Andrew Boff AM (Chair, Planning Committee): I would like to thank the Mayor for his opening remarks. I am here as Chair of the Planning Committee to speak about the Committee’s response to the draft London Plan.

Since the first draft of the new London Plan was published in November 2017 there has been a significant volume of work by the Committee to respond to and scrutinise the draft Plan; a plethora of detailed consultation responses, Committee meetings, reports and letters; as well as a significant contribution to the EiP process. I would like to place on record my thanks to all the Committee members who took part in this process, particularly the herculean efforts of Deputy Chair Nicky Gavron [AM], as well as the many officers from the Secretariat and political groups who have provided support at this time.

Departing slightly from my script, I want to particularly thank Paul Watling [Policy Adviser, GLA], Reece Harris [Senior Strategic Planner, GLA] and Joanna Chambers [Director, Changing Cities] for the enormous work they have put in, above and beyond the call of duty. Also, may I say, a particular note of thanks to Alex Denvir [Research and Support Officer, Labour Party, GLA] and Stephen Greek [Research and Support Officer, Conservative Group, GLA] who have provided such amazing support to us as politicians in our Groups.

I will not attempt an exhaustive list of everything the Committee has said and done on the draft London Plan in the space of five minutes, all of which is a matter of public record, but I would like to focus on a few specific points.

A key issue has been the provision of family-sized homes of three bedrooms or more. This has been a concern not just of the Committee but of the Assembly as a whole. You will recall that back in February 2018 the Assembly passed a motion raising various issues regarding family homes in the draft London Plan as well as the Housing Strategy. Among these, in relation to the draft London Plan, was the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and the family homes target. The 2017 SHMA set out a requirement for 55% of homes to be one-bedroom units rising to 69% of socially rented homes which was given weighting in the draft London Plan. There has been a strong feeling that this undermined the delivery of family-sized homes in new developments. The Committee made strong representations about this in its initial response, and the EiP and the SHMA was then amended to include an addendum with two further scenarios with an improved size mix. However, these were generally found to lack sufficient weight or evidence base to make any significant difference and this was discussed at length at our meeting on 23 January [2020]. The Mayor has now, just before the meeting, circulated a new version of the SHMA with further changes and I am sure we all look forward to further discussion on this today.

We were also concerned that the draft London Plan prohibited boroughs from setting family-home targets for market and intermediate homes. We were pleased to see that the Planning Inspectors shared this concern and recommended that this ban be removed and that the Mayor has now done so.
Another issue of common concern has been the density matrix. Previous London Plans have had a density matrix that sets limits on density by location, type and public transport accessibility level (PTAL). The new draft London Plan has removed this in favour of a design-led approach. From its first consultation response the Committee has called for the density matrix to be restored. Our recommendations said that we recommended the density matrix be restored and linked to policy D6. It should be refined by adding a further dimension that addresses access to services and local infrastructure along the lines of the TfL density report. A refined matrix would then serve its original purpose and fit more appropriately across the varied local character, accessibility and infrastructure provision found across London. Applications should therefore more likely fall within the matrix and what communities can reasonably expect to be delivered over time. This is an area where unfortunately the Committee remains at odds with the Mayor and our recommendation has not been accepted.

Another key issue has been the small sites policy and the Committee has made various interventions. For example, we have raised its impact on conservation areas, back gardens and biodiversity, existing family homes and on light industrial and retail premises. Much of this has now been addressed as a result of the Inspectors’ report and subsequent changes to the Plan, especially the removal of the presumption in favour of development and the reduction in small site targets. However, the Plan still lacks the same protection for back gardens as set out in the previous London Plan through policy 3.5 which supported boroughs to introduce policies to resist the loss of back gardens. This is something that the London Wildlife Trust in particular raised concerns about with us in our Committee meetings. I am sure this will be further discussed today as this meeting progresses.

These are just a few of the many issues we have discussed as a Committee - I have gone well over time now - over the past two years but hopefully this statement will aid our discussion today on the draft London Plan.