1. **Recommendations**

1.1 That the Committee agrees the terms of reference of the scrutiny of London’s Urban Renaissance.

1.2 That the Committee identify possible individuals/community groups/organisations it would wish to seek written and/or oral evidence from.

2. **Summary**

2.1 This report sets out proposed terms of reference and a suggested outline programme for the Committee’s scrutiny into London’s Urban Renaissance.

3. **Background**

3.1 On 13 May 2003 the Committee agreed its work programme for the coming year. This included a scrutiny of Urban Renaissance in London. The scrutiny would examine the progress of the urban renaissance in the capital, focusing on urban design issues and considering the performance of the GL A’s Architecture and Urbanism Unit.

4. **Urban Renaissance in context**

4.1 The concept of Urban Renaissance grew out of the final report of the Government’s Urban Task Force¹ “Towards an Urban Renaissance”. The Task Force was set up in October 1998 by the Deputy Prime Minister to identify causes of urban decline and to address the question of “how we can improve the quality of our towns and villages while at the same time providing houses for almost 4 million additional households in England over a 25-year period?”

4.2 The report, published in June 1999, set out a vision for an “urban renaissance” of British town and cities through making them compact, multi-centred, mixed-use, socially mixed, well designed and connected, and environmentally sustainable. It put on the agenda the need to upgrade the existing urban fabric, and promote high quality in the design of buildings and public spaces.

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¹ Further details on the Urban Task Force can be found at http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n=3563&l=2
City Hall, The Queen’s Walk, London SE1 2AA
4.3 The report argues strongly that urban renaissance is “design-led” and that “promoting sustainable lifestyles and social inclusion in our towns and cities depends on the design of the physical environment”\(^2\). Design in this sense does not just mean aesthetics. It is also a process, a “core problem-solving activity”\(^3\) that not only determines the quality of the built environment – the buildings, public spaces, landscape and infrastructure – but is also a key to achieving economic, social and environmental goals. In terms of design the report highlighted a number of key physical aspects, which impact on the performance of successful urban neighbourhoods and cities, including density, mix of uses, architecture, and, crucially, the layout of public spaces and the design of the transport network.

4.4 The report also includes a set of basic principles for urban design\(^4\) for assessing plans and proposals, which are relevant to the proposed scrutiny:

- Respecting the site and setting
- Respecting context and character
- Priority to the public realm
- Ensuring access and permeability
- Optimising land use and density
- Mixing activities
- Mixing tenures
- Building durably
- Building to high quality
- Respecting the environmental stock

4.5 The Task Force Report was followed by the publication in November 2000 of the Government’s Urban White Paper “Our Towns and Cities: The Future – Delivering an Urban Renaissance”, which set out a comprehensive framework for action at national, regional and local level to achieve urban renaissance. In the White Paper London is identified as unique – mainly in terms of its structure of governance, with the Mayor and an elected assembly. The White Paper highlights the important role of the Mayor’s Spatial Development Strategy in driving forward the objectives of urban renaissance in London.

4.6 Most recently, the Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan\(^5\), published in February 2003, reiterated the Government’s commitment to improving the quality of the built environment design as a key to creating attractive and sustainable communities in the South East.

5. London’s urban renaissance

5.1 Delivering an urban renaissance across London is one of the aims of the draft London Plan, the Mayor’s Spatial Development Strategy for London.

5.2 The Plan identifies the urgent need to plan for an additional population of 700,000 people over the period to 2016. It acknowledges that London cannot accommodate its growing population and improve conditions for existing residents without the highest standard of architecture and urban design to make the best possible use of land and buildings. The Plan stresses the importance of design of individual dwellings, streets, neighbourhoods in achieving economic, social and environmental regeneration and improving the quality of life of Londoners.

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The role of the GLA Architecture and Urbanism Unit

5.3 The Architecture and Urbanism Unit at the GLA, led by Richard Rogers, was established by the Mayor in April 2001 with the aim to lead the urban renaissance in London. The role of the Unit is to:

- Promote high quality architecture and urban design, in order to create socially balanced and sustainable communities
- Optimise the potential of London’s available sites, by linking transport and development opportunities
- Improve London’s public realm

6 The scrutiny

6.1 The proposed scrutiny on London’s Urban Renaissance would aim to address this subject from a practical standpoint, through examining what has been achieved in creating a design-led urban renaissance in London since the publication of the Urban Task Force report in 1999, identifying the key successes, the obstacles and what can be done to overcome them.

6.2 A proposal outlining in detail the terms of reference and a suggested programme for the scrutiny is attached at Annex A for the Committee consideration.

7 Strategy Implications

7.1 The scrutiny will be of relevance to the London Plan, the Mayor’s Spatial Development Strategy for London and to the Assembly consideration of the crosscutting theme of sustainable development.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 There are no relevant legal implications arising from this report.

9. Financial Implications

9.1 The cost of the scrutiny would be met by appropriate allocations from the 2003/04 Secretariat budget. The scrutiny would be carried out in-house; the only costs involved would be printing and distribution costs and the cost of the site visit.

Background documents:


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## London’s Urban Renaissance- proposed terms of reference

### Scrutiny name

*London’s Urban Renaissance*

### Terms of reference

The terms of reference for the scrutiny are to:

- Review and assess progress made towards achieving a design-led urban renaissance in relation to planning policy, development control and regeneration practice in London; focusing on achievements against the key urban design principles as outlined in the Urban Task Force report.
- Highlight examples of best practice in design-led urban renaissance in London.
- Assess some of the obstacles that are being encountered in delivering an urban renaissance across London and what can be done to overcome them.
- Review the effectiveness of policy and mechanisms to achieve an urban renaissance in London, including the role and performance of the Mayor’s Architecture and Urbanism Unit and the GLA family.
- Make appropriate recommendations to the Mayor, Local Authorities and other key stakeholders.

### Framework and conduct of scrutiny

It is proposed that two hearings be held and a site visit be arranged in the following Committee meeting slots:

- Tuesday 11 November
- Tuesday 25 November
- Tuesday 9 December

The first hearing would examine key issues and challenges relating to the implementation of a design-led urban renaissance in London, including housing quality issues, quality of public spaces, urban design skills, resources and mechanisms for delivery.

The second hearing would focus on practical achievements. It would review successes and failures in delivering an urban renaissance in London, by considering development schemes that have been recently built across the capital, with particular focus on riverside developments.

### The value the Assembly can add by adopting this project

The Urban Task Force report was published over four years ago. This appears to be an appropriate time to review and assess the implementation of an urban renaissance in London.

### Any similar work on this topic? How will duplication be avoided?

As far as we can determine, there has not been a comprehensive examination of urban design issues in London in the context of urban renaissance.

### Related scrutiny work by the Assembly

The Assembly scrutiny report “Access to the Thames” highlighted the key importance of high quality design in relation to riverside development. The report, published in August 2003, included the following recommendation to the Planning and Spatial Development Committee:

“The Planning and Spatial Development Committee should conduct a further scrutiny to review progress, considering riverside developments referred to the Mayor since May 2000, to assess...”
performance against the objectives outlined within the Blue Ribbon Annex to the Draft London Plan™.

This recommendation will be addressed as part of the proposed scrutiny on Urban Renaissance.

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