

Subject: Increasing Housing Density through the London Plan

Report to: Planning Committee

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

Date: 14 March 2017

This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the background information for a meeting with Greater London Authority (GLA) planning officers and invited external experts to discuss the issue of increasing housing density through the London Plan.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the Committee notes the report as background to putting questions to GLA planning officers and invited external experts to discuss the issue of increasing housing density through the London Plan.**

3. Background

- 3.1 London is under significant ongoing development pressure, particularly for new housing to accommodate the rapidly growing population of the city, which is expected to exceed 10 million by 2036.
- 3.2 The current London Plan's housing need figures set out the scale of the capital's housing challenge. Between 2015 and 2036, London will need 49,000 additional homes per year.¹
- 3.3 Managing density will be a central challenge in the coming years, and reviewing planning policy on housing density will be a feature of the forthcoming London Plan review – specifically Policy 3.4: Optimising Housing Potential and in particular its associated sustainable residential quality density matrix.
- 3.4 Anticipating this as one of the central issues for the full review of the London Plan the GLA commissioned a series of research projects to investigate different aspects of housing density², the reports reviewed:
- Defining, measuring and implementing density standards in London;

¹ The London Plan, March 2016 paragraph 3.16b.

² <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/london-plan-technical-and-research-reports>
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- Lessons from higher density development;
- Exploring character and development density; and
- Linkages between housing density and wider economic processes.

3.6 Further details of the objectives of this research are set out in **Appendix 1**.

4. Issues for Consideration

- 4.1 One of the Committee's priorities for the coming year will be scrutiny of the emerging revisions to the London Plan. Issues discussed at this meeting will therefore inform the Committee's input into the public consultation version of the London plan that is expected to be published in the Autumn.
- 4.2 The capital is a relatively low rise, medium density city, but in an effort to make London a more sustainable 'compact' city, new housing development will need to be built at densities higher than those seen in modern times. Already, over half of all planning consents are for projects at densities above those allowed by the London Plan for their locations.³
- 4.3 High density does not have to mean higher rise development. There are many studies that illustrate how high density schemes can provide good quality, attractive housing and ensure the most efficient use of land.⁴ Others advocate the creation of more and better urban homes with terraced streets of houses and apartments, rather than complex multi-storey buildings.⁵
- 4.4 The overall thrust of the London Plan seeks to accommodate growth within London's boundaries without encroaching on open space or the Green Belt.⁶ To maintain this approach, housing density must increase across the city, but particularly in Opportunity Areas, town centres and other large sites.⁷ However there are areas of London that historically have developed at low densities that will inevitably see demands for higher density housing in the future. The London Infrastructure Plan maintains that "if London is to accommodate a large proportion of its growth within its borders, it will be necessary to increase densities in Outer London, at least to some extent."⁸
- 4.5 In this context the issue of public acceptance of higher density is important if development is to be successful. "Higher housing densities can be an emotive subject – particularly amongst local communities – that are understandably concerned about the legacy of past mistakes in urban regeneration."⁹

³ London Plan Annual Monitoring Report, July 2016 https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/amr12_july_update.pdf

⁴ For example: Housing for a compact city, GLA 2003; The London Housing Design Guide, LDA 2010.

⁵ For example Create Streets <http://www.createstreets.com/home/4590529701>

⁶ London Plan Policy 1.1: Delivering the strategic vision and objectives for London

⁷ London Plan paragraphs 3.17a and 3.19, policies 2.15: Town Centres, 2.13: Opportunity and intensification areas and 3.7: Large residential developments

⁸ London Infrastructure Plan 2050, page 62 <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/business-and-economy/better-infrastructure/london-infrastructure-plan-2050#acc-i-43213>

⁹ Redefining Density, London First and Savills, September 2015 <http://londonfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Redefining-Density-0915.pdf>

Issues for discussion

- 4.6 The research that has been published by the Mayor covers a considerable range of factors that affect the challenge of increasing housing density. One of the studies concluded that:
- Development at densities above the London Plan density matrix is achieved through a wide variety of built form and layouts, with buildings of different heights.
 - The key to successful high density buildings as places to live is in the quality of the internal design and the external space in which they sit. What also matters is the way they are managed day to day.
 - As density and height increases, these factors become more important and greater scrutiny is needed to maintain the quality of high density and high rise living.
- 4.7 Members may wish to focus this meeting on some of these conclusions and their implications for the development of future London Plan housing density policy and frame the discussion around the following questions:
- What are the lessons from high density development (above the London Plan density matrix)?
 - What are the implications of increasing density for the cost, affordability and viability of new homes?
 - What level of scrutiny from the Mayor and local authorities is required to ensure increasing housing density delivers both numbers and quality and ensures wider public acceptance?

Invited guests

- 4.8 The following guests have confirmed their attendance:
- Lin Cousins, Director, Three Dragons
 - Crispin Kelly, Baylight
 - Elliot Kemp, Senior Strategic Planner, GLA
 - Jenifer Peters, Strategic Planning Manager, GLA
 - Pieter Zitman, Mix Developments

5. Legal Implications

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

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications to the Greater London Authority arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report:

Appendix 1 - GLA Density studies – summary of research

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers:

London Plan technical and research reports: Housing Density Review 2016

<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/london-plan-technical-and-research-reports>

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Appendix 1: GLA Density studies – summary of research

Background

London is under significant ongoing development pressure, particularly for new housing to accommodate the rapidly growing population of the city, which is expected to exceed 10 million by 2036. The average density of new dwellings within London has more than doubled in recent years, from under 60 dwellings per hectare in 2000, to over 120 dwellings per hectare in 2008.

Managing density will be a central challenge in the coming years, and reviewing planning policy on housing density will be a feature of the forthcoming London Plan review – specifically Policy 3.4 Optimising Housing Potential and in particular its associated sustainable residential quality density matrix.

GLA Density Research

In November 2015 the GLA commissioned a series of research projects to investigate different aspects of housing density to inform the full review of the London Plan.

Study 1: Defining, Measuring and Implementing Density Standards in London

The aim of this project was to explore different approaches to defining and measuring density and recommend a preferred approach for the London context. Secondly, the project developed a definition for different categories of density which can be applied irrespective of the sites' context.

Studies 2 and 3: Lessons from Higher Density Development

The aim of this research was to investigate completed developments that are above the density matrix maximum in London to find out what has worked and what hasn't and how this knowledge can be applied to future policy to ensure future developments are successful and sustainable. The project identified what type of housing different typologies and densities can deliver - for example, are there typologies that are not conducive to delivering family or smaller household dwellings?

Study 4: Exploring Character and Development Density

This project explored the relationship between increasing density, building height and development costs, and the delivery of affordable housing in different locations. The research determined if increasing density, particularly through the development of tall buildings, has any significant implications for development costs and long term management costs and if these have knock-on effects on the affordability of development for the owners and occupants. In addition, this project assessed if higher density developments in London are supplying proportionally more or less affordable housing than comparable lower density.

Study 5: Why Else is Density Important?

This project involved examining other significant respects whereby maintaining/raising the density of development and intensity of space-use might be important in relation to London Plan objectives. It identified the linkages between urban form, agglomeration economies and overall economic productivity, and their implications for density policies that might enhance productivity. It examined the significance of the linkages between urban form, travel patterns and emissions. Finally the project looked at how density policy may enhance the effectiveness of new housing initiatives in relation to starter homes and PRS – for which denser sites offer specific productivity advantages.