

Subject: Design Approaches to New Housing Development

Report to: Planning Committee

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

Date: 18 March 2015

This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the background for a discussion with invited experts on the issue of the role of different housing typologies in increasing housing density. The discussion will focus on how to help accommodate a range of individuals and families, without sacrificing residential quality or sustainability.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Committee note this report as background to the discussion with invited experts on different design approaches to new housing development in London.**
- 2.2 **That the Committee delegate authority to the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chair, to agree a future site visit to new developments in London that demonstrate different approaches to delivering high quality and sustainable housing for a range of individuals and families.**
- 2.3 **That the Committee use the discussion on this item to contribute to a response to the revised Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance that is expected to be published for consultation in May 2015.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The London Plan has been revised in response to the capital's unprecedented levels of growth. Housing targets have been increased by 31 per cent – to 42,000 per annum. Affordable housing targets have been raised to 17,000 and policy gives priority to family homes.
- 3.2 The Mayor recognises the need to build homes at higher densities and a number of policies in the Plan have been amended to encourage development of homes at higher densities. However he also recognises that "the last decade has been characterised by high-rise, high-density housing providing predominantly one- and two- bedroom flats often marketed towards young professionals."

- 3.3 In March 2014 the Planning Committee reviewed how the density of housing development is being managed in response to the rapid growth of London's population and the need for new homes in the capital.
- 3.4 Part of that discussion touched on the fact that different forms of development can have similar densities and London has historically developed at a wide range of densities, with many of its most successful residential neighbourhoods being built at relatively high density more than a century ago. High density does not have to mean high rise flats.

4. Issues for Consideration

- 4.1 Members have previously discussed the challenges of providing family homes at higher densities that include the necessary level of interior, exterior and amenity space. Alternative solutions have been put forward (and are being built) that attempt to provide family homes without exclusive use of a garden.

Planning policy and guidance

- 4.2 There is a range of planning policy and guidance in place that influences the type of housing that is being built to meet London's housing need.
- 4.3 The London Plan has been amended in a number of ways that will impact on the delivery of housing. Specifically, policy has been amended to encourage higher densities:
- Policy 2.15 encourages local authorities to proactively manage the changing roles of town centres... promoting diversification, particularly through high density, residential led, mixed use re-development.
 - Policy 2.13 expects Opportunity Areas to meet and where appropriate, exceed, the minimum guidelines for housing capacity
 - Policy 3.7 applies to large residential sites capable of accommodating more than 500 dwellings that should be progressed to encourage higher densities.
- 4.4 The London Housing Design Guide (2010)¹ is specific that:
- “To make dwellings built for smaller households suitable for a wider range of people, including families with children, we need to explore different models of housing. These will include maisonettes, a type that can deliver successful family housing at moderate densities. Where family flats are included in higher density development, developers must ensure that these provide at least some of the amenity afforded by houses, including private outdoor space.”
- 4.5 The Guide was published in Interim form in August 2010 and was superseded by the publication of the Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) in November 2012. The Housing SPG sets out guidance on how to achieve housing densities in excess of those contained in the London Plan's housing density matrix. The current Housing SPG is proposed for amendment and public consultation in May 2015.

¹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Interim%20London%20Housing%20Design%20Guide.pdf>

The costs of long term management and maintenance of higher density housing

- 4.6 For housing built to higher densities, a range of additional services and amenities are required to maintain residential quality. For example, London Plan policy and Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance specify a range of communally provided and used services and standards. These include:
- The number of lifts required to access different heights and secure access or concierge systems
 - Play space standards based on estimated child occupancy
 - Open space standards that cover provision such as outdoor sport and play facilities, local parks and other public spaces
- 4.7 Where there is shared or communal provision the cost of maintenance and management of these will be subject to service charges. As well as day-to-day service, freeholders charge for cyclical maintenance works such as redecoration of the exterior and communal parts as well as 'one-off' major works covering repairs of the exterior and the communal areas, the replacement of roofs, new windows and doors, replacement of lifts, and new door entry systems.
- 4.8 A previous Assembly investigation² identified the average service charge bill to be around £1,800 – £2,000 per annum in London, although they can reach up to £5,000. Where major works are involved, particularly for tall buildings, service charges may reach tens of thousands of pounds for each unit. Leaseholders of private accommodation are required to pay these up-front while social tenants contribute through weekly rents.
- 4.9 If policy is pointing toward higher density, mixed tenure housing development, then the implications of long-term management and maintenance costs must be a consideration in terms of the affordability of this type of housing.

Issues for discussion

- 4.10 Mayoral and Assembly priorities are to increase the delivery of both affordable and family housing. It is suggested that the focus of this meeting should be on how to increase density to help accommodate London's population through different typologies which are also suitable for a range of individuals and families, without sacrificing residential quality or sustainability.
- 4.11 In light of the forthcoming Housing SPG consultation Members may wish to focus the meeting's discussion on the following questions:
- For different development sites, what typologies of housing are suitable to meet the needs of a range of individuals and families?
 - Can this type of housing be delivered at higher densities than previously thought while retaining residential quality?
 - What can London learn from successful international examples?
 - How can management and maintenance costs be reduced so as to retain affordability?
 - What is working well in London, and what not so well?
- 4.12 It is further suggested that the discussion might focus on the suitability of different housing design approaches for the likely locations of new housing development in London, for example:

² Highly charged: Residential leasehold service charges in London, March 2012
<http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Highly%20charged%20report%20March%202012.pdf>

- Opportunity Areas
- Estate renewal
- Small, infill and difficult sites
- Suburban intensification

Invited guests

4.13 The following guests have confirmed their attendance at this meeting:

- David Birkbeck, Chief Executive, Design for Homes
- Martin Green, Head of Specialist Housing Services, London Borough of Southwark
- Esther Kurland, Director, Urban Design London
- Philipp Rode, Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities

Potential site visit

4.14 Members are recommended to agree to attend a future visit of a number of new developments in London that demonstrate different approaches to delivering high quality and sustainable housing for a range of individuals and families.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no direct financial implications to the GLA arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report:

None

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
List of Background Papers:
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