

Planning Committee – 18 March 2015

Transcript of Item 5 – Design Approaches to New Housing Development

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Today's topic is looking at the form and typology of London's housing. London is growing enormously and we know its population is increasing. We know, for instance, that we need a quarter of a million new family homes over the next few decades. We are particularly going to focus today on, given the growth in population and given the emphasis on higher densities, how we can accommodate the different households, whether they are single, families, couples or people with special needs. How can we accommodate people in a way that actually still gives quality of life and sustainable development but meets the higher densities? Can it be done? How can it be done? Are there better ways of doing it?

We have a very good panel to help us with that. We have already looked at density and we will be revisiting that, I am sure, during the next year. We are going to look at estate renewal in our work programme over the coming year. We will be revisiting and building on a lot of what you and we discuss today. Committee, if I can just introduce our new panel? If you each say just a few lines about yourselves, we will just go over who is here for the sake of the webcast. Thank you.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, London Borough of Southwark): My name is Martin Green. I am the Head of Specialist Housing Services across the road here at the London Borough of Southwark (LB Southwark). For my sins I have been in housing for 40 years later on this year, mainly managing high-rise estates. One of my areas of responsibility at the moment is constructing service charges. When you chaps build the blocks, I have to manage them and maintain them for the next 100 or so years and I have to incur those costs and recharge the residents in them.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It would be nice to be building them. I guess you make loads of money if you do. I research them. I work for an organisation called Design for Homes and I run the Government's Housing Design Awards, which means I get hold of about 150 to 200 detailed examples of things being built at any time that I can look through to try to find out what is working and what is not working. I am going to talk a little bit about some of those today. I am sorry I am late.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That is all right. That was David Birkbeck.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I am Esther Kurland. I am a planner by background and I deal with urban design. In the last ten years I have been working at Urban Design London, which is an organisation to support local authorities in London: councillors, officers, planning, highways and housing. We run about 80 events a year. We also do design reviews and design surgeries. Between the events, which are very practical and looking at examples, and the surgeries and design reviews looking at schemes, we also see lots of what is going on, what people are building and not building and what the problems are with them.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): I am Philipp Rode. I am the Executive Director of LSE Cities at the London School of Economics (LSE), which is a research centre that focuses on international dimensions of urbanisation and city development, where of course one central question is related to housing density and questions of the implications for planning. We have researched some of that in the case of London, most of it more internationally, and I will make some cross-references to how London compares to a broader international perspective.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): The way we are going to do this is we are going to have eight questions overall or blocks of questions and we are going to intersperse that with the presentations by Philipp, Esther [Kurland] and David [Birkbeck], but we are not kicking off straight away with the presentations.

I would like to start by asking Philipp about whether he thinks we can really accommodate families, given the densities we are trying to achieve. Do you think it can be done?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Thank you, Chair. What I thought I would just do is remind ourselves of what are probably the most important dimensions of the quality of housing that is relevant for families. In doing so, from the beginning we need to differentiate the scales we are talking about because a lot of that discussion really happens only at the scale of the individual unit, whether that is a flat or a house, not considering the broader environment that that house or flat produces, which is absolutely central for families.

Let us start with the smaller scale. It is absolutely clear that a certain generosity with regards to the living space in a family house is central. The desires are probably endless with regards to how much you would want as an individual, but it is determined by price and how much we can afford. Therefore, a very important and probably central metric for family-worthiness or family-affinity is the square metre price of housing. Comparing that across different typologies is a very important story.

On the other end of the scale are all sorts of accessibility questions, issues that relate to how services - education, health and so on can - be accessed given the various different typologies one is living in. This is already an area where we can see considerable advantages of higher density and more compact mixed environments, which become, you could say, family and child-friendly simply because they produce that accessibility.

I want to just pick one crucial example that is often forgotten in that debate and that is that even the access to jobs for the parents of children matters enormously in terms of the quality of your upbringing. If your parents commute an hour or more per day in one direction, you are just going to see far less of them compared to a situation where in an ideal world it is walking distance or let us say less than 30 minutes. A commute of that distance has advantages. It is very rare that you would find that in environments that are more dispersed and more residential only. Let us keep that in mind.

There is a specific question that always comes up about the importance of private green space. While it is obvious that a private garden has massive advantages and probably is the one thing that differentiates other typologies like flats or more high-rise living from the house-based typology, we also need to acknowledge that there are very sensible strategies to compensate for the non-existence of a garden. Number one, of course, is generous terraces and rooftops or, indeed, balconies.

More importantly for children probably are these so-called 'semi-public' environments, where they can play in a safe environment, maybe in a courtyard situation, where not only one parent but several families and several parents can oversee what is happening and where they very early on have greater exposure to children other than in their core family unit. That in itself can of course be also an asset.

I will leave it here. There are more points I will come back to.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Does anyone want to ask anything just around what Philipp has just said? Not at this moment? OK.

Do you think that what you are talking about can be replicated? Does it have to be a street-based design or should the kind of accommodation you are talking about be replicated in some different form or could it be? Are you talking only about street-based design?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Street-based designs have proved to be enormously successful for many other reasons than those specifically related to the family question. From an urban design perspective, activating and defining the street as a very clear space has significant advantages for all sorts of reasons.

If we are linking it to the question of quality living for families, we almost need to shift the debate on what the street is about and how it is used. Traditionally, streets can be the most educational environment you can imagine for growing up in a city. Unfortunately, the tendency has been that we feel it is no longer safe enough to have our kids play in streets. Therefore, whether your property is aligned to a street or not slightly becomes irrelevant.

However, if we were able to bring back quality street-based environments that allow children to access them in a safe way - and 'play streets' are obviously a good example of exactly doing that - the street typology, whether it is a perimeter block or a terrace, has massive advantages for creating communication and for creating a sense of environment in young children. However, it entirely rests on this important precondition that the street in itself needs to first be fit for purpose for a use that goes far beyond a movement function of vehicular traffic.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Does any of the rest of the panel have anything to say about what Philipp has just been saying? Would you like to add anything?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I can do in terms of that. I totally agree with you about what the street is. There are all sorts of different types of street and there is a lot of work at Transport for London at the moment going on about looking at how to balance movements and living or place-based functions for any particular street. They may actually change the balance between those over time in the same street. Sometimes it is quite difficult because lots of people want to move through the street and lots of people want to dwell on the street and use it as part of their outside living space.

When you are talking about places where people are living and using that street, it is really important to get that balance right. That is generally about how to manage deliveries, waste collection, through traffic, the speeds that are used and the amount of space in the street that is given over to those, whether it looks and feels like it is dominated by through vehicles or looks and feels like it is dominated by those for whom it is their home environment. How the streets are dealt with is really very important to getting the housing working for families.

However, I do not know what the alternatives are for a street-based layout because streets can be all sorts of different things. They are obviously giving access to the buildings and the homes themselves. If you are thinking about more of a 'Radburn' kind of layout, they still have streets but they are very small and narrow or are streets that cars do not go down. Where they seem to go wrong is where you are not sure whether you are in a private space or in a public space. If you say that a street-based layout is basically saying, "This is public and that is not and so anybody is allowed to go here but only certain people are allowed to go there", and if that is the concept of street-based development, then that is pretty important. However, what that street is actually like and how big it is will vary between schemes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Do you want to add anything to that, David?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Just on the last point that Esther made, most people feel comfortable with their home and where they live if they know that some of it is private to them and their family, some of it is shared with them and a certain number of people in the community and the rest is shared with everybody, and if there is a clear and obvious definition of that. That is essentially what a traditional street does. You have a door and behind that door are you and your family; you have a front garden, which often in London is behind a set of railings if you are lucky, and that is the space that you share with other people in your street; and then you have the pavement outside that you share with everybody. That basis of having a hierarchy and the reason why we like that is it makes us feel comfortable and it makes us feel relaxed and it gives us the opportunity to make connections with other people in a system we understand.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We are not going to have the luxury, are we, if we want to accommodate families within London in the future?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): No, but we should try to get as much of it as possible.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Are you going to show us that in your presentation?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Yes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): OK. We will not pre-empt that, then. If you are going to show us these things in your presentations, then we will not pre-empt that. I am interested in how much play space is shared for different age groups: under-fives, five-to-elevens, eleven and upwards. They have different needs, perhaps. Under-fives definitely do and older children and teenagers have different needs from five-to-elevens and so on. They need ballgame space and so on. I am interested in how we think we are going to accommodate that.

You may want to refer to that in your presentation and so I do not want to bring it in now if it is not relevant, but you go around estates and you see no ballgames. There is virtually nowhere for kids to be. Mothers cannot overlook them. I do not know. Are you going to show us in your presentations examples of --

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): I do not have a great deal on that, no, but what you are talking about is the use of the perimeter block to create recreation space within the block. There is lots of evidence that it just does not seem to be working. The fact that companies like Berkeley Homes are now filling those spaces with water to stop people from using them suggests that they come with some serious management issues. There are all kinds of pressures on those spaces within the block that seem to disappear if you take them to the front of the block and onto the street. It is like people expect what is at the back of their building to be more private than perhaps those 'doughnut' blocks are making that space.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Philipp, you talked about courtyard designs. I have seen courtyard designs where you have a small private garden - pretty small, actually - at the back and there is communal space that young people and small children will share. Is that part of what you were talking about or alluding to?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): I will show a few examples but, whether these work or not, there are so many factors that influence that. The reality is that we can all point towards developments where it works in an excellent way and that is the reason why we are talking about it. At the same time, yes, there are failures. How much of that is related to how the whole thing is managed, ownership structures, the actual design and questions of scale? We put a lot of very different dimensions into this basket of perimeter-block developments and it is no surprise that we get very, very mixed results.

Of course, there is a culture around that as well that needs to develop over time. It is very important to acknowledge when one introduces new typologies that we cannot magically expect these typologies to induce new behaviour from day one and we need to give this time. The terraced house had 200 or more years to become as successful as it is because it is part of our cultural DNA. That is also an important dimension we need to acknowledge.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): There is a building that classically illustrates the problem with doing this in Southwark at Bear Lane. You must know that street. It appears on the front cover of virtually every architectural magazine on the grounds that it is presented as drop-dead gorgeous housebuilding, but it has a tiny courtyard behind it that is so compact and the distances between the windows are so narrow and so tight. If anybody goes into that courtyard, which has no soft landscaping at all and is very high, going right up to about 11 or 12 storeys, they only have to get their mobile phone out and they are effectively a nuisance to everybody in the back of every flat because of the echo within that courtyard. It is constructed in such a way that it becomes a problem. Those kinds of spaces are often presented as amenity space for the residents, but a space like that just becomes a battleground for the residents. Anyone who uses that on a Saturday night after about 10.00pm is going to keep everybody in the other apartments awake. You get shift workers who do not want you to be using it during the day. This type of arrangement has been planned all over London without anybody having any sense of how it is actually going to be used. This is why in some cases people are filling them up with water now to stop them being used.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): There is a good example near here in Coin Street. The scale is totally different. Coin Street is a very interesting example because there are four stages of development from the 1980s first block all the way through to the Doon Street Tower - or whatever it is called - that they are building now.

The one before the most recent development is four storeys of stacked maisonettes around a central, shared, private courtyard behind. It has some small gardens and then it also uses levels quite interestingly and landscaping so that it puts the more noisy activities to one side, as it were, and lower. Then it has areas that are maybe for adults and older people to sit in and enjoy being outside at a different level and slightly separate from the ballgames areas. The scale of that is such that I do not think the noise created inside it is causing a problem for residents. There are also management systems in place to stop doing things after 9.00pm or 10.00pm at night. That perimeter block does not have residential on one side. It has community uses on one side and that allows those noisy and more disturbing things to go into that area.

The schemes that really worry me are the ones where you do get this amenity space and it is asked to do so many things. It has small private gardens in it. It is giving the access routes to a course and to flats above. It has the bike storage areas in it. It might have the rubbish collection areas in it. Then it is put down as a garden. It is not a garden. It is more of a street than the street on the side in a way because it is doing all of those functions. It is drawn in green on the plan so that it looks pretty, but you know it is not going to work that way. The quality of those sometimes is challenging. Just think about what it is going to be like to live there, how you use that and how the landscaping is going to bear up as well.

There is good and there is bad. With all of these schemes, it is down to the individual qualities of the scheme, the architect, the planners, the developers, the management regime, etc.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Yes, I take all that. That is really interesting. There also might be something about the number of units and the scale and the height if they are too small.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): I was just going to make that point. I would not be surprised if there is a bit of a rule of thumb here whereby these courtyards work,

particularly again for families and children, if they meet, for example, a condition that you will more or less know everyone who is facing that courtyard. You would know if someone is noisy who that is and you could engage with that person. Some of the developments we have just heard about are of a scale where this place is in some ways more public than semi-public or indeed private. You no longer know your neighbours and you no longer have a sense of social control over that environment and ownership of it. It becomes very difficult for people to co-manage it with everyone who lives around it. In some ways you need a more formal management that just takes care of the rules and takes care of the maintenance of the space.

In these cases, I would not be surprised where you have a degree of correlation with those problems popping up that these places are no longer being that desirable. Scale is crucial and looking into how many family units surrounding such a courtyard make it a good experience versus where you have a cliff and it becomes something more negative.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): On the other hand, I can imagine that the smaller the numbers, then the smaller the courtyard, and there might be other issues in terms of noise and so on.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It is worth remembering that the courtyard is there to give light and air to the backs of the buildings in the first instance when you have a perimeter block or two rows of terraces. That back area is helping those buildings work. If you think about their fronts and their backs and if you think about the activities you want to support - whether it is play, informal recreation, sport or whatever - is that a more public activity or a private activity? If it is a public activity, can it go at the front of buildings rather than at the back of buildings? It is flipping it around to think about how that space is there for the buildings. How big does it need to be? How much can you give on the other side?

We have seen more development of the perimeter block idea with Z shapes and C shapes instead of O shapes and a morphing of these areas so that sometimes it is the street outside that becomes the communal play space because cars cannot go all the way through it or only very slowly. The back area is not asked to do quite so much and may be slightly smaller as well.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Are you going to show us an example of that?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I cannot remember. Maybe. We will see what I have.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It was just a bit of a warm-up for seeing your slides so that we can go through some of the issues now. I hope we get a chance to talk about - we have talked quite a bit about what is outside - what is inside, too. Different households need different amounts of storage, for instance. Families need quite a lot more. I do not know. Are any of you going to look at what is inside as well?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): I am not, no.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Not in depth, but I wanted to talk a bit about what is shared and what is private. Not in depth, but I will come to that with the slides, if you prefer.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Yes, because at the last meeting where Philipp was, he talked quite a lot about the space standards of the apartments. Perhaps you are going to come on to that when you talk about your international examples and internal space standards, the amount that is given to storage and so on. Is that right?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Yes, I will make some reference with a few photos.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Good. We need that.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The only thing I would say, though, is that some of this is now regulated for the first time in history, really. I do not think that we have ever had quite as vigorous regulation before, either, because it only affected council housing. However, I understand that the definition of minimum storage sizes in apartments from reading the London Design Guide has been X metres for this unit, X-plus metres for this unit and so on.

What no one is necessarily doing is watching what happens when somebody then fills that space with one of those heat-recovery units. We are seeing a lot of apartment that on plan look like they have the requisite storage according to the Design Guide and then, because they are all dependent now on having a mechanical ventilation system that has a box bigger than a washing machine, it goes in the very cupboard that is supposed to be the storage. Your two metres of storage suddenly becomes 0.8 of a metre because you have the equivalent of a fridge-freezer sucking the air out of your house in order to ventilate it. Therefore, there are some issues around those things. I am not actually going to talk about them now.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): No, I was not going to talk in detail, but it is worth picking up on the issue of how adaptable the space inside a house is or is not. We are building using the standards with quite large downstairs toilets and corridors that sometimes end up as smaller rooms or we are putting in more storage and taking it out of rooms. For some people, it is absolutely fine and that is to ensure lifetime homes to a large extent. However, for other people, they might prefer to have a bigger room or a smaller corridor.

How adaptable these are so that you can change that around for families as opposed to other users or families with small children is a bit of a question and I do not know the answer to that. I totally understand why we are where we are, but the efficiency of the use of wall space, whether it is inside the home or outside the home, may be not always that efficient for every type of user if we are building to a pattern book, as it were, or to a standard.

It is a bit of a controversial thing to say, but you hear sometimes people saying when we go around and we take people from different local authorities to look at the new schemes, "There is a massive downstairs toilet, but the living room is tiny and you cannot get anything in it. What is most important? Is it possible to change the wall when you are in there?"

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I recently went to a development of fast-build, modular, prefabricated homes, which looked just like traditional homes but when we went inside them we were told that they had very generous standards and the walls could be moved around. You could change things. That is one of the advantages of the modular system.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It is a question. When it comes to storage space, are you ending up using that big toilet as storage space, basically? Maybe that is fine.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The other thing to say just as an aside is that if you ever ask the house-builders to be entirely candid with you and tell you whether they think they produce big enough flats, they will say, "We produce the flats that people can afford". Then you say, "What is wrong with the flat that you produce?" They say, "There is nothing wrong with it. It is what people can afford: except for the storage, which we always undersupply". They recognise that. That is the one thing that they openly admit that they always mess up. People are being sold units that do not contain enough storage for what people have in this century.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I would have thought that that is particularly important - though it is probably important in other ways for other households - for children. What we are picking up is a whole lot of recommendations from this that we can put in. We will come on to later what the Mayor could and should be doing and may even be doing in the future.

Tom Copley AM: How can family housing be delivered at higher densities than previously thought while retaining residential quality? Who wants to kick off with this one? Esther?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Why, because I am smiling? I am really thinking about the question and I have so many questions about the question and about what was previously thought to be the appropriate density for residential housing.

Tom Copley AM: Is 250 a hectare the maximum that is considered?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I am always very sceptical about using density figures to try to understand what we are doing and what we are not doing. I do have a slide about this a bit later on, but I am happy to talk about it without the slide.

Whether it is a family or not a family or whatever it happens to be, if we think about our lives as having private things we need to do or private spaces that we need and shared or public things that we do or things we do shared, there is a balance between those. The more we do share and the higher the density, the higher intensity the area can work at. If you share everything like in a kibbutz in Israel or something like that, you are sharing your nursery and you are sharing absolutely everything. It means that the density and intensity of use for everybody there is very high. If you take it to the other extreme with a Green Belt house that has its own swimming pool and its own gym, you are not sharing anything and you have a much lower intensity of use of the resources that are going on there. There are all sorts of spectrum between the two.

How much is shared and how much is not shared - whether it is play space, whether it is laundries, whether it is spare rooms, whether it is a restaurant - there is a trade-off in terms of the way space is being used. It is space inside the private home and space outside the private home.

When we are thinking about density, are we thinking about just that private home or are we thinking about the space needed for all of that life, for the shared life as well as for the private life? If we are only thinking about the private home and if we are thinking that the densities we are building for private homes are going up and up because we are squeezing not only the size of the private home but also the amount of space around it that is used for that shared life, then we are probably storing up problems? I do not know what the threshold is by which it does not work, but it is the way we are thinking about it.

Tom Copley AM: Where is this happy medium between the two? If you go to Denmark, you have co-housing, where families share --

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Yes, exactly. That can work very well. I do not think there is one model that fits all. When we are talking about density, if we say, "We will keep increasing the net density on the site and we are building this on this site", and we do that on every site in that neighbourhood, then we do not leave the breathing space for those shared activities, whether it is the school, the playground or whatever else it happens to be. We are probably causing problems for the future.

However, if we are looking at what the density is and how to optimise that across both the private spaces and the shared spaces, more of a gross neighbourhood density, then I am sure that with ingenuity and changed

attitudes to how we live, we will move away from, “Everything must be private and I must have my own everything”, to, “I am very happy to share a laundry with six other families”, and we can increase densities without jeopardising quality. Does that answer your question?

Tom Copley AM: You are saying it requires a shift in attitude to how we live if we are going to increase densities?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It requires looking at densities slightly differently rather than just the number of habitable units.

Andrew Boff AM: Are you not describing a hostel?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): That is one example of very intense use to house a lot of people. A hotel is a really intense way of doing that where you have only one room that is your private life, as it were, that you are living in and then you are doing all sorts of other things in shared facilities. I am not suggesting that we build London as loads of hostels or hotels, but that is one extreme and the private home with everything is another extreme. There are all sorts of options in between, probably. It is whether we actually think of density in that way or whether in planning we just think about the site net density and optimising that. I have tried to answer your question as best as I can.

Tom Copley AM: No, that is good. Philipp wants to come in on that.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): This is incredibly helpful what Esther just said about the sharing, but I just want to add maybe two perspectives.

The first is going back to the space standard and literally the amount of square feet or square metres you have. There is something counterintuitive happening here. As I mentioned at the beginning, what we really need to talk about is the affordability per square metre and how expensive it is. Once you leave the house-based typologies, you actually have a jump in affordability initially and the square metre becomes cheaper rather than more expensive. That means that once you are moving from the house-based typology into flats, you probably have a reduction in price per square metre of 30% or even more, particularly if you include the costs of making an area accessible with the roads, parking and all of those requirements.

In other words, what we are getting with the first jump towards density is potentially more square metres of living space. This is really an important story, which at the moment we are covering up because of the way costs are divided between the public and the private. We are essentially as a public subsidising relatively low-density housing, not including the costs for accessibility in the development of these square metres. That is why sometimes they appear to be cheaper. They are not.

If you then continue of course, you get into at some point, again, if you want to increase density more and more, persons per hectare. You might have a function of a reduction in personal living space. However, we really need to communicate that in the context of London where there is an opportunity to go from house to flat typologies. Purely from an economics perspective, it is an opportunity to increase personal living space rather than to decrease it. That is not very well understood.

The second issue is about sharing and the hostels. On the one hand, you can have a slightly negative attitude to that. On the other hand, in a context where there is a degree of resource scarcity at all ends for the private consumer and also of course at a public level, for an individual to afford more and be able to access various things and to be able to share is one way of getting there. If you have a housing typology that enables the sharing of resources, you might all of a sudden find yourself in a situation where you have access to items that

you would normally never be able to afford, including all sorts of opportunities for your children to play and access to shared facilities. One should not forget that dimension of a real added value through the opportunity of sharing.

Tom Copley AM: Any more comments on this?

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Perhaps I could just make a comment on that last point. That is true in terms of the capital cost of provision and everything you have said is correct. My area is the ongoing revenue costs. As soon as you introduce an element of communality, it has to be managed and --

Tom Copley AM: We are coming to this later, actually. This is something we are coming to further down the agenda that Steve [O'Connell AM, Deputy Chair] is going to take up.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): -- that is when the management cost goes up. With all these things we are talking about, we have to think about the difference between the capital provision and the ongoing revenue costs.

Andrew Boff AM: Can I just ask, if I may? You will be familiar with all sorts of reports that say that the happier people are the ones who control their environment and the unhappier people are the ones who have less control over their environment. How does that square with being asked to share everything?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I do not know those reports myself. I am sorry.

Andrew Boff AM: I will get a reference. There has been more than one about happiness related to --

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I am sure I can totally understand that and it comes down to the management and the scale and the way these things are done. It is about choice. If you are forced into a certain lifestyle where you do not have much power and you do not feel you have control, I am sure there is real hardship and real problems with that. If you make a conscious decision that you want your kids to have better play space, for example, than you can afford in your back garden and you are happy to share that with others and you make that decision together and you put it in a public space, then you have made that decision. I can understand what you are saying but in terms --

Andrew Boff AM: An awful lot of Londoners have absolutely no choice whatsoever.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Absolutely no control, but that comes down to the rub about what we do about housing in London. The question was more about how we can increase densities without losing residential quality.

Tom Copley AM: Without losing residential quality, yes, for families with children in particular.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): That is not quite the same as without doing the right thing for people because that is another question entirely.

Tom Copley AM: Is there not a trade-off as well? People might say, "I want a private garden", and if you ask them if they want a private garden, they will say, "Yes". Actually, if you put that up against a number of other choices - a larger living space within the house, more storage and all these other things - people might decide that they would prioritise the other things more. Even though they would like a private garden, they would prioritise the other things more.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Some will and some will not.

Tom Copley AM: Some will and some will not, exactly. Others may choose the garden over anything else. My parents, for example, would choose the garden over anything to do with the house, really. Again, it is about the idea of people being able to choose how they want to live.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): The principle is that the more you share things that can be shared, the less space potentially they take and therefore the higher the density and intensity of space, but maybe the higher the management costs and the maintenance.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Yes. The other thing, Esther, you said correctly is about the scale of the thing. If we get back to Oscar Newman's [American city planner and architect] 'defensible space', if you have vast open areas, it is not defensible by individuals or small groups of individuals and therefore it becomes non-manageable and derelict. However, if you carve up that communal space into gardens for blocks or for groups of people, it then becomes defensible and people adopt it and use it and it becomes successful.

It is a matter of scale. Sharing in terms of revenue is expensive, but it is a way of making people take on board ownership to lessen the management costs and that is a matter of scale. Yes, sharing is OK at a small level, but not at a vast level when people cannot defend their own areas.

Another example is not just gardens but tower blocks where we put door-entry systems on each level. Corridors can defend and take responsibility for their own corridor. The lift entrances maybe not, but the corridors are. That is the sort of area that we are talking about.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We will move on, Navin, to yours and that is the prelude to your presentation, Esther.

Navin Shah AM: Yes. Esther, you touched upon it in terms of talking about the rules of architects, planners and so on in the development. My question you might want to answer now or leave it for your presentation, but the question is: for different development sites, how can planners, architects and developers best meet the needs of families?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It is probably best if I go through the presentation. However, in principle and coming at it from a design angle and not a management angle, a funding angle or anything like that, there are some very basic design principles that do seem to work over the centuries. They are about things like knowing what is private and what is public and respecting that so that the actual place respects that. They are about building things that are fit for their purpose so that they can be used in the way they are intended.

In ancient Rome there was what we would call an architect today and he said that the principles of good design are that something should last, should be usable and should look good. To a certain extent, those three have stood the test of time. You are looking for those in any type of scheme and on any type of site for planners, architects, etc. Beyond that, it really does depend on the qualities of the actual circumstances and the context.

I do not know if anyone else has any other thoughts on that.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): That is a really good translation of the Latin!

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I do not know the Latin. It was Vitruvius [1st century BCE Roman architect]. Do you want me to go through some pictures?

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, let us do the slides. Let us do the presentation.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Some of what I am going to go through I have actually gone through already and so I will just skip through those. Basically, I have put down a talk of about 15 minutes. If I go too long, just shout at me and I will stop.¹

There are a couple of things to consider, which are the sharing and the density things - we will pass over those - and very quickly looking at what sort of building types we have and what sort of delivery types we have, and then rethinking some of the elements around housing design we have been looking at and where the ingenuity and creativity may be helping us as it comes forward.

I am going to look at some of the smaller infill stuff. I am not going to look at the high-density typologies because I hope David is going to look at those.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Yes, I am.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Yes. We will not overlap. Lastly, there are just a couple of suggestions that might help, but I struggled with that a little bit, I must admit.

This is the thing we have already been talking about on sharing. We mentioned choice. If you had £4.5 million, which I expect none of us do, you could choose a nine-bedroom house in Totteridge with everything you ever wanted inside it, but you would have to drive 20 minutes to get anywhere, or you could choose a five-bedroom flat at Swiss Cottage Station with much less open space and it would not have its own swimming pool, etc, but you would have the public swimming pool downstairs and the public pool. You have the zoo around the corner and loads of restaurants. If you had the choice - and that is what we were talking about before - you can make that choice. That is about private and what is shared, what you are prepared to have private and what you are prepared to have shared.

Of course, almost nobody is in that position. If we have no space for the private life, to be quiet, to feel safe, to play, to exercise, to learn, etc, and few opportunities for those outside the private home to do those things in a shared or semi-shared environment of some sort, then we are creating real problems. That is the point that I was trying to make earlier and that is where sharing home offices, play gardens or whatever it happens to be may be something to consider when taking things forward.

That is linked totally to this question about density. I did not know you were going to ask that question when I put these together, I must admit. The way we measure density - and I am sure you have all seen slides like this before - there is the same density with all these different typologies. However, there is this space between the buildings - some of the typologies have more than others - and there is a purpose to that space like air access, outdoor living space for the people in the flats, the school or whatever else it happens to be. If we fill that space with more houses, where do those activities go? That is the thing about thinking about the difference between the net and the gross density. I would suggest that sometimes density is really about increasing by using space wisely rather than thinking about particular typologies or particular numbers and making sure that everything is working as hard as it possibly can.

¹ Esther Kurland's presentation is attached at Appendix 2 to the minutes

The topic of building types is what I was asked to cover mainly and to look at what is going on a little bit in London. We have traditional things that we are used to: houses, terraced houses, mansion blocks, etc. Then there are these other things that are popping up: single-sided mews, courtyards and additions to existing blocks. These things are using sites that we never thought we would build housing on but now, because of the economy and the housing crisis, we are. What I am going to focus on is some of those ones in that new style, just to introduce them. Hopefully, it will be helpful and interesting for you.

Similarly, with delivery types, we are used to house-builder developments, housing association developments and speculative stuff, but now we are starting to see councils starting to build their own homes again in all different types of model. I have on the table there a new sourcebook that we have with 15 examples of estate regeneration projects across different boroughs that you are very welcome to have a look at. We are not looking at that in great detail today. However, there are these different models and self-build is tiny, but also small-scale or difficult sites are sometimes architecture-led or involve specialist developers like Igloo or Pocket Living. People like that are popping up and finding they can make money out of new types of housing, which can add to the stock and variety of choice, with all different building typologies across the different delivery types. I just thought I would throw that in for you.

The G15 of housing associations [a representative group of the 15 largest housing associations in London] is doubling its pipeline. On estate regeneration, Hackney is saying it is going to build 2,700 extra homes. If you imagine that every borough does half of that, it is 45,000. Obviously, that is over time. This is not going to happen overnight, but there is a programme of those. These little infill things I am going to show you some examples of, with ten houses on 100 sites in each borough, things that maybe nobody thought was viable or could get planning permission. That could certainly increase housing. I do not think that is a number to be sniffed at, to be honest.

Now I am just going to show you some of the elements of housing design and how they are being rethought and that is nothing new. This is a page out of [Raymond] Unwin's [British town planner and architect] *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding* of 1912, which has some of the stuff that influenced the garden city movement. I just thought that if you had not seen that for a long time, you might be interested in it. By-law housing is the stuff on the left and Unwin as a planner would say, "Let us react against what we are doing. There are all sorts of social problems, all sorts of stigmatisation and all sorts of issues. We do not want to be doing it. If we start to reduce the amount of streets we are building, then we can have a different typology. With the perimeter block here, we can introduce much more greenery, gardens, play areas and shared space at the back of the block". He did some calculations, which I believe are wrong, but he was showing that you get higher rents from the stuff in his layouts and you are not paying so much for the road-building and so it actually comes out cheaper. Forget that his calculations were wrong because he did not remember that he was building fewer houses on the site. Forgetting that, this was obviously incredibly influential and it was about a different kind of life as much as a design idiom, if you want to use that word.

The London terrace has been with us for many, many years. It is being revisited. This is Kidbrooke, an estate regeneration using new methods, all housing design standard compliant. There is a new street, but it has something very familiar about it. Here is another one in Hackney that is morphing between ideas about flats and ideas about houses, but again it is a very traditional street and we are seeing these being built.

Myatt's Field at the bottom and South Kilburn at the top are quite interesting. It is this kind of idea that it looks like a terrace street, but actually behind there could be all sorts of things. It could be a hotel. It could be stacked maisonettes. It could be one-bedroom flats. It could be a hostel. What they do have is front doors, whether that front door on the street is to one property or is to a core serving three or four. You really cannot tell. That is very much like the way older houses in London and terraces have been subdivided and non-divided and put back and whatever else. These things are happening.

On rethinking the home and its parts, this was a very wet and cold to Myatt's Field a while back, looking at the planting area on the roof. Innovation about windows, light, outlook and gardens are opening up opportunities to different types of housing. Again, this is nothing new. Again, this is Unwin, going back 100 or so years, saying, "Hang on a minute. Do we have to have the yards behind the houses? Could the gardens be in front of the houses or at the sides of the houses so that they are more visible to the street?" I do not think they actually built much like this going back to that time, but it is starting to ask questions about the relationship between different parts of the home and how they work together.

That we see 100 years later with the Peter Barber housing. I do not know if anybody knows this particular one at Donnybrook. I cannot remember when it was finished. David, was it 15 years ago or so?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Yes, about that.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): About that. What is interesting, I suggest, about it is that eureka moment that said, "Do gardens have to be on the ground floor? No, they do not". We can start to actually layer the parts of our housing in a different way and we can use roofs and we can use half-level roofs to create a different type of street that is higher density but is not necessarily losing on quality or amenity.

Then we have things like Accordia. Have you heard of Accordia in Cambridge? It is a very influential and very expensive development with £1 million houses, but basically you start to get different types of gardens for different family members or for different times of day or night at different levels. Can you see peeking through that mews house at the back that open terrace on the first floor? You also have ground-floor gardens, internal courtyards, roof gardens and all sorts of things happening. It is blowing apart the traditional look at housing.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): When was that built?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): 2005 to 2007.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): We are taking that now a step further, actually, and the concept here is very interesting. Thinking about a lot of sites in London, there is a problem building on them because there are already people around them and they do not want others looking into their gardens or their windows and they also do not want to be looking into somebody else's home. If you put the courtyard inside your home, as it were, you can use it for outlook for your windows and you basically start to get blind elevations to houses without windowed elevations to houses. You will not have single-aspect internally but you do externally. This is Claredale Street. Let me explain it a little bit. It will be easier. What you have here on the left is the ground floor of the Claredale Street development, which is an estate regeneration in Hackney. You have a unit on the ground floor that has its garden there. It is a little courtyard and it has one of its bedrooms at the back of the courtyard. Above it, you have flats, which are on the right-hand side here. They are overlooking the courtyard, yes, but you still have that outdoor space for the ground floor unit. That is really quite high density. It is using a site that does not have access to having windows at the back. You are getting quite a lot on there.

This is what it looks like at the front. This is a very successful development. It recreated the street. The street is the open space that kids will play in more, but you see the corridor at the bottom of the picture. That is going from one side of this ground-floor unit to the other around the courtyard and you have windows and you have light coming into the property. That is opening up a site to work much harder than it would have

been if you did not use this courtyard typology. It is not right for everywhere – absolutely not – but it is bringing opportunities for some sites.

This one is a tiny little site. It is that bit behind the “25-37”. It has a tiny access. Again, it is this kind of house and it could be a family house, I would suggest, really quite successfully. It has its own internal open space and it is looking at it. It is that line of roofs behind the house. That is what it is looking like when built. It is a site that is very, very difficult to do, but it is opening up opportunities like this. That is the access to it.

Here is another example of more blind houses in back-land. I am just giving you a few. Maybe these are typologies that we have not been thinking about as potentially adding to what we can build. They are expensive and they certainly do not need to be white.

Another thing that is going on is thinking that we do not have to have the bedroom upstairs and we do not have to have windows all the time. It is dangerous. There is danger with all of this because the examples I am showing you have been done by very good architects, they are properly designed, they are scrutinised by planners, etc. If others tried to necessarily just create some of these homes without thinking them through properly, they could be awful and they could be horrible places for families.

In this example, you have light coming down to the bedrooms, which is behind the canal wall. You do not have an outlook from those bedrooms, but you do have light. If you tried to do just that in a home and you did not have proper windows above, you would really have a substandard home, I would suggest. There are ways and means of getting around some of these sites.

On rethinking estates, this is the inside courtyard of a new block on the Aylesbury Estate and, again, it is using light. It is merging what is inside and what is outside. We have seen this in quite a few blocks over the last few years. You have light, borrowed light and planting, as you can see, on the inside, which is allowing a certain amount of outlook from that side of the flats. Again, you do have small cores. Is this one of yours?

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): It is not. It is a housing association development, not the local authority.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It is a housing association. It is relatively new and so I do not know how well it is working, but the concept is --

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): That is Red Lion, is it not?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It might be. You can see the punch-holes in the ceiling, which are allowing light from the top to come through to the lower floors. The idea is that is a shared space – probably not play space but it is shared space – for a minimal number of units and we have more cores going into the blocks as a result. That is very much from the housing design standards.

This is Tybalds Estate in Camden with another approach to estate regeneration. The white buildings here are new builds and the brown ones are the existing estate. This is, again, a way of densifying and intensifying the use of the land – and some of these estates are not particularly dense – and at the same time also overcoming some of the problems on that estate of undefined space – whether it is public, whether it is private – and rubbish open space that people do not feel able to use because it is not being overlooked, contained, bounded and loved by residents.

You can see in this example the tower block is existing, and then you have new buildings and a new street, basically, of houses that have been built alongside it to create a square. That was just nothing, just a blank

wall and empty garages. Here you have a little bit added to an existing block, which is increasing the density and is allowing for improvements to the public realm. It is just another approach that we are seeing at the moment.

Another one, which is an estate regeneration, is actually an estate regeneration of one of these one-sided blind homes in Tower Hamlets. Again, you can see these gardens have been put on different levels and the new houses are looking in on themselves obliquely, as it were. They cannot have any windows looking that way, as it were. David knows these schemes better than I do, actually.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): That is a seven-bedroom house. You can see the nearest building to it.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It works very well, again, helping to contain that space and create much more shared and potentially successful social space and play space. There is a playground at the back there.

With these estates, it is very important to think about the outlook and the wishes and the way residents are thinking about and love their estates already, even with what other people might think of as problems. One design element here is to think about the shoulder of a building – that diagram is showing you the sightline from the ground floor – and make sure that the building is set back. It probably could have been slightly bigger than it is there, but it is the idea that upper elements of the building are set in so that you have these sightlines protected.

David [Birkbeck] can talk about internal layouts much better, than me, but there is intelligence that is going on in terms of interlocking, although there are questions about it. If you have a home and you are buying it and you need a mortgage and you cannot show the mortgage company exactly where the curtilage of the home is, then are you going to get the mortgage? The idea is very much that things are going inside that maybe you cannot understand from the outside.

This is Myatt's Field. Here, this block has stacked maisonettes. However, to get away from having to put lifts in if you go over four floors, these are five floors and you go up only to the third floor and then you enter the front door to the unit, which then takes up the upper floors and the roof garden.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Where is that?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): This is at Myatt's Field in Lambeth. It is a very interesting estate regeneration scheme, actually. It is lower density than others and it includes a big park and a big community area. This is the bit where maybe there are some questions for the mortgage companies. To get two family homes both with their own front door, they interlock so that one has a small amount of ground floor and quite a bit of first floor and the other one has more ground floor and less first floor. You cannot say that that is the boundary between the two.

Another example is this scheme in Brixton. This we do see quite a lot in schemes where you have a scheme and it has more than one typology. This is, I suggest, much better than those perimeter blocks that we were talking about earlier that David [Birkbeck] said end up with water in the middle. They are basically all flats around the outside. Here, you are creating a perimeter block and in fact you have front doors on the streets on the outside of the area, but that central area is dealt with in different ways, in this case much more with private gardens, because you actually have your flats in one block and you have different types of houses in the other. It is lower density, maybe, although you can probably bring those buildings together a little bit more. If you are looking at these overall densities, there are some questions.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What we are not talking about is tenure here, are we? Are we separating out the --

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): No, I am not talking about tenure. Most of what I am showing you is estate regeneration. Most of those blocks, as I understand it, have different tenures within them and I cannot tell you exactly on these examples.

What is happening here is that, if you take a cross-section, this is the first floor and the second floor. If you look on the left, you can see that access corridor for the flats, but you can see there is no access corridor on the floor above. What is actually happening is you have a flat that has its own internal stairs. The red square bit is the ground-floor back flat, as it were, and the bedrooms are above just on one side and the green is the handed flat. We are looking at these in different ways. In this case, you have dual aspect rather than single aspect. It may just have a dual aspect for the bedrooms, but at least you have the dual aspect and you can choose how to use it.

I am sure that that must have been about 15 minutes and so I will just put down a few thoughts about where this leaves the London Plan, I suppose. I am coming at this quite naïvely, to be honest, but it might be very interesting to understand a little bit more about the roles these different housing types might play in delivering family housing particularly and generally in terms of delivering housing in London.

As a planner or as a local resident, if you saw some of those infill schemes or some of those interlock schemes or whatever else they happen to be, would it be quite difficult to understand what is going on there and would your gut reaction be, "This is not a slab block of flats or a terraced house and so I really do not understand it and I want to say no"? Would it be useful to have a little bit more highlighting of what is going on to open people's minds to the possibilities and to funders and investors? I do not know. Maybe not.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Do you think there is huge potential for infill sites that is not being taken up?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I am not in a position to do --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Enfield is negotiating housing for virtually all its infill sites.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Yes, there is that kind of housing --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): How much money is going into it?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I do not know how many of those sites there are. I have not done an audit or anything else and I do not have the resources to go out and look at these things --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It is a question?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): -- but it is a question and it may be an interesting thing to look at.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): I actually sponsored a report quite recently with the GLA Conservatives to ask the Mayor to instruct boroughs to hold surveys within their boroughs to identify potential infill sites. If we identified X number, it would raise so much housing. That is something that we put forward.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It is interesting with the ones that we have seen - and we recently had an event and we invited a lot of architects to come and talk about these infill sites - that they are all in Zones 1 and 2. I do not know whether, if you move out beyond that, it is still economically viable. What is your --

Andrew Boff AM: Your report found the biggest chunk in Bexley, did it not?

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Yes. We found chunks particularly in Bexley and particularly in outer London as well as Zones 1, 2 and 3.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I have just cited Enfield.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Then you had to balance and counter it with the quality of life of those existing residents, which is the challenge, is it not?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It is a challenge, which is why we are trying to get --

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): A lot of these are very sympathetic and I can understand. However, for example, that block where you have actually built an extra piece to the block in principle is a good idea, but think about the residents already living in that block. We are talking about practicalities.

Andrew Boff AM: It is interesting that you mentioned Hackney, actually, about the infill because Hackney has been trying this for years. About five years ago - more than that now - it tried to do the infill and could not get it done because the residents had rejected the plans that they had. To some degree, you have to have the consent of the residents on the estate.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): They had to go back and see what they were doing.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): People do treasure --

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): They do.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): -- their open spaces and so you have to think that one through, do you not?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Yes. That is councils doing it themselves on that side. In terms of the ones that are more speculative building by Igloo or others like that, when I say I have not seen them outside of Zone 2, I do not know if they are viable to build outside of Zone 2. Whether we just have not found them or the people doing them are not interested in Bexley, personally, I have not seen any that have been delivered in those areas.

What might make them deliverable in those areas is not funding necessarily, but is there something that can help raise expectations of what can be done on those sites and make life a little bit easier for them?

Andrew Boff AM: The problem that we have identified here - and this is a bit of a debate rather than us asking questions - is that there are not enough developers wanting to do small sites. The problem is that the big developers only want to do big sites because that is where they will get the return. We have seen a gradual death over the years of small developers and self-build, for example. You go on about self-build not contributing much, but 80% in Austria is self-build, 60% in Germany and here less than 10%. We are not

realising that there are small packages of land that individuals can go on and build if they want to. For some reason we are not generating that market.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): People are happy to take their pension pots to buy something to let, but they are not so happy to become investors themselves.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Can I just go back to the Enfield one? That is using a small company and that is fast-build.

Andrew Boff AM: We need more, then.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): There are 400 units on many, many infill sites. They put their own money into it.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Is this something that if there was more information about it, it would help to galvanise more people to invest it, to get planning permission for it, to design it and to build it? What are the barriers at the moment for that?

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We should do a bit more work.

Andrew Boff AM: People do not know that the things are there. Steve's [O'Connell AM, Deputy Chair] called for each borough to make a survey. It did not ask each borough to actually build the houses. It said, "Just do a survey and find the land", because there is land just in housing estates.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): This is one.

Andrew Boff AM: Yes, exactly. That is it.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): This is the site and it was actually the architect himself, who lives with his young family in one of them, who built it. My question is to you rather than having the answer: if we have the ingenuity and the ability to build these things, how can we create a better environment to do that?

Andrew Boff AM: I will tell you what you can do. Stop charging people. I had one lady who wanted to build a self-build in Islington and she was told by Islington, "Yes, that is fine, but the section 106 agreement is a one-bedroom house". She said, "That is fine", but they say, "The section 106 agreement is going to cost you £60,000 to build one house".

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): That is another conversation. Using planning as a taxing tool is another conversation.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It might be getting money back into the public purse, but I do agree with you on that one.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Chair, could I just add? Some authorities already have identified infill sites. In Southwark, for example, if you go down Tower Bridge Road, you will see infill sites there.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): That is right. We recognised some boroughs are--

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Going back 30 years, Wandsworth did exactly the same and Wandsworth have produced over 200 units and Southwark have done it as well on those infill sites. There are sites available and some boroughs are doing infills --

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Some are not, yes.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): -- but some are not, yes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): All right. We have a good trot around that subject. Is anyone else coming in or should we go to --

Andrew Boff AM: Do you want me to ask my question, which I am scheduled to ask now?

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Yes.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you for the presentation. It did not touch on the question I have. Is there some kind of new London vernacular emerging or are developers simply taking a formulaic approach? There is a new vernacular?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): If you go back to the question, for me personally this was an interesting start to this conversation. On the top floor of this building when Boris [Johnson] was newly elected as Mayor, he gave some talk or other and said, "What is it about new housing that we will want to keep and what will end up in the architectural salvage yards of the next 50 years?" The only thing I could think of was flat-screen televisions, to be honest. I just did not think there was anything really that had been built like that. That stuck with me.

David [Birkbeck] and I did quite a lot of this training together. After a couple more years, we have been looking at a lot of what is coming up. We were sitting on a train in Pimlico, were we not? We said, "Have you noticed the balconies, the use of brick, the increased numbers of front doors and more articulation in housing in terms of the in-and-outed-ness of the facades?" That is coming about maybe partly because of the Greater London Authority's (GLA) policies. At that time they were the housing standards for social housing before they were Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). It may be because of tastes. It may be because of certain architects wanting to do that. It may be because people enjoy the bricks being used. However, there were certainly commonalities that were coming out about five years ago now and it did appear like a vernacular.

That was when we produced that [report]. David [Birkbeck] has brought some copies along. It goes through what was being seen. It was about the street, actually. It was about the relationship between the frontage of the buildings, what is private, what is shared, what is public, how you get in and out of the buildings and how you look in and out of the buildings. There are things going on inside as well, like I said, with big toilets and things like that, but in terms of the vernacular it was about rediscovering the street. There were all sorts of reasons for it.

I am not sure we are there now. Actually, irrespective of the things I have just shown you, which are a different type of thing entirely, ingenuity is part of the new London vernacular and, yes, that is great. However, we are seeing a lot more return to glass frontages, taller towers --

Andrew Boff AM: Do you think that might be becoming the vernacular?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Maybe it has its own vernacular.

Andrew Boff AM: Yes. The reason it is an interesting question is because of Mount Pleasant, which Boris [Johnson], the Mayor determined. At that planning meeting, one of the planning officers said that Mount Pleasant represented a new London vernacular. There were gales of laughter throughout the public gallery. Is the new vernacular just shit? It is dreadful development. Is that our new vernacular?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Did they try to explain at all why they said that?

Andrew Boff AM: I cannot remember. I could not hear through the laughing. Something about 'blockiness'. Lots of public space, lots of public art and lots of big squares.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): "Street-based and permeable" was what was said.

Andrew Boff AM: It is permeable. I will give it that; it is permeable.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Permeable and street-based was a defence.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Forget whether it is new or not. The London vernacular is a relationship between front doors and windows and streets. The street is very much London; maybe it is boulevards in other cities and other approaches elsewhere. When we talk about the new London vernacular, everyone looks at brick. Yes, there is lots of brick. Actually what we are seeing there is not standard but I would suggest a very good relationship between streets and building frontages.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Esther, an awful lot of the density that we have seen and maybe we will see is coming out of estate - I would not even like to dignify it with 'regeneration' - redevelopment. Quite a lot of that is formulaic.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): A lot of it is formulaic.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We are looking at all kinds of situations. Perhaps David is going to home in on that. Are you, David?

Tom Copley AM: You are absolutely right; it is formulaic. I can look at flashcards at some estates and know exactly where they are. I know where the Packington Estate is. I know where BedZED is. You just have to show me a picture. I know where that is because they are distinctive and they are good quality products. BedZED has gardens all over the shop. They are not on the ground, they are on the roof, but they are gardens. They are personal space. I know where they are.

Andrew Boff AM: If you gave me a flashcard of most of the properties that seem to be built now I could not tell you where they are because they are all this brown brick and square windows and are dull. What is it about these multi-coloured balconies? "We will paint them all different colours because people really like that"?

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Andrew, would you say a lot of the difference is not just the quality of the density but also the density? It is at the heart of what we are trying to talk about. The ones you have cited are not very high density compared with what we have to produce.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It sounds like you are describing the Ocean Estate redevelopment.

Andrew Boff AM: I am not familiar with that one.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): There is good and bad. It would be very good to try to stop the bad.

Andrew Boff AM: We are trying to find out what the good is. In the new London vernacular, what is the good?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I would look at things like Myatt's Field, for example, in Lambeth. If Myatt's Field came forward now I am not sure it would get permission or funding. I do not know if it is dense enough for those who make those decisions at this point in time. That goes back to the start of our conversation this afternoon about density and quality. There is one thing about how much you put in somewhere and the scale issue; there is another about the facings, the materials and the quality of the architecture. They are two separate questions. You can get low density, not particularly intense, crap basically, which is really badly done and you can with the high density.

Andrew Boff AM: Sorry, I started a theme here. Sorry. I apologise.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): You can also get good stuff at both densities. It is who is involved? How challenged are they? What are the drivers for the developer and the client? How are they thinking about maintenance on the estate as well? That is really, really vital.

I personally do not like all the coloured truss bars and all the rest of it and they will not last long.

The term 'new London vernacular' and this thing that we have produced was very much more just observing what was going on and recording it, rather than saying the new London vernacular is good or is bad or is all good or all bad. It is seeing what is going on, picking out what you as politicians or decision makers think is the right thing to be done or not from what is going on, pushing for that and trying to stop the other side of it.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Thank you, Esther. We are going to have to move on. I want you to hang on to the formulaic idea. Now can we move on to your presentation, Philipp?²

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Last time we spoke about location primarily. The fact that we have this meeting very much reflects a recognition that there is an inherent link between location and housing typology. What you see here is what we have built over the last ten years in London, purely in square metres, nothing else. Everything in grey is housing. That, of course, includes all the things that Esther [Kurland] referred to. Somehow we have created the conditions through the planning framework and through the economic pressures to create new forms of housing. Everything in colour is business and other types of uses.

I am first sticking very much to the quantitative dimension. I am going back to this point from a family housing perspective as well as a resource scarce condition. There is a central paradigm around getting as much utilisation out of a given plot of this scarce land. A measure of how much building space we get out of a given plot is quite central. I will then go a bit more into the qualitative dimension to share some more generic observations that are not necessarily part of our conversation on a day-to-day basis but are nevertheless quite crucial if we are thinking of higher density and its success in the long run.

My starting point is here with a comparison. It is the polar opposite of what Esther [Kurland] showed us. This is showing you the most dominant existing housing typologies for European cities: London, Paris, Berlin and Istanbul. They are very different, obviously, to the familiar London typologies.

² Philipp Rode's presentation is attached at Appendix 3 to the minutes.

The first effort we conducted here was to quantify the relationship these different types of housing create if you look at some key parameters. There is a wonderful diagram that I really recommend you potentially use to start compare the contrast if you are only interested in the quantitative dimension of different typologies. It is actually sometimes referred to as a 'space-made diagram'. What you see on the vertical [axis] is the floor area ratio. That is literally if you have a given plot of land how much building space you get. If the floor area ratio is one, you get exactly the same amount of living space and built environment space as you have land available. Then you have multiples of that, of course, going up. On the horizontal [axis] you have the surface coverage, how much of your plot of land or area is covered by buildings and how much is therefore open. You can then add two additional dimensions that are very important to understand how buildings operate. This is the building height. You can see here the number of storeys. Something which is less relevant is an open-space ratio, in some ways repeating the surface coverage.

What we have done is to plot all these very typical typologies in these four European cities in this diagram. I am just running through that to then make a few important observations. These are the typologies which are at the lowest density end; detached housing and semi-detached housing which exist in all those places. Typically, all of them are far below a floor area ratio of one, and in terms of the building not even occupying more than 30% of your plot of land. That is why you can have gardens.

The polar opposite of this is the perimeter block. You here see in the extreme case of the Paris perimeter block, which you all recognise in this image, a context where you actually get four to five times the amount of living space out of the existing area. You cover up to about 50% or 60% of the area. Of course, even London, Berlin and other cities have perimeter blocks which typically range between one-and-a-half and three in terms of floor area ratio.

This is where we get to a very mixed group of typologies: in London the terraced house of course, in other cities row housing and modern apartments in Istanbul. I will come back to that. In the London case the terraced house does sit pretty much within this bracket of up to a floor area ratio of one. You rarely get more out of it than that. It goes up to 30% of surface coverage and not more than that.

Here we have our high-rise apartments. An important observation here is that they actually rarely deliver the big density which we think of. Here is the group of these high-rise buildings. You can see that they go up to ten to 12 storeys or above. However, they rarely exceed a floor area ratio of two. That is the result of building regulation where, of course, the higher you go the more you separate out. The message for London is very important. With high-rise and the current planning conditions we are not going to get density levels and the amount of living space we might desire, which we can get with other typologies. Then we have the slab housing, which sits in between.

Back to my key point here about house-biased typologies: That is the predicament we are facing here. That is why we are also discussing typologies which are other than house-based. House-based basically constrains us with regards to the amount of floor area we can produce to something which is at a maximum exactly the same amount of land we have available, not more. That is a constraint which is probably not fit for purpose for the type of pressures we are seeing in London and the kind of accessibility we want. There is a really important urge to think about typologies that, yes, produce qualities which relate back to some of the reasons why the house-based typology has been so successful, but we probably need to also move beyond it.

There is another problem with house-based typologies which is a disadvantage in a more urban context. That is mixed-use, related to how you use the ground floor. I am comparing here two neighbourhoods at similar distance to the city centre in Berlin and in London. Some of you might know Kilburn. There is a very typical pattern here of how London distributes mixed-use functions. The core of the neighbourhoods are very mono-

functional. They are purely residential. Then you have quite a lot of concentration when it comes to your high street with all sorts of uses. Often these high streets then create also a sense of overcrowding which, for some people, is an experience which is not necessarily a positive one.

Look at the difference to a typology which is based on a perimeter block. Again, I stress this is not a complete outlier. It is a similar distance to the city centre in Berlin, Prenzlauer Berg. I do excuse myself for having to go back to my home country but it is an interesting case study because it happens to be one of the areas across Germany that is now the most successful one for families. This is where families want to live in Berlin. At the same time it is very high density, extremely mixed-use and provides all sorts of building functions at the ground floor other than residential. It can be residential but does not have to be.

Let me now focus a bit on what are in some ways maybe more hidden success factors of a typology that certainly in continental Europe has maintained its relevance. If anything it has improved its relevance for family living - I stress that, family living - for several decades now. Here is an aerial photograph of what I am talking about. The very first observation is look at the green and how it is concentrated in these parks which is an inherent part of that typology and then, of course, the courtyard structure that we have been seeing.

Let me now talk a bit about the qualitative aspects of those typologies that are often less discussed and portrayed and also where we need to add emphasis in future research on the different types we are experimenting with in London. The first, of course, is its relationship to proper public environments and public parks and how it can create an intensity of use and a notion of civic-ness and civility, which profits in particular the younger generations. You can see this in many European cities. If you go to these playgrounds and observe the intensity of use and also how much children use these as destinations, they want to be there rather than stay with their parents in their flats, in *der Hinterhof*, in the courtyards. That is an important first thing.

I mentioned the courtyards themselves as a semi-public private space which provides for some oversight and for some control, of course, by parents. It is protected usually by a bigger front door so they cannot run away into the main public space of the street. Some of these courtyards are used in very diverse forms, small little garden plots, playgrounds but even used for adult entertainment, as you can see here, for --

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): I know this place very well. The front of this plot was removed by the United States Air Force.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): That is true. I can come back to that. It is an important component that the original typology was so dense and so compact that it did not allow for quality of life. The current density is still significant even though you have taken out some of the courtyard structures.

Here are a few further issues that are crucial and are often forgotten. The generosity of these entrance areas - if you are putting more people together in one of these entrances - is a central component. I mentioned before that these places in fact can create greater affordability. They can be cheaper per square metre. There is another question which is if you want to keep them at the same cost level what can you pay for and where can you be more generous. These entrance areas are hugely important, not least for certain storage functions but overall to create a welcoming and not intimidating space where you suffer entering your flat on a daily basis. That goes all the way for the internal circulation spaces as well. It is very rare that you see in London new flat developments a spacious environment; staircases that are designed for you to get up with ease and navigate these environments. Even if you have to carry your pushchair, people can help you move them up. It is very central for an experience which is positive all the way up to the front door of your individual apartment.

There is new research that shows how issues like of course light but also ceiling heights matter enormously. We seem to have forgotten that that is in itself an asset that we could think about much more proactively. Also, there is something interesting about keeping these flats at one level rather than trying to have internal vertical circulation. In some places this has also been an added positive success factor. Think of the elderly, who often will profit from having a flat that internally does not require you to move vertically.

Then there is the outdoor space. I mentioned before that, yes, we need to compensate for the lack of gardens and you can do that on the one hand by these public and semi-public spaces I referred to before. Of course, you can also do it through terraces and balconies. The interesting thing is where you have those balconies and terraces their use is very intense. It is rare that those are entirely under-utilised. It is a typology which many cities such as Amsterdam have, for obvious reasons, used and worked on at very different scales. This is Java Quay in Amsterdam. It has very different circumstances and, as I said, a different scale, but the logic remains the same.

Then there is another extreme form. I am using this, which is on the outskirts of Copenhagen in Ørestad, a development that introduces at the periphery of the city hyper-urban and very family-friendly building. I find this particularly interesting because it creates something that very few cities have. It is a hard edge of the city with nature. What does that do to accessibility for people living there is of an enormous quality. Very few people who are in London residential environments live in a condition where many can access with that immediacy, proper nature and proper--

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): I have been there. It is very dense though, is it not, as well?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): It is very dense.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It is interesting when you think of things on the edge of the Green Belt.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): This is where nature starts, absolutely.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It is not a suburban typology on the edge of the Green Belt. It is a very urban typology and very dense right at the edge of nature; you are right.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Coming back to London, we have already seen some of those typologies. I am not advocating just looking abroad because so much is happening within London. As Esther [Kurland] said, understanding those new living conditions better and how much the new type of Londoners are appreciating them or not, where there are problems, is a very important step forward. Work with what has already been produced and tested over the recent years.

The question of how we manage and run housing was referred to. Self-build is something that is struggling in the case of London. Again, this is a European example here of self-building in a high-density environment, a project where several owners came together to create that. As a result you have relatively high-quality environments. It is not impossible to build at scale something that relies on more co-operative forms of ownership or, indeed, of building groups.

That is the hyper-density in London that we are currently working on. I have already hinted that in order to achieve considerable densities we do not necessarily have to go down that route. Nevertheless, what I said about the more innovative types also apply for those housing typologies. Let us better understand the affordability implications, and also the implications for general housing quality of what is currently built in Canary Wharf and those more international housing communities.

In conclusion, this trade-off between houses and flats, where there are a couple of very basic and entrenched assumptions in London, is problematic. You need to move beyond the trade-offs and can probably discover a lot of good things beyond, in my view, rather absurd ideas. I just visited this in Singapore last week, an award-winning housing development. This is certainly not what we need to do here. In our case we can learn much more from the experiences we already have. Thank you very much.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Thank you, Philipp.

Navin Shah AM: Why are we not emulating Berlin, which I thought was a stunning example? This is where there is a good connect between what people here think in terms of a traditional family home – sticking to family accommodation, which is something we are doing this afternoon – versus Canary Wharf where you have blocks that people do not want to live in regardless of what size they are, generally speaking, unless you are looking at very small one- or two-bedroom accommodation.

The question I have is: what is stopping developers from doing what is being done in terms of good practice elsewhere in this world, Paris or wherever? What is stopping the architects, councils and so on from taking that route? What are the barriers?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Our economists at the LSE would argue that the main story is the difference between the price of land and then how much use can still be spent on the building itself. I do wonder how much that is the case.

There is another explanation which ventures more into questions around a building culture, and a building culture particularly for those different typologies, ie not the house-based typologies where in many ways you do not have a constituency. You do not have a group in London on both the residents and consumer sides that really understands these typologies and advocates for a certain space standard and for certain approaches. In some ways the building discipline in London is a victim to very temporary and very international markets in that regard, which do not build pressures to really think through the model and develop certain standards that in other places would be the absolute minimum requirement to be even desirable.

Navin Shah AM: How can we change this?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): In the absence of a voice of those potential occupants – it is a very transient place, people come in and out – there is probably a role for the GLA or more broadly speaking the public to engage more proactively in quality design questions. Of course, there have been many attempts in this country to address this. Maybe as part of this now heightened alert around the housing crisis there is another momentum building up where we can couple the housing quality issue with the density question and where we say, “OK, if we are agreeing we are going to go for this higher density for all the good reasons, let us couple it to the delivery of housing quality which is not only going to be celebrated in London but which sets new international standards which the city does in other areas of policy”. Why can it not do the same thing in housing?

Navin Shah AM: There is this whole culture that needs to be challenged. It is not just within the people who are meant to be living in these developments but within the planners, and even within this building when you hear that team for planning saying, “You want to build clusters of tall high-rise buildings because we need high densities”, which actually goes completely against what you are saying that you can have high densities with much smaller blocks. What I saw in Berlin was four- or five-storey maximum blocks. How can we bring about this cultural shift so that we do not end up with an environment that does not do the business?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): It is very important and where these things always start is where there is an exchange and where people who are responsible for making decisions are exposed to alternative models. The famous field trips abroad are a very important starting point. Beyond that in London already - and this is an important point - we already have experiments which hint at experiences which are more continental. Maybe the Olympic Village is also one of those areas where one really needs to go back to Esther's [Kurland] point, and understand really how it is working, how it is not working and communicate that much stronger; possibly even go as far as doing a new type of international building competition or exhibition where the city takes this theme head-on and celebrates the fact that the best thinkers around housing typology have an opportunity to display things in London and you run pilots. These ideas have been around for a long time. There is ultimately something about political will when it comes to those issues and getting the buy-in from the industry, which is probably the biggest problem.

Navin Shah AM: Just sticking to culture shift, you talked about the professional and political change that might do business. Do you think there is an aversion to apartments here in London as far as the choice of homes is concerned? Particularly, is apartment living so standard that larger units are not viable?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): You are asking whether there is an aversion?

Navin Shah AM: Yes, aversion.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): There is aversion, probably related to what is on the market at the moment. That is one thing. Overall I would not be surprised if people are given options that are more considerate of these trade-offs, which we all talked about - the way you live has implications beyond your four walls - and we will probably be amazed by the extent to which there is an acceptance of alternative building typologies in order to have access to those trade-offs on the one hand.

Also, I made the point the last time: who are the new Londoners that demand family units? Who are these groups? How typical are these families and how much will they still replicate the same housing needs we have seen for the last two generations in this country? If one unpacks the London growth and the demographics behind it, we are talking about something that is very, very different from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That is very interesting.

Andrew Boff AM: Are children different? Is the environment children need to be brought up with different now? Are children a new breed?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): No, our children are not a new breed. One important reference I am making is international migration. We know that preferences are very different depending on your background in that regard. I am also alluding to a phenomenon where priorities have shifted. This trade-off has probably become one that is shifting from a suburban preference towards an urban preference for all sorts of reasons, including - and that is absolutely central - households where both parents work. They need very different housing typologies because of the access story than a traditional household where only one person needs to commute.

Andrew Boff AM: I get that but I am talking about the environment in which children are being brought up. It is no different. Their requirements surely are no different from what they were.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Absolutely right, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: When there was a demand in the past for children to have personal space so that they could be supervised by parents, it is still there, is it not?

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): This may be going back to a bit of a personal experience living in Hackney and seeing how parents deal with those issues in a high-density environment. The whole routines around your house are considerably different compared to what you have in a conventional suburban city. The amount of time your children spend in more public environments and maybe school-related activities is high as a result of parents being busy. Beyond these individual experiences, one can do proper research on this. That is what I am suggesting we need to do. It is a mistake to just assume we have an intuition about what people want.

Andrew Boff AM: We do not need intuition. There have been plenty of surveys. They show what people want and they say they want a terraced house.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Yes, I commented on those surveys.

Tom Copley AM: In the end people make trade-offs, like we talked about earlier.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Exactly, they rarely focus on the trade-offs.

Andrew Boff AM: No, but you obviously said about what people want. We know what people want and we are going to make the trade-off for them, surely.

Navin Shah AM: Yes, but should we be making the trade-off for them?

Andrew Boff AM: I do not think we should. We should give people what they want. I do not see what is wrong with that. I really do not.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What they want. This is all about choices, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: What is wrong with giving people what they want? Why is it so awful to give people what they want?

Tom Copley AM: Andrew, if you are looking at the examples from Berlin, would you say they were a good example of --

Andrew Boff AM: That is fine. I looked at the examples of Paris, which is often cited, and they have many more social problems than we have in Paris; many more, and I would put that down to the accommodation that those people are brought up with. We are always told "Look at Barcelona. How wonderful it is". Barcelona is a basket-case in terms of young children with alienation and you are talking about gangs in Paris, not so much in Berlin but it is a different kind of city and is not the same size. Sorry. No, it is not about me. It is about questioning.

Tom Copley AM: It is an interesting point. Yes, if people want gardens, you should be able to give them to people. If there is a trade-off then between how dense you can provide the housing and we need to house the population that we have, which is a growing population, then there does come a debate, surely, between whether or not you can provide housing at that density with a garden or whether you make a trade-off and provide something which is different but will provide more housing and more space.

Andrew Boff AM: Was it Space Syntax who did the study post the 2011 riots where they actually took place and what their relationship was to the rather poorly built estates that we have in London? There was a correlation.

Tom Copley AM: I am sure there was a correlation but not necessarily causation. It could be a factor. It is an interesting debate to have.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Esther, you just piped up for a moment.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I just wanted to slightly change the subject, which is about deliverability and the hyper-density. With some of these higher-density urban structures that we were shown, for example, in Berlin, the whole neighbourhood is like that and it works like that because of the homogeneity.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): David [Birkbeck] is going to talk about this.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): That is different from when we develop individual sites. The drivers for a developer to put one tower on their site is very different from the drivers of creating a whole area that works at a similar density for the whole area. That developer does not really care that much about what is going on around the outskirts.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): We have missed that boat now. Berlin has had decades of that.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Centuries.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Centuries, indeed. We have not and so all we will be doing is dumping a highly sense piece of work, which is the slums of tomorrow.

Tom Copley AM: We have mansion blocks, though, which are four or five storeys in a similar thing.

Navin Shah AM: Do we not have an opportunity to create Berlin-like versions where, for example, they have major plans for opportunity areas? You have Old Oak Common. We are talking about creating neighbourhoods of different scales. That is where we can bring about that step-change at all levels, right from the planners to the people who are going to live in those buildings.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): To come back to that first diagram we were just shown, if you do those tall towers on every pocket of land, you do end up, I believe, with higher densities. The focus on higher numbers in those areas, rather than creating a possibly longer lasting and more loved area, is a toss-up. It is a political decision.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Esther, thank you for that. You are making a distinction. Wood Wharf, which was mentioned by Navin [Shah AM], is 700 dwellings to the hectare in a tower there. We are just about to hear David's presentation. I would like to know what you are talking about. It is probably more like 400 to the hectare and even that is very dense. We need to understand what all these different densities are. If you have only a ten-pence-sized space and you are a developer, it is what is happening: 700 dwellings to the hectare. David, tell us. You are going to compare two very dense estates, right?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Yes.³ I just want to begin by asking one question. Who in this room thinks that Argent is an admirable example of what a developer should be and how would you compare it with Barratt?

Tom Copley AM: I like the King's Cross development. I will say that. I am not going to say anything about their other developments but I live near the King's Cross development. It looks marvellous.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It is quite an interesting example actually of a developer that is building a block every day of the week, learning about particular block forms that work. I will just show you some of the detail on this. I have looked at two different schemes and they deal with something we all know.

About a year-and-a-half ago the big shock with one of the censuses that was done in London was that the larger households were growing again. It was assumed that London's future was all going to be about tiny households. If you pick up *Time* magazine, every other year there is a picture on the front cover saying, "Cities will be filled with 33-year-olds going forward and essentially families will disappear". The London census came back and showed that the growth of the 'millennial' is a genuine phenomenon and the single-person household under the age of 40 is a genuine phenomenon. In London the other phenomenon is the growth of the larger household. The big question mark may be for London in particular, how do you deal with that? How do you deal with the fact that you have demand for small units side-by-side with demand for family units? That is the basic conversation here today.

Design for Homes have been looking at this stuff for about 15 years. I will not go into any of the detail of it, just to say we have looked at it in various cities not just in London. We think that when you look at this idea of small units and large units, the way you do this is to build this one street should be terraced housing, one street should be a slab block. This is a default model for a huge amount of regeneration around London. Maybe one side of the street you get small terraced houses, on the other side of the street you get slightly larger terraced houses and then behind that, to make up the values, you get a market sale block that is all flats and they tend to be small. That is the basic model. You can look at the numbers on the right-hand column. You have 76 one-beds and the economics say that they pay for the 23 seven-person houses. That is what we tend to do. We break it up into three distinctive forms. They present themselves as quite distinctive buildings. I do not think that when they are done this well they are particular stigmatising. Historically it was always the people in the cheap housing who went in the slab blocks. Perhaps the picture is not as negative as saying, "This is what we are doing just about everywhere we do it". As you look again at this data you will see, in fact, in this particular case it is a trick. This is 100% social rent. This is the Barking model where they are now doing houses, terraced, small ones, bigger ones and then flats as well. In a nutshell that is what most developers on most schemes in London.

This is King's Cross. Here we are moving into higher density. If you look at the density on the last one, 116 homes to the hectare, it is not very much. That would have been what you would have had during the 1990s, but 360 homes to the hectare you would not have seen in the whole of the 1960s or 1970s and nothing like it in the 1980s or 1990s. It has only really returned in the last five years. In fact, Tom Copley [AM] asked a question earlier about the traditional point at which alarm bells rang. It was 200 habitable rooms to the acre, which is 500 to the hectare, which is typically 150 homes to the hectare. That is about twice the density that they used to have an emergency committee meeting at the old Ministry of Housing to say, "Are these people mad? Will it fall down?" You are now building at twice that number.

³ David Birkbeck's presentation is attached at Appendix 3 to the minutes

The block itself is based on the idea of having almost like a mansion block but slightly on steroids. It perhaps looks more like Chicago than London but actually it is not completely alien, not like some of the stuff that is going up in places like Vauxhall Nine Elms. It has some quite nice features to it, not least the quality of the materials. It is quite expensive to build this building. At the end you do not get a huge amount of variety in it. If you look at the range of size on the right-hand side, the biggest is 108 square metres and the smallest is 48 square metres. It is not a great variety. If you look at the actual tenure mix, again, it is not particularly good. It does not have car-parking at all. It has quite high management charges. I have not been able to pin down exactly what the management charges are on it.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): What was that tenure mix? I could not quite work out the abbreviations.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Affordable rent, shared ownership, one of these is shared equity products and the last one is just pure market sale.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): A building with absolutely no parking spaces whatsoever?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Exactly.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): That is King's Cross?

Tom Copley AM: Nobody should be needing a car in King's Cross. They can use a car-pool, the sharing things.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It is the biggest interchange in Europe.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): I know that, but there is still this attitude that people in affordable housing do not have cars, which pisses me off, but there we are. Sorry, it is a campaign I have myself. I get it completely and I understand why there should be very little car-parking, but that is another thing altogether. Carry on.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): I will show you a couple of plans showing what the individual levels are like. Generally it is quite well organised. It is probably denser than I would personally recommend but it would appear the issues for the scheme are that the management is quite slack and the management charges are quite high. I have not been able to get them to tell me the management charges: they are genuinely scared of it. What I have done is I have printed off the minutes of the last two residents' association meetings and it is absolutely obvious from reading these that everybody is up in arms about the management regime, the cost of management and everything else. Let us just take that for granted.

The other thing to say is this is a scheme that was caught with the section 106 agreement by One Housing directly from Argent. One Housing had no opportunity to influence, shape or size anything. Nothing is done to their development briefs. Everything effectively is essentially what they were told you could have on the back of the section 106. That is quite important going forward to the next scheme.

You do get these quite impressive entrances with these double height spaces, but again big costs, big transfer structures at ground floor level for people to come into these grandiose entrances. That will add to the developer's costs.

I am going to skip now past the rents. You can see that nothing is cheap. It is directly managed by One Housing. It is done by them using multiple subcontractors. The problem with that is that each subcontractor

that charges One Housing puts their profit on the bill and value-added tax (VAT) on top. What actually happens is One Housing gets a series of inflated bills and has ten or 15 companies making their money out of them.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): We can go on to it later but, as you say, the management charges here vary on blocks of tenure as you have just said there. Depending which block of tenure you are and which facilities you are having, there will be different management charges.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): It often depends on how many units are in the block because you have a cost divided by so many flats. One of the big parameters is how many flats are you dividing the cost by. Different numbers of flats in the block mean different cost.

Andrew Boff AM: Different cost related to the size of the flat as well, presumably?

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Depends how you apportion it but it can be that way.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The final thing to say is almost none of the flats have direct access to the street. For all the families that live in these blocks, their children have to use the common parts, go up in the lift and go down a corridor. If they behave at all like Matilda [children's book character] does in the plaza or something, it is the end of the paintwork on every level. That is always an issue. You can tell essentially it is not the most successful arrangement for the larger family.

This is St Andrews. This is a scheme that I got to visit for the first time about four or five years ago. I would quite like to jump up now and show you because it will be easier if I do. It is essentially five blocks. I have only data for the first floor because the fifth is being occupied as we speak. Together we are talking about an enormous amount of housing; 67,000 square metres of housing on a site of 3.6 hectares, which is nine acres. If you do the maths and convert that into imperial, it is 80,000 square feet to the acre. Again, that is one of those numbers that historically would have set off all kinds of alarm bells. Outside of London, developers believe they cannot sell anything of more than 20,000 feet to an acre.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): What is that in dwellings to the hectare?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It would really depend but essentially, with the coverage rates by which they buy land and build, they think anything above 20,000 to the acre is almost unsaleable. To see four times that rate, there will be people in companies, like Barratts looking at that and thinking, "Poor sods", when they see that number. That on paper looks troubling. There are also the storeys - three, seven, 12 and 24. I will show you some pictures in a minute. The final data on this is 989 homes delivering 34.5% social rent and 16.5% shared ownership.

It has every possible suggestion that this would be a complete and absolutely unmanageable ghetto from the data.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): This is up to about 400 to the hectare?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Yes, exactly.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): This is absolutely the tops, is it not?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The smallest unit in the whole 989 is 35 square metres. That is in the tower and that is a studio that sold. Then look at this and the variety you get here.

Back at King's Cross the range was 66 to something like 102. Here you have 35 all the way through to 139. The average again is higher than it was back in King's Cross. The other thing to spot is that 33% of the homes here are family homes for five-person to eight-person occupancy. They are big units and a third of them are big units.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): How many bedrooms?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Typically four and five.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That is interesting. We are getting so many three and not more.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): This picture gives you a much better idea of what we are now beginning to talk about. I said you have three storeys there and then you have the 12 storeys there, the 24 storeys there and then 17 floors there. You have this huge variety. The other thing here that is quite interesting, before we move on, is if you look how much the top floors are notched out with all these kinds of spaces and also some of the levels below. Normally on a building like this you would just build a flat top. Here they have actually cut into it. Some of the biggest flats of all are up on the top levels. Some of these are wheelchair-accessible units. Some of them are market-scale units. The biggest ones are at the top and the bottom, as I showed you.

This is a schedule of accommodation, again, so that you can get a feeling for what you are getting in terms of the range. Block 1, which I explained, is the one at the bottom southwest corner with 194 flats and maisonettes. Quite a few of them are three-bedroom or bigger. Block 2 again has three-bedroom and bigger all the way through. You can see the sizes as well, ranging between the various schemes. An incredible mix, really.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): That proves my point about the attitude that people in affordable housing do not have cars. You have 120 car-parking spaces in the private block and about ten in total across the other three blocks.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): I agree.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): My case rests with that. They are too poor to have cars. It makes me absolutely sick. It really does.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Three large perimeter blocks and each have six cores. Essentially the cores are partly mixed. The shared ownership shares with market sale; the shared ownership also shares with intermediate rent. Social rent does not share but many units have direct access to the street. All the large families effectively can come and go through their own front doors, with the exception of the ones that live on the top level. They have been let by Tower Hamlets on an allocations policy of not putting lots of children on the top levels but putting people with extended families and older parents on the top levels.

Some features of the scheme: it has un-adopted public access to the street so that essentially the through roads that you can see going through the blocks are un-adopted. You have also [key] fob control for the courtyards. The courtyards are not courtyards in the traditional sense. They are more like a kind of quadrangle or university courtyard because they function as the accesses to the maisonettes that face in or out. They

actually have an active use with people coming and going and walking to their front doors. It does not feel like one of those dead spaces that no one quite knows what to do with. It is significantly more successful for being like that.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): We have not really touched upon viability. I know of schemes that become less viable and they become denser as a result of having more affordable housing, which is a good thing. There is that critique. We are saying about densities which are higher but sometimes they are not higher by design; they are higher because of viability. That is unspoken in this kind of debate. That can actually reconfigure the development because it is around viability not by design, because this is a nice place and it all works like that. It is because you have to squeeze so much in to make it viable for the developer or the housing association.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Viability itself has become even more narrowly defined, and the rate of returns are very much higher than they used to be. We are a bit off the topic.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): I know, but it is worth saying.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It was worth saying.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): In terms of the viability as well on this particular scheme, the developer thinks this is an easy scheme to build because it does not have very much underground car-parking and it costs them £18,000 a bay to build. Their attitude is, "This is a relatively economic model for us to build because we do not have to sink a lot of concrete into the ground and build on top of it", putting £2 million to £4 million worth of concrete into the ground before you even have a single unit for sale.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): David, who was the developer?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Barratt.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): They have different architects for different blocks?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Exactly, yes. Just a few more details that you need to know. There are 136 car-parking spaces underground and they are for sale; you essentially buy one. There are only 20 car-parking spaces on the street and they are allocated as disabled. The parking ratio is very, very low. The scheme is on top of two different stations. The assumption is on its incredibly high Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) rating - because you can go north, south, west or east from here - that you do not need the normal ratios of car-parking. I am uncomfortable with this. There is some more data to come and, as you see, I am not supporting this as a policy.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): You pointed out there are a large quantity of families at home. Families have young children. Young children go to school. They do not all get buses and trains.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The last point to make really is that management charges range from block to block. Essentially they were slightly higher at the beginning because the costs of managing the thing had to be shared by a single block and they have been dropping as it has been going on. I have the data on these.

Andrew Boff AM: I do not understand that sentence.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Management charges range from block to block. Everyone in each block pays the same.

Andrew Boff AM: I see. Everyone in a block pays the same.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Pays the same rate.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Does not matter what size.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Some imagery. This is one of these un-adopted through streets. You can see what it looks like and you can see some of the bays where people can park. There is one of the courtyards that is not a courtyard; it is effectively a quadrangle. You can see it is designed to look like an access route to your front door. There is a photograph at the bottom right showing some of the notched-out spaces at the upper level. Then, a picture from the street showing those notched-out levels again.

This is an interesting aspect to this. This scheme was not sold to the housing association blindly under a section 106 agreement. It was actually a situation where the London Development Agency (LDA) and Tower Hamlets Council sat down with Circle Anglia and Barratt and all the architects and said, "We want to take control of the design during the actual procurement process". The first thing they got out was the Islam Design Guide. A lot of the private spaces in this scheme are completely private and cannot be overlooked so that women can throw off their hijab or whatever they are wearing and essentially sit in a private outdoor space at the upper level without being seen by anybody else. It is extremely popular and extremely successful for that. There are very few apartment buildings like this in the whole of London where you can do that.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): There is no recreational space? There will be 'no ball games' posters all over the place.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): No, there are, and there is a local area of play.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Outside the block?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Outside the block, yes, right on the green there, right within the development. There is a variety of facilities as well.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That is good, actually.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Essentially, you have to come out of your building and go 100 yards to play, but there is space for it.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): When was this built?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The last block was built only just weeks ago.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Does it comply then with our space standards for young children of ten square metres per child?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Mostly. It predates the Design Guide but they were very aware of it. At the time it was almost a prototype for the Design Guide.

Some more images. Very, very heavily stylised. You can see all kinds of features. It has brickwork that looks like snakeskin or something. You see the double height spaces again for a level.

The one that does not show up particularly well, which is disappointing, at the ground of this building is a plinth of maisonettes. These are all effectively houses. The houses are at ground floor, then small units go on the second to fifth floors and then come the big units at the top. You have essentially a sandwich of relatively small accommodation for 'millennials' and keyworkers between big family units with direct access to the outside and private outdoor space as well as access to the secure courtyards. On the top you have these big units which are social rent and intermediate rent. I do not think any are shared ownership but there are some market sale. Again, these are very, very private spaces at the top for people who have a particular cultural need.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): They are the private market sale, except for one block?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The majority of the market sellers are in the point blocks.

These are the service charges, remembering the build cost on this is very economic because obviously there is an economy of scale into building pretty much the same block three times and then using the materials on 989 homes. In come the management charges. You can see essentially the management charges began to drop as they added blocks. For the second and third block the management charge came down and then they went back up again in the last two because the last two are paying for all the additional facilities they have and essentially there are fewer flats in those towers than there are in the big slab blocks. People pay essentially for what they access. The management company told me that the biggest mistake was that the solicitors issued standard leases that made the maisonette dwellers pay towards the upkeep of the lifts. If they did this again and they were aware of what was going on, they would make sure there was a discount for the people living in the maisonettes because it makes no point for them to be responsible for the upkeep of the lift.

The other issues is variation in flat size. This causes problems as well for management because there are one-bedroom flats as big as two-bedroom flats. As they are charged at the same rate on the fact that it is per square metre, a lot of the tenants cannot understand why they are living in a 67m² single-bedroom apartment and they are paying the same as the people in the 74m² apartment with two bedrooms. They are used to be charged on a straight bedroom count. Again, it is bit of education.

It is not all perfect. There are several mistakes with these but these are mistakes that mostly are rectifiable. The finance director at Pinnacle says, "St Andrews is one of the most successful schemes we have ever seen". They manage about 1,000 schemes around London. He thinks this is one of the ones that causes them the least trouble. They believe it is not only easy to manage but also the quality of what was built makes it easy to manage; the robust materials, the design and the tenure integration. He says the biggest design drawback is the lack of daylight into those access courtyards because the blocks are just ever so slightly too high which kills off the sun going into them so the grass keeps dying in these blocks. His attitude would be if they could have pushed the block five metres out or taken the top level off you would probably have a completely different experience.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Are they not different heights? They should have thought that out. You would have thought with different heights you would get the sun right.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Essentially the west and the east facing block towers over so that you do not get the morning light coming from the east or the evening light coming from

the west. You only catch it in the middle of the day as it goes round and apparently it is not quite enough to keep the grass green.

The other thing he said was that the biggest management headache here – and he said it was relatively lightweight compared with the stuff they manage in a different area – is that they effectively became de facto traffic wardens. Nowadays you cannot clamp cars that ‘fly park’. You can only ticket them and the ticketing companies only chase the people that pay the tickets. Essentially there are about 20 families here that park their cars anywhere they want because they know they are not going to come and ask them for the money for the ticket. He did say that another time he could either double the parking, put in another underground or just say, “No one gets to park here”, so that there are no bays for people to ‘fly park’ in.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Can I just ask who maintains the play space?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The management company.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We did say in our SPG that they had to, yes.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): On this development during the day, there are 11 persons working in cleaning and estate management, and two more who are the concierges, and they are 24 hours a day. At the peak point there are 13 people on this development for 1,000 people. Essentially the management team, the cleaners and the estate manager act as low-level security and obviously the concierges are full-time security. The concierges also double up as the gateway to the gym. Part of their cost is paid by the gym contractor.

The fact that this development is cheap to build, that it was designed by a volume builder, not a specialist developer, that the housing associations say it is one of their most successful schemes in London in the last 10 years, and the fact that the biggest management company in London says it is virtually the easiest they have to manage, suggests that there is a lot that is very good here. I asked the financial director, “What do you reckon?” He said, “It is one of the most successful schemes we have ever seen.”

Andrew Boff AM: What did the developers need to know before? What did we need to know, as people who possibly might sit on planning committees or all the rest of it passing judgment, in advance? What did we need to know beforehand in those two schemes to determine if it is a good scheme or a bad scheme?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): I would love to be able to write a brief for what to watch out for.

Andrew Boff AM: Briefs are terribly long and people sitting on planning committees are used to sitting and reading huge documents about planners’ attitudes and how they relate to local planning, but there does not seem to be a nice, easy thing to say, “This is a really bad idea”, and, “This is a really good idea”. What separates the two?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It is quite tricky, this. Originally, I showed this scheme here and I said, “This is the default. You build a terrace and then you build a slab block and you build the terrace because it is better to put families into houses so that they have direct access to the street and you build the slab block because you need the density and the volume”. What they have done here is they have said, “Why can we not put one on top of the other?” That is the first time I have seen that done at this size and this scale and I do not think that anybody really knew what they were doing, perhaps, back in 2007 and 2008 when they were doing this, but they have virtually stumbled, perhaps accidentally, on a successful formula.

One of the most interesting things of all is that it obviously has this catch-all variety. It is a big enough scheme with enough of a range of units, including very private ones at the top, to deal with just about every kind of requirement from the housing market, everything from 36-square-metre studios for people who just want pied-à-terre in London and who probably can afford to buy it for cash, all the way through to people who have eight kids and need an enormous 140-square-metre house.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): I suppose something about the layout that might be interesting is the streets in the Bromley-by-Bow example are not really streets because you have the train line at the end. They are basically more garden. You have communal space on both sides of the building, if you look at it here. One of them has buildings on both sides of it and one of them does not, book-ended. That makes a big difference to this scheme and it is worth remembering that when looking at other schemes. If those streets actually had to take cars through them, there would be a lot less space for people living there as outdoor space because it is tight. In this case, what they did here was widen the pavement onto the street at the south here. Is that south? They counted that widening as part of the open space. It is an attitude to streets as public space, as part and parcel of the living environments of the residents, which helps to make this work in the way that they are detailed up. That is really worth remembering when you are looking at other schemes. It is that relationship between how many people have been living there, where they get in and out of their buildings, what spaces are there for them and what those spaces are like. It is worth remembering. This scheme is a really good scheme and really interesting, but if you had to join through those --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It is perhaps what?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Those internal ones. There is one, two, three, really, and the one at the top as well. If all of those streets were traditional streets, it would be a different place.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): It would not work.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It might work and it certainly would work if there was the attitude. If you think of that car-parking and you look at the Berlin examples, there is no car-parking there, is there? You need local accessibility dealt with as well as the long-distance accessibility. The PTALs are measuring long-distance accessibility to jobs. The local accessibility, getting to things local, is something totally different, whether that is by car or by walking or whatever. It is that --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We have not seen in context, actually, how far it is from the schools and so on. Steve's [O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair)] point.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Anymore? No. Shall we move on to service charges?

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Yes. We touched upon it in the last couple of hours about service charges. I published a report a while back highlighting this and it is referenced here. We have talked about pressures and the disparities of service charges, but how can we best address the issues around service charges and demand and inordinate service charges that may spring from something? The lift is one example of it. It is a fantastic example. It is a horrific burden on people in maisonettes to have to contribute towards the lift charges, being why they do not use them. How can we unblock that, Martin, and what advice would you give to new developers?

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): That is down to the construction of the lease. You mentioned lifts. Professor Alice Coleman [Emeritus Professor of Geography, King's College London] came down to one of my council estates when I worked for the London Borough of Wandsworth, an

estate called Alton, and one of her plans was to create neighbourhoods in the sky. This is about 25 years ago. She was going to take some of the big slab blocks and put new lift shafts up them and create these small neighbourhoods. By doing that, we calculated that she was going to increase service charges by 100% to 150% because, as soon as you introduce a lift, you have lift servicing, regular servicing of the motor and lift repairs, you have to clean the lift, you have electricity to run the lift and you have lift insurance. Suddenly what you are doing is introducing all these new costs into a development as soon as you have a lift. With lifts, the best way of keeping the --

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): How can you make it more affordable?

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): I was going to say that the best way to keep it more affordable is divide it by more flats. A lot of your lift costs are fixed: you are going to service it; you are going to insure it; you are going to clean it on a regular basis. Maybe the repairs are more variable. You have those fixed costs, as long as you have done your procurement properly, and the law makes you do that, the law around surface charges having to be reasonable and it being tested in the first-tier tribunal. As long as you have procured your costs, the best way of keeping costs down is simply by dividing it by a greater number of units.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): It is logical arithmetic. Even someone as simple as me can work it out. Particularly if the lift is in the block and it is all the same tenure, it is just an arithmetical fix, is it not? You divide X by Y. Where you have, for example, mixed tenure and not just lifts but other recreational spaces, then it gets far more complicated.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Exactly the same principle occurs. You saw Bromley-by-Bow. There you have communal areas in the middle. You have trees that need to be pruned. You have paths that need to be lit and maintained and swept. You have grass that needs to be cut. You have flowerbeds that need to be mulched. I heard what David [Birkbeck] said about what the managers said about the costs and my thought was, "They would say that, would they not?" I cannot wait until the trees need pruning or the grounds or the flowerbeds need mulching and stuff like that because these things grow and the costs grow with them. There, you have estate costs that might be divided up by all the units on the estate.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Notwithstanding the tenure?

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Notwithstanding the tenure, no, because if someone pays for social housing rent, those costs are in the rent or they may be charged a service charge for certain elements as well. It is in with the rent, let us say, or the fixed service charge.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): The other option, of course, is you have different facilities across the unit. Tom [Copley AM] will talk plainly about 'poor door' syndrome.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Yes.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): You say you have accessible facilities to everyone and you subdivide it and it does not matter what the tenure is. Everyone gets the same facilities and that is absolutely fantastic. Then you get it loaded on your rent or service charges. You are minded that actually, if you do it right and design it right, that can become affordable if you work it through properly.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): You see, that is the nature of the question. The question actually assumes that some service charges are unaffordable. What I would say to you

is that the service charge is simply the cost of delivering the services that are needed by the block. Therefore, that is the cost. The only way of keeping the overall cost down is paying everybody minimum wage or something like that. It is the cost.

The unaffordable bit is the land value, the scarcity value reflected in the rents, etc. People say that service charges are unaffordable. It is not the service charges that are unaffordable: it is the land value; it is the market rent that reflects the scarcity. The service charges are simply the cost of providing those services. In inner London, contractors charge more because of access problems and site issues and things like that, but it is the cost of providing a service.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Affordable and unaffordable is not opinion. I do not want to dwell on it because my report proved that there are actually service charges that are inflationary and that are top-ended. Affordable to one person is unaffordable to another. I do not completely buy that.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): What I am saying is that they reflect the costs of providing those services. Yes, they can be inflationary because, as I have said, as the building gets older more maintenance is required, lifts need to be replaced, door entry systems need to be replaced and lightning conductors.

Andrew Boff AM: These very configurations generate service charges. That is the point. There are certain configurations you can have - for example, a terraced street - that have no service charges whatsoever.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Andrew, I could not agree with you more. I am a very sad person because when I look at a block, for example, these are the sort of ideas and just two examples that go through my mind. That block is above 32 feet and when you turn the tap on, water comes out of it. When you turn the tap on, water comes out, OK? How does the water get into the flat when you have a pump pumping water up to water tanks? That pump is consuming electricity and has to be serviced. You have communal water tanks that have to be tested. The water has to be tested at periodic times. If there is a bacteriological infection, it has to be chlorinated. In my terraced house, I have none of those costs, but all of a sudden, by putting a communal water system in there, you have that.

Another analogy is that I look at that and I have a garden. I am very proud of my garden, but I cut my grass and I sweep my front garden. OK. There, you are paying people to cut the grass and to prune the trees. That is the problem. There are two ways of reducing service charges: divide them by more units because then the unit price comes down or do not build blocks that need these services. As I said, with Dr Alice Coleman [Emeritus Professor of Geography, King's College London], as soon as you build a block with a lift in it, you are going to increase the service charges. I cannot understand on Bromley-by-Bow how you have some three-storey blocks without lifts in them that pay the same service charge as blocks with lifts in them. I cannot understand. That just does not work for me in my mind.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The solicitors just issue standard leases. The management company said that they would now tailor the lease to the block.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): No. That is what you have to do and that is why I am saying I understand that mistake, but what that means is that this group of people are not paying a service charge because the leases are wrong. The managing agent has to go to the people in the tower blocks and say, "Do you mind paying a bit extra because we cannot charge them?"

Andrew Boff AM: That works.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Basically, you have quite a fatalistic view on service charges. It is a pretty fatalistic view on service charges. There is no remedy. Service charges are what they are.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): They are.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): You are living in a block in a development. You have some facilities. You divide the units and facilities, and you have to pay for them.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): That is right. The one thing that I would say, Steve, in that is that you have to make sure that when you are procuring these services, you get best value.

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, I know.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): That goes without saying. At the end of the day, that is the cost.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Esther, do you have a view on this? You talked a lot about sharing and shared resources and communal resources.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Again, what is the value to you of somebody else cutting your grass or your garden? That goes back to your point about choice. Once you have built in a service charge, like this with the management company, you do not give anybody the opportunity to do things themselves for their own home and their environment, and so you have to charge it out to somebody else to do it. That is a way of dealing with a home environment. If you have your own home in terms of a house, you can pay a gardener if you can afford it or you do it yourself or you leave it. You have a choice. I do not know much about service charges but I suppose from what you are saying that there is no choice. I wonder if there are any models where people can do something rather than paying a service charge.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Yes, there are plenty. Esther, you have hit the nail on the head. I could not agree with you more. There are plenty of examples. One of the examples I was thinking about when I commented about Oscar Newman's [American city planner and architect] 'defensible space' and breaking them up was one particular estate I managed in Battersea. It had these vast open areas and all of a sudden what we did was we enclosed some of the areas and gave them to the blocks so that only the residents in the block could access them and suddenly they started looking after the gardens themselves. That was great because we did not have to spend those costs and, therefore, we did not have to recharge them.

The problem with that is it is a very transient thing. People move out. New people move in and they do not look after the garden. You look at the lease and the lease says that we have to maintain it. That can put costs up. If you have a standard contract where you are offering the contract to lots of work on a routine basis, then the prices come down, but if it is a one-off basis, then the prices go up. Sometimes it can be a double-edged sword, but where you can get people to do the stuff themselves, that is fine.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): That is a cultural issue about where you are living and what the tenure is and how it is being paid for.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): We have somebody in Southwark who is quite invisible, the Guerrilla Gardener, and he goes around and he does some brilliant work on gardens and things like that. That is all about self-help and about doing those gardens, and that can --

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): The other thing, I suppose, is from the Berlin example of having commercial uses or other uses on the ground floors. This is a mono-use development and how much you can then start to split up who is paying what for the service charges of a building. Certainly when you are getting higher density and you are looking at flats, there are all sorts of costs that are not there. It is a toss-up with your first picture, David. Window-cleaning is going to be more expensive as you go up.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Absolutely.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Cleaning the building in 20 years' time or recladding it 40 years' time or whatever, these lifetime costs, it is a balance, and it comes back to what a priority is. Is it the number of homes? The cost of the homes? Rental or the tenure? Is it the service charge and the ongoing maintenance costs? What is most important? I do not know.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): It is capital versus revenue. When you have the revenue, it is about whether you assuage those revenue costs by doing it yourself, and it is as simple as that. I am not being particularly fatalistic, but when Steve [O'Connell AM, Deputy Chair] said before about his previous report, he may remember I gave some evidence to that report. What I am trying to get over is sometimes there is a sense of reality. It is what it is. That is what we have built. That is what we have contractually said, "Those are the services we are going to provide". We have to provide those to an adequate standard, giving value for money, and there is lots of law around that, but those are the costs and it costs more to live in a tower block.

Andrew Boff AM: Can I just ask? I do not know this for a fact, but does the likely level of service charges feature in planning decisions?

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): No. Can I say --

Andrew Boff AM: You do not take it into account and so you can have anything you like on that --

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Andrew, can I give you a prime example of --

Andrew Boff AM: What did you say?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): The other costs that are not service charges but may be recladding or may be repairs, which --

Andrew Boff AM: Do they feature in planning decisions?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): No, because looking at the viability is looking at the cost and the profit or the income then and there, not 40 years down the line; the lifecycle costs.

Andrew Boff AM: We do not get to see those figures anyway because they are confidential, are they not?

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): Maybe they are. Maybe they are, but they do not count.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): One of the biggest issues in London at the moment in the public sector for service charges and for ex-right-to-buy properties is the Decent

Homes Programme and has been for several years. I challenge the panel to go back and read the Decent Homes manifesto. You will not find one comment anywhere about the knock-on effects of Decent Homes to service charges for those owner-occupiers in those blocks. When that report was brought out, there was a group of us that said, "This is going to cost our leaseholders a lot of money". OK, that was 15 --

Andrew Boff AM: How many people had to move out in order — because they couldn't afford --

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): That was 15 or 16 years ago. I do not think people have to move out. Local authorities can help them, but that is another subject. All I am saying is those revenue costs are the costs and they are a fact of life. It is not that they are unaffordable because affordability depends on the income of people. It is about what we provide in the first place.

The final thing that I would like to say is this. If you look at the history of flats, they were all in Grosvenor Terrace. They were all on the Grosvenor Estate around Buckingham Palace. Historically in London, the people who lived in the flats and owned the flats were the wealthiest people. We have put the people least able to afford owner-occupation in the type of accommodation that is most expensive to maintain and then we wonder why we have a problem. That is the core of it.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): While listening to this conversation, I am worrying that we are neglecting very important system boundaries. If we consider this area here of 1,000 people and now imagine a development that is detached housing, 1,000 people is not a small village. That is a big village.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): That is about 5,000.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): Yes. Sorry, exactly. That is units and so it is 5,000. This is a small town, OK? If we were to talk about a small town, probably 80% of the charges we are talking about would be dealt with by public money or taxes: servicing the streets; cleaning the streets and dealing with all those public services. The problem is that in these cases, in the lower-end developments, we are socialising those costs. Here, we are privatising them. That is a policy distortion one also needs to be aware of. It is a very indirect and very essential subsidy for those low-density developments that cities are struggling with.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): You are absolutely correct, Philipp.

Philipp Rode (Executive Director and Senior Research Fellow, LSE Cities): A lot of these charges have been socialised in other circumstances.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): A very helpful intervention. Thank you.

Tom Copley AM: Shall we ask about 'poor doors'?

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): 'Poor doors'?

Tom Copley AM: Yes. Are 'poor doors' inevitable?

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): I do not think they are inevitable. It depends what people want to pay for. If you are providing high-end services like a concierge or security, then those people who receive that service have to pay for it. If the social housing providers within the development want to charge a higher rent, then they can cover those costs, but do those people want to pay

it? Can they afford to pay the higher rent? The other people, the owner-occupiers who are buying the flats, are saying, "This is a service," and they are saying, "I want that service. I am going to pay for it". Are they inevitable? Yes, because some people do not want to pay for those services. They do not require those services. They do not require a gym or cannot afford a gym. They do not require a car-park because they cannot afford a car-park. Therefore, there has to be some physical separation. That is the situation.

Tom Copley AM: Is there any way to avoid that? Obviously, there is an argument for social mix.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): That is a design thing. That is a feature of the social mix. When you are mixing market rent with owner-occupation, shared equity and shared ownership, affordable housing – there are five different tenures – it is all down to who wants to pay for what. If you have one group of people that either does not want to pay for it or the social rent does not cover those costs, there has to be a design solution to separate off the services. That is the nature of a mixed-tenure development.

Esther Kurland (Director, Urban Design London): It might be helped by the fact that we do have smaller cores, more front doors and more doors for individual units from the street. With the Bromley-by-Bow one having those maisonettes where every home has its front door, you are reducing the need to have different people of different tenures or different abilities to pay using the same place, but that does not necessarily mean that they have to look different, not particularly. That comes down to the marketing and how a developer might be thinking about how they are marketing and who is going to be buying the things that are for sale and what will tick their boxes. This stuff over here by Berkley's [Berkley Group, property developer], they are incredibly glamorous, front, concierge-related, huge, tall areas to go into this block here, which does look very luxurious but it does not necessarily have to be like that. That is them making a decision. I suppose if there is a policy that says they cannot do that to the 'non-poor doors', if you want to use that term, then that would reduce the cost for everybody, but it would change the image.

How much should planning be influencing how a developer puts out the image of those properties? In this case I believe that it is very difficult to see that it is a social housing block, but the people who have been living there will not have access to the underground swimming pool and gym, but will anybody know that they will not have access to it themselves unless they pay for it? I do not know. Is that a 'poor door' or not? I am not sure.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): I paused at the beginning because I am not sure that we all have the common recognition of what a 'poor door' is. Yes?

Andrew Boff AM: You are right about that. Yes. When I quizzed – if you do not mind – him on the Olympic Village before it was built, during the planning, I asked him and I said, "Is it going to be pepper-potted?" He said, "Yes, it is". I have never seen pepper coming out like that in great chunks. As it is, they ended up on the Olympic Village with 'rich doors' and 'poor doors'. That is what you have.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): Absolutely. That is right. Andrew, we cannot have 'poor doors' in social housing in the right-to-buy because we have true pepper-potted people. With designs for new build, with mixed tenure, you are going to do it, "We will have all these there and we will have all these here". If it was true pepper-potting, there would be no 'poor doors' because you would not be able to say you could make people --

Andrew Boff AM: Can I just, as an addendum to this, ask about the pressures on it? I have been told that it is not just estate agents who do not want poor people mixing with their rich residents. It is also the housing

associations themselves that find it easier to manage discrete blocks where they do not have residents. Is that something that you have experienced?

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): What I would say is, yes, it is something that I recognise, but that is mainly because a lot of the housing association stuff now is shared ownership and so they have to have a certain level of income. At the moment they are looking at a family income for shared ownership in this area of about £60,000. People have to have a higher income. I do not think that makes it necessarily easier. I do not think that housing associations recognise that it is easier to manage people on a higher income. It is simply that they cannot afford that form of tenure. Shared ownership is becoming less and less affordable.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Does anyone else on the panel want to comment on the 'poor door' question or issue?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The intriguing thing for me is that with this type of scheme and the one in Barking, the 'poor doors' will be to the nicest units.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Absolutely. You mean that each social rent has its own --

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Yes, because essentially --

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): The thing is that there every single social-rented property has its own front door.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): It has its own door, yes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That is very different.

Tom Copley AM: It is different. Yes.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): That is what is interesting, is it not?

Andrew Boff AM: When you say the 'nicest units', they tend to provide family units as the social housing and flats as the market housing. Is that what you mean by 'nicer' property?

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): Sorry. I was just thinking of the family units, anyway, which have access. Each has its own front door, whereas the others --

Andrew Boff AM: Yes, yes. It is not an issue.

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): The demand from Tower Hamlets here was for a significant number of large houses or homes for multiple-person occupancies. They have accommodated these by mostly using them as a plinth to the smaller apartments above. All those maisonettes and town houses that you can see forming the skirt of the perimeter block are essentially nearly all social rent.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): With an internal quadrangle. I thought that was a very neat solution. Obviously, is there a concierge for the flats above?

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Yes, there is a concierge on the building. Essentially, the concierge moves sideways. It is on the master plan. Let us see. That may be better.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): They mean shared ownership are paying for --

David Birkbeck (Chief Executive, Design for Homes): Yes. When the first block I pointed out was put here, the concierge was here at the beginning and then the concierge moved into here and managed these two from there, then into there and managed these three from there, and then into there and managed all of this from there, and I do not know where the concierge is at the moment. They are probably here because that is where the gym is.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): We should have a site visit to this place.

Martin Green (Head of Specialist Housing Services, LB Southwark): That might be why the service charges went down, because you have the fixed cost of the concierge just managing one block, then managing two blocks and then managing three blocks over time. Yes? That could be one of the explanations. It is back to my, "What are the costs and how are they divided?" That is probably why the costs came down as you brought more units on.

Nicky Gavron AM (Chair): All right, folks. Unless there are any more burning questions or responses, we could go on for a long time, but we have been going on for a long time. I did not stop it because I thought it was such brilliant material that we were getting. Thank you, guests, very much for all your contributions.