney Central train station, Hackney Council offices, Homerton hospital, the Picture House, and their homes. Just 11 metres wide and 250 metres long, Narrow Way is a narrow and short high street. It is a remnant of the Victorian street pattern, much of which was destroyed by World War II bomb damage and carved up by infrastructure. With mainly three storey buildings on both sides of the street, the scale and corridor-like structure of Narrow Way gives the street its own legibility and rhythm. This is accompanied by a slow, continual one-way flow of buses that occupy the middle of the street like a queue of elephants in a hallway.

The commercial diversity of Narrow Way reflects the non-uniform demography of its users. The street hosts a concentration of different shops, which together provide a wide range of goods and services. The products are priced for the people living in the area; a tin of chickpeas costs 49 pence, and a litre and a half of mango juice cost 95 pence. Interviews with the shopkeepers reveal that the street has been an important starting point for successive waves of migrants. One shopkeeper summarised the transition: "If you arrive and don't know a single word in English and you need money, then you have to buy and sell something - that's the easiest way to do it. My dad started the shop without an education and now my sister is a doctor. That's how it goes" (Fieldwork conversation, 2012). The Turkish, Vietnamese and Caribbean shops on Narrow Way reflect Hackney's immigrant business base and strong enterprise culture.

△ 06 Average years of tenure by type of shop on Narrow Way
[Number of responses 67/76]

▽ 07 Shopkeepers' perceptions of their business performance
[Number of responses 30/76]

◁ 08 Distribution of shops on Narrow Way by size of business
Independent store (1-2 stores in the UK), small Chain (3 - 15 stores in the UK), large Chain (+16 stores in the UK)

▷ 09 Range of shop sizes on Narrow Way

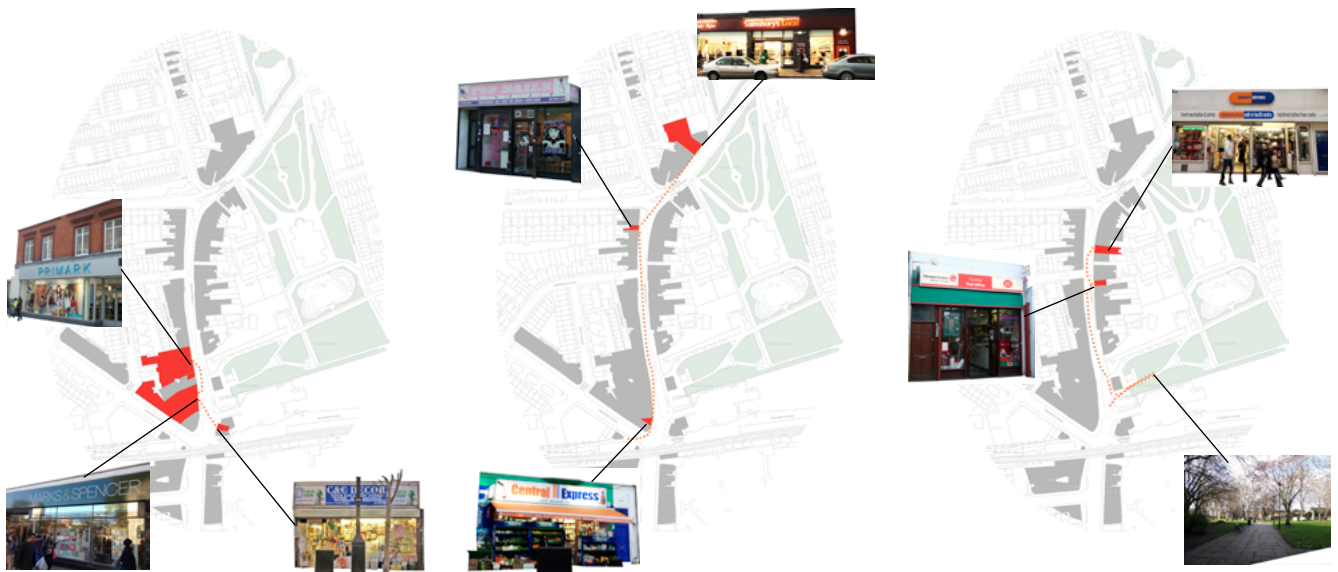
Narrow Way displays economic agility. The street has a high commercial density; there are 76 businesses on the street, with some of the shops subdivided between different businesses to maximise the use of retail space. The design of the buildings on the street allows for mixed uses, including residential, commercial, manufacturing and business services. As well as being a place for independent entrepreneurs, Narrow Way has been the starting place for several high street retail chains in London, including Marks & Spencer, which was built in 1868. The relationship between the chain and independent stores on the street is one of competition and cohabitation. Whilst the independent shopkeepers are wary of the chain store's low prices and physical size, many also perceive the chains as 'anchors' on the street, attracting new and regular customers. From the chain stores' perspective the independent shops provide 'character' and 'vibrancy' to the street, and complementary offerings (Fieldwork conversation, 2012). Narrow Way's combination of entrepreneurial activity, spatial design, mixed business types, and high footfall, provides resilience. This is reflected in the street's relatively low vacancy rate of 3.9% compared to the current London average of 7.1% (London Assembly, 2013), and the street's high average tenure.

At the same time, Narrow Way shows signs of economic fragility, victim to the tough economic climate and local competition with Westfield. Like many other high streets, business activity on Narrow Way has fallen. Last year 84% of the businesses in Hackney Central reported a

lower turnover compared to the previous year, with 67% reporting a decrease of more than 10% (The Retail Group, 2012). The decline in sales is coupled with increasing rents and business rates, which are based on top-of-the-market 2008 property values. In addition, the impact of Westfield has been dramatic, particularly for the chain stores. The chain clothing retailer, Primark, has seen a 30% drop in its footfall since the mall opened (Fieldwork conversation, 2012). The economic fragility of Narrow Way is reflected in the rise of betting shops and pawnbrokers on the street, which has increased two fold in the last five years; there are now four betting shops and five pawnbrokers on Narrow Way, 12% of the street's retail space.

People come to Narrow Way because it is convenient, affordable, and familiar. The street has a high surrounding population density of 121.6 persons per hectare, compared to Westfield's 19.5 persons per hectare. A survey on the street users' transport patterns indicates that the majority of the street's users derive from Hackney Central and the immediate wards; 40% walked to the street and 40% took a bus, and the remaining 20% drove, cycled or took a train or taxi (The Retail Group, 2012). Shopkeepers describe the majority of their shoppers as 'on a budget' or 'value seekers' and the average transaction value on the street is less than £15 (The Retail Group, 2012). Some of the independent shops allow customers to have credit tabs so they can 'buy now and pay later', which reflects the local links and economic agility of the street.

Narrow Way's users are diverse. Students and workers, families and pensioners, homeless and unemployed, all use the street for social as well as material needs. Alongside shopping we observed people stopping and talking outside shops, resting on benches in the church yard, sitting for hours with friends and family inside McDonalds, and playing in the plaza. These patterns of movement, or user ecologies, show how the street provides a variety of spaces for the public. There are pockets for personal retreat or 'breathing spaces' from the busy-ness of the street and also spaces for extroversion and engagement, with shopkeepers or other shoppers. In a place of demographic diversity, the street makes it possible to feel anonymous in the global diversity of Hackney, but also to feel part of a familiar, local place. This is akin to Massey's definition of place: "the construct of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (Massey cited in O'Riordan, 2001:38). Narrow Way provides social, economic and spatial value to a wide variety of people.



△ 10 User ecologies

Each ecology indicates the observed route of an individual street user on Narrow Way

THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Demographic changes and public-private developments in Hackney Central have the potential to alter dramatically the existing identity and social fabric of Narrow Way. They could also enhance the street by bringing new people and energy. If the street is to harness these local investments, it needs to understand the threats and opportunities that they present.

The Hackney Fashion Hub development is being driven by Hackney Council, with £1.5 million of funding from the Mayor's post-riot Regeneration Fund. The council's aim is to "develop Hackney's status as the creative heart of London and as a retail hub for the Borough's fast growing fashion industry". The council intends to build upon the popularity of a high end Burberry outlet store, which attracts a million visitors a year (Invest in Hackney, 2013). This development has the potential to bring more footfall to Narrow Way, given that it will be 300 metres away. However, it could also inflate property values, and, as it expands, the Hub could displace businesses on Narrow Way. Several automobile repair businesses and



△ 11 Burberry Outlet Store

The anchor of the new fashion hub in Hackney which attracts a million visitors a year, many of whom are tourists from East Asia

▽ 12 Selection of newspaper articles about the Fashion Hub

Hackney Gazette, December 13, 2012; Hackney Citizen, February 2013, Issue 40; The Guardian, March 12, 2013

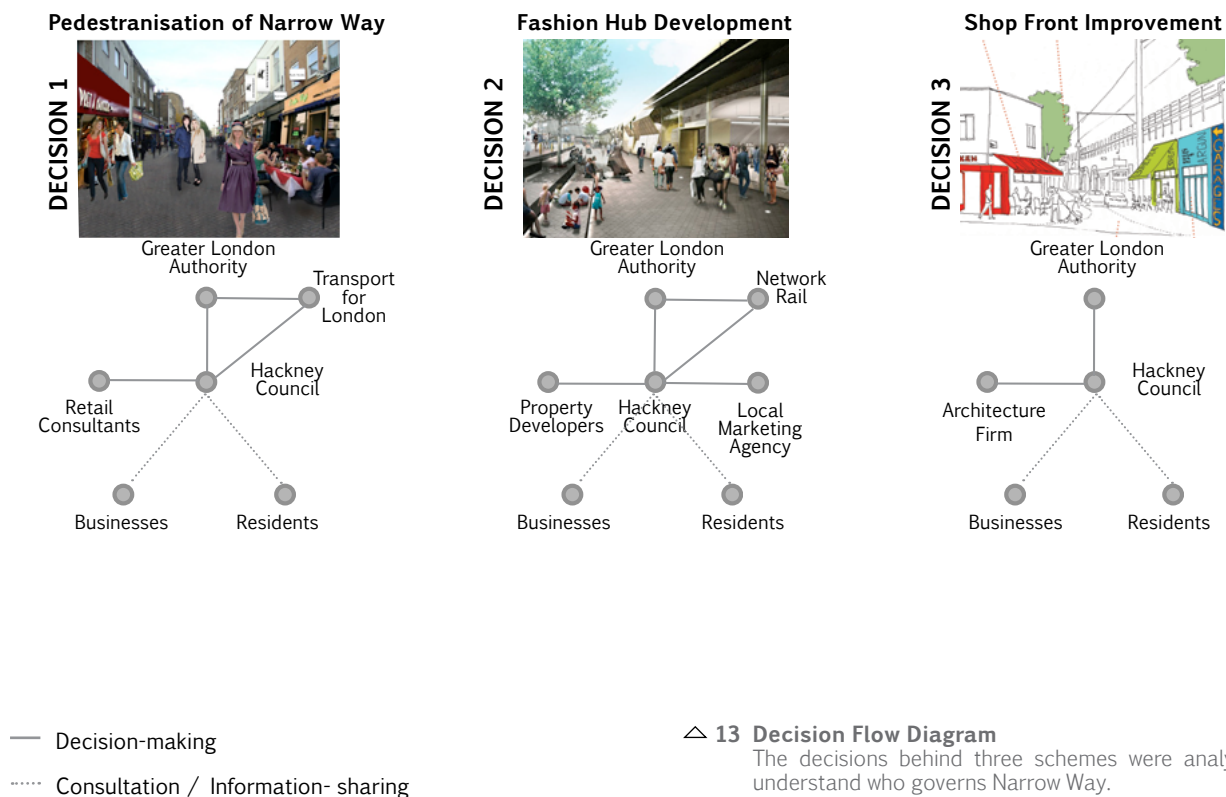


a furniture-maker that were on the site of the Hub have already been relocated. There is a risk that Narrow Way will not receive any benefits from the new investment.

A shop front improvement scheme also presents a mixture of threat and opportunity to Narrow Way. The £500,000 scheme, also funded by the Mayor's Regeneration Fund, aims to "improve the retail offer" of three streets in Hackney Central, including Narrow Way, by "upgrading" their shopfront (Interview with LBH, 2013). Following the high street public realm enhancements promoted by Mary Portas, appointed by the government to review the future of high streets, shop front schemes have become popular among councils in the UK. The scheme provides an opportunity for the shopkeepers to have the façades of their shops improved to suit their commercial offerings and to enhance the identity of the street. However, there is a threat that the scheme gives the street a new identity that alienates existing businesses and residents. The way that the scheme has been delivered on Narrow Way seems to confirm this threat. Many businesses that signed up to the scheme have now dropped out due to its expense and inflexibility. The matched funding required from the

businesses was considered too expensive. The new designs for the shopfronts were drawn up by an architectural firm, contracted by the council, without initial input from the shopkeepers. They were only engaged to suggest modest changes to the designs.

This summer the council will temporarily re-route twelve bus routes from the Narrow Way as part of a pedestrianisation pilot scheme. If the pilot proves to be a success, then there is a possibility that it could be permanently instituted. Consultation reports and interviews with shoppers, residents, and visitors indicate a general perception that pedestrianisation will be good for Narrow Way, reducing bus congestion and pollution (Hackney Council, 2009; Fieldwork conversations, 2012). Alternatively, the shopkeepers perceive it as a threat to business that could reduce footfall as well as 'eyes on the street' (Jacobs, 1961). Pedestrianisation projects on other high streets in London and abroad have generally increased footfall and improved the street's social and economic activity. They have also often resulted in higher rents and property values (Gehl et al, 1999; CABE, 2007). The case for Narrow Way is potentially different, as the street is on the periphery of the



inner city and in an environment of social and economic change. If pedestrianisation were to be fully implemented here, the business community would need to embrace the change to turn the threat into an opportunity.

The ability of the street to address these threats and opportunities depends on its management. Responsibility for the high street can devolve to a wide range of actors—public and private, strategic and local, individual and communal. Typically a UK high street is managed by the public sector and across a number of different departments—planning, transport, economic development, housing, street management—who each perceive the high street in different ways. To understand who governs Narrow Way we followed Robert Dahl's theory that power is only visible in its exercise and drew conclusions from the three schemes discussed above (Dahl, 1989). The decision-making flows behind each scheme reveal that Narrow Way is largely driven by Hackney Council and the street's landowners, and that the voices of the tenant businesses and residents are not actively involved. As a consequence, the objectives and designs of the three schemes present more of a threat than an opportunity because they do not take into consideration the views and aspirations of the street's users.

Why are the businesses on Narrow Way not actively involved in street decisions? Conversations with business owners, managers and employees on the street reveal an array of opinions about the street's health and future. This rich information about the street is not shared; communication between the businesses occurs on an informal basis and in small pockets, usually between shopkeepers with similar interests or backgrounds. In addition, communication with the council is infrequent and limited. The tough economic climate and uncertainty over the developments have generated frustration among the businesses, which is primarily directed towards Hackney Council. The council, on the other hand, perceives the businesses as disorganised and fragmented. Without a clear line of communication, both sides have become disillusioned with the idea of collaboration.

Forging better connections between the council and those closest to the street, the businesses and residents, would enable the council to base its schemes on a fuller understanding of Narrow Way, which goes beyond measures of footfall and turnover. Instead of focusing on "upgrading" shops which it perceives to be "messy" (Interview with council, 2013), the council could enable the businesses to be active curators of the street. A 'stronger' street would respond to the interests of its users and to political interests, creating a shared vision of what Narrow Way is, and what it can become.

INTERVENTION: NARROW WAY ASSOCIATION

To broaden the management of Narrow Way we need to look beyond conventional models of high street governance. In the UK, two models are mainly used: Town Centre Management schemes run by local authorities and Business Improvement Districts run by business interests. Through legislation such as the Localism Bill the national government aims to give more power to “communities” and “local partnerships.” Supporting this, government grants, such as the High Street Innovation Fund and the Portas Pilot Towns, are available for local organisations with ‘shovel ready’ high street projects. However, only a small proportion (7%) of the government’s £10 million High Street Innovation Fund has been spent so far. The councils that have been awarded money have spent it in different ways; one council spent £10,900 on Christmas lights, another spent £10,038 on a train station ramp (Simpson, 2013). While the political will and funds are available, local impetus and new ideas to change the high street seem to be absent.

Speaking Across

There is much that businesses can do for the high street independent of government support. For the businesses on Narrow Way, feelings of apathy and powerlessness within the community and with Hackney Council would need to be overcome before forming any kind of constructive grouping. In addition, the businesses would need to see value in expending time and energy, given that they are generally entrepreneurs working long hours with little spare time.

To galvanise participation, the group could initially form around one pressing issue, such as the council’s plan to pedestrianise the street. A ‘Narrow Way Association’ could drive an awareness campaign to disseminate information to other businesses, residents, property owners, and affected parties.

Building upon the coalition created around pedestrianisation, the Association could continue to share knowledge and resources to realise regular benefits. Information sharing could be key to strengthening the Association. Business performance and operational metrics, such as sales, footfall, tenure, business rates, insurance and energy costs could be shared in a private database. This would enable the businesses to understand their relative performance and the overall health of the street, as well as larger economic trends. This is a practice already adopted by certain business communities, such

Narrow Way is being pedestrianised....

Have Your Say!

What’s happening? Narrow Way will be closed to vehicles, including buses, and remain open to pedestrians and cyclists.

When? A trial will take place for 3 months this summer (July-Sept).


What can you do? You can provide feedback to the council on the plan

For more information:
www.narrowway.com/pedestrianisation

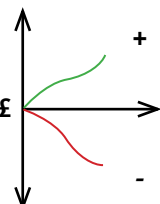
Do you want Narrow Way to become pedestrianised?

Yes	No	Undecided
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Name:		
Business:		
Reasons for choice:		


Reject plans



Wait and Measure



Embrace Change

 + ? = £

✓ 14 Example of Association action

An example of how the Association could collectivise around the pedestrianisation scheme, by collecting opinions, casting a vote, and deciding upon a suitable action

as The Association of British Bookmakers, with competitor betting shops regularly sharing their sales data to assess patterns of betting at a regional and street level. Narrow Way could follow a similar approach to create a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the street's performance. The metrics could also enable the Association to develop a collective vision for the street by highlighting issues and opportunities and to create targets, such as increasing the street's turnover and the variety of its retail offerings, or decreasing its carbon emissions.

Speaking Up

As the Association solidifies with a growing member base, clear goals, and a growing public identity, it could change the council's perception of the business community from being fragmented and unstructured to united and organised. At this point, the Association could begin to 'speak up' to the council and other political interests. The performance metrics collected by the Association could be used as a way to earn political legitimacy by providing a detailed single view or 'health check' of the street, which is currently lacking. This information would enable the council, to benchmark Narrow Way against other high streets and support the formation of their proposals and decision-making. The metric database could continually gauge the effects of street changes. A public dashboard could display the street's metrics online to reach a wider audience and a website could explain the Association's vision and meetings, as well as profiles of the businesses and upcoming events and activities in and around the street.

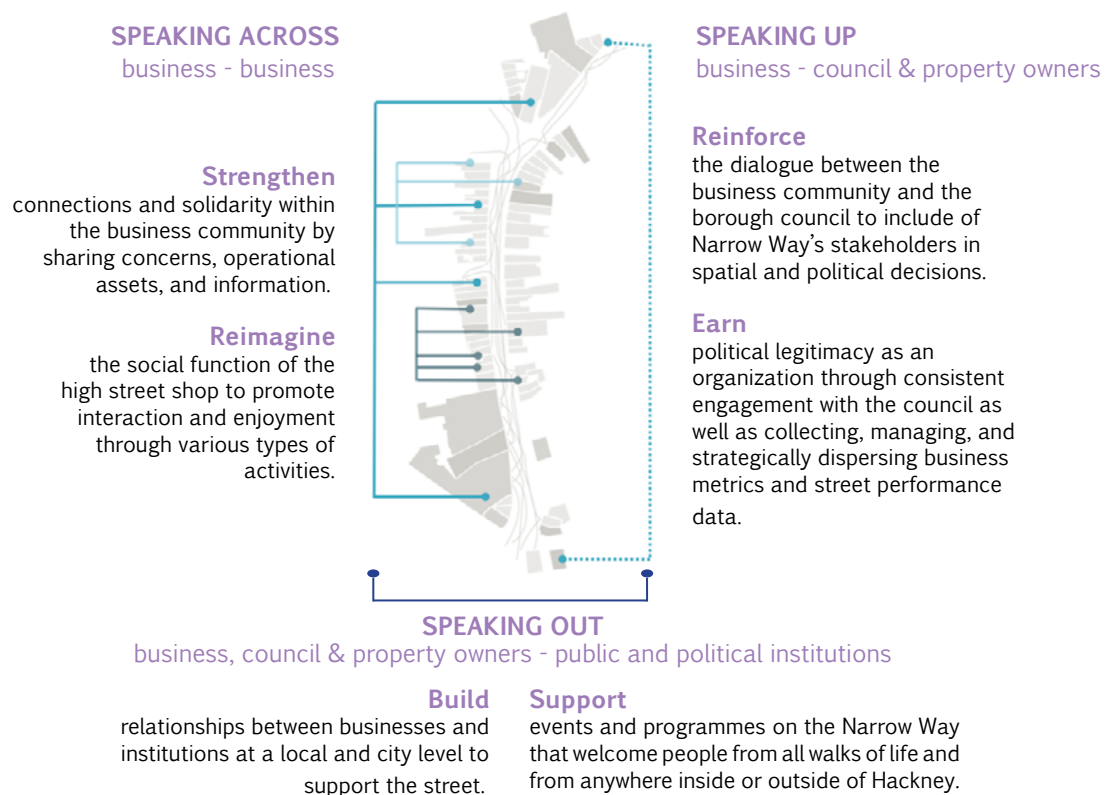
NARROW WAY DASHBOARD



While contemporary approaches to high street revitalisation recognise the importance of the social functions of the high street, they rarely explore the idea of shops as social assets that can directly engage with the public. The businesses could focus on improving the social elements and activities on the street, as well as bringing their business assets to the fore. For example, the businesses could use façades, the sidewalk, and the road bed to engage with the public in new ways by promoting small and large-scale activities, events, and workshops on the street. This would create a more dynamic, welcoming street environment and also help the street to benefit economically. To encourage the businesses to lead the social life of the street, the council could use their ‘discretionary business rate relief’ powers to incentivise businesses to provide socially-oriented activities related to their shops.

Speaking Out

As the Association could collaborate with other organisations to gain wider support and put forward proposals to the GLA and other strategic authorities. For example, it could combine forces with the council to lobby national government to change the policy on the concentration of betting shops in the borough. Analysts point out the need for and difficulty of engaging property owners on high streets (Portas, 2011). For many high streets in London this is partly due to large numbers of different owners. On Narrow Way, the property owners and businesses are deeply fragmented, due in part to absentee owners (O'Donnell, 2013). The Association could use its political capital and legitimacy to invite property owners into the organization. It could do this by initially incorporating the business owners who own property, followed by reaching out to absentee owners. If landowners were to perceive the value of the Association as a benefit to the street and their assets, then a relationship could emerge whereby the Association assists in drawing new commercial tenants to the street that its members would support. Inviting property owners to help shape the future of the Narrow Way could build a new “sense of stewardship” amongst this community (Baum et al, 2000).



△ 16 Functions of the Association

Diagram showing the three different ways the Association could operate to strengthen the street

INTERVENTION: NARROW WAY LIFE

Enabling the Vision

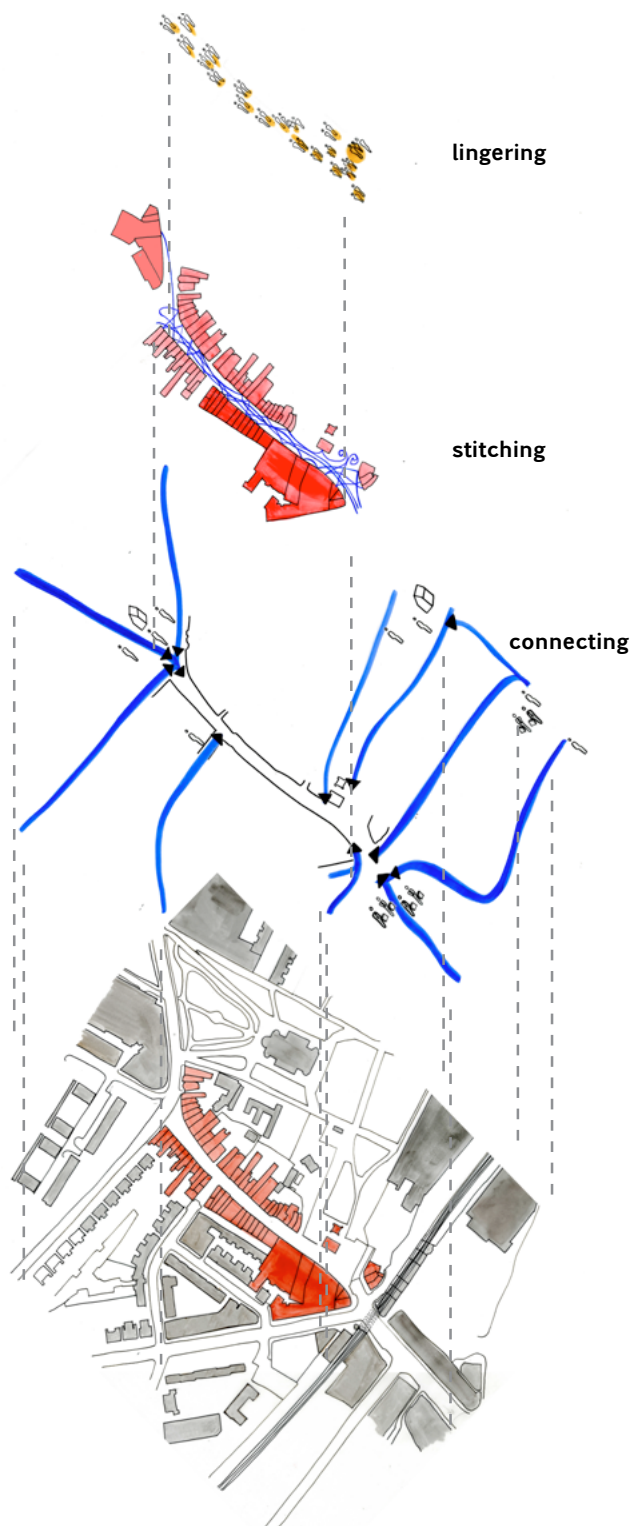
With the creation of a Narrow Way Association, we imagine the spatial changes that could occur on the high street. The vision consists of three layers of activity that would act in unison: the first, “connecting”, focuses on the street as part of the larger urban system; the second, “stitching”, enhances the social, economic, and spatial connections on the street; the third, “lingering”, looks at ways in which the street can slow down and reveal new elements; making the invisible visible. This layered approach intends to amplify the existing assets of the street and its periphery, making them more “close up and personal” to street users while providing benefits to shops as well (Gehl, 2006).

1st Layer: Connecting

A host of neighbourhood assets exist in the immediate surroundings of Narrow Way which provide products and services that are not found on the street. The Association could “pull in” these assets to provide free public activities and to promote programmes, events, goods and services. The pedestrianised street would allow for larger scale events and activities to take place, promoting a shared sense of spatial identity and inviting newcomers to the street (Allen et al, 2005). The existing Saturday market could migrate into the street. In the summer months, the market hours could extend into the evening to address the new bus-free quietness of the street that happens after dark. Locations with access restrictions could be improved by removing obstructive fences, gates, and walls. Paths between the street and new developments in the periphery could be strengthened to draw new visitors to the area.

2nd Layer: Stitching

Narrow Way has a strong physical character, providing a sense of enclosure and intimacy that gives it a “positive form” (Carmona et al, 2003). In this kind of narrow setting, a street’s elements take on a more prominent position as “eye-level details become more important” (ibid). As the council will resurface the street for pedestrianization, the Association could offer suggestions for how best to tie the street together. This could begin with light improvements to the Old Town Hall Plaza to facilitate the range of activities that take place there. The plaza currently functions as a space for chance encounters,



reading, eating, performing, waiting, sleeping, buying coffee, and campaigning. Subtle improvements to build upon the character of the plaza could include additional seating for events and performances, trees and plants to soften the hardscape, improved lighting to increase feelings of safety and security, and the reinstallation of windows to the south façade of the Old Town Hall (now a Coral betting shop) that faces the plaza. In tandem with St John's Church and Hackney Council, the Association could manage a programme of events and activities in the space. The Association could propose to the Council that a pedestrianised Narrow Way could be thought of as an extension of the plaza, informed by its current uses and the physical language found there.

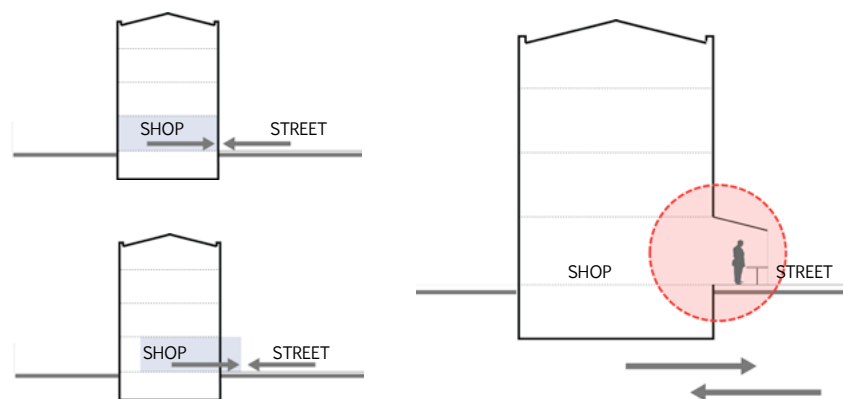
Through our observations of the way people use Narrow Way, we see that people stitch the street together through their paths and interactions. As the Association, council, and local institutions become more involved in the mechanics of Narrow Way, a stronger, more cohesive street can be envisioned—one that could experiment with the relationships between shops, street, and people.

3rd Layer: Linger

A pedestrianised street is a street that slows down. For the businesses, this could mean having longer periods of “dwell” time and higher concentrations of customers; for the public, this means a calmer environment and more spaces to use. The interstitial space between the public realm of the street and the semi-private container of the shop could be the main point of the Association’s spatial intervention, re-thinking the relationship between the shop

and the street. Gehl (2006) promotes the importance of ground floor façades as providing “important links between buildings and people” in how they can “welcome passers-by” (p. 29). He considers the emotional influence of façades on people, which have “far greater impact on us than our perceptions... of the street” (ibid: 32). The businesses on Narrow Way could change the relationship of their shop front to the street, beyond the purely profit-driven transactional modes of exchange, by adding social elements.

The Council’s shop-front improvement scheme directs attention towards the shop, but fails to permeate the façade. This division between interior and exterior could be reconsidered. The shop interior is both an introverted and extroverted space of interaction. There are “invisible assets” within the shop walls – in back room activities, in the hands and minds of the labourer and shopkeeper, in the social relationships these institutions naturally facilitate, in the resource networks they are connected to. These assets could be shared with the public in different ways to foster a street that stimulates curiosity, invites interactions, and continues to provide for a myriad of public needs. The Association could propose a new way of engaging with the street, one that “magnifies” what is behind the shop window, what is behind the back wall, and what is behind the street, by bringing it into the street. This new space would evolve over time in its shape and function.



△ 18 Interstitial space between shop and street ; Cross-section showing the magnifying process

IMPLEMENTATION OF MAGNIFIERS

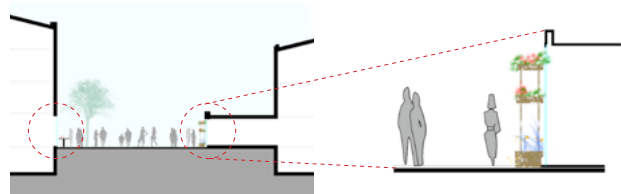
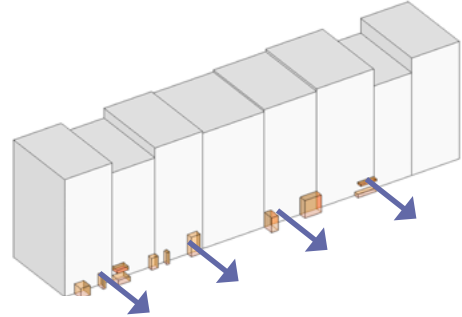
Phase I

Cost: £100-500

(paid for by individual businesses)

Implementation: 3 months, during Association formation

The first phase of magnifying involves the spilling out of goods and basic services onto the street shows how the shops on the street could immediately engage with the public by displaying certain products and services on the street. Some shops already practise this spilling, but many more could participate to add color, nuance, and activity that contribute to a more sensual experience of the street. Shopkeepers would begin to think about the range of possible engagement strategies for the spaces outside their shops that welcome and engage the public, promote social interaction, longer stay times, and stimulate commercial activity (Mehta, 2007).



▽ 19 Diagram showing the shops spilling

20 Cross-section and details of shops spilling into the street

▷ 21 Perspective of Narrow Way



Phase II

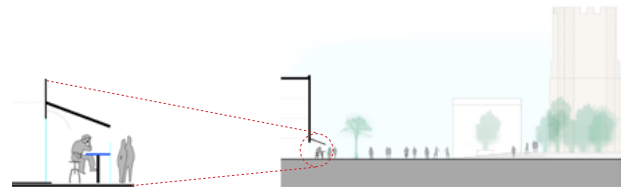
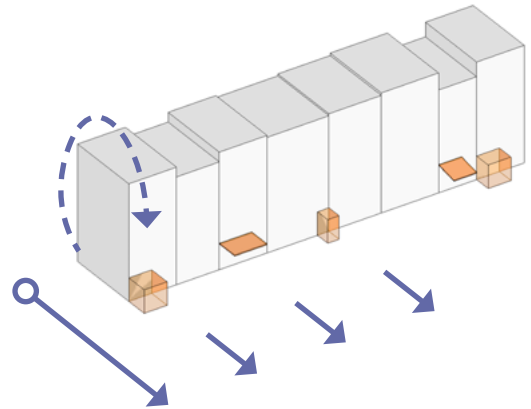
Cost: £500-1,500

(paid for by Hackney Council capital construction funds)

Implementation: 6-12 months after Association formation

The second phase pushes the idea of engaging with the life on the street by magnifying the invisible elements behind the shop windows, counters, and walls: pulling out backroom activities and making them visible. A “magnifier”, a physical object akin to a stall, would be introduced to the front of a shop to facilitate these activities on a temporary basis. Its presence would indicate that “something is happening here” on the street.

The magnifier relies upon a joint partnership between Hackney Council and the Association. Each magnifier could provide a socially-engaging activity related to a shop that takes the form of teaching, demonstrating, or manufacturing. The first generation of magnifiers could be purchased by the council to support its pedestrianisation scheme. The businesses in the Association could take responsibility for managing the magnifiers, organising a related public programme of events and activities.



22 Diagram showing shops bringing activity into street

23 Cross-section of Narrow Way

Cross-section showing activity of magnifier in context of Narrow Way and Old Town Hall Plaza

24 Perspective of Narrow Way



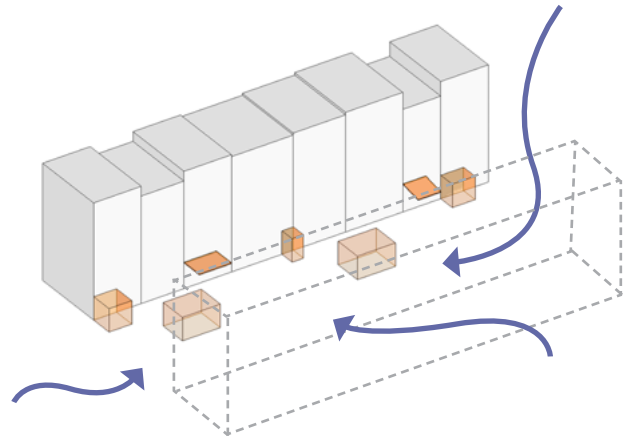
Phase III

Cost: £3,000-6,000

(jointly paid for by Hackney Council and Narrow Way Association)

Implementation: 12-24 months after Association formation

The third phase involves the full functioning of the magnifiers and their evolution to other spaces and uses. The magnifiers would welcome institutions and organisations from “behind” the street to provide additional activities and experiences, at times in partnership with Narrow Way businesses. At this phase, the council could combine funds with the Association, to provide higher quality units for the street. Chart 41 shows examples of what types of activities and partnerships could arise through the practice of “magnifying,” linking assets in and around the Narrow Way. Through these efforts, visiting the street could provide for an even more enjoyable and interesting experience, with “carefully crafted activities and events” driven by the street stakeholders—embellishing, as Allan Jacobs (1993) says, the “rhythm of opportunities on the street.”



25 Arrows representing outside institutions appropriating magnifier

26 Cross-section detail of magnifier

27 Perspective of Narrow Way
Activities of shops and institutions coming into street

28 Phasing magnifiers activities



Phase 1



a free manicure in exchange for a memorable story about the neighbourhood (recorded and put onto the Hackney Archives website)



outdoor reading room with books and daily newspapers



photo portrait studio with props and wigs

Phase 2



breadmaking techniques are brought into the street



shoe repairs come into the street



jewellers demonstrate watch and jewellery repairs

Phase 3



a new space for the St John's knitting group



bike repair workshops in the street



free English classes in the Old Town Plaza

CONCLUSION

Narrow Way is in the midst of significant change. While some shops have had to close, others have opened; the street reveals a capacity to endure through its high footfall and low vacancy rate. Rising rents and the council's push for higher quality retail in the area threaten many of the businesses on the street that serve a regular, low income and hyper-local public. To add to this uncertainty is a plan to pedestrianise Narrow Way, which could strengthen or weaken the street's social and commercial life.

Many attempts have been made to "save" high streets, but on Narrow Way we see how complicated this idea of "saving" can be. Real estate developers are collaborating with the local council to envision a future that is foreign to many of those who live, shop, and sell in the neighbourhood. The street users seem to have minimal influence over or knowledge of the creation of this future vision that is already manifesting in their backyard. The Localism Act promotes opportunities for neighbourhoods to assume more influence over elements of the public realm, but this requires a dedicated group of individuals representing different interests to self-organise and gain council approval. At the moment this does not exist on Narrow Way.

Political support for high street solutions naturally exclude streets that are not organised and where relationships with local authorities are strained. The business stakeholders on Narrow Way have an opportunity to create a coalition to transform the street from within. Recognising their own potential to "speak across" and build a coalition in the face of powerful changes would be the first step towards a stronger street. By sharing information, knowledge and resources, the businesses on the street could gain legitimacy and a sense of collective ownership.

Through the Narrow Way Association the businesses could lead the social life of the street by revealing the assets behind their shop windows and behind the street itself. This kind of high street, one of fractured relationships, wary stakeholders, and uncertain futures, could be stitched together to achieve a more certain future.



△ 29 Rendering of Old Town Hall Plaza after pedestrianisation

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