

MAYOR OF LONDON

Sian Berry AM

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Our ref: MGLA100622-2831

Date: 12 October 2022

Dear Sian,

Thank you to your office for sharing with me your briefing document "London's dead spaces", which addresses this important issue of under-used space in London. I am sorry for the delay in responding to you.

Your briefing requests support for the proposal of the People's Land Commission (PLC), which we met and discussed in September 2021, following an exchange about community housing on small sites at Mayor's Question Time in June 2021.

When we met, I expressed support for the objectives of the PLC but emphasised that the cost and resource required to set it up may not be proportionate to the number of homes and other amenities it could likely deliver. There are a number of practical and financial challenges with the PLC proposals as I understand them:

- We do not have funding for the acquisition of land in the way the model seems to envisage (the Green Party Manifesto stated that where land was identified, Compulsory Purchase Orders could be used to bring more land forward for development).
- The community-led route is not always the way to make the best use of small sites, including for housing development. Community organisations tend to take longer to develop sites because of a lack of experience and access to finance. In many cases, councils are much better placed to take on this role and to get homes built.
- We would often want to prioritise appropriate small sites for council housebuilding rather than divert them to community groups by default.

However, I agree with the principle that local communities should be at the heart of new development, and I am enacting that with my funding programmes. Community involvement is key to ensuring London is inclusive and that new development supports Good Growth.

Housing

I am absolutely committed to delivering the volume of affordable housing that London needs, including community-led housing. To date, I have allocated around £19m in capital funding and almost £4m in revenue funding from my Community Led Housing Fund to community groups to deliver 290 homes, with 66 homes already underway. And my Community-Led Housing Hub is supporting land identification opportunities through a dedicated programme of work with

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landowners and community groups. I am supporting further initiatives – including a new digital, real-time Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment – that will enable communities to put forward sites that they think would be suitable for development.

My programmes have also enabled publicly owned land to be made available for housing use. Through the LEAP funded Small Sites x Small Builders programme, we have allocated £9.8m of capital funding to boroughs to support the delivery of homes on small sites across London. The programme, focussing exclusively on publicly owned sites, has supported 33 schemes across seven boroughs to release land to deliver over 500 homes, all on under-used or difficult-to-release sites.

In terms of the planning process and identification of housing capacity, we have made progress on setting up a new digital Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment enabling identification and tracking of sites in real time.

Community Action

I also have a range of programmes allowing local communities to identify specific needs and issues beyond housing and enabling them to act on local priorities.

The High Streets for All Challenge Fund supports community-led ideas to be developed into strategies for creating exemplar high streets. The programme puts under-represented communities at the forefront of design and implementation. Every borough initially received £20,000 to develop a local partnership around a high street, representative of a range of voices and interests. Fifteen have received a share of £2m to undertake further work on their strategy or exemplar project.

An example from this fund is in Herne Hill and Tulse Hill, where the local community have identified a specific local issue. Led by Station to Station BID, the local partners together feel drawn to the concept of the '15 minute city', with their area having many strengths for sustainable local living. However, a study of the local amenities has highlighted that affordable workspace is in short supply in their area, despite local evidence of vacancies, and considerable local demand. Promoting this aspect of a successful place has subsequently been agreed as a local priority. Through local partnerships and engaging local landlords, the project aims to increase the amount of lower-cost workspace, by utilising underused spaces within existing commercial properties, and match-making 'move on' space for existing successful businesses. In this case, the solution is developed and enacted locally.

A further £1m was allocated to seven more High Streets for All Challenge projects in the summer, growing a pipeline of projects ready to utilise future funding such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund or associated Greater London Authority capital regeneration funding. A learning network has been established to surface and share innovation whilst providing technical expertise on key issues from licensing and regulation to urban design.

We have recently established the [Property X-Change](#) to bring diverse voices together and share fresh ideas to create thriving high street properties. We want to explore new approaches to using or managing assets to promote innovation and inclusion and secure local social value. There is an opportunity to work together to shape an exchange to discuss issues of community ownership and a 'People's Land Commission' as part of our programme.

Need

Importantly my funding also targets need – 40 per cent of the £75m Good Growth Fund is going to initiatives in the top 20 per cent of deprived neighbourhoods, where 3.5 million Londoners live.

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The funding supports best practice regeneration that enables:

- Londoners to actively participate in their local community and have a say in how their city is shaped;
- diverse and accessible local economies – from high streets and town centres to industrial areas – to realise their full potential, making London a place of opportunity for all; and
- delivery of coordinated place-based strategies.

These principles continue to guide the development of future funds and delivery of strategic Mayoral support for regeneration in London.

I thank you for continuing to draw attention to this important agenda and look forward to working further with you, and the Assembly, to aid London's recovery.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small '2' written below the 'h'.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London