

Wednesday 10 May | 1:30 pm - 2:30pm  
Room O, Portcullis House

#### In attendance

John McNally MP | SNP  
Martin Docherty-Hughes MP | SNP  
Liz Twist MP | Labour  
Claudia Webbe MP | Independent  
Tamara Cincik | Fashion Roundtable  
Jodi Muter-Hamilton | Fashion Roundtable Board Member  
Meg Pirie | Fashion Roundtable

Maria Chenoweth | CEO Traid + Co-founder Charity Super.mkt  
Alison Carlin | Manchester Fashion Movement  
Kemi Gbadebo | Founder of brand Gbadebo  
Julia Roebuck | Mend Assembly Affiliate – Circular Fashion  
Aisling Griffin | Manchester Metropolitan University  
Fiona Hackney | Manchester Metropolitan University  
Sophie De Salis | British Retail Consortium  
Lucy Hall | Hemingway Design  
Emma Reichenbach | Bath Spa University  
Joshua Williams | Bath Spa University  
Alex Robinson | CEO Hubbub  
Nicholas Diamond-Krendel | Paradise Row  
Jay Morton | Architect for Bell Phillips  
Emma Finamore | Editor at Drapers

#### Minutes

#### Discussion:

- John McNally introduces the event and confirms that prior to the event, he had asked the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak [a question at PMQs](#) which Fashion Roundtable as Secretariat of the APPG briefed in advance. The question centred around the 'Eat Out To Help Out Scheme' which had increased demand for eating in restaurants by 216%. With figures revealing over 17,500 retail chain stores closed in 2020 and impacting over 35,000 employees, John McNally asked the Prime Minister if he had considered launching a similar scheme for brick-and-mortar retail as part of the regeneration of our high streets and town centres.
- John McNally then introduced the discussion and welcomed the first speaker, Liz Twist to speak (and all subsequent speakers hereafter were introduced by John McNally).
- **Liz Twist** discussed the following key points:
  - As the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Future for Retail, Liz Twist feels strongly that not enough is being done for retail.
  - In her constituency of Blaydon in 2021, 26% of workers worked in retail. This equated to 10% of employees in the North East, and 9% in the UK as a whole.
  - The lack of physical presence of the high street, due to the closures of many stores, is now impacting on jobs and the ability for our high streets to thrive.
  - This has been exacerbated by the soaring energy costs and competition from online retailers.
  - 47 stores a day closed during Covid ([according to the Centre for Retail Research](#)).
  - Now in the North East, 18% of stores stand empty due to economic pressures.
  - There needs to be a reform on business rates to take businesses out of 'survival mode'.
  - The Metrocentre in Blaydon has been repurposed for the community, with exhibitions and meeting spaces, and this requires an imaginative approach.
  - The importance of the [Grimsey report](#) mentioned.
  - As well as a reform of business rates – transport, anti-social behaviour, and housing should be looked at.
  - Fashion Watchdog is very important in ensuring that MPs continue to pledge towards a fairer fashion sector.

- **Maria Chenoweth** discussed the following key points:
  - The purpose of Charity Super.Mkt (CSM) is to take charity retail into spaces and places that would otherwise be inaccessible.
  - The aim of CSM is to make charity retail more mainstream in an era where second-hand retail is being exploited by fast-fashion brands alongside increased competition from commercial organisations.
  - CSM came about through:
    - Testing the concept at the Classic Car Boot Sale in King's Cross.
    - Listening to charity retailers.
    - Recognising that the fast-fashion industry uses second-hand as 'greenwashing'.
    - A shared desire to correct the negative narrative perpetuated by the press about charities on the high street.
  - Whilst there are a lot of vacant retail spaces available, red tape prevents many of these spaces from being used.
  - In the end it came down to their reputations and track records of success to secure the first space for CSM at Brent Cross. Before CSM, no charity retailer had ever managed to access Brent Cross.
  - At the Brent Cross location:
    - CSM took an 8,000 sq ft store in Brent Cross for a 4 week long pop-up.
    - Due to its popularity, the pop-up was extended for an additional 2 weeks.
    - 40,000 items were sold, making £370,000.
    - CSM was the third most read news article on the BBC website.
  - In 12 weeks, as a retailer with purpose, CSM achieved:
    - Sold 60,214 items.
    - Raised just under £600,000.
    - Diverted 17 tonnes of clothes from landfill.
  - This equated to the following aid to charities:
    - Havens Hospices received 1,000 hours of specialist nursing care for a patient in their own home at the end of their life.
    - Cancer Research received 96 days of Cancer Nurses to support life-saving research.
    - Traid saved a project in Dhaka funding a school's running costs for the education of waste pickers on the Matuail landfill site.
    - Shelter was able to offer 1,000 webchat housing advice calls.
    - North London Hospice could fund healthcare assistants to stay with a patient in their home overnight for more than 30 nights.
  - Complexities of using a vacant space were discussed, which included the issues in accessing vacant spaces and the fact that this needs to be normalised and more support offered for retailers with purpose.
  - Now CSM is launching at a location in Reading.
- **Alison Carlin** introduced Manchester Fashion Movement's (MFM) purpose as a Community Interest Company in educating around the damaging effects of clothing consumption on people and planet.
  - MFM curates experiential spaces bringing people together to influence society, express creativity and explore how fashion and art can be a vehicle for change.
  - MFM collaborates with brands and businesses who are driving progressive agendas – such as Gbadebo.
  - MFM also creates educational programmes for students to better understand humanity's impact.
  - They launched in Stretford mall in 2021, taking over the old Bon Marche store with the agenda of reconnecting communities and rehabilitating the high street and local areas.
  - Their current space in Quay Side, Media City in Salford has increased footfall by 7% and has acted as an incubator for brands and start-ups within this space.
  - The benefits were described as:
    - Offering support to future independent brands through incubation.
    - Preferential rates and access to growth utilities.
    - Re-energising tired town centres.
    - Retail-led regeneration.
    - Community wellbeing through reducing social isolation; introduction into other ways of consuming with like-minded people; learning new skills.
  - MFM discussed the following 'asks':
    - Rents and rates waived for the first year.
    - Investment to go live with space.
    - Access to networks for funding – as funding is hard for CIC.
    - Mentorship opportunities, with experts who understand their world and language.
    - Government to enable landlords with incentives for tenants with progressive agendas.
    - More involvement from local councils, i.e. effective business rates.
- **Kemi Gbadebo** a brand who is being incubated by MFM shared the following:

- As a brand, they take pride in reworking donated, damaged or unwanted textiles and transform them into new, 90's-inspired streetwear pieces; making eco-conscious fashion more accessible in high-end retail and bringing a solution to reduce waste in the fashion industry, working alongside local manufacturers and local vintage wholesalers.
- They specialise in up-cycling, experimenting with zero waste techniques and promoting a cleaner and more circular business model and continuously advocate for the implementation of more sustainable practices throughout the chain and aim to encourage the re-education of consumer habits through fun and interactive workshops. Working with major brands such as; The North Face, Adidas, Ellesse and Samsung to name a few.
- Being a sustainable brand means that they are always considering the 3 P's in everything they do (People, Place and Profit), being sustainable is not just about materiality but in how you affect the 3 P's throughout your journey. The brand places community and environment above all else, striving to create connections and change perceptions. This is done primarily through:
  - Community activations and use of free space to provide engaging re-education and upcycling workshops to promote new insights into consumerism habits and make-do and mend techniques in a fun and refreshing way as opposed to shaming.
  - Creating spaces that are more than just retail but interactive and experiential to allow for community engagement and help create a tribe of like-minded individuals
  - The importance of creating spaces like this has been shown through many companies creating these activation spaces in stores to help connect with their markets i.e, Adidas, Flannels new event space and MFM.
- Providing a brick and mortar that otherwise would have put too much pressure on the brand's overheads has given access to an amazing community filled with other creatives, mentors and small business owners in a similar position, helping them scale naturally and sustainably within our means.
- Having their own space also allows for collections to be made more accessible, and according to Business Wire, [82% of consumers surveyed](#) said they were more inclined to make purchases after seeing, holding or demoing products in-store.
- Being in a physical store as opposed to solely online has taught them so much more about business strategy from marketing to visual merchandising and again the importance of community engagement, allowing people to learn the story behind the brand and take a more active role in its future, providing more appreciation for the garments and in turn changing attitudes toward consumerism.
- Having organisations like MFM has also helped them to reach a wider range of individuals who wouldn't have otherwise seen the brand before, like today, opening up the possibility of collaboration and networking as well as the opportunity to be even more than just a brand but an active thought leader and symbol of industry change.
- Having worked with all levels of companies from grassroots like MFM to The North Face, Adidas and luxury retail like Flannels in the next couple months, it's clear that on all levels companies are seeing the benefits of bringing in creatives and small businesses to bridge-the-gap and reimagine retail spaces on the high street to provide engaging point of sale experiences for consumers.
- According to the [Harvard Business Review](#), creativity is truly enhanced when the entire organisation supports it' so speaking as a small business owner occupying the spaces.
- **Julia Ruebuck** finished the session with the following key points:
  - Mend Assembly is a unique blend of grassroots maker space, local production, sustainability expertise and innovation.
  - The three key spaces they have are: Thread Republic – The Piazza Huddersfield; Stitch Department – Department, Ryde; Mend Assembly – The Mansion, Totnes.
  - Discussed that a lot of the issues discussed were short-term issues.
  - Mend Assembly is aiming to be the blueprint for:
    - Micro-production and localism;
    - Fabrics and scraps – through their haberdashery store;
    - Stitch socials and building community wellbeing.
  - There needs to be a wider discussion around cultural, heritage and tourism strategies that intercept council work and wider visions. A lot of what Mend Assembly does is in preserving skills and heritage skills, as these are fast diminishing.
  - Funding streams need to be far more accessible to the 3rd sector.
- John McNally wraps up discussion.